

Shakespeare's Search for Tragic Form in the 1590s

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A NOTE ON TEXTS

Texts:

Unless otherwise stated all general quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, with eds. Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997; repr. 2008).

Primarily, as highlighted in each chapter, I have used individual editions of *The Arden Shakespeare*, as these are fully annotated editions that allow on the page access to questions of sources, theatre history and textual history. Other editions consulted include *The Norton Shakespeare* as above, and individual editions of *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* and *The Oxford Shakespeare*. These are fully referenced in the thesis.

Modernisation:

In reproducing passages and quotations from the early texts, I have followed the conventions of early modern spelling and punctuation in most cases, changing only letters which ease reading: 'i' becomes 'j'; 'u' becomes 'v'; the long 'f' is changed to an 's'.

Illustrations:

Plates containing facsimile reproductions of various pages cited in the thesis from the early editions of Shakespeare's plays are collated in the Appendix.

SUMMARY

Starting from David Bevington's observation that 'Shakespeare's disparate ventures into tragic expression in the years prior to 1599 suggest that he had not yet found the model or models he was looking for',¹ the current thesis explores four early tragedies in terms of their experimental nature: *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*. Central to the thesis is how metadrama in these plays point towards an exploration of tragedy that is marked by the intermingling of genres and sources. The thesis argues that each of the four tragedies under discussion is creatively imaginative in the way it involves adding a fresh perspective to tragedy and its mixing of genres. The thesis begins by arguing that in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', the play-within-the play of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare mocks the amateur staging of tragedy which he seeks to revitalize, starting with *Titus Andronicus* as a bloody revenge tragedy uneasily mixed with poetic language. Chapter Two suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* explores some of the ways in which comedy collapses into tragedy, while Chapter Three asks questions about Shakespeare's use of history as a source for tragedy in relation to *Richard II*. The final chapter concentrates on *Julius Caesar* as a 'broken' play, examining the role of the 'hero'. Each chapter examines a number of features, including the blending of genre types, the creation of the tragic 'hero', unsatisfactory endings as well as metadrama. Finally, *Hamlet* is seen to incorporate many of these experiments, and thus to lead on to the later tragedies.

¹ David Bevington, 'Tragedy in Shakespeare's Career', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern, 2nd edn. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 51-70 (p. 57).

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Introduction

Part One. Shakespeare and Genre

This thesis starts from David Bevington's observation that 'Shakespeare's disparate ventures into tragic expression in the years prior to 1599 suggest that he had not found the model or models he was looking for'.¹ Put slightly differently, the main argument of the following pages is that Shakespeare's early tragedies are a deliberate experiment in form, a searching out of different kinds of tragedy. Colin Burrow argues that 'the category 'tragedy' was very elastic in this period'² and suggests that 'Shakespeare's own conception of what might be achieved by a play which its printers might want to call a tragedy kept on changing.'³

Underlying this shifting conception is, however, a sense of purpose. The four plays looked at in the thesis – *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, and *Julius Caesar* – though disparate, share a self-consciousness about their language and effect as Shakespeare explores the instability of the popular drama.

That instability was an acknowledged feature of the Elizabethan theatrical scene is reflected in the deliberately metatheatrical references in 2.2 of *Hamlet*. Polonius' speech welcoming the players to Elsinore suggests that there is a deliberateness about this mixing of genres, as he interlinks apparently opposing kinds: 'The most famous actors in the world for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-historical-comical-pastoral, scene

¹ Bevington, 'Tragedy in Shakespeare's Career', in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern, 2nd edn (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 51-70 (p. 57).

² Colin Burrow, 'What is a Shakespearean Tragedy?' in *Shakespearean Tragedy* (see Bevington, above), pp. 1-22 (p. 5).

³ Burrow, p. 18.

individable or poem unlimited' (*Hamlet* 2.2.379-82).⁴ Genre, Polonius suggests, was not set in clear and equitable divisions. Rather there was significant slippage and crossover between apparently opposite types of play. As Jill L. Levenson notes, 'In effect Elizabethan tragedy and comedy had so much in common that a stroke of the pen could change one into the other'.⁵

Paradoxically, it was this very fluidity that allowed Shakespeare to begin to define the boundaries of the tragic through a questioning of both action and language. The main aim of this thesis is to examine Shakespeare's early tragedies with the intention of exploring how they show the dramatist at work innovating new directions for tragedy. Each play is seen as a kind of experiment in tragic form involving a mingling of different genres. Such mingling, however, was not peculiar to Shakespeare. In 1560-1 Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* appeared; its full title page reads;

*A lamentable tragedie mixed full of pleafant mirth, conteyning the life of CAMBISES King of PERCIA, from the beginning of his kingdome vnto his death, his one good deed of execution, after that many wicked deeds and tirannous murders, committed by and through him, and laft of all, his odious death by Gods Justice appointed, Doon in fuch order as foloweth,*⁶

Whether or not we regard *Cambyses* as 'the first Elizabethan Tragedy',⁷ its mixed mode is reflected throughout the period and seen, for instance, in the

⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare: Hamlet*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd edn (New York and London: W.W Norton & Co., 1986; repr. 2005).

⁵ Jill L. Levenson, 'Introduction' in *The Oxford Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; repr. 2008), p. 51.

⁶http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=SINGLE&ID=99846071&ECCO=N&FILE=../session/1450890649_9851&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&SUBSET=1&ENTRIES=6&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD=default [accessed December 23rd 2015]

⁷ See Eugene D. Hill, 'The First Elizabethan Tragedy: A Contextual Reading of *Cambyses*', *Studies in Philology*, 89 (1992), 404-433.

mutability of the titles of the quarto and Folio editions.⁸ For example, *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second* printed in quarto version in 1597, by the time of the Folio text of 1623 has become *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second*. Equally, the version of *King Lear* in the quarto version of 1608, *Mr William Shakespeare his true chronicle history of the life and death of King Lear and his three daughters, with the unfortunate life of Edgar, son and heir to the earl of Gloucester, and his sullen and assumed humour of Tom of Bedlam*, becomes plain *King Lear* by 1623.

Even within the Folio, this mutability of genre is reflected by further titular discrepancies. Of the eleven plays listed in the ‘Tragedies’ section at the front of the volume, only three, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, are denoted as such. Of the remaining eight, three have what Burrow names as ‘bald titles’,⁹ thus *Romeo and Juliet* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* have no other description, while *The Life and Death of Julius Caesar* suggests that it perhaps would be more suitable to be placed in the ‘Histories’ section of ‘A CATALOGUE / of the severall Comedies Histories and Tra / gedies contained in this Volume’. There are further disparities in the ‘running titles’ at the top of the respective pages of the Folio. Amongst other alterations *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*,

⁸ This is only one example of a title suggesting the mingling of genres. Others include John Lyly’s *Campaspe* (1584) known variously as *A moste excellent Comedie of Alexander, Campaspe, and Diogenes* in its Q1 edition, and as *A tragical Comedie of Alexander and Campaspe* across its ‘running titles’; ‘R.B.’s 1575 *Apius and Virginia* is more accurately known as *A new tragicall comedie of Apius and Virginia wherein is liuely expressed a rare example of the vertue of chastitie, by Virginias constancy, in wishing rather to be slaine at her owne fathers handes, then to be deflowered of the wicked iudge Apius*. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000998401840000&WARN=N&SIZE=60&FILE=../session/1450890400_9253&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&ECCO=N [accessed December 23rd 2015] See Peter Berek, ‘Genres, Early Modern Theatrical Title Pages and the Authority of Print’ in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. by Marta Straznicky (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), pp. 159-175 for more information.

⁹ Burrow, ‘What is a Shakespearean Tragedy’, p. 5.

Othello and *King Lear* have ‘Tragedie’ conferred on them in their respective title pages in the volume proper, underlined by their nomenclature as such in the ‘running titles’. *Julius Caesar* also changes from *The Life and Death of Julius Caesar* in the Catalogue to *The Tragedie of Julius Caesar* in the title page and ‘running titles’ of the play proper. *Timon of Athens* from the Catalogue gains a ‘Life of Tymon of Athens’ by the play’s title page, although remains *Timon of Athens* in the running title. As Burrow comments, ‘a play’s title leaf might foretell the nature of the tragic volume. Or it might not’.¹⁰ The idea of three stable dramatic divisions – comedy, history and tragedy – suggested by the Folio’s ‘Catalogue’ is not supported by its subsequent pages.

The instability of genre reflected in the changing titles extends to the content of the plays themselves. Apparently obvious indicators such as commonality of theme are not applicable to identification as there is significant overlap in subject, not only between comedy and tragedy, but also between history and tragedy. As Bevington notes, ‘Shakespeare certainly pursued tragic themes and consequences in his early historical plays’, citing *The Contention* or the three parts of *Henry VI* as examples.¹¹ It is the evolving conception of tragedy as an identifiable genre within this pattern of overlapping themes, however, that is the overall concern of this thesis. The four plays under consideration, all written in the 1590s, illustrate, I suggest, an ongoing exploration of the idea of tragedy. Each play, and its ‘tragic subject’ appear essentially different. From the bloodthirsty Roman world of *Titus*

¹⁰ Burrow, ‘What is a Shakespearean Tragedy’, p. 5.

¹¹ David Bevington, ‘Tragedy in Shakespeare’s Career’, p. 51. Bevington further comments on the changing titles of *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous House of York and Lancaster* of the 1594 quarto version becomes *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth* by the Folio of 1623, and similarly that *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Death of Good King Henry the Sixth* is known as *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* by 1623.

Andronicus, to the examination of the tragic love of *Romeo and Juliet* and the historical but self-inflicted tragedy of *Richard II*, before a return to the classical tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, each play is identified as a tragedy and yet both its subject and its treatment differ significantly from the preceding play. Ostensibly there appears to be no clear sense of tragedy as a genre, but rather a seemingly disparate group of plays and subjects that are only identified as tragic by their titles, which, as already indicated, can be mutable.

However, within Shakespeare's own body of work there appear to be strong indications of his own perspective of tragedy as a genre. Pertinent here because of its dating as concomitant with the plays under discussion is a consideration of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, most specifically, its deliberately comic representation of the tragedy of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. At once a parody of the tragic and a masterpiece of metatheatre, there are indications within this play-within-a-play of contemporary assumptions about tragedy, but also more particularly, indications of Shakespeare's own view and expectations of the genre.

I. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Tragic Archetype of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'

There is, currently, no consensus as to the date of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although, as it is mentioned by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598, it clearly pre-dates Meres' work.¹² Stephen Greenblatt in his 'Introduction' to the play in *The Norton Shakespeare* comments that 'certain of its stylistic features have led many scholars to place it around 1594-6, the

¹² See Amy J. Reiss and George Walton Williams, 'Tragical Mirth: From *Romeo* to *Dream*' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43 (Summer 1992), 214-218 for a consideration of the dating issues surrounding the two plays. Reiss and Williams conclude that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* postdates *Romeo and Juliet*.

probable period of the comparably lyrical *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II*'.¹³ That there are links between *The Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* is highlighted by Levenson's question about the dynamic relationship between comedy and tragedy in the two plays: 'Is *Romeo and Juliet* a serious treatment of the romantic dilemmas in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a parody of the romantic tragedy?'¹⁴ Both plays, of course, focus on lovers divided by familial objections. However, the narrative connections between the plays are not my primary concern. Rather, it is the implications of the deliberate lampooning of a tragedy for comic effect that is of interest. There will be a much more comprehensive analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* and 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in the second chapter of this thesis but I wish here to suggest that the satiric example of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' both implicitly and explicitly tells us something important about the nature of Shakespearean tragedy.

Tragedy as a blend of genre is introduced from the initial mention of the play-within-the-play: 'Marry, our play is 'The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe'' (1.2.11-12).¹⁵ The suggestion of tragedy as a compound is referred to subsequently at the play's first proper rehearsal: 'Marry there are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never please. First Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself' (3.1.8-10). The conjunction of 'comedy' with 'kill himself', while clearly played for comic effect, highlights the genre as mixed and intermingled (as well as underlining the necessity of death to a tragedy). This is again referred to in the

¹³ Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction' in *The Norton Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 839.

¹⁴ Levenson, 'Introduction', p. 103.

¹⁵ All quotations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are taken from *The Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979; repr. 2007).

description of the play prior to its performance: ‘A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus/And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth’ (5.1.56-7). The use of antonyms, ‘tedious’ and ‘brief’, ‘tragical’ and ‘mirth’, emphasises the comic aspect of the parody, but equally underlines the suggestion of genre as a contradictory blend.

The play-within-the-play is inherently self-referential, and while a comic device, it also exposes something of the tragic pattern. Bottom in 1.2, within the space of fifteen lines, deliberates on the importance of audience response, the place of fear in a drama, the idea of ‘lofty’ tragedy, intertextuality and a potential acknowledgement of Robert Greene’s implicit criticism of Shakespeare in the *Groatsworth of Wit*,¹⁶ all delivered in hyperbolic rhetoric. His focus on the style of tragic acting – a precursor to Hamlet’s later critique - and his emphasis on the idea of audience response are more than empty noise, for they are also part of the ongoing contemporary debate about drama, voiced most strongly in Sir Philip Sidney’s *A Defence of Poesy* posthumously published in 1595. Sidney had little time for the mingling of clowns and kings or the demotic. Bottom’s lines appear as part of Shakespeare’s response to Sidney’s attack, potentially addressing part of Sidney’s tract directly: ‘That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. Let the audience look to their eyes. I will move storms’ (1.2.21-23). These lines seem a deliberate glance at Sidney’s account of how tragedy ought to be:

But how much can it move, Plutarch yielded a notable
testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pharaeus from
whose eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew

¹⁶ Bottom’s reference to ‘Ercles’ refers to ‘The twelue labors of *Hercules* haue I terribly thundred on the Stage’, a line from Greene’s *Groatsworth of Wit*: <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/greene1.html> [accessed December 21st 2105] Greene had referred to Shakespeare as ‘an upstart crow beautified with our feathers’ in his pamphlet published posthumously in 1592.

abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers and some of his own blood.¹⁷

Bottom's subsequent emphasis on his tyrannical suitability appears to confirm these textual links: 'Yet my chief humour is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in to make all split' (1.2.24-25). His parody of Seneca's tragedy *Hercules Ortaeus* also suggests that intertextuality is a part of the tragic mixture, in the same way that *Titus Andronicus*, for example, relies on Seneca's *Thyestes* for part of its plot.

Contextually, then, dramatic precedent is inherently important – certainly in the early part of Shakespeare's tragic career. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* uses such precedent for comic effect:

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks,
Shall break the locks
Of prison-gates;
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish fates.
(1.2.27-34).

Bottom here parodies the overtly tragic style of contemporary Senecan translation,¹⁸ while also burlesquing the pretentious rhetoric associated with classical tragedy. The hyperbolic alliteration, 'raging rocks/And shivering shocks', along with the recognised parody of a peculiar stylistic characteristic indicates that Shakespeare's target, while specific, is also broader, as Kenneth Muir argues: 'Quince's play serves to satirise not merely the crude mingling of tragedy and comedy still prevalent in 1595 in the lower levels of popular

¹⁷ Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poesy* in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; repr. 2002), pp. 212-252 (p. 230). All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁸ Most editors credit Stanley Wells' comment that these lines are probably Shakespeare's deliberate burlesque of John Studley's 1581 translation of *Hercules Oetaeus*. See Brooks, 1.2.27-34n and Holland, 1.2.26-33n.

drama [...] but also many of the absurd faults of style into which the poetasters of the age were liable to fall'.¹⁹ Extravagant rhetoric was clearly an anticipated stylistic feature of tragedy and one that Shakespeare as part of his conscious attempt to redefine tragedy from the mid 1590s onwards seeks to avoid.

Marcus' exaggerated speech of 2.3 in *Titus Andronicus* is, I will argue, while part of inherited theatrical precedent and the intertextuality of that play, is also a part of Shakespeare's innovative approach to the role of poetry in tragedy and to the finding of an appropriate discourse. Indeed, the early tragedies are as much about a search for a new tragic language as about a search for a particular form or shape of action of tragedy.

The place of the audience and their response is a further consideration in the tragic matrix, an idea that Bottom's subsequent emphasis in the rude mechanical's second rehearsal confirms:

Bottom: There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never please. First Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?
Snout: Byrlakin a parlous fear.
Starveling: I believe that we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

(3.1.8-14)

To 'leave the killing out' would turn the play into a comedy, so the indication is that violence is a necessary part of the tragic paradigm. In turn, such violence is linked by Snout to the role of fear – and potentially the Aristotelian concept of catharsis – engendered in the audience as key to tragedy. Catharsis as a part of the tragic imperative will be discussed more fully in Chapter One on *Titus Andronicus* but the analysis by Bottom and Snout of their play seems to capture some of the essential ingredients of the

¹⁹ Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 77.

tragic. Audience response to tragedy is later emphasised by the performance of the play itself.²⁰ Hippolyta's early interjection, 'This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard' (5.1.207), is undermined by both Theseus' advice that 'The best in this kind are but shadows and the/worst are no worst if imagination amend them' (5.1.208-9), and by her subsequent response, 'Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man' (5.1.279). The idea of pathos as part of the paradigm of tragedy will be addressed in Chapter Three as an aspect of the innovative approach to Richard II as a tragic 'hero'.

The self-referential aspect of the mechanicals' rehearsal is consistent with the place of metadrama in the tragedies that this thesis will examine. The parody in *The Dream* relies upon a number of 'in-jokes', not least Bottom's insistence on the necessity of a prologue to explain that the play is, in fact, only make-believe:

I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue, and
let the prologue seem to say we do no harm with our
swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed.
(3.1.15-18).

This metatheatricality is confirmed by the mechanicals' insistence on deconstructing theatrical artifice. From a discussion of costume, 'and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck' (3.1.35-6), to the practicalities of staging, 'but there is two hard things: that is to bring moonlight into a chamber – for you know Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight' (3.1.45-7), theatrical mechanics, while providing much of the comedy, also are delineated as an essential aspect of tragedy. Metadramatic

²⁰ Terence Hawkes makes the point that audience participation formed such 'a distinctive part of the traditional theatrical experience in Shakespeare's theatre' that their 'interjected comments [...] became [...] included as part of the plays themselves'. See Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare's Talking Animals* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p. 231.

considerations are some of the links between the plays under discussion. From Tamora's pastiche of Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*, to Richard II's stage management of his own deposition, the tragedies of the 1590s continually revert to the metatheatrical conceits suggested by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Part Two. Metadrama: Origin and development of the term

Central to the present thesis is the idea of metadrama. The terms 'metadrama' and 'metatheatre', as James L. Calderwood notes, were first coined in 1963 by Lionel Abel in his book *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*.²¹ In the revised edition of 2003, Abel himself acknowledges the fluidity of the metatheatre idea, referring to it as 'ever loose and sometimes erratic'.²² While metadrama as a concept thus has always had a certain ambiguity - Richard Hornby, for example, identifies six 'overt' varieties - at its most basic level it is about drama as drama.²³ The following section attempts to trace the extension of this idea by the main critics who have taken up the term for their own use. These include Calderwood, Anne Richter, Andrew Gurr, and Tiffany Stern. Although these all differ in critical approach, they are linked by a common thread which sees metadrama concerned with the audience's perception. The current thesis, by contrast, posits that, rather than focusing on audience response, metadrama is instead intrinsically linked with Shakespeare's exploration of tragedy as a genre and what I refer to as his

²¹ Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963). See James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama: The Argument of the Play in 'Titus Andronicus', 'Love's Labour's Lost', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and 'Richard II'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 4.

²² Lionel Abel, Martin Puchner (Introduction), *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 2003), p. v.

²³ Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (Toronto and London: Bucknell University Press, 1986), p. 32.

‘search for tragic form’ in the 1590s. My use of the term therefore is consonant with Abel’s suggestion of its malleability, but proposes that it is part of Shakespeare’s early-career experimentation with tragedy, rather than, as Abel argues, something that works in opposition to the idea of tragedy.

I. Abel and Righter

As Martin Puchner comments, the term metatheatre has, since Lionel Abel coined it, taken on a ‘life of its own’.²⁴ It is, however, worth examining Abel’s own definition and understanding of the phrase in order to fully comprehend how the idea has been adopted and transfigured in the intervening decades. Abel’s aim in *Metatheatre* is to explore modernist theatre and its relationship to tragedy. Taking as his starting point the Aristotelian idea of tragedy as a play that ‘stimulates its audience to pity and fear’, Abel rejects the majority of Shakespeare’s plays generally regarded as tragedies, arguing instead that ‘The only “tragedy” of Shakespeare which may stimulate us to both pity and fear is *Macbeth*’.²⁵ He distinguishes between *Macbeth* and those tragedies that, in his opinion, are ‘defective’, including *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Julius Caesar*, which he sees as melodrama rather than tragedy.²⁶ He suggests that the emphasis on theatre and the mechanics of drama in these plays, their metadrama, is the result of Shakespeare’s ‘finding it difficult to make the story tragic’, rather than metadrama being an intentional feature of tragedy.²⁷ Metadrama, he contends, is entirely separate from the ‘reality’ of the play, and, for Abel, it is the engagement with the ‘real’ world that makes a drama tragic. Theatricality – and the self-awareness of theatricality – offers a

²⁴ Martin Puchner, ‘Introduction’ to *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, p. 1.

²⁵ Abel, *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, pp. 28-31.

²⁶ Abel, *Metatheatre*, pp. 43-58.

²⁷ Abel, *Metatheatre*, p.41.

dreamlike status that detracts from the reality of tragedy: ‘Tragedy gives by far the stronger sense of the reality of the world [...] Metatheatre, from the point of view of tragedy, is as real as are our dreams’.²⁸

While Abel’s stance softened somewhat over time, his initial response to the role of metadrama was as a device contradictory or opposite to tragedy. Instead of self-reflexivity being part of the tragic imperative, in Abel’s reading it is rather a sign of failure: if the play becomes aware of its own theatricality, he argues, it immediately ceases to be tragic. More, the theatricalisation within the texts puts the characters into competition with the playwright, as they themselves insist on their right to ‘write’ their own destinies. While Abel recognises this tendency in characters such as Falstaff and Caliban, *Hamlet* is, for Abel, the culmination of this idea, where, he suggests, ‘there is hardly a scene in the whole work in which some character is not trying to dramatise another’.²⁹ Such theatricalisation detracts from the tragic focus of the plays, but also identifies Shakespeare as ‘the first modern playwright: the grand precursor of Pirandello and Brecht, of Genet and Beckett’.³⁰ Although Abel’s critical legacy has been reduced, as Jenn Stephenson suggests, to ‘his contribution of terminology [that] is so well-integrated into theatrical discourse that it no longer needs a reference’,³¹ his focus on self-reflexivity in Shakespeare’s plays and his contention that the theatre was concerned only with the world that it created and its effect on the audience, opened up the idea of metadrama to a wider critical reception.

²⁸ Abel, *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, p. 183.

²⁹ Abel, *Metatheatre*, p. 45.

³⁰ Richard Fly, ‘The Evolution of Shakespearean Metadrama: Abel, Burckhardt and Calderwood’, in *Comparative Drama*, 20 (1986), 124-139 (p. 126).

³¹ Jenn Stephenson, review of *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form*, *Theatre Journal*, 58:1 (2006), 165-166 (p. 166).

Anne Righter, in her 1962 book *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, although not specifically using the term metadrama, like Abel explores the inter-relationship of illusion and reality in Shakespeare's plays.³² Referring to what she calls the 'tyranny of the audience', Righter argues that the Elizabethan theatrical period inherited a legacy from the earlier Tudor morality play that accepted audience involvement.³³ She suggests that a part of the Elizabethan attitude towards self-reflexivity is the struggle to separate the audience from the actors, tracing this development through the increased theatrical engagement with classical playwrights: 'Most important of all, they [the Renaissance dramatists] found in Roman comedy a means of overthrowing the tyranny of the audience, a liberating sanction of the self-contained play'.³⁴ This self-containment is, in Righter's reading, a limiting of the audience-actor contact through such additions such as the Prologue and Epilogue. The increasing self-sufficiency of the play also increases its illusory nature, and, for Righter, the separation of reality and the drama is part of the theatrical experimentation of the period. Theatre acquires a 'dreamlike' quality, whilst retaining contact with the 'real' world beyond the play through its subject and structure: 'A sense of contact with the audience still had to be maintained, a means of relating the play world with that reality upon which plays are built'.³⁵ Metadramatic technique for Righter, then, is part of the interplay between the 'real' world and that of the play, forcing the continual

³² Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, repr. 1967). Righter's book predates that of Lionel Abel's and his coining of the term 'metadrama'. An early exploration of similar ideas was S. L. Bethell's *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London: Staples Press, 1944). More recently, Charlotte Scott in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) has taken Righter's idea in a new but complementary direction.

³³ Righter, p. 41.

³⁴ Righter, p. 41.

³⁵ Righter, p. 55.

re-evaluation of the audience-actor dynamic. The emphasis on the world of the play and the theatrical qualities of drama serve, in Righter's view, to illustrate the dichotomy between illusion and reality, 'to remind the audience that elements of illusion are present in ordinary life and that between the world and the stage there exists a complicated interplay of resemblance that is part of the perfection and nobility of the drama itself as a form'.³⁶

Shakespeare's emphasis on the idea of theatre, while a part of the dynamic between illusion and reality, is equally enmeshed in Righter's reading with a sense of 'glorifying the stage', while its self-reflexivity serves to affirm 'the power of the stage'.³⁷ Highlighting that the conceit of the 'world as a stage' was an Elizabethan commonplace, Righter comments that Shakespeare's engagement with the idea was to an 'unusual' extent, and that metadramatic influences are fundamental to the form and structure of his plays:

Essentially a technique for maintaining contact with the spectators, the play image also became in mature Shakespearean drama a meditation on the nature of the theatre, a meditation which, between the Henry VI plays and *The Tempest*, reflects a series of changing attitudes towards the relation of illusion and reality. Shakespeare's genius perceived in the metaphor a virtually inexhaustible means of expression, reflecting the multiple possibilities inherent in the dramatic situation itself.³⁸

While this thesis engages with Righter's suggestion that theatrical associations permeate the structure of Shakespeare's plays, it further argues that metadrama is linked to the exploration of genre and tragedy. Metadrama, I argue, is therefore more than a conduit for audience engagement and self-conscious celebration but also informs Shakespeare's 'playing with' varying kinds of

³⁶ Righter, p. 78.

³⁷ Righter, p. 147.

³⁸ Righter, p. 81.

drama and their relationship to tragedy. While both Abel and Righter focus on metatheatres' relationship to illusion and reality and to the audience, I argue that the conceit's self-reflexive nature is about more than its own appearance, and includes that of the form and category of the play itself.

II. Calderwood, Gurr and Stern

While metadrama, for both Abel and Righter, is about the dynamic between illusion and reality, for James L. Calderwood, whose work, as Fly points out, 'is practically synonymous with the metadramatic method',³⁹ metadrama is more concerned with the text itself and its making and shaping.⁴⁰ Calderwood, who acknowledges the influence of Righter's work on his thinking, sees metadrama as more than 'the idea of the play', and extends the term into 'dramatic art itself - its materials, its media of language and theater, its generic forms and conventions, its relationship to truth and social order'.⁴¹ Metadrama here is seen as a much broader term, engaging more with the fabric of the text rather than a celebrating of the stage's separateness from reality. For Calderwood, the figures onstage become metaphors of Shakespeare as dramatist and his working out of the dramatic problems he faces:

If Henry VI is figured as a dramatist staging the play of state, how he does and fails to do this can tell us something about how that royal dramatist Shakespeare – in whose theatrical realm actors are courtiers and groundlings in the pit are subjects as potentially rebellious as Jack Cade's unworthies – regards his role in ordering his fictional commonwealth.⁴²

Calderwood's strength lies in extending the metadramatic focus beyond references to plays, players and theatre in order to become a tool to analyse

³⁹ Fly, p. 132.

⁴⁰ Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, p. 5.

⁴² Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, p. 6. Calderwood accepts the drawbacks of this approach, acknowledging that although he seems 'to be courting a sort of combined intentional-biographical fallacy' he also argues that 'Shakespeare's final intentions *are* the play' (p.6).

Shakespeare's language. He uses Shakespeare's metadramatic emphasis as part of the author's search for a suitable dramatic language, tracing Shakespeare's exploration of poetry through what he suggests is a failure to find a suitable poetic discourse in *Romeo and Juliet* to the disintegration of language in *Richard II*. Central to Calderwood's thinking, however, is *Hamlet* and its multiple theatrical references, its play-within-the play and Hamlet himself with his antic disposition. For Calderwood tragedy is nearly synonymous with metadrama and his subsequent book on *Macbeth* is very much the companion piece to his study of *Hamlet*.⁴³

Calderwood has had a considerable influence on readings of *Hamlet* and of metadramatic readings of other plays,⁴⁴ but more recently there has been a questioning of some of the underlying assumptions employed by Calderwood and his predecessors. This questioning can be seen in the work of Andrew Gurr who relates the metadramatic strain in Renaissance drama to a fear that the theatre might have been thought to have been engaging in a kind of Catholic deception of its audience. Gurr, arguing that the Elizabethan theatre was fundamentally anti-realistic, equates its inherent artifice with the idea of illusionism, an idea that he suggests was firmly associated in Elizabethan minds with religion: 'Behind the churchmen's diatribes [against the theatre] sat a real fear of illusion

⁴³ James Calderwood, *If it Were Done: Macbeth and Tragic Action* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Judd D. Herbert, *Metatheatrical: The Example of Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Joanne Rochester, *Staging Spectatorship in the Plays of Philip Massinger* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010); Kate Flaherty, 'Theatre and Metatheatricality in *Hamlet*', *Sydney Studies in English*, 31 (2005), 3-20; Jenn Stephenson, 'Singular Impressions: Metatheatricality on Renaissance celebrities and corpses', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 27:2 (2007), 137-153.

and a revulsion against the deliberate dishonesty it was based on'.⁴⁵

Theatrical costume undermined the sumptuary laws of Tudor society, while performance of such matters as invisible spirits linked the theatre with the contemporary condemnation of witchcraft and deception. Gurr comments: 'Professional players were condemned for staging illusions because they pretended to be people other than themselves which was a basic dishonesty'.⁴⁶ He suggests that the inherent metadramatic approach in Shakespeare's plays such as *Richard III* is as a mechanism for addressing the disparity between theatrical illusion and wider religious concerns. In this way he suggests that metadrama is a way of hiding in plain sight: 'Telling the audience about his planned deceits, Richard offers himself in the familiar image of the actor entertaining the audience by openly playing his devilish part'.⁴⁷

While noting the contemporary association of performance with 'Catholic practices', Gurr also suggests that the relationship of illusion to deception was a concern of both audience and actors as something to be avoided.⁴⁸ Metadrama in this reading is a distancing device, separating performance from religion by highlighting the intrinsic theatricality of the theatre: 'Such a privileging', Gurr comments, 'helped to reduce the seriousness of the counterfeit'.⁴⁹ For Gurr other elements of the play – speaking in blank verse, asides, prologues and epilogues – were all part of

⁴⁵ Andrew Gurr, 'Metatheatre and the Fear of Playing', in *Studies in Renaissance Literature: Neo-Historicism*, ed. by Robin Headlam-Wells, Glenn Burgess and Rowland Wymer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 91-111 (p. 91).

⁴⁶ Gurr, 'Metatheatre', p. 94.

⁴⁷ Gurr, 'Metatheatre', p. 95.

⁴⁸ See Gurr, pp. 93-99, where he refers to pamphleteers such as Stephen Gosson as well as to the 1592 academic debate between John Rainolds and William Gager. See also

<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/gager/prose/rainolds/text.html> [accessed July 5th 2016]

⁴⁹ Gurr, 'Metatheatre', p. 107.

the anti –realistic response, of the need to reinforce the theatricality of performance and to separate it from what he regards as the very real tension between dramatic illusion and religious practice.⁵⁰

He argues that the metatheatrical expectations in Elizabethan theatre from both sides of the performative divide were thus much more significant than previous critics have suggested, referring to the ‘metatheatrical games’ engaged in by both authors and performers and the audience. Gurr further suggests that the endings, specifically of tragedies, needed to breach the divide between illusion and reality, commenting that this liminal moment, whether a jig or some early form of curtain call, needed to ‘destroy whatever vestiges of illusion the ending might have drawn the audience into and helped to give explicit emphasis to the metatheatrical game that the audience and players had shared’.⁵¹ The idea of a ‘metatheatrical game’ between the audience and actors is expanded in Gurr’s consideration of the idea of the theatrical ‘in joke’. Thus metatheatre in the form of internal references to plays and playing offers an insight into the relationship between the performer and the audience, providing some degree of complicity between them: ‘Shakespeare clearly expected his audience attending The Globe in 1600 for *Hamlet* to know that the actor now playing Polonius, probably John Hemminges, had been Caesar in the previous year’s play’.⁵²

Although Gurr therefore considers metatheatre as operating in a very different way from that of Abel or Calderwood, his ideas still

⁵⁰ For example, Gurr highlights Edward Alleyn’s practice of wearing a crucifix while performing *Dr. Faustus*.

⁵¹ Gurr, ‘Metatheatre’, p. 107.

⁵² Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 126.

primarily focus on audience response. For Gurr the role of metadrama in Shakespeare's plays is to deconstruct the artificiality of the theatre, to show the audience that theatre is only theatre, not a truth that might compete with religion. Metadrama in Gurr's reading arises out of a fear of the authorities charging the drama with deception and falsehood in the same way that Hal charges Falstaff in Act Two of *1 Henry IV*. Rather than simply emphasising the illusory nature of the drama, however, I suggest that the metadramatic references in the four plays under discussion also draw attention to the texts' engagement with the exploration of genre, specifically tragedy. So Tamora's pastiche of Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*, for example, while a part of the intertextuality between Shakespeare's play and that of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, also confirms revenge as a significant part of the tragic paradigm.⁵³ Equally, *Julius Caesar*'s multiple metatheatrical focus is overtly self-reflexive in its questioning of the role and nature of honour in politics and tragedy.

In contrast to Gurr, Tiffany Stern considers theatrical allusions to the performance space as 'proud acknowledgements of the staging possibilities', and thus sees metatheatrical references as a celebration rather than a plea for imagination over the limitations of what was practically available.⁵⁴ Moving away from Righter's conclusion that Shakespeare's relationship with the theatre in his later career was one

⁵³ On Kyd and Shakespeare, see Gregory M. Colon Semenza, 'The Spanish Tragedy and Metatheatricality', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 153-162. The complex relationship between Kyd and Shakespeare lies outside the scope of the present thesis. Similarly to follow the dynamic interaction between Shakespeare and Marlowe explored, for example, in Robert Logan's *Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) would have taken the thesis in a different direction.

⁵⁴ Tiffany Stern 'This Wide and Universal Theatre': The Theatre as Prop in Shakespeare's Metadrama' in *Shakespeare's Theatre's and the Effects of Performance*, eds. Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2014, repr. 2015), pp. 11-33 (pp. 14-15).

bitterness, ‘of disorder, futility and pride’,⁵⁵ Stern instead argues that ‘Shakespeare’s references to a theatre that was so visually a part of performance could be seen as the reverse of alienation: it celebrated the space, while letting the spectators off the hook, allowing them the relaxing option of not, for once, having to add imaginative fancy to what they see in order to believe’.⁵⁶ While Gurr suggests that the anti-realistic staging reinforces the idea and importance of theatrical artifice, Stern argues that Shakespeare exploits the performance possibilities to the full: ‘Shakespeare’s complexity, and his profoundest “metatheatre” [...] is angled to the ways in which the physical reality of the stage met the fictions acted upon it’.⁵⁷ Shakespeare’s references to the literal performance space thus both reinforce the conceit of the world as a stage while also emphasising that the events on stage are a fiction.

Like Gurr, Stern also considers the inter-relationship of playtexts and playhouses, suggesting that the intertextual references between *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* not only link the two plays but also act as a form of advertising. Commenting on Horatio’s lines, ‘A little ere the mightiest Julius fell/The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead/Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets’ (*Hamlet*, 1.1.113-6), Stern considers that ‘This can be read as a promise of ghoulish pleasures in the other play if the same audience chooses to come back to the theatre’.⁵⁸ Although not the most significant aspect of my thesis’ engagement with metadrama, the idea of intertextual relationships between not just the plays, but also between

⁵⁵ Righter, p. 140.

⁵⁶ Stern ‘This Wide and Universal Theatre’, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Stern, ‘This Wide and Universal Theatre’, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2004, repr. 2005), p. 75.

authors and the quotidian world of Elizabethan theatre forms a part of my argument. It is through the metatheatrical intertextual references that I argue Shakespeare's creative approach to tragedy can to some degree be traced. His recognition of the importance of the idea and place of the theatre to earlier plays informs what I suggest was a contemporary preoccupation with and debate about the nature and form of the theatre and drama.

Stern, in common with all of the critics under discussion above, acknowledges that metatheatricality was multi-dimensional, but my idea of metadrama differs from that of Stern in its conception of the purpose of these theatrical references. Stern primarily sees them as a means of 'interpreting and heightening the words, and, sometimes, as a way of querying or undercutting them'.⁵⁹ I suggest that Shakespeare's use of metadrama rather explores the generic categorisation of the play. In *Julius Caesar* for example, Shakespeare plays with the perception of tragedy by killing the titular character part way through the play, thus questioning its tragic focus. Although the performance space is clearly explored – the staging of the running race inverts expectation with the main action occurring away from the sight of both actor and audience – metatheatricality is part of Shakespeare's creative approach to the form of tragedy, disturbing the prevalent archetype to identify questions such as the role and place of the tragic hero as well as the nature and form of a language for tragedy. A part of my argument is that metadrama is an often overlooked link between the varying threads that can be seen throughout the early tragedies. As I note in Chapter One, I also wish to extend the term to

⁵⁹ Stern, 'This Wide and Universal Theatre', p. 31.

encompass all aspects of theatrical reference as well as engagement with the audience. It might be objected that such a use of the term weakens its primary usefulness, but if the term is intended to draw attention to the idea of play making, then it cannot help but include a wider range of considerations. Everything in the play is about the play, either explicitly or implicitly, and about Shakespeare's making of it.

Part Three: Shakespeare at work

As David Bevington notes, 'Shakespeare apprenticed himself to neo-classical Senecan tragedy in *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1589-192)'.⁶⁰ This is the tragic model that is suggested in the parody of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', an archetype that Shakespeare in his subsequent tragedies of the 1590s distances himself from, experimenting instead with different forms, shapes and structures of tragedy in his search to create a new model that both breaks from but remains connected to popular drama through such features as violence and fear. Running concurrently alongside Shakespeare's self-conscious search for a new type of tragedy is also his differing treatment of his narrative sources. These include, in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, Ovid and Seneca, contemporaneous poetry in *Romeo and Juliet*, historical chronicles including Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall in *Richard II*, and Thomas North's translation of Plutarch in *Julius Caesar*. These various sources are instrumental in establishing the generic focus of each of the respective plays, although part of the investigation of this thesis is the development in Shakespeare's handling of them. Primarily I will suggest

⁶⁰ Bevington, 'Tragedy in Shakespeare's Career', p. 54.

that a significant part of Shakespeare's experimentation is the distillation of his source material to increase the opportunity for tragedy.

The structure of the thesis that follows is broadly linear, with each chapter focusing exclusively on, as much as academic consensus suggests, successively composed tragedies. The varying iterative characteristics of the plays under discussion are addressed in turn, as, I will argue, authorial treatment of these features develops as the decade progresses. These traits include, as already mentioned, primary sources, metadrama, dramatic vocabulary and pre-existing theatrical tragedy. An ongoing part of my argument is the assessment and re-assessment of the influence of Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy*, most particularly Sidney's idea of 'mongrel tragi-comedy'.⁶¹

Chapter One concentrates on *Titus Andronicus*, a play that seemingly relies on the formulaic structure of Elizabethan revenge tragedy to establish its tragic credentials. *Titus Andronicus* is the earliest part of Shakespeare's tragic experimentation, but within its utilisation of dramatic precedent there are, I will suggest, tangible traces of an authorial attempt to explore a different tragic paradigm. This is seen in the introduction of overtly poetic imagery to sensationalist revenge tragedy, and, although not an altogether successful experiment, is indicative of Shakespeare's deliberately innovative approach to the genre.

Chapter Two considers *Romeo and Juliet*, a very different type of tragedy. The narrative is split, focusing on two protagonists, rather than the single figure model of *Titus Andronicus*. The tragic pattern has, strikingly,

⁶¹ Sidney, p. 244.

changed. There is no place for macabre violence in Shakespeare's Verona, as there is no role for a malevolent character or characters working against the main protagonists. This is not a tragedy of state. Rather, the tragedy is informed by the failure of timing more usually associated with a comedy. Instead, the primary source dictates the play's genre. Arthur Brookes' *Romeus and Juliet* is a tragedy; consequently Shakespeare's play must also be tragic. But the theatrical model, as already noted, is that of a comedy. To this extent *Romeo and Juliet* appears a dramatic response to Sidney's disparagement of the 'mingling kings and clowns'.⁶²

Richard II is discussed in Chapter Three and marks a further departure from the tragic prototypes already explored. The play sees a return to the single protagonist but instead focuses on the lyrical construction of the central character as a tragic hero. It is the story of Richard's tragic self-fashioning, delineating his movement from a putative tyrant to a tragic figure. Shakespeare also significantly reworks his source material, exploring the evolution from history to tragedy. *Richard II* is thus an exercise in how to change historical perspective into a new tragic archetype.

Chapter Four analyses Shakespeare's explicit reimagining of a well-known story, *Julius Caesar*. This is Shakespeare's most radical approach to tragedy as it is an exploration of what remains when the titular character is killed off almost exactly halfway through the play. It is a divided play, and Shakespeare's innovation is both structural and self-reflexive. In this, the most metatheatrical of the plays addressed, Caesar's

⁶² Sidney, p. 244.

death undermines the tragic expectation established by the title and creates a liminal space between actor and audience. The narrative becomes multi-dimensional, questioning the idea of a single ‘hero’ figure as seminal to tragedy.

The thesis posits, then, that, during the 1590s, there is no single tragic pattern that fits Shakespeare’s plays. Instead, each play is viewed through a prism of exploration, analysing both the iterative features that interlink these plays, but also investigating Shakespeare’s innovative approach to the establishment of a tragic discourse. Shakespeare, at this point in time, is still a journeyman playwright working in the quotidian rough and tumble of the Elizabethan theatre. Competing against such violent ‘entertainment’ as bear baiting means that visceral violence and death have to be elements of his early tragedy. However, as the decade progresses, I suggest that Shakespeare investigates the idea of tragedy in order to define his own metatheory of the genre. The focus of this thesis is the self-conscious search for Shakespearean tragedy, a move away from the preexisting tragic precedent towards the more complex idea lampooned in ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ of a play that cannot easily be dismissed from memory. The Conclusion suggests that that play may prove to be *Hamlet*.

Chapter One

Titus Andronicus: Origins and Early Innovation

To an audience of 1594, *Titus Andronicus* superficially conformed to the contemporary vogue for bloodthirsty revenge tragedies. Following on from the theatrical successes of the late 1580s and early 1590s when plays including Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine The Great* and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* were first staged, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is ostensibly very much in the same mold. It has easily identifiable 'revenge tragedy' characteristics, including a bloodthirsty banquet (*The Battle of Alcazar*), the personification of Revenge (*The Spanish Tragedy*), the Rape of Philomel, taken from Ovid but frequently referred to in revenge drama (*Four Plays in One/The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*), and an appealingly witty but thoroughly evil villain (*The Jew of Malta/The Battle of Alcazar*).¹ However, while these aspects of *Titus Andronicus* appear to conform to a type, through the use of these theatrical signposts Shakespeare both identifies and explores expectations of the genre, seeking to create a new tragic paradigm.

Early modern theatre's relationship with genre was not straightforward, intermingled as it appears to be with ideas of the literary tragic archetype. Contemporaneous debates about the nature of tragedy focused primarily on its relationship with classical ideas of the tragic, and it is this debate that is

¹ All of the referenced tragedies are contemporaneous with *Titus Andronicus*, entered into the Stationer's Register in February 1594 and with a first recorded performance date of January 24th, 1594. *The Battle of Alcazar* attributed to George Peele (early 1590s); Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (entered into the Stationers' Register 1590 and first recorded performance of its first part dated 1587. There is no record of any performance after 1595), and Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (first recorded performance 1592). Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was probably written between 1584-1589 (first recorded performance 1592, although this is unlikely to have been its first performance). *Four Plays in One/The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins* is a lost drama belonging to Lord Strange's Men and conjectured to have been performed circa 1591-2. A surviving plot, extant at Alleyn's alma mater, Dulwich College, indicates that the third episode involves the Rape of Philomel. <http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/essays/plot.html> [accessed November 11th 2013]

exemplified by Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy*, written in the late 1570s but not published until 1595. Shakespeare had, by the early 1590s, established himself as a 'literary' poet, with the publication of first *Venus and Adonis* and subsequently *The Rape of Lucrece*.² Like Marlowe, he had also begun to be recognised as a new kind of dramatist, both in terms of language and action. I suggest that *Titus Andronicus* is, like 'Pyramus and Thisbe', part of Shakespeare's theatrical response to Sidney's literary argument.

There are distinct differences to be drawn, however, between the idea of literature for its own sake and the reality of the theatre and the play. As George K. Hunter points out:

Literary criticism [...] was, of course, tied to the humanist project of recuperating a classical literary and cultural order [...] The vernacular drama of Shakespeare and his fellows was, however, a commercial and pragmatic enterprise, dependent not on the precepts of authority but on the willingness of a heterogeneous contemporary audience to take delight in what they were shown.³

English tragedy that concentrated on the ideas of Greek and Roman classical authors was written but was primarily performed in the rarefied atmospheres of the universities and the Inns of Law.⁴ However, at this stage of his career, the everyday world of Elizabethan theatre was Shakespeare's milieu. Tragedy in this arena competed with a variety of alternative entertainments, including bear baiting and cockfighting, both 'sports' that were bloodthirsty and violent. Against this background of entertainment, it is no surprise that the first populist English theatrical tragedy of Elizabeth's late reign incorporated sensationalist violence.⁵

² This is suggested by Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia or Wit's Treasury* from 1598 where, along with references to certain of Shakespeare's plays, Meres remarks: 'mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred *Sonnets* among his priuate friends'. <http://www.bartleby.com/359/31.html> [accessed December 21st 2012]

³ George K. Hunter, 'Elizabethan theatrical genres and literary theory', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume III: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P Norton, 9 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. 2004), pp. 248-258, (p. 248).

⁴ See Rebecca Bushnell, 'The Fall of Princes: The Classical and Medieval Roots of English Renaissance Tragedy', in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005; repr. 2009), pp. 289-306 (p. 297).

⁵ Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561) is regarded as the progenitor of English theatrical tragedy as the earliest surviving five-act verse tragedy written in English. In blank verse, it was

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Titus Andronicus, then, derives from the same tragic stable as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* but its seeming reliance on this popular form of revenge tragedy is not the whole story. This chapter suggests that *Titus Andronicus*, like 'Pyramus and Thisbe', uses the medium of the play itself to explore the meaning of tragedy.⁶ The chapter examines in detail the relationship of the play to classical precedent, contemporary theatre, poetry and the vocabulary of tragedy as features of Shakespeare's exploration of a tragic formula that will be expanded upon and changed across subsequent plays.

Part One: Classical Influences: Seneca and Ovid

Renaissance focus on humanist ideology had led to a rediscovery of classical authors and texts. Ancient definitions of theatrical terms began to be deliberated from the mid 1500s onwards, and, although initially largely an academic debate, with recorded performances of classical tragedies being primarily at the universities and Inns of Law, the concerns of the discussion filtered across into the developing theatrical tradition. Roger Ascham in *The Schoolmaster*, published posthumously in 1570, describes such theoretical conversations: '[Mr Cheke] and I [...] had many pleasant talks together, in comparing the precepts of Aristotle and Horace *De Arte Poetica*, with the examples of Euripides, Sophocles and Seneca. Few men in writing of tragedies in our days have shot at this mark'.⁷ Thomas Nashe, writing in the early 1590s,

first performed at the Inner Temple in 1561, receiving a court performance at Whitehall in January 1562 and so dates from the early part of Elizabeth I's reign. See Matthew H. Wikander, 'Something is Rotten: English Renaissance Tragedies of State', in *A Companion to Tragedy*, pp. 307-327 (pp. 307-10).

⁶ The print history of *Titus Andronicus* clearly delineates the play as a tragedy. The first quarto of 1594 calls it 'The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus, As it was Plaide by the Right Honourable The Earle of Derby, Earle of Pembroke and the Earle of Sussex, their servants'. The First Folio equally confirms its tragic status, placing it second to *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* in its 'Categories of the severall Comedies, Histories and Tragedies contained in this Volume'. *Titus Andronicus*, then, is construed as a tragedy from its print inception, a status confirmed by the subsequent Quartos of 1600 and 1611, and cemented by the repetition of the 'final' line, 'Finis the Tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*', from the second quarto in subsequent editions. See Plate 1.

⁷ Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster* (1570), cited in *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, ed. Janette Dillon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; repr. 2009), p. 154. The author, 'one of the few men', referred to in the conversation is Thomas Watson and his play *Absalom* (1540 approx).

in the Preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, acknowledges the influence of classical authors on contemporary playwrights:⁸

But oh grief! *Tempus edax rerum*: what's that will last always?
The sea exhaled by drops will in continuance be dry, and
Seneca, let blood line by line and page by page at length must
needs die to our stage; which makes his famished followers to
imitate the kid in *Aesop* who, enamoured with the fox's
newfangles, forsook all hopes of life to leap into a new
occupation

The influence of classical authors in the drama is clear, manifesting itself through common themes, the use of stock characters and even in direct references to the earlier plays themselves.⁹ Building on David Scott Kastan's comment that '[In] The earliest tragedies [...] the young playwright displays his mastery over inherited forms, declaring his ability to rework recognisable classical models, one Senecan, one Ovidian, into compelling contemporary plays',¹⁰ this section considers the ways that Shakespeare uses these two authors in his first tragedy.¹¹

I. Senecan Overtones

Burrow points out that 'Shakespeare, however, would have been mad to neglect Seneca [...] Playwrights in the generation just older than Shakespeare whom he sought to emulate and supersede [...] had made their debts to Senecan tragedies of

⁸ There is an explicit, and not entirely complimentary, reference here to Thomas Kyd in 'like the kid in Aesop', and it is tempting to see a reference to Shakespeare in 'what's that *will* last always', had Shakespeare been published at Nashe's time of writing. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. by J. B. Steane (London: Penguin, 1972, repr. 1985), p. 474.

⁹ Jonathan Bate relates that *Titus Andronicus* was performed on January 1st 1596 by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the house of Sir John Harrington in Burley-on-Sea in Rutland. The response of Jacques Petit, a French tutor in the household who wrote home saying that 'on a aussi joué la tragédie de *Titus Andronicus* mais la monstre a plus valu que le sujet', suggests that the horror provoked a greater audience response than the subject matter. It is also noteworthy that this early audience, while perhaps not being overwhelmed by the topic, still clearly acknowledges the play as tragedy. See William Shakespeare, *The Arden 3rd Series: Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 43-4. All quotations are taken from this edition unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ David Scott Kastan, 'A rarity most beloved': Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2003; repr. 2006), pp. 4-22 (p. 15).

¹¹ The 'box office' receipts noted by Philip Henslowe in his *Diary* for the earliest recorded public performances in January and February 1594 suggest that '*Titus & Ondronicus*' was one of the most popular plays in a season cut short by plague, and the mention in Francis Mere's *Palladis Tamia* of the play in his commendation of Shakespeare's tragedy 'among the English' suggest that the contemporary audience found something that appealed. See *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961; repr. 2002), p. 21.

blood instantly obvious'.¹² At this early stage in his career, it would have been 'box-office suicide' had Shakespeare not acknowledged and deferred to previous theatrical successes, incorporating their impact into his own work. Seneca's influence on *Titus Andronicus* is not in doubt; there are certain parallels, as Jonathan Bate notes in his Introduction to the Arden edition:

In a famous chorus in the *Agamemnon*, the Trojan women, led by Cassandra welcome death as 'a peaceful port of everlasting rest, a refuge from woes which opens wide and with a generous hand invites the wretched'. [...] When Titus lays his sons to rest, Shakespeare writes a formal imitation of this: 'In peace and honour rest you here, my sons/Rome's readiest champions repose you here in rest'.¹³

Palladis Tamia or Wit's Treasury of 1598 makes explicit the contemporary analogy between Shakespeare and Seneca:

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latines: so Shakespeare among y English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labors Lost*, his *Love Labours Wonne*, his *Midsummer Night Dreame*, his *Merchant of Venice*: for tragedy his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁴

Jessica Winston, in her essay 'Seneca in Early Elizabethan England',¹⁵ suggests that there were two separate phases of Elizabethan preoccupation with Senecan drama. During the late 1550s and early 1560s, Seneca was translated and performed at the Inns of Court, although Winston suggests that there were pronounced differences in approach: 'Later playwrights imitated aspects of the tragedies, but earlier ones engaged with them comprehensively and in their entirety'.¹⁶ The first stage of interest in Seneca saw full translations made from the original that then directly influenced contemporary playwrights. As Winston also notes, in works including *Gorboduc*, Seneca's direct influence is seen in structure

¹² Burrow, 'Shakespearean Tragedy', p. 13.

¹³ Bate, 'Intro', *Arden Titus*, pp. 30-1.

¹⁴ Meres, *Palladis Tamia*.

¹⁵ See Jessica Winston, 'Seneca in Early Elizabethan England', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 59 (2006), 29-58.

¹⁶ Winston, p. 30.

(five acts divided by a chorus), composition, (lengthy speeches) and by ‘quick verbal exchanges’.¹⁷ Shakespeare came under the influence of the later collection of the original translations, *Tenne Tragedies*, compiled by Thomas Newton and printed in 1589. Winston further comments that ‘playwrights in the second phase wanted their Seneca in parts – his sentences, rhetoric, devices and structures’.¹⁸ Shakespeare’s use of Seneca in *Titus Andronicus* entirely conforms to this model: it is in Seneca’s *Thyestes*, for example, that he finds inspiration for the bloody banquet that is the culmination of *Titus Andronicus*.

Thyestes sees Atreus brutally murder his three nephews and serve them at a banquet to his brother, Thyestes, in revenge for the latter’s seduction of his wife and abduction of a golden fleece that guarantees control of the empire.

Thyestes is a brutal and savage revenge tragedy: ‘What if the father could be made to tear/His children into pieces, happily/With eager appetite – eat his own flesh? Good, very good. I could be well content/With such a punishment’

(*Thyestes*, 2. 274-278).¹⁹ Titus’ revenge clearly follows the same lines. The

explicit description of Atreus’ revenge is mirrored by Titus’ vicious

explanation of what will follow to Chiron and Demetrius:

Messenger: He was content, and ready to prepare
The banquet for his brother; hacked the bodies
Limb from limb – detached the outstretched arms
Close to the shoulders – severed the ligaments
That tie the elbow joints – stripped every part
And roughly wrenched each separate bone away –
All this he did himself; only the faces
And trusting suppliant hands he left intact.
And soon the meat is on the spits, the fat
Drips over a slow fire, while other parts
Are tossed to boil in singing copper pans.
(*Thyestes*, 4. 786-796).

¹⁷ Winston, p. 31.

¹⁸ Winston, p. 31.

¹⁹ Seneca, *Thyestes, Four Tragedies and Octavia*, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1966). Unless otherwise stated, all Senecan quotations are taken from this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

Titus: Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
 And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
 And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
 And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
 And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,
 Like to the earth to swallow her own increase.
 (*Titus*, 5. 2. 186-191).

Seneca's gruesome detail highlights the academic debate over whether or not his plays were even contemporarily performed. As Patrick Kragelund in his essay 'Senecan Tragedy: Back on Stage?' notes:

The problem is old and much debated: On the one hand there is an overwhelming amount of evidence from archaeology as well as literature which testifies to a rich and varied theatrical life at Rome's imperial centre [...] At the same time we are in the odd position of possessing the complete text of ten tragedies from the mid-first century AD (eight by Seneca, two by authors unknown) - and of the theatrical fate of precisely these ten tragedies we know nothing at all.²⁰

The graphic account of Atreus' act seems as much aimed at a reader as a theatre audience. Shakespeare, obviously writing for a visual theatre, needs a less violent description as Titus' lines are supported by the visual stage image of Chiron and Demetrius bound and gagged.

The bathos that runs throughout *Titus Andronicus* also finds its genesis in Seneca.²¹ Atreus' 'confession' to Thyestes is faintly ridiculous: 'But here are your dear sons/Whom you have asked to see' (*Thyestes*, 5.1016-1017). Titus' acknowledgement to Saturninus and Tamora reflects that of Atreus:

Saturninus: Go fetch them hither to us presently
Titus: Why there they are, both baked in this pie
 Whereof their mother daintily hath fed
 Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred
 (*Titus*, 5.3.58-60).

²⁰ Patrick Kragelund, 'Senecan Tragedy: Back on Stage?', in *Seneca*, ed. John G. Fitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 181-194 (p. 181). Kragelund considers the question of performance versus recital before coming to the conclusion that 'standard ideas about Senecan dramaturgy and ancient stagecraft are in dire need of a thorough revision' (p. 194).

²¹ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines bathos as the 'ludicrous comedown from the elevated to the commonplace'. I use the term to suggest a change in tone from serious to humorous.

Punning and conscious disambiguation is also a feature of both plays. When Atreus tells Thyestes that, ‘Your sons are taking part in the enjoyment/Of festive fare’ (*Thyestes*, 5.985-6), he is well aware that the sons are the main course. This disambiguation is seen in *Titus Andronicus* in Aaron’s approach to the ‘release’ of Quintus and Martius: ‘I go, Andronicus, and for thy hand/Look by and by to have thy sons with thee/[*aside*] Their heads I mean’ (3.1.201-3). The use of bathos complicates the audience response to both texts. Humour makes the commentator more appealing to an audience; its use makes the identification of the ‘hero’ problematical. The humour opens up the possibility of collusion between actor and audience, effectively blurring the space between them. As we will see later, in *Titus Andronicus* Aaron constantly disturbs the conventional distance between actor and audience in his asides and speeches.

The linkage between Shakespeare and Seneca is completed by, as A. J. Boyle notes in his essay ‘Seneca and Renaissance Drama’, Marcus’ allusion in the play’s final scene to the closing lines of Seneca’s *Phaedra*. There, Theseus, in contrast, closes with, in Boyle’s words a ‘sense of permanent dislocation’:²² ‘Let some prepare/The royal pyre; others search the fields/For any portion of the corpse still lost’ (*Phaedra*, 5.1275-1278). Marcus’ lines, however, ‘point up the difference from Seneca’s dismembered world’,²³ with their possibility of rebuilding and redemption:

You sad-faced men, people and sons of Rome,
By uproars severed, as flight of fowl
Scattered by winds, and high tempestuous gusts,
O let me teach you how to knit again
This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf,
These broken limbs again into one body.
(5.3.66-71).

²²A. J. Boyle, ‘Seneca and Renaissance Drama: Ideology and Meaning’, in *Seneca*, pp. 386-420 (p. 407).

²³ Boyle, p. 408.

Here Shakespeare ostensibly moves away from the Senecan model to provide an ending that suggests the possibility of social restoration while equally adhering to the demands of the theatre and providing an almost entirely satisfactory ending for the audience.²⁴

Shakespeare's use of Seneca is a synthesis of the visceral violent narrative and the practicalities of writing for the Elizabethan stage, opening up a productive tension that will inform the development of the tragic genre. Shakespeare's evolving tragic model mixes the brutality of Seneca's words with his increasing awareness of the power of the visual image that is presented onstage together with a sense of the need to break away from the senseless violence of Rome.

II. Ovidian Overtones

Ovid was a standard text in Elizabethan grammar schools, as Jonathan Bate notes in *Shakespeare and Ovid*: 'Latin was the substance of the grammar-school curriculum [...] and within that curriculum, Ovid occupied a very special place.'²⁵ Although Ben Jonson famously claimed in the preliminary pages of the First Folio that Shakespeare had 'small Latine and lesse Greeke',²⁶ Shakespeare clearly understood enough about the classical authors to be able not only to acknowledge them but also to manipulate them to his own advantage. Prior to the composition of *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare had been working on his longest narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, both of which rely on Ovid for at least part of their source material.²⁷

Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia* equates Shakespeare's use of language with that of both Latin and Greek poets:

²⁴ This thesis, in part, will argue that the idea of the restoration of some sort of order becomes a feature of Shakespeare's tragedies of this period.

²⁵ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; repr. 2001), p. 13.

²⁶ <http://firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/book.html> [accessed January 11th 2016].

²⁷ *Venus and Adonis* first printed in Quarto form in 1593; *The Rape of Lucrece* followed in 1594. See Appendix 1, *Arden 3rd Series: Shakespeare's Poems*, eds. Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen, (London: Thomson, 2007), pp. 471-489.

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As the Greek tongue is made famous and eloquent by Homer, Heiod, Euripedes [...] and the Latin tongue by Virgil, Ovid, Horace [...] so the English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent habiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Chapman.²⁸

The list demonstrates Meres' perception of the importance of Shakespeare as a poet rather than a dramatist – the preceding authors are primarily poets, with only Marlowe and Chapman as other poet-playwrights named. Such a reading is borne out by Meres' subsequent paragraphs: 'so the sweet, witty soul of Ovid lives in the mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared sonnets among his private friends.'²⁹ It is only after addressing Shakespeare's ability as a poet that Meres mentions him as a playwright.

Contemporary documentation, then, bears testimony to Shakespeare's perceived importance as a poet over and above a dramatist in 1598, four years after the first Quarto of *Titus Andronicus* appears in print. Equally, it is worth noting that 1598 is the same year in which Shakespeare's name first appeared in full on any play's extant title page.³⁰ These references equally testify to the abundance of Shakespeare's narrative poetry that was available at this time; *Venus and Adonis*, first published in 1593, was reprinted in 1594, 1595, 1596 and 1599 in the decade under discussion, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, originally reprinted in 1598, was reissued three further times up to and including 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death.³¹ As Patrick Cheney notes, 'In other words, these poems did not simply

²⁸ *Palladis Tamia* [accessed 28th April 2010]

²⁹ *Palladis Tamia* [accessed 28th April 2010]

³⁰ Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. xiv.

³¹ *Venus and Adonis* was further printed in 1602, 1607, 1608 and 1610 before Shakespeare's death and *The Rape of Lucrece* was reprinted in 1600, 1607 and 1616.

appear and then disappear; they became a visible feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean literary culture.³²

Without question, *Titus Andronicus* owes a huge debt to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The myth of Actaeon from *Metamorphoses* 3 permeates the play, and the 'Tereus, Procne and Philomela' story is the model that Shakespeare uses in the construction of his first classical tragedy. Taking elements of both stories from books 3 and 6 respectively, Shakespeare transposes parts of the myths into dramatic form and amalgamates them with the extreme violence typical of revenge tragedy. Diana's words, 'Now you may tell the story [...] If story telling is in your power' (*Metamorphoses*, 3. 193),³³ reflect Shakespeare's approach throughout the play, combining static narrative with violent action as he manipulates Ovid's story with a dramatic web of Senecan intrigue.

Shakespeare's approach to his source material is perhaps encapsulated by his denying his characters the very thing that Ovid's book is based on - the chance to metamorphose. Unlike Ovid's Philomela, Lavinia is murdered by her father and her voice is forever silenced:

A reason mighty, strong and effectual,
A pattern, precedent and lively warrant,
For me, most wretched to perform the like.
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die.
(5.3.42-46).

Lavinia's death at Titus' hand fulfils, in part, the demand of revenge tragedy for a bloody and violent ending. The similarity with Ovid's ending for Philomela and Procne is that, in her death, Lavinia is freed from the shame of her mutilation. This is signified by Titus' dialogue with Saturninus: 'Was it

³² See Cheney, p. 23. *Richard II* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are the plays that first attribute Shakespeare as the playwright in this year.

³³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004). All quotations are taken from this edition and will be referenced parenthetically in the text.

well done of rash Virginius/To slay his daughter with his own right
hand/Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?' (5.3.35-37).

Lavinia's violent death is both a classical reference and a valid death for the
revenge tragedy genre that Shakespeare is exploiting.

Metamorphoses is a series of stories loosely linked by the theme of
transformation. As Dennis Feeney comments, 'transformation is not just a part
of the way the stories work, and not just a human and philosophical theme of
inexhaustible richness, but a dynamic that permeates every level and facet of
the poem.'³⁴ In Ovid's version, Philomela, raped, muted and imprisoned by her
brother-in-law, Tereus, weaves her story into a tapestry that she smuggles to
her sister, Procne. Procne, rescuing Philomela and realising the extent of her
husband's savagery towards her sister, understands that their best revenge
involves them murdering her own son, Itys:

But Procne picked up a sword, and stabbed her son in the side
Of his chest without turning away. Though the blow
on its own
was enough to murder the child, Philomela then used the weapon to cut
his throat.

(*Metamorphoses*, 6.641-3).

Itys is then torn apart, cooked and fed to his father, before Procne with
Philomela by her side, admits what they have done. Procne, Philomela and
Tereus are all then transformed into three different sorts of birds:

And they *were* suspended on wings. The one, transformed to a
nightingale,
Made for the forest, the other flew up to the roof as a swallow;
but badges of murder remained on their breasts in the blood-tinged
plumage.
Tereus, swiftly impelled by his grief and thirsting for vengeance,
Also changed to a bird, with an upright crest for a headpiece
And beak jutting out to monstrous length in the place of his long
spear,
Looking as if he were armed for battle.

(*Metamorphoses*, 6.668-673).

³⁴ Dennis Feeney, 'Introduction', *Metamorphoses*, p. xxii.
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Philomela, after Procne confronts Tereus with the news that he has eaten his own son, also wants to be involved in the confession. She expresses her desire to speak: ‘She had never wanted so much/to be able to speak and to voice her joy in a paen of triumph’ (*Metamorphoses*, 6.659-60). Ovid presents her transformation into a nightingale as a reward for her suffering; in contrast to Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, she is ultimately able to speak and ‘voice her joy’ through birdsong.

Ovid’s treatment of Philomela provides one pattern that is acknowledged, although not slavishly adhered to by Shakespeare. Lavinia is based on Philomela, but her story is recast. In the play, she is denied her voice and her transfiguration and her release is in her death at her father’s hand. Marcus in 2.3 makes explicit the connection with Philomela: ‘But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee’ (2.3.26), and later in the same speech, ‘Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue/And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind’ (2.3.38-9). Titus in 4.1 also realises the link: ‘Lavinia, wert thou thus surprised sweet girl/Ravished and wronged as Philomela was,/Forced in the ruthless, vast and gloomy woods?’ (4.1.51-4); later he aligns himself with Procne: ‘For worse than Philomel you used my daughter/And worse than Progne I will be revenged’ (5.2.194-5).³⁵ Titus’ allusion to Ovid suggests how Shakespeare melds Ovid and Seneca in the play’s revenge motif.

Cheney, writing about *Titus Andronicus*, refers to ‘this overt textualising of classicism... as mak[ing] visible the intertextual strategy the mature Shakespeare comes to finesse’.³⁶ Shakespeare, however, does more than intertextualise the myths - he subverts them and cross-references them, and does this with a keen sense of irony. This is apparent in his use of the Actaeon myth. It is Titus who suggests the hunt as an entertainment for the court and

³⁵ *Metamorphoses* refers to the character as ‘Procne’; *Titus Andronicus* uses ‘Progne’.

³⁶ Cheney, p. 66.

yet it is his daughter who, unknown to him, becomes the prey: ‘Tomorrow, and it please your majesty/To hunt the panther and the hart with me/ With horn and hound we’ll give your grace *bonjour*’ (1.1.496-8). Lavinia, overtly depicted as virginal – ‘Take this of me: Lucrece was not more chaste/Than this Lavinia, Bassianus’ love’ (1.1.608-9) – on the one hand represents Diana, but on the other suffers the fate that Diana meted out to Actaeon. In Ovid’s myth, Diana metamorphoses Actaeon into a hound as a punishment for spying on her naked, and in some quarters is lauded for protecting her virginity; yet it is Lavinia’s chastity that contributes to her fate.³⁷ Lavinia is both hunter and hunted.

Shakespeare’s acute ironic sense is seen in the alignment of Tamora with Diana, but the 2.2 sequence where Tamora becomes, briefly, verbally ‘hunted’ makes clear the complexity of Shakespeare’s characterisation. The taunting that Bassianus and Lavinia indulge in prior to Bassianus’ murder emphasises the universality of cruelty throughout the play – the Andronici are not entirely innocent victims. Bassianus initiates the verbal insulting of Tamora:

Who have we here? Rome’s royal empress,
Unfurnished of her well-beseeming troop?
Or is it Dian, habited like her,
Who hath abandoned her holy groves
To see the general hunting in this forest?
(2.2.55-9).

In Ovid’s Actaeon story, Actaeon is the innocent victim; he stumbles across Diana bathing and so his is not an intentional transgression. Yet both Bassianus and Lavinia indulge in baiting Tamora – Lavinia’s mockery is particularly interesting as she indulges in sexual punning not entirely seemly in a young virgin: ‘‘Tis thought you have a goodly gift in horning [...] Jove shield your husband from his hounds today/’Tis pity they should take him for a stag.’

³⁷ ‘while others commended it – worthy they said of her strict virginity’, (*Metamorphoses*, 3. 253-4).
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(2.2.67-71). Lavinia's characterisation, therefore, is more complex than purely than that of an innocent. She is partly complicit in Tamora's dislike of her.

2.2 then, is an inversion of the classical myth and an undermining of the expectations set up in the classical configuration of the characters. At her entrance Lavinia is presented as a dutiful daughter both of Titus and of Rome: 'And at thy feet I kneel with tears of joy/Shed on this earth for thy return to Rome/O bless me here with thy victorious hand' (1.1.164-6). Her silence in the conflict between Bassianus and his brother Saturninus suggests that she is a passive commodity and yet this impression is undermined in her vocal taunting of Tamora. Lavinia's characterisation is representative of Shakespeare's treatment of his classical sources. He goes beyond Ovid's story, tipping Ovid into Senecan horror. This increased brutalisation seems to be a part of his tragic innovation, suggesting that drama needs to go further than the myth. Lavinia, obviously inspired by Ovid's Philomela, suffers more than her Ovidian inspiration. Ovid's character retains her hands in order to enable her to weave the names of her attackers into a tapestry. Shakespeare denies his character even that opportunity by having her hands as well as her tongue removed. This is a visual depiction of Shakespeare's essential conundrum as he pushes human suffering to the limit, but also exposes the limits of language. The inadequacies of words to articulate such suffering are expressed, in 2.3 in Marcus' highly rhetorical response to Lavinia's appearance. Her own later response is both highly literary and equally ironic. Her use of a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in 4.1 to explain her situation closes the dramatic circle: Ovid is the inspiration behind the plot and part of the theatrical solution to making wounds speak.

Part Two. Metadrama, Metapoesis and the Language of Tragedy

Colin Burrow in *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* argues that it is the ‘relationship between physical or emotional suffering and rhetorically skilled expression’ that ‘lie[s] at the heart of *Titus Andronicus*’.³⁸ A part of the play’s approach to tragedy is an experiment to find the dramatic voice for its fusion of poetry and myth with the extreme ‘blood and guts’ violence of the prevailing theatrical taste. Lavinia’s total silencing, in contrast to Ovid’s Philomela who is still able to weave, is representative of the play’s exploratory nature, highlighted by the emphasis that Shakespeare places on Lavinia’s pre-mutilation literacy. Marcus comments on this in his conversation with her nephew: ‘Ah, boy, Cornelia never with more care/Read to her sons than she hath read to thee’ (4.1.12-13). This invented aspect of the Philomela archetype underlines the brutality of Lavinia’s suffering. The search for the vehicle for the dramatic expression of this barbarism and the consequential suffering forms a part of the play’s questioning nature. Shakespeare’s response appears both metatheatrical and meta-literary, as the following section will suggest.

I. Metadrama

Shakespeare’s approach to self-conscious theatricality is to embed it into the play, rather than revert to the play-within-a-play device that is part of the approach that Kyd employs. Tamora’s pastiche of Revenge in Act 4, while recalling the dumb shows of *The Spanish Tragedy*, also exposes the process of making drama:

Now will I to that old Andronicus,
And temper him with all the art I have
To pluck proud Lucius from the warlike Goths.
And now sweet emperor, be blithe again
And bury all thy fear in my devices.
(4.4.107-11).

³⁸ Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 110.
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Her use of ‘art’ and ‘devices’ indicates her engagement with an artistic process in order to dupe Titus. She acknowledges the artificiality of the illusion, self-referencing the process of characterisation:

Thus in this strange and sad habiliment,
I will encounter with Andronicus
And say I am Revenge, sent from below
To join with him and right his heinous wrongs.
(5.2.1-4).

Her adoption of the disguise recalls the onstage presence of Revenge as a character in *The Spanish Tragedy*, bringing Kyd onstage as it were and making obvious the earlier play’s influence. Similarly, the unfolding of the murders of Chiron and Demetrius appears to mirror the events of ‘Soliman and Perseda’. In Kyd’s play, Balthazar and Lorenzo are killed while performing as Soliman and Erasto:

And to this end the bashaw I became
That might revenge me on Lorenzo’s life,
Who therefore was appointed to the part
And was to represent the knight of Rhodes,
That I might kill him more conveniently.
So Viceroy, was this Balthazar thy son,
That Soliman which Bel-Imperia murdered
In person of Perseda murdered.³⁹

Chiron and Demetrius are murdered as themselves, but their deaths come about as a result of the ‘characters’ that they have been playing, and so are part of the deception of Titus. In a further metadramatic plot twist by Shakespeare, it is Tamora’s disguise as Revenge that allows Titus to manipulate the plot, so becoming, briefly, the dramatist for the play’s final impetus.

The exchange between Titus and Tamora, with its elements of improvisation, partly illuminates the process of playmaking. Titus has to respond to Tamora’s pastiche in an extemporaneous way, revealing the interplay between the characters. This is a departure from *The Spanish*

³⁹ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. David Bevington (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996; repr. 2002), 4.4.130-7. All quotations are taken from this edition and all further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

Tragedy, where ‘Soliman and Perseda’ is very much a planned performance: ‘For why, the plot’s already in my head’ (*Spanish Tragedy*, 4.1.51). Titus, in contrast, has to improvise. This process is illustrated by his initial denial of Tamora’s disguise: ‘I know thee well enough [...] For our proud empress, mighty Tamora.’ (5.2.21-6), but then his ironic complicity with her plot, to perform, to act, is exposed: ‘Art thou Revenge? And art thou sent to me/To be a torment to mine enemies?’ (5.2.41-2). This exchange is the acme of theatrical self-awareness. Not only does the plot hinge on Titus’ extempore response to Tamora’s disguise but the deliberate self-reference illuminates the adoption of character. Tamora’s ‘performance’ of Revenge displays the artifice behind the process of playmaking while bringing the realities – costume, performance - of the theatrical world into focus. Like *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* advertises its status as a theatrical revenge tragedy.

Tamora’s disguise, however, provokes a potential metadramatic crisis, as the adoption of her disguise destabilises the ‘real’ world of the play. Titus, having planned out his own revenge, ‘See here in bloody lines I have set down,/And what is written shall be executed’ (5.2.14-15), now has to react to the tableau that Tamora presents. Tension is generated by the repeated insistence of Tamora that she is who she is pretending to be: ‘I am not Tamora’ (5.2.28), ‘I am Revenge, sent from th’infernal kingdom’ (5.2.30), ‘And in their ears tell them my dreadful name/Revenge’ (5.2.39-40). The question then becomes to what degree does Titus believe his own response. How much is he feigning? His continual allusions to the ‘real’ world of the play indicate that, for Titus as much as for Tamora, this interlude is a performance. His response implies that he sees through the disguises, generating a moment of levity: ‘Good Lord, how like the empress’ sons they are/And you the empress!’ (5.2.64-5). The sequence engages with dramatic irony; Tamora is unaware that

Titus is ‘playing’ her: ‘What says Andronicus to this device?’ (5.2.120);
 ‘Revenge now goes/To lay a complot to betray thy foes’ (5.2.146-7).

The staccato exchange between Titus and Publius brings the charade quickly to an end, as Publius identifies Tamora’s sons: ‘The empress’ sons I take them: Chiron, Demetrius’ (5.2.154), although Titus initially refuses to publicly acknowledge that Chiron and Demetrius are anything other than that which Tamora has professed them to be: ‘Fie, Publius, fie, thou art too much deceived/The one is Murder and Rape is the other’s name/And therefore bind them, gentle Publius’ (5.1.155-7). The irony here is reminiscent of *The Spanish Tragedy*, where Hieronimo uses the play of ‘Soliman and Perseda’ to disguise the actual murders of Lorenzo and Balthazar. In a departure from Kyd’s model, however, Titus ultimately acknowledges Chiron and Demetrius’ identities, effectively making his revenge more meaningful. The dropping of the metadramatic conceit underlines the significance of Titus’ retribution. The brothers know that he is sane and fully aware of their identities: ‘But let them hear what fearful words I utter/O villains, Chiron and Demetrius’ (5.2.168-9). His acknowledgement exposes the artificiality of Tamora’s Revenge pastiche.

Titus’ speech before Chiron and Demetrius’ murder in 5.2 encapsulates Shakespeare’s re-definition of the theatricality that dominates Kyd’s text. It unites, and openly acknowledges, many of the approaches that Shakespeare has taken, before finally recognising the theatrical artifice that dominates the play. The speech begins by silencing Chiron and Demetrius, in direct correlation to the silencing of Lavinia. This insistence on silence focuses attention on Titus’ words, but they are performed in front of the visual spectacle of their bound and gagged recipients: ‘Sirs, stop their mouths; let them not speak to me’ (5.2.167). Titus articulates this tension between the visual and the verbal: ‘What would you say if I should let you speak?’ (5.2.178). He is adamant that

his is the only voice that will be heard, that they will have to ‘hear what fearful words I utter’ (5.2.168). His is the only ‘truth’.

Titus’ speech, both implicitly and literally, acknowledges the classical source texts that have dominated the narrative. Both Seneca’s *Thyestes* and Ovid’s ‘Philomel and Procne’ are recognised by his description of the prospective feast: ‘This is the feast that I have bid her to/And this the banquet she shall surfeit on’ (5.2.192-3); ‘This was the feast to which Procne coolly invited her husband/(the man knew nothing of what had occurred or what was in store)’ (*Metamorphoses*, 3. 647-8); ‘I will yet see this father eat his fill/Of his dead offspring’ (*Thyestes*, 5.8-9). This self-reflexivity allows Shakespeare to expand the tragic narrative. By recognising the deficiencies of previous tragedies, he sensationalises the idea of the tragic: ‘Come, come, be everyone officious/To make this banquet, which I wish may prove/More bloody than the Centaurs feast’ (5.2.201-3). Through a further Ovidian reference (‘the Centaurs feast’),⁴⁰ Shakespeare suggests that the play’s final bloodbath will be more extreme than anything previously performed. Classical tragedy, then, is again used as the background for Shakespeare’s deliberate revision of the idea of tragedy, eclipsing previous versions in the same way as his treatment of Lavinia is more extreme than that of Ovid’s to Philomela.

Acting and performance is, as has already been noted, a central tenet of *Titus Andronicus*, and Titus, in his speech of 5.2 acknowledges this as a final flourish: ‘So now bring them in, for I’ll play the cook/And see them ready against their mother comes’ (5.2.204-5). However, this ‘performance’ is then deferred; Shakespeare inserts a scene between the announcing of the plan and its execution. This, creating a space between the imagining of an act and the act itself, allows the idea to work upon the imagination of the audience before the

⁴⁰ *Metamorphoses*, 12. 210-535.
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final reveal, and increases the nightmarish aspect of what follows, building tension by deferral.

II. Marcus' Speech

If Titus' speech in Act 5 heightens the metadramatic tension of the play, Marcus' speech on the discovery of the mutilated Lavinia in 2.3 seems to encapsulate a metadramatic crisis that identifies the failure of poetry to explicate the theatrical moment. Although this speech has long been regarded as uncomfortable in its context - as Bate notes, ' Marcus' long lyric monologue was regarded as indecorous: what place has poetry in the face of such a sight of horror?'⁴¹ - the speech equally illustrates the play's preoccupation with finding a language for tragedy.

From its very beginning, the speech is full of poetical devices. The opening lines, 'If I do dream, would all my wealth would wake me;/If I do wake, some planet strike me down' (2.3.13-14), employ two poetical conceits, repetition and assonance, that both emphasise Marcus' shock at the spectacle that confronts him, further underlined in the repetition of 'w' words - 'would', 'wealth', 'wake' - almost as if he is stammering through his shock. This effect is continued through 'That I may slumber an eternal sleep' (2.3.15), and 'Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare' (2.3.17). The use of poetical devices to express Marcus' outrage is indicated by the use of alliteration that permeates the speech: 'And make the silken strings delight to kiss them' (2.3.46); 'Or had he heard the heavenly harmony' (2.3.48). The extended metaphors employed throughout, the use of forestry terms to describe Lavinia's dismemberment, and the fountain metaphor that is analogous to her oral mutilation sit uncomfortably with the spectacle of her suffering. The rhetoric is overblown, the metaphors too graphic:

⁴¹ Bate, 'Introduction', p. 59.
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Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
 Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
 Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
 Coming and going with thy honeyed breath.
 (2.3.22-5).

The application of such soft floral imagery is in direct contrast with the image of visceral violence on stage. The disparity is between the image described and the language used: ‘Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in/And might not gain so great a happiness/As half thy love’ (2.3.19-21). It seems obscene to talk of happiness when such a picture of violent misery is being presented on stage. The gap between the language and the onstage image creates a tension between the verbal and the visual that becomes, I suggest, a motif of Shakespeare’s tragic exploration during the 1590s.

Marcus’ rhetoric throughout the speech continues the Ovidian analogies: ‘A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met’ (2.3.41) makes explicit Cheney’s argument that, ‘As Aaron patterns the rape on Ovid’s Philomela myth, so Marcus patterns his *comprehension* of her rape on the same Ovidian narrative’.⁴² The speech is peppered with literary references: ‘And notwithstanding all this loss of blood/As from a conduit, with three issuing spouts’ (2.3.29-30) reflects Arthur Golding’s 1567 translation of Ovid’s Pyramus and Thisbe of Book Four of *Metamorphoses*: ‘Pyramus’ ‘bloud did spin on hie/As when a conduit pipe is crackt’.⁴³ ‘O had the monster seen those lily hands/Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute’ (2.3.44-5) utilises a poetical commonplace in the period probably derived from Golding’s Ovid: ‘Stoode trembling like an aspen leafe’.⁴⁴ More significant is the fact that Marcus’ speech is cast in a framework that is permeated by references to the myth of

⁴² Cheney, p. 68.

⁴³ 2.3.30n. In David Raeburn’s modern translation, this reads as ‘As he lay stretched out on the earth, his blood leapt up in a long jet, just as a spurt from a waterpipe, bursting because of its faulty leadwork, gushes out through a tiny crack to create a hissing fountain of water and cuts the air with its impact’ (*Metamorphoses*, 4.121-4).

⁴⁴ 2.3.45n.

Orpheus, which is the primary focus of Book 10 and the beginning of Book 11 of *Metamorphoses*. The silencing of Lavinia's poetic voice is analogous to the frenzied tearing apart of Orpheus by the Maenads in Book 11. This analogy is first intimated by Demetrius: 'She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash/ And so let's leave her to her silent walks' (2.3.7-8) is reminiscent of 'The poet extended his helpless arms. He spoke, but now for the first time/Spoke to no purpose' (*Metamorphoses*, 11. 38-40). 'Or had he heard the heavenly harmony/Which that sweet tongue hath made/He would have dropped his knife and fell asleep' (2.3.48-50) recalls the natural world under Orpheus' spell, prior to the attack by the Maenads: 'First the Maenads pounced on the innocent creatures that still/Lay under the spell of his music' (*Metamorphoses*, 11, 19-20). The reference to Lavinia's prowess upon the lute, 'tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute/And make the silken strings desire to kiss them (2.3.45-46), further defines the parallels between the two characters. Ovid describes Orpheus as 'the heaven-born bard [who] sat down and started to play upon his lyre' (*Metamorphoses*, 10.88). The correlation between the two characters is completed towards the end of Marcus' speech: 'He would have dropped his knife and fell asleep/As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet' (2.3.50-51), although this is not how Ovid tells Orpheus' story. While Cerberus is mentioned in Ovid's description of Orpheus' visit to the underworld, there is no account of the poet entrancing the three-headed dog. Shakespeare also refers to this incident in *The Rape of Lucrece*, although there the reference is a more accurate reflection of Ovid's interpretation of the myth: 'So his unhallowed haste her words delays/And moody PLUTO winks while ORPHEUS plays' (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 552-3).

Marcus, then, like Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus*, is embroiled in Ovidian rhetoric and references, regardless of their suitability as an expression

of the tragic moment. Frank Kermode, however, comments that ‘[Marcus] leaves us in no doubt that he commands the means to explain why he finds the whole scene very upsetting’, suggesting that, in part, the speech is successful.⁴⁵ Marcus’ dramatic hyperbole in this reading is an attempt to vocalise the horror that he is confronting, an attempt to try to make sense of the brutality of Lavinia’s attack. At the same time, the clash between the poetic imagery and the visual presence of the bleeding Lavinia intensifies the sense of barbarity in the play.

Arguably, Marcus’ speech captures the paradigm of Shakespeare as poet/playwright, the paradox of the problem of poetic language and violent action that is at the heart of *Titus Andronicus*. On the one hand, Shakespeare demonstrates his command of poetic metaphor, and consequently of poetry itself, but the poetic projection into a moment of intense theatricality suggests an attempt, whether successful or not, to create a new sort of poetic-theatrical synthesis. If, as Cheney claims, although specifically referring to *Romeo and Juliet*, ‘Shakespeare’s generic experiment [is] the sixteenth-century invention of a new form of authorship that combines poems with plays in a single literary career’,⁴⁶ then Marcus’ speech in 2.3 is a clear indication of the author’s intentions. This conflict between poetry and drama, although fertile, is yet to be resolved in a new tragic discourse.

What is particularly interesting, however, is that Marcus’ speech does not develop. Unlike Shakespeare’s other rhetorical speeches, it does not come to any firm conclusions. It is purely descriptive. Compared, for example, with Hamlet’s ‘O what a rogue and peasant slave am I?’ (*Hamlet*, 2.2.527), which

⁴⁵ Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 9.

⁴⁶ Patrick Cheney, ‘“An index and obscure prologue”: Books and theatre in Shakespeare’s literary authorship’, in *Shakespeare’s Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and Reception*, eds. Richard Meek, Jane Rickard and Richard Wilson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 29-58 (p. 46).

sees Hamlet moving through self-frustration to deciding upon a course of action, '[...] the play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king' (2.2.581-2), or Antony's 'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now' (*Julius Caesar*, 3.2.166), which stirs the citizens of Rome to action, Marcus' rhetoric is impotent and stagnates, functioning only as a description of suffering. The sole conclusion drawn is the necessity of mourning: 'Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee' (2.3.56); in a play about revenge, Marcus does not even consider that possibility, a further reason that the piece appears to sit uncomfortably with the rest of the play.

Marcus's speech does, however, illustrate the intertextuality between two artistic forms, poetry and drama, a further anomaly at the core of the play. By focussing purely on the poetic, his speech seemingly detracts from the visual and silent spectacle of the bleeding and mutilated Lavinia. This effect, though, can be read very differently. On the one hand, Marcus' rhetoric becomes an oasis amidst the violence, a deliberate break from the bloodshed. On the other, his over-elaborate and unsuitable rhetoric clashes with the theatrical scene of his mutilated niece, emphasising the strength of the visual visceral theatrical image. Marcus' speech distances him from Lavinia's immediate suffering. It acts as a barrier to her plight and no real sense of empathy is reflected in its closing couplet: 'Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee/O, could our mourning ease thy misery!' (2.3.56-7). He makes no obvious attempt to comfort her. The predominantly descriptive nature of the speech underlines this remoteness.

Marcus' unnecessary insistence on poetical rhetoric when confronted with the grotesque reality of Lavinia suggests that there is a lack of confidence in the power of the visual, that the image needs to be supported - or indeed anaesthetised - by language. Marcus' rhetoric is an attempt to understand or

poetry is used to create theatre. The moment is inherently dramatic. The scene begins with the Boy being chased by his aunt, both in a state of distress: ‘Help, grandsire, help! My aunt Lavinia/Follows me everywhere, I know not why?’ (4.1.1-2). This moment of dramatic tension is extended by the discussion as to Lavinia’s motives for this behaviour: ‘What means my niece Lavinia by these signs? [...] Canst thou not guess wherefore she plies thee thus?’ (4.1.7-15). Her motives are unclear. Shakespeare is deliberately teasing the audience, both by keeping them in suspense but also by further acknowledging *Metamorphoses*. In the Ovidian myth, Philomela and Procne, in revenge for Tereus’ rape of Philomela, murder Procne’s son, recognising his resemblance to Tereus, his father: ‘Gazing with pitiless eyes on her son, “How like your father you are!” she said’ (*Metamorphoses*, 6.621). An audience conversant with Ovid’s version of the myth would assume that it is Lavinia’s nephew who is going to suffer the same fate as Itys. Shakespeare immediately undercuts this assumption by clarifying that it is the book, rather than the Boy, that Lavinia wants: ‘Some book there is that she desires to see’ (4.1.31). Her distress is a further embedded Ovidian reference, made by her nephew for very obvious reasons:

For I have heard my grandsire say full oft
Extremity of griefs would make men mad
And I have read that Hecuba of Troy
Ran mad for sorrow

(4.1.18-21).

Bate notes that ‘In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Hecuba became frenzied with grief’.⁴⁹ In Shakespeare’s play, Lavinia’s ‘frenzy’ is for the book that will enable her to ‘tell’ her story.

This meta-literary passage becomes metatheatrical when Lavinia is given a stick to write the name of her attackers, an action fusing both literature

⁴⁹ 4.1.20n.

and theatre. Having been the literary victim, Lavinia's naming allows her briefly to metamorphose into a playwright. She performs the action, as the stage, literally and figuratively, becomes the page: 'O do ye read my lord what she hath writ?' (4.1.77). The language used reinforces the meta-poetical dramatic action. 'Writ' (4.1.77), 'pen' (4.1.75), 'print' (4.1.75), and 'read' (4.1.77) supplement the idea of the conjunction of page with stage, confirmed by Marcus' description of the rapists as 'performers', and underlined by Titus' quotation from Seneca's *Hippolytus*: 'What, what? The lustful sons of Tamora/Performers of this heinous bloody deed?/Magni dominator poli/Tam lentus audis scelera, tam lentus vides?' (4.1.79-82). Titus' recourse to Latin at a moment of extreme emotional distress parallels Kyd's Hieronimo, reinforcing the tragic symbiosis which will be discussed later in this chapter. Titus' intertextuality also underlines the idea of metamorphosis as a feature of Shakespeare's play: in a similar way to Lavinia's brief metamorphosis into a playwright, Ovid's text becomes a part of a revenge tragedy.

Titus' Latin response to Lavinia's revelation recalls not only *The Spanish Tragedy*, but also Seneca's *Hippolytus*,⁵⁰ a play that Demetrius has quoted earlier with the closing lines of 1.1: 'Per Stygia, per manes vehor' (1.1.634).⁵¹ Titus responds in kind: 'Magni dominator poli/Tam lentus audis scelera tam lentus vides' (4.1.81-2),⁵² creating an intratextual relationship between the two scenes. Titus has already acknowledged the classical relationship with Ovid earlier in his interaction with Lavinia, 'Patterned by that the poet here describes/By nature made for murders and for rapes' (4.1.57-8).

⁵⁰ Also known as *Phaedra*.

⁵¹ 'I am carried through the Stygian regions, through the realm of shades' (*Phaedra*, 5.1180), or, colloquially, 'I am in hell'. See 1.1.634.n. Emily Wilson's 2010 version is a literal translation: 'And I will follow you blindly through the lakes of Tartarus, the Styx and the fiery river' (1180). *Seneca: Six Tragedies*, ed. Emily Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 35.

⁵² 'Ruler of the great heavens, are you so slow to hear crimes, so slow to see?' Titus misquotes *Hippolytus*, merging the lines with a well-known Senecan commonplace from his *Epistulae Morales* (107-111). See Bate, 'Intro', p. 30 and Burrow, *Classical Antiquity*, p. 183. Wilson's translation reads 'Great ruler of gods!/Are you so slow to hear and see the works of sin?', (*Phaedra*, 2. 672-3).

This approximated Senecan quotation, an intertextual reference, creates a recurring pattern within the play, and further underscores the literary and theatrical relationship. The sequence also marks the turning point of the play, as it moves away from the Ovidian pattern of mythic reckoning - Procne, Philomela and Tereus are all, ultimately, transformed into birds - towards the more overtly violent and brutal and dystopian revenge patterning of Seneca.⁵³ Having recognised the precedent classical archetype, ‘Ravished and wronged as Philomela was’ (4.1.52), Titus attempts to take control of the narrative and move it towards his own ideas for revenge through the use of a further classical – although this time an historical – reference:

And swear with me – as with the woeful fere
 And father of that chaste dishonoured dame,
 Lord Junius Brutus swore for Lucrece’ rape-
 That we will prosecute by good advice
 Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths
 And see their blood or die with this reproach
 (4.1.89-94).⁵⁴

This historical bias becomes a focus as the play progresses, with further historical allusions in 4.4, ‘With threats in course of this revenge to do/As much as Coriolanus ever did’ (4.4.66-67). The emphasis on revenge that this passage illustrates is underlined by Titus’ desire to transform Lavinia’s disclosure into a lasting memorial: ‘And come, I will go get a leaf of brass/And with a gad of steel will write these words’ (4.1.102-3). This is another self-consciously literary moment, when Titus becomes both author and revenger. His second response is literary - recording her admission on brass ensures that it will endure – but his initial reaction is for retribution, reflecting Titus’ background as a military warrior. Action overtakes rhetoric. Titus does not use

⁵³ Burrow relates the inclusion of the *Hippolytus* quotations to the suggestion of the play’s dual authorship, noting that they ‘occur in the sections of the play which have been ascribed to George Peele’ (*Classical Antiquity*, p. 183). The question of authorship is not the concern of this thesis that accepts the text as homogeneous.

⁵⁴ Although this episode is part of the focus of *The Rape of Lucrece*, the publication date of the poem post-dated that of *Titus Andronicus* and so, in my reading, the reference to Junius Brutus is historical rather than literary.

words to attempt to understand Lavinia's predicament, but instead he uses words to record her distress into something more permanent. As Bate comments, 'Titus seeks to fix, to memorialise, the most terrible truth that he has learnt.'⁵⁵ For Titus, the physical recording of the event realises it.

This literal documenting of the event is a consistent image throughout the play: in 3.1, in his unsuccessful appeal to the Tribunes for Quintus and Martius' lives, Titus pleads: 'For these two, tribunes, in the dust I write /My heart's deep languor and my souls sad tears' (3.1.12-13); in 5.2, 'See here in bloody lines I have set down/And what is written shall be executed' (5.2.14-15). The play's narrative is written into the drama. The relationship between writing and action is symbiotic; Titus writes his intentions down before they can be performed. The emphasis on reading and writing in *Titus Andronicus* also forms a pattern. Each literary act appears to have its corollary. In 3.2, the additional scene of the F text, Titus offers to read to Lavinia:⁵⁶ 'I'll to thy closet and go read with thee/Sad stories chanced in times of old' (3.2.82-3); in 4.1 he invites her 'Come and take the choice of all my library' (4.1.34), referring to her bibliophilic tendencies. Ian Smith, in his essay '*Titus Andronicus*: A Time for Race and Revenge,' sees a relationship in the stage directions of 4.1: '*Boy flies from her with books under his arm*', and 4.2, where the same character reappears with '*a bundle of weapons and verses writ upon them*',⁵⁷ suggesting a further linkage of page and stage.

3.2 is a clear manifestation of this literary-theatrical synergy: Titus sends Chiron and Demetrius arrows with 'verses writ upon them', a conceit that only Aaron interprets correctly: 'The old man hath found their guilt/And

⁵⁵ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 104.

⁵⁶ See Bate pp. 117-21 for further information on this 'inserted' scene.

⁵⁷ Ian Smith, '*Titus Andronicus*: A Time for Race and Revenge' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003; repr. 2006), pp. 284-302 (p. 290).

sends them weapons wrapped about with lines' (4.2.26-27). Words, this time verses from Horace's *Odes*, become another aspect of the narrative. Literature is transposed into a vehicle for revenge, an idea that is further reflected in the action of 4.3 where '*Titus bears the arrows with letters on the end of them*'. This scene again illustrates the metatheatrical focus of the play. The quotation of Ovid that Titus chooses is used twice in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*: '*Terras Astraea reliquit*' (4.3.4).⁵⁸ In Kyd's play both allusions to Ovid occur in the same scene, marking the play's increasing focus on revenge. Shakespeare's use of Ovid here is consistent with the use in Kyd's earlier play,⁵⁹ and seems a deliberate piece of cross-referencing.

As we have seen, a part of the approach to the revenge tragedy of *Titus Andronicus* is the exploration of its grotesque violence through the use of poetry, both in the abstract – Marcus' speech of 2.3 being illustrative of the idea of poetry as an expression of violent image – and as a practical solution propelling the narrative forward, suggesting that the play is an attempt to synthesise literary form with visceral drama. The reliance on classical texts is a further part of this attempt to bring the literary into a meaningful relationship with the violent. There is also a preoccupation with ideas of literature that, I propose, reflects engagement with contemporary debate around theories of literature, poetry and drama, specifically Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* that will be discussed in the subsequent section. Together, these different aspects all point to the extent to which *Titus Andronicus* is self-consciously about the making of tragedy.

⁵⁸ See 4.3.4n.

⁵⁹ In Kyd's play the lines are in translation: 'Though on this earth justice will not be found' (3.13.108); 'For justice is exiled from the earth' (3.13.140). The literal translation is 'Astraea has left the earth', Astraea being the goddess of justice. In Raeburn's translation the lines read: 'And Justice the Maiden/was last of the heavenly throng to abandon the blood-drenched earth' (*Metamorphoses*, 1. 149-50).

IV. Sidney and the ‘sweet violence of a tragedy’

Sir Philip Sidney’s essay, *The Defence of Poesy*, illustrates the importance of genre classification to a literary audience contemporary with *Titus Andronicus*. Written in the late 1570s but not published until 1595, and probably motivated, at least in part, as a response to Stephen Gosson’s 1579 *The School of Abuse*, *The Defence of Poesy* indicates both the contemporary preoccupation among certain circles with ideas of poetry and genre, as well as the relationship between poetry and playwriting for, in its defence of poetry, Sidney’s essay comments freely on the nature of drama. The first part of the tract defines the parameters of Sidney’s response to Gosson’s criticism before moving on to scrutinising the contemporary theatrical ‘scene’. It is Sidney’s comments on tragedy that are most pertinent to this thesis as I propose that Shakespeare’s idea of tragedy that is explored through his tragedies of the 1590s is an implicit response to Sidney’s argument, moving the debate away from the page and on to the stage.

The Defence of Poesy defines one Elizabethan perception of tragedy:

[...] that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world.⁶⁰

Sidney suggests that tragedy is driven to some extent by fear. Appropriating a popular line from Seneca’s *Oedipus*, ‘*qui scepra saevus duro imperio regit/timet timentes; metus in auctorum redit*’,⁶¹ Sidney proposes that violence, as the cornerstone of tragedy, frightens the tyrant as much as those that fear him.⁶² There is a sense, then, of violence as retaliatory justice, of violence begetting violence,

⁶⁰Sidney, p. 230.

⁶¹ Sidney, p. 230. Translated as ‘*the tyrant who rules harshly fears those who fear him; terror returns on its agent*’. Seneca’s line has ‘*qui scepra duro saevus imperio regit*’. See Duncan-Jones, p. 380n.

and the instigator being ‘caught out’ by his own tyrannical creation.⁶³

Supporting this view, Sidney introduces the story from Plutarch of Alexander Pharaeus, a fourth-century tyrant from Thessaly who ‘was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy’.⁶⁴ Titus’ initial actions in the play conform to the tragic criteria that Sidney espouses: ‘the uncertainty of this world and upon how weak the gilden roofs are builded’.⁶⁵ Titus’ return from his victory over the Goths should be the acme of his career, resulting in his emperorship: ‘Gracious triumpher in the eyes of Rome’ (1.1.173). Instead his poor decisions – the killing of Alarbus and the refusal of the empirical robe – lead to the spiral of violence that Shakespeare explores through the play’s subsequent acts. The cycle of revenge – and Sidney’s expectations of tragedy – is fulfilled by the end of the first act. Titus begins the play with Tamora kneeling to him, but by the end of Act One she has risen above him: ‘How comes it that the subtle queen of Goths/Is of a sudden thus advanced in Rome?’ (1.1.397-8). Tamora is the ‘ulcers that are covered in tissue’ that Sidney asserts is a component of ‘high and excellent Tragedy’.⁶⁶ The conclusion of the usual pattern of a tragedy for, as Rebecca Bushnell comments, ‘The writers and actors of the sixteenth century did inherit from the preceding century a definitive notion of what ‘tragedy’ is [...] the fall of those of high estate or rank’, by the end of Act One allows Shakespeare to explore his own theory of tragedy throughout the remainder of the play.⁶⁷ The delivery of the accepted ‘fall of princes’ or ‘fortune’s fool’ tragic model

⁶³ For example, Hamlet’s opinion of ‘The Moustetrap’ in *Hamlet* encapsulates this argument.

⁶⁴ Sidney, p. 230.

⁶⁵ These actions also establish the parameters of *Titus Andronicus* as fulfilling the expectations of medieval tragedy, a tragic archetype that informs Sidney’s debate, as illustrated by his references to Chaucer (*Defence*, p. 242). Chaucer’s definition of tragedy is found in the Prologue to *The Monk’s Tale*: ‘Tragedy is to seyn a certyn storie/As olden books maken us memorie/Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee/And ys fallen out of high degree/Into myserie and endeth wreccedly’ (Chaucer, ‘The Monk’s Tale’ in *The Canterbury Tales* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 180.

⁶⁶ Sidney, p. 230.

⁶⁷ Rebecca Bushnell, ‘The Fall of Princes: The Classical and Medieval Roots of English Renaissance Tragedy’ in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, repr. 2009), pp 289-306 (p. 292). See also See for example, Bevington, ‘Tragedy in Shakespeare’s Career’, pp. 51-3,

by the end of the play's opening, indicated by Titus' recognition of his position, 'Titus, when wert thou wont to walk alone/Dishonoured thus and challenged of wrongs' (1.1.344-5), suggests an ambition that the rest of the play will move beyond the conventional tragic narrative.

Titus Andronicus conforms, at least in part, to some of Sidney's tragic expectations. Casting the play within a classical framework, Ovid and Seneca, as already discussed, are significant influences, illustrates the fulfillment of Sidney's didactic insistence for tragedy. The consequence of the violent extension of Ovid's source text – and therefore the classical framework – is that the extremity of the play's violence runs the risk of becoming merely horrific for horror's sake. The possibility of the audience becoming immured to the visceral brutality is mitigated, however, by the depiction of its effect on Titus himself. Titus on his return to Rome cries tears of joy: 'To resalute his country with his tears/Tears of true joy for his return to Rome' (1.1.78-9). By 3.1 his attitude towards Rome has exponentially altered:

Why, foolish Lucius, dost thou not perceive
That Rome is but a wilderness of tigers?
Tigers must prey, and Rome affords no prey
But me and mine.

(3.1.53-6).

The events have hardened his attitude. Conversely, the same Titus who claims in 3.1 'For two and twenty sons I never wept' (3.1.10), is emotionally shattered by the violence imposed on his family, reaching what A.C. Hamilton describes as 'a state beyond grief'.⁶⁸ The human impact of the events is shown by Titus' recourse to laughter in 3.1.265. He has no more tears to shed, although this is his immediate emotional response as Lucius comments: 'Sweet father cease your tears for at your grief/See how my wretched sister sobs and weeps' (3.1.137-8). Titus' linguistic breakdown – words cannot describe the depth of his emotion – is represented by

⁶⁸ A.C. Hamilton in 'Titus Andronicus: The Form of Shakespearean Tragedy', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14 (Summer, 1963), 201-213, (p. 210).
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his laughter: ‘*Titus*: Ha!Ha!Ha!/*Marcus*: Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour’ (3.1.265-6). Although perceived as inappropriate, his response is representative of his anguish. It is once Titus has reached despair, if not madness, that he can turn his thoughts towards revenge. Like Kyd, Shakespeare adds a depth of feeling and character to the revenge figure of the father.

Sidney’s emphasis on the Aristotelian unities of time, space and action are ignored in *Titus Andronicus*, as is his recommendation for a new sort of tragic decorum: ‘Again, many things may be told which cannot be showed’.⁶⁹ The onstage representation of brutality in *Titus Andronicus* is consistently savage. The offstage depiction of some of its most graphic atrocities - for example, Lavinia’s attack occurs offstage, the beheadings of Quintus and Martius are not shown – has the effect of protecting the audience from the play’s worst excesses. The dramatised violence is visceral, even before the play descends into the bloodbath of the final act: Aaron cuts off Titus’ hand, Chiron and Demetrius are strung up before their throats are cut, stage directions see Lavinia holding her father’s bleeding hand in her mouth and kissing the severed heads of two of her brothers. There is a pervading sense that, although Elizabethan revenge tragedy is characterised by its excessive violence - certain of the violent acts had already appeared on the stage⁷⁰ - it is the liberality and almost gratuitousness of the savagery of *Titus Andronicus* that is unprecedented. Catherine Belsey refers to this development as a ‘festival of dismemberment’.⁷¹

This presentation of savage grotesquery is a distance from Sidney’s model for tragedy as ‘notable morality’, as is the introduction in *Titus Andronicus* of a clown figure, challenging the idea of purity in tragedy that he espouses:

⁶⁹ Sidney, p. 244.

⁷⁰ Hieronimo bites out his own tongue in *The Spanish Tragedy*; hands are cut off in *Selimus*.

⁷¹ Catherine Belsey, ‘The Divided Tragic Hero’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works: The Tragedies*, pp. 73-94 (p. 74).

But besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays being neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestic matters with neither decency nor discretion so as neither the admiration nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained.⁷²

The inclusion of the ‘pigeon-seller’ scene of 4.4, with its stock ‘clown’ character, is Shakespeare’s conspicuous challenge to Sidney’s precepts, as the clown seems ‘thrust in by head and shoulders’ with no obvious connection to any previously depicted characters. Equally, the inherent comic value of scenes such as 2.2 and the discovery of Bassianus’ body by Quintus and Martius and their subsequent antics falling into the pit, further increase the play’s comic scope, as there appears to be calculated opportunities for the scene to be ‘played for laughs’. There is a sense of slapstick in the helping out of the pit/pulling into the pit physical comedy that the sequence engages in. Commenting on the punning between Marcus, Titus and Aaron in 3.1, Katherine Eisamann Maus refers to this inserted humour as ‘jarring technique’: the ‘deliberately awful’ jokes ‘shatters the norms of dramatic and moral suitability’.⁷³ The puns are blackly comic: ‘Lend me thy hand and I will give thee mine’ (3.1.188); ‘And in this hand the other will I bear’ (3.1.281). Further examples include ‘Speak Lavinia, what accursed hand/Hast made thee handless in thy father’s sight’ (3.1.68-9), and ‘Thou hast no hand to wipe away thy tears’ (3.1.107). Comedy, then, appears as part of Shakespeare’s synthesis of genre. The ‘jarring technique’ referred to by Eisaman Maus seems a calculated device to draw attention to the scene’s comedy and, as such, can be seen as a deliberate response to Sidney’s comments.

But the pigeon-seller scene best illustrates the interweaving of tragedy and comedy. Ostensibly a scene with a comic tone, involving an established stock character, pathos is drawn from the fact that the clown is subsequently hanged. The

⁷² Sidney, p. 244.

⁷³ Katherine Eisamann Maus, ‘Introduction’, *Titus Andronicus: The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 405.

pattern of topsy-turvy language that the clown employs immediately identifies him not just as the play's comic character but also as, demonstrably, an echo of the mummers play: he is, to use Robert Weimann's term the 'folk fool'.⁷⁴ This trace of an earlier theatrical tradition adds a further dimension to Shakespeare's exploratory tragedy. He draws on previous theatrical techniques and melds them with his own 'Shakespearean' innovations. As Weimann comments, the folk fool is 'characterised by a topsy-turvy patter which is closely connected with the utopian Cockayne motif'.⁷⁵ The clown introduces a brief moment of levity into the play; his persistent misunderstanding of Titus' comments, for example mis-hearing 'Jupiter' for 'gibbot-maker', his malapropisms and the confused realism of the verbal exchange between Titus and the clown indicated by the change in language from poetry to prose, marks this interlude as representative of the integration by Shakespeare of inherited dramatic form. This synthesis, though, is developed by the unexpected demise of the character. Shakespeare undercuts the comedy with considered tragedy. The clown's belief in the justice that he will receive at the hands of the emperor is undermined by 'Go take him away and hang him presently' (4.4.44) and is reminiscent of the execution of the clown in the *Greatham Sword Play*⁷⁶ referred to by Weimann: 'the non-sensical character of the Clown's beheading is underlined by his grotesque bequest'.⁷⁷ *Titus Andronicus*' exchange between the clown, Tamora and Saturninus mirrors the misunderstandings of the folk play and mimics the peremptory dismissal and execution of the clown to bring about a shifting perspective in the play.

⁷⁴ Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 32.

⁷⁵ Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition* p. 31.

⁷⁶ The Greatham play has the Second Clown accusing the King of stealing swine:

2nd Clown: Wasn't that thou stealing swine the other day?

King: Stealing what?/2nd Clown: Feeding swine, I meant to say/King: Come young men and try your rapiers on this villain,/Or he'll stand prating to me all day/We're going to try you for sheep stealing'

Greatham Sword Play < <http://www.folkplay.info/Texts/92nz42pn.htm> > [accessed September 24th 2014]

⁷⁷ Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, p. 46.

The change of tone that the comic interlude introduces is underlined by Saturninus' speaking in iambic pentameter in 4. 4 immediately following on from Titus' exchange with the clown, and before the clown engages with the emperor: 'Why lords what wrongs are these! Was ever seen/An emperor in Rome thus overborne/Troubled, confronted thus and for the extent/Of equal justice used in such contempt?' (4.4.1-4). Saturninus' soliloquy in blank verse, although in keeping with the majority of the play, comes after Titus' exchange with the clown in which he has spoken in a mixture of prose and irregular rhyme. This shift in speech pattern is noteworthy as, other than during the two exchanges with the Clown, the entirety of *Titus Andronicus* is written in verse. This emphasises the anachronistic nature of the clown's introduction. The pigeon-seller is not part of the Roman world of the play and consequently is instantly exposed as not being an integral part of the onstage action. In the context of the play, this interlude marks Titus' unconvincing attempt to dupe the emperor by hiding a knife in the supplication that he gives the Clown to give to him. While not obviously a comic scene to a modern audience, to a sixteenth-century audience, it was clear that Shakespeare was playing games. Contextually, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'pigeon' in Elizabethan England also meant ' a person easily swindled or tricked'.⁷⁸ From the clown's introduction, Shakespeare is engaging with multiple meaning word-play: 'Why I am going with my pigeons to the tribunal plebs to take up a matter of brawl betwixt my uncle and one of the emperal's men' (4.3.91-93). Unwittingly, the clown accepts his role as a 'person easily duped, swindled or

⁷⁸ The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is specific about this usage being current between 1570-1599, and so applicable to the period of *Titus Andronicus*' composition. The usage however, pre-dates this period as the Oxford English Dictionary online gives an example from 1525 from *Interlocucyon betwyxt Man & Woman* sig. Aiiij: ' When a younge pegeon a Woman hath gotyn She will make hym at length as stronge as a crane For surely she will neuer forsake hym Tyll that his croper bone wax very lame'. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/143661#eid30645909> [accessed September 24th 2014]. This illustrates that by 1594, the usage would have been in common parlance. It is easy to see how this usage contributed to the development of the term 'stool pigeon'. 'Pigeon' also had the connotation of coward, hence Hamlet's term 'pigeon-livered'. (*Hamlet*: 2.2.554).

tricked’, arguably reinforcing the idea that the scene is multi-layered. The pigeon-carrier, to an Elizabethan audience, is signaled from his entrance as a fool.⁷⁹

Although David Wiles in *Shakespeare’s Clown* notes that *Titus Andronicus* is ‘The only early text which actually refers to a ‘clown’ in its stage directions’, he also adds that the ‘clown episode takes the form of a self-contained ‘merriment’’.⁸⁰

I propose that this episode is rather evidence of Shakespeare’s awareness and engagement in the prevailing preoccupation of genre classification epitomised by *A Defence of Poesy* but articulating his response through a theatrical, rather than a print response. The inclusion of the anachronistic pigeon-seller scenes re-creates a gory revenge tragedy as a ‘mongrel tragicomedy’, although the pigeon-seller’s execution directly merges the ‘hornpipe’ with the ‘funeral’.⁸¹ The pigeon-seller is both comic and tragic, becoming another part of the play’s violent trajectory, his brusque execution underlining the casual approach of the play’s protagonists towards violence. Shakespeare’s approach to the consideration of comedy in tragedy is further illustrated in the character of Aaron, whose comic value will be assessed fully later in the chapter. The idea of comedy in tragedy can equally be seen as part of the economic realities of the late Elizabethan theatrical world. Theatre had to keep evolving to retain its audience in a marketplace crowded with other theatrical companies and alternative forms of entertainment, a reality for which Sidney’s intellectual approach had little support

Part Three. Intertextuality and Theatrical Precedent

Shakespeare’s first Roman tragedy is part of a theatrical dialogue that is carried out throughout the 1590s, and into the Jacobean period. Clearly part of the tradition of revenge tragedy that begins with Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, in Emma

⁷⁹ Other commentators, including Francis Barker in *The Culture of Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 143–209, view this scene as a comment on contemporary religious persecution.

⁸⁰ David Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; repr. 2005), p. 74.

⁸¹ Sidney, *Defence*, ‘they never, or very daintily, match hornpipes and funerals’, p. 244.

Smith's words, 'the ghost of a theatrical predecessor that will not lie down',⁸² this section will consider *Titus Andronicus*' response to preceding revenge tragedy, specifically its relationship to Kyd's work, as well as suggesting that the subsequent revisions to *The Spanish Tragedy* owe something to the influence of Shakespeare's play and highlight the intertextuality prevalent, but not always acknowledged, during this period. These revisions are part of theatrical 'conversations' in which one play can have a direct influence on the different versions of another.

I. Other Influences: *The Spanish Tragedy*

The Spanish Tragedy was, according to Bate, '[one of the two] most successful plays in that repertoire [of the 1590s]',⁸³ and by the end of 1603 had been published in five quarto editions, attesting to its popularity. It is not at all surprising that a young Shakespeare, arguably looking for his first main box office success, looked to one of the most popular contemporary plays for his inspiration. As Gregory M Colón Semenza comments, '[...] it was perhaps the single most influential play from the golden age of English theatre, regularly performed on the London stage for more than a decade after its first performance'.⁸⁴

The influence of *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592) on *Titus Andronicus* is both manifold and specific. There are obvious parallels with ideas of the onstage voice being silenced. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo bites out his own tongue to prevent himself revealing Bel-Imperia's complicity in his revenge. *Titus Andronicus* sees Lavinia's tongue being cut out to prevent her from naming her attackers. *Titus* is a revenge tragedy with a similarly bloodthirsty agenda, but the

⁸² Emma Smith, 'Shakespeare and Early Modern Tragedy' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, eds. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 132-149 (p. 135).

⁸³ Bate, 'Introduction', p. 85.

⁸⁴ Gregory M. Colón Mendoza, 'The Spanish Tragedy and Metatheatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, pp. 153-162 (p. 153).

particular influences range from ideas of metatheatricality to specific images of petitioning the gods for justice:

O sacred heavens, if this unhallowed deed,
 If this inhuman and barbarous attempt,
 If this incomparable murder thus
 Of mine, but now no more, my son
 Shall unrevealed and unrevengéd pass,
 How should we term your dealings to be just,
 If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust?
 (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 3.2.5-11).

In *Titus* a similar appeal reads: ‘And sith there’s no justice in earth nor hell/We will solicit heaven and move the gods/To send down Justice for to wreak our wrongs’ (4.3.50-3). Stylistically *Titus Andronicus*’ debt to Kyd is seen through the similarity in imagery: [...] if they did hear/they would not mark me, or if they did mark/They would not pity me’ (3.1.33-5), for example, imitates:

Fortune is blind and sees not my deserts;
 So is she deaf and hears not my laments;
 And could she hear, yet is she willful mad,
 And therefore will not pity my distress.
 (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 1.3.23-6).

The Spanish Tragedy establishes its metadramatic credentials from the opening scene. The whole play is framed within a metatheatrical device: Don Andrea and Revenge permanently occupy a liminal space onstage, that is both in and outside of the main play’s action. *The Spanish Tragedy* is a play-within-a-play, acknowledged as such by Revenge: ‘Here sit we down to see the mystery/And serve for Chorus in this tragedy’ (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 1.1.90-1). The outcome of Kyd’s play appears predetermined by the very presence of Revenge, with the audience aware that Revenge, literally, will be served. Revenge’s presence delineates that the characters’ destinies are already decided. Or at least this is how the device is commonly interpreted. Hieronimo’s determination to be the architect of his own destiny, a claim repeated throughout the play, counteracts this argument. When Hieronimo asserts his desire for revenge, ‘And here I vow (so you but give consent/And will conceal my resolution)/I will ere long determine of

their deaths/That causeless thus have murderéd my son' (4.1.42-45), he appears to take control of his destiny and the destiny of the murderers. *The Spanish Tragedy*, then, can be seen as a debate between a divine determination of events and the autonomous revenge figure.

Each Act in *The Spanish Tragedy* closes with a comment on the action by Revenge and the Ghost of Don Andrea, confirming the intentionality behind the framing device. The running commentary even includes Revenge falling asleep onstage: 'Awake Revenge, for thou art ill-advised/To sleep; awake! What thou art warned to watch!' (3.15.9-10). This clearly has a dual meaning: Revenge is sleeping both figuratively and metaphorically. Notably the answer that Revenge gives to Don Andrea takes the form of a dumb show, further emphasising the play's metatheatrical credentials. The nuptial dumb show at the end of Act Three follows on from the dumb show of Act One where English knights are depicted capturing their Portuguese and Spanish counterparts. Both act as precursors to the play of 'Soliman and Perseda', their inclusion underlining *The Spanish Tragedy's* preoccupation with theatre, a preoccupation that is adopted by Shakespeare and becomes part of his new formula for tragedy.

II. 1602 Additions and *Titus Andronicus*⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Addressing the significance of the 1602 additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* necessitates the consideration of the 'fly killing' scene in *Titus Andronicus*, as this itself was an addition between the Q3 text of 1611 and the F text of 1623. The Folio text was printed primarily from Q3 of 1611, with the addition of what Bate refers to as 'extensive stage directions' ('Introduction', p. 98), and the new, self-contained scene. Taking into account the question marks over the history of the play, there is a small possibility that the performances of January and February 1594, annotated by Henslowe as 'ne' in his diary, contained revisions that did not appear in the quarto of that year. Theoretically then, the addition of the fly killing scene of *Titus* could be concurrent with the 1602 additions to *The Spanish Tragedy*, dating from the late 1590s. The 'fly killing scene' does fulfill the same purpose as certain of the 1602 additions, cementing the idea of the protagonist's 'madness', but the question of influence on Kyd's revised text can equally be applied to Q2 *Titus Andronicus*, largely set from the Q1 text and printed by Edward White in 1600. The only substantive alteration from the Q1 text was the insertion of four new lines of ending: 'And being so shall have like want of pity/See justice done on Aaron that damn'd Moor/By whom our heavy haps had their beginning/Than afterwards to order well the state/That like events may ne'er it ruinate' (Q2, 1600). Other changes are primarily those of punctuation. See Bate, 'Introduction', pp. 117-121, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Titus Andronicus*, ed. Alan Hughes, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-10, and *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R.A Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Academics, including Emma Smith, have considered the influence that *Hamlet*, with its focus on a father/son relationship, may have had on the additions to the 1602 text of *The Spanish Tragedy*.⁸⁶ I would argue that it is worth considering *Titus Andronicus* in the same way, particularly as the play was evidently popular and a second edition was issued in 1600, reasonably concurrently with the composition date of the alterations to Kyd's play. Henslowe's *Diary* bears testament to the play's popularity, as does the existence of four versions by 1623 as against five versions of *The Spanish Tragedy* by 1633. Recent work by Brian Vickers has pointed out the similarities between the two texts, highlighting the lines 'I pried me through the crevice of a wall' (*Titus*, 5.1.114), and 'I pry through every crevice of each wall' (*1602*, 4.17), suggesting that there is the possibility of the Q1 *Titus Andronicus* having influenced the additions to Kyd's play.⁸⁷ Even without this, there is enough evidence to suggest a good deal of intertextual influence. For the purpose of clarity, I will refer to the revised addition of *The Spanish Tragedy* as *1602*, while continuing to highlight the specific Addition.

Smith, writing on the parallels between the additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*, comments, that *1602* 'amplifies the theatrical impact of Hieronimo's grief-stricken madness [...] by foregrounding the inter-related themes of insanity and paternity'.⁸⁸ These concerns are also those of *Titus Andronicus*, although in Shakespeare's play the relationship is between a father and a daughter. Perhaps the most significant Addition is that of the 'Painter scene', where Hieronimo encounters a Painter, who is also the father to a murdered son. Hieronimo requests a sort of 'living portrait' to encapsulate his grief: 'Art a

⁸⁶Smith, 'Shakespeare and Early Modern Tragedy', pp. 134-5. William Empson also considered that Shakespeare had effectively updated an earlier play for 'modern' audiences with *Hamlet*, evolving the tone to suit changing tastes. See William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. David B. Pirie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; repr. 1994), pp. 79-136.

⁸⁷Brian Vickers, 'Identifying Shakespeare's Additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* (1602): A New(er) Approach' < <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17450918.2012.660283> > [accessed September 24th 2014]. For Vickers, these confirm the potential of Shakespeare's responsibility for the Additions.

⁸⁸Smith, 'Shakespeare and Early Modern Tragedy', p. 136.

painter? Canst paint me a tear, or a wound or a groan or a sigh?’ (1602 4th Addition, 113-14). He goes on to say that ‘[...] the end is death and madness’ (1602 4th Addition, 164). There seems to be a correlation between Hieronimo’s view and that of Titus Andronicus on being confronted with the mutilated Lavinia: ‘Had I but seen thy picture in this plight/It would have madded me’ (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.104-5). In the same scene, Titus also comments, ‘Or shall we bite our tongues and in dumb shows/Pass the remainder of our hateful days’ (3.1.132-3), clearly a reference to Hieronimo’s final act. I would suggest that Titus’ striking image of a mutilated portrait has the potential to have influenced the 1602 new scene with a painter, suggesting the possibility of a further theatrical conversation between the two plays. Kyd’s influence on Shakespeare, these *Additions* suggest, may have been reflected through the prism of *Titus Andronicus* back on the later version of *The Spanish Tragedy*. The added emphasis on Hieronimo’s madness also mirrors the descriptions of Titus: ‘His sorrows have so overwhelmed his wits [...] His fits, his frenzy and his bitterness’ (*Titus*, 4.4.10 - 12); [...] our master’s mind is much distraught [...] grows lunatic and childish for his son’ (1602 4th Addition, 5-10).

Hieronimo in the *Additions* takes recourse in laughter from his overwhelming grief. This destabilising effect on the text is initially seen in *Titus Andronicus*: ‘Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour’ (3.1.266); ‘Ha! Ha! Saint James but this doth make me laugh’ (1602 1st Addition, 25). 1602 includes additional emphasis on ironic humour, a humour that is prevalent throughout Shakespeare’s play in lines such as: ‘Come brother, take a head/And in this hand the other I will bear’ (*Titus*, 3.1.280-281); ‘In troth, my lord, it is a thing of nothing/The murder of a son, or so/A thing of nothing my lord’ (1602 Second Addition, 8-10). There is an increased sense of the grotesque, encapsulated by

Hieronimo's additional mad scenes, that imitates the overall effect of *Titus Andronicus*.

None of this is, of course, conclusive, but the change in emphasis that the *Additions* makes to Kyd's original play is suggestive of a theatrical 'conversation' between the two texts. As William Empson suggested in his essay on *Hamlet*, writing of Shakespeare, 'I am not trying to make him subservient to his public, only sensitive to changes of taste in which he had an important part'.⁸⁹ The *1602 Additions* allow for a theatrical synergy between *Titus Andronicus* and the later version of Kyd's original play, a synergy suggestive of the protean nature of tragedy in the period, a synergy not excluding earlier forms of drama.

III. Aaron, the Vice and the Playwright

Benjamin Griffin in *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama, 1385-1600* comments that 'the alteration and suppression of medieval dramatic forms drove their energies into new channels'.⁹⁰ It is this idea, that there are perceptible traces and references to pre-existing drama that is significant in Shakespeare's development of his tragic synthesis, specifically in *Titus Andronicus* in the character of Aaron.⁹¹

Aaron's introductory soliloquy explicitly indicates that he and Tamora will fulfill the Vice tradition:

I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold
To wait upon this new-made empress.
To wait said I? – to wanton with this queen,
This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph
This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine
And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's.
(1.1.518-523).

⁸⁹ Empson, p. 84.

⁹⁰ Benjamin Griffin, *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama 1385-1600* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S Brewer, 2001), p. 22.

⁹¹ Enid Welsford in her book, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935; repr. 1973), comments that Richard Tarlton, allegedly Queen Elizabeth's favourite clown, was 'sometimes called a Vice' (p. 282). Medieval terminology then was still current in the late 1580s, suggesting that medieval theatrical antecedents still had some influence during the period of *Titus Andronicus*' composition.
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His subsequent soliloquies and asides underline this perception: ‘A very excellent piece of villainy (2.2.7), ‘If that be called deceit, I will be honest/And never whilst I live deceive men so/But I’ll deceive thee in another sort’ (3.1.188-191). Aaron’s direct address to the audience breaches the space between them and the performers, but, equally, this direct acknowledgement of the gap between actor and spectator also underlines it. It is worth taking on board the argument that many ‘asides’ are, in fact, a construct of a succession of editors.⁹² Nevertheless, many of Aaron’s asides delineate him from the rest of the onstage action: ‘Now will I fetch the king to find them here’ (2.2.206); ‘But I’ll deceive you in another sort/And that you’ll say ere half an hour pass’ (3.1.191-2); ‘Their heads I mean. O how this villainy/Doth fat me with the very thought of it’ (3.1.203-4). These illustrate that Aaron is taking the audience into his confidence and directly engaging with them, but they also provide the play with a cynical humour. Humour is a further engaging device – audiences will identify with the characters that make them laugh. The association of comedy and Aaron’s first aside is noteworthy, as it recognises contemporary expressions, underlining the idea of audience engagement: ‘Clubs, clubs! These lovers will not keep the peace’ (1.1.536). Bate points out that, historically, this has been suggested as ‘the cry raised at a London brawl for the watch to come and separate the combatants with clubs’.⁹³ If this is an accurate historical representation, then it suggests that the playwright, as well as identifying Aaron as a troublemaker, is looking for the audience to identify with Aaron by using references familiar to them,⁹⁴ thus bringing the play up to date.

Aaron, as a composite of the Vice and the Devil characters of medieval theatre, encapsulates this theatrical self-consciousness, primarily illustrated by his

⁹² For a fuller discussion, see Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 60-62.

⁹³ 1.1.536n. This is the argument made in the 1953 Arden Shakespeare edition of *Titus Andronicus*, although Bate gives no further evidence for the claim.

⁹⁴ Thomas Dekker in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* refers to ‘Cry clubs for ‘prentices’ (18. 29-30).

interaction with the audience. But his role represents more than just theatrical history, for it also engages with contemporary drama, following in the footsteps of Marlowe's villains, a correlation identified by linguistic intertextualities. As Bate remarks, 'Aaron's catalogue of misdeeds is modelled on the exchange between Barabas and Ithamore [*The Jew of Malta*] in which they outdo each other in outrageous ill-doing'.⁹⁵ Aaron himself acknowledges his identification with the devil of Marlowe and the morality play: 'If there be devils, would I were a devil/To live and burn in everlasting fire/So I might have your company in hell/But to torment you with my bitter tongue' (5.1.146-150). Again, this multi-layered synthesis is indicative of Shakespeare's innovative approach to his play.

Helen Cooper suggests that, 'Even in the Jacobean era of the macabre, few of the villains dare to continue their defiance of God at the moment of their death'.⁹⁶ Aaron, although not defying God, continues to reject any idea of absolution:

I am no baby I, that with base prayers
I should repent the evils I have done
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
Would I perform if I might have my will
If one good deed I did in all my life
I do repent it from my very soul
(5.3.183-189).

This is a deliberately inverted 'confession'. The language, 'prayer' and the repetition of 'repent' acknowledge Christian iconography, but Aaron's repudiation of forgiveness clarifies his association with the Devil tradition. This absolute damnation is in keeping with the extremities of violence in the play.

Further illustrating the exploratory nature of the play, Aaron is conversely offered a form of redemption in his attitude towards his son. Aaron is not, regardless of his protestations, purely evil. His attitude towards his son, 'Sweet blowze, you are a beauteous blossom, sure' (4.2.74), 'There to dispose this

⁹⁵ Bate, 'Introduction', p. 87.

⁹⁶ Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Methuen, 2010), p. 117.
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treasure in mine arms' (4.2.175), gives the character additional depth. His desire to save his child above all else demonstrates Shakespeare's attempts to make the character multi-dimensional, much in the same way that Lavinia is not purely an innocent. This complication of character type is further indicative of Shakespeare's expansion of previous theatrical models. As his career continues, so of course does his exploration of character, but Aaron's depth is unexpected.

Aaron's occupation of the liminal space, both of, but also outside the action, is in keeping with his role within the play as the outsider. His first appearance as a silent presence in the opening scene delineates this.⁹⁷ He is the architect for most of the evil in the play: 'Indeed I was their tutor to instruct them' (5.1.98). This sense of identification of Aaron as a sort of playwright is directly acknowledged in 2.2: 'Know that this gold must coin a stratagem/Which cunningly effected will beget/A very excellent piece of villainy' (2.2.5-7). His is the role of puppet master; his plotting replicates the idea of the dramatist at work. This responsibility is confirmed in the explanation to Lucius of exactly what has occurred during the course of the play. While Shakespeare falls short of making Aaron give a running commentary on the onstage action, he is fundamental in explaining the mechanics of the plot. Aaron explains to Lucius exactly who has had a part in what, but again this confession is complicated as it is made to save the life of his child: 'And this shall all be buried in my death/Unless thou swear to me my child shall live' (5.1.67-8). While Aaron's love for his son – and presumably his desire to see a part of him live on – represents some form of redemption, this is ultimately undermined. His reversion to evil in the final scene points to the exploratory nature of *Titus Andronicus* – he cannot appeal for absolution, as he has no god to call upon. He has to invite the audience to contemplate a 'horror beyond

⁹⁷ 1.1.499n.

the confines of the plot'.⁹⁸ There is no easy resolution either for the play or for the audience: 'Aaron will have his soul black as his face' (3.1.206). The difficulty for Shakespeare is how to unify the elements of different tragic ideas. Aaron, in his persona as the playwright, explicating the plot to Lucius in 5.1, is an attempt to provide a solution. That this experiment is not wholly successful is indicated by the reliance, at the end, on the traditional finale of the revenge play.

Part Four. The Sense of an Ending

It is in the endings of Shakespeare's tragedies of the 1590s that, I suggest, the importance of death to his evolving theory of tragedy is asserted. The expectation is that an ending provides a sense of resolution, of the tying up of loose ends. While this is an aspect of the finale of *Titus Andronicus*, its ultimate vision is one of nihilism rather than a benevolent reunion. The ending of Shakespeare's first Roman tragedy is emphatically metadramatic. It unites many of the play's recurring features - classical references, disguise – but these themes are refracted through a prism of nightmarish horror. Shakespeare, at the point at which it seems that all violent avenues have been explored, increases the play's brutality and cruelty. The importance of death and a lack of consolation for the play's characters are, at this point in his exploration of tragedy, a compelling part of the tragic form.

I. The End

The idea of reality and disguise, of the importance of costume and of acting as an aspect of theatre is recognised in the banquet tableau of the final scene. Titus and Lavinia are concealed. Titus is dressed '*like a cook*' (5.3.0) while Lavinia, according to the stage directions, has '*a veil over her face*' (5.3.0). The suggestion is that what follows will expose the truth, that the 'reality' of Lavinia's predicament will be revealed. Tension is built through the deferral of the ending.

⁹⁸ Cooper, p. 117.

Titus addresses this at the end of 5.2: ‘So now bring them in for I’ll play the cook/And see them ready against their mother comes’ (5.3.204-5). As I noted above, the subsequent interaction between Lucius, Marcus and Aaron delays the play’s climax still further, building the sense of anticipation.

The importance of metadrama to tragedy is made explicit in Titus’ answer to Saturninus’ question” ‘Why art thou thus attired Titus?’ (5.3.30). Although costumed, Titus is now in a position to expose the truth: ‘Because I would be sure to have all well’ (5.3.31). Metadrama, then, reveals the substance of tragedy – apparently represented, at this point in Shakespeare’s career, by a synthesis of classical precedent, violence and death. Titus kills Lavinia because this is the ending that is dictated by classical tragedy: ‘Was it well done of rash Virginius/To slay his daughter with his own right hand/Because she was enforced, stained deflowered?’ (5.3.36-7). Classical precedent is part of the tragic pattern: it sanctions Titus’ filicide, again acknowledged in Titus’ response: ‘A pattern, precedent and lively warrant’ (5.3.43). His subsequent line, ‘For me, most wretched to perform the like’ (5.3.44), foregrounds theatricality as a consistent theme. There is a performative aspect to death, so that this tableau of horror functions almost as a play-within-a-play. Saturninus and Tamora are the audience for the play’s explicatory bloodbath. The emphasis on classical authority is reiterated in Titus’ self-identification with Virginius: ‘I am as woeful as Virginius was’ (5.3.49).

The following rhyming couplet exchange between Saturninus and Titus creates a sense of urgency. Titus’ classical revenge is dependent on Tamora cannibalising her sons:

Saturninus: What was she ravished? Tell who did the deed?
Titus: Will’t please you eat? Will’t please your highness feed?
 (5.3.52-3).

Shakespeare's introduction of a further classical author – and Saturninus' understanding of the reference to Livy - accentuates the play's reliance on classical precedent as a pattern for tragedy. Titus' revenge is the performance of Senecan brutality. Again Titus resorts to rhyming couplets: 'Whereof their mother daintily hath fed/Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred' (5.3.60-1). His glee at the success of his revenge is evidenced through the use of rhyme; its use draws direct attention to the realities of his revenge, though couched in artifice.

It is at this point that the play reverts to the sensationalism of typical revenge tragedy, albeit amplified. Three murders occur in quick succession –Titus stabs Tamora, Saturninus kills Titus and Lucius then kills Saturninus. There is no classical reference or precedent for these killings, Lucius' lines refer rather to the proverb: 'There's meed for meed' (5.3.65).⁹⁹ Much of the critical reaction against *Titus Andronicus* previously focused on the gratuitousness of the violence, a view encapsulated by T.S Eliot, who referred to the 'wantonness, an irrelevance, about the crimes of which Seneca would never have been guilty'.¹⁰⁰ This view, commenting as it does on the role of the classics in the drama, indicates the importance of the classical pattern as a vindication for the violence. Without classical precedent to give the violence context, it becomes foundationless, leading to the play collapsing into mere brutality or farce. The vindication for the killings is, however, part of the pattern of revenge: 'Die frantic wretch for this accursed deed' (5.3.63). This justification is made explicit by Lucius: 'There's meed for meed, death for a deadly deed' (5.3.65). Within the parameters of the expected trajectory of the revenge tragedy, Shakespeare, however, continues to push the boundaries. The final onstage body count is excessive, with four killed onstage,

⁹⁹ 5.3.65n.

¹⁰⁰ T.S. Eliot, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation', in *Elizabethan Dramatists: Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 31.

two baked in a pie and Aaron about to be buried alive, an excess that marks the new tragic world.¹⁰¹

Aaron's fate undermines the sense of restoration that Lucius' accession attempts. Although there is an attempt at a unifying resolution with the discussion of the burial honours for Titus and Lavinia, this idea is undercut by Tamora's nihilistic fate: 'Her life was beastly and devoid of pity/And being dead let birds on her take pity' (5.3.198-199). The final image is dehumanising, suggesting that desensitisation is the result of the play's brutality. The play's ending is one where death enjoys a feast, as if to destroy all attempts to give civilization anything other than a negative meaning.

II. Conclusion

Entered into the Stationers' Register in November 1592, Thomas Kyd's play *Soliman and Perseda* poses a question about the definition of tragedy: 'And what are tragedies but acts of death?'¹⁰² Encapsulating the multiple concerns of the early modern stage, *Titus Andronicus* is Shakespeare's first attempt not only at addressing the preoccupations of the contemporary theatrical and literary milieu, but also at re-defining the genre. For Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, while appreciating and, to some degree, acknowledging both theatrical and literary antecedents, is, however, not a play solely about death. *Titus Andronicus* acknowledges its heritage, but has rather more than one eye on its future. It is a self-conscious exploratory attempt to move the genre of revenge tragedy away from stereotype, complicating expectations and rejecting archetype. Marcus' speech on discovering Lavinia's mutilated body has often been seen as a paradox,

¹⁰¹ See Gurr, 'Metatheatre and the Fear of Playing' for an account of the practical impact 'of getting corpses offstage at the end of the play' (p. 104). Gurr suggests that in most tragedies the solution to this problem was written into the play itself, for example Lucius' instructions at the end of *Titus Andronicus*, 5.3.190-3.

¹⁰² Thomas Kyd, *Soliman and Perseda*, (1.1.7) <http://www.elizabethanauthors.org/soli101.htm>
[September 30th 2014]

even being described as ‘in bad taste’.¹⁰³ However, this poetical rendering of a nightmarish scene is an embedded example of Shakespeare’s initial effort to bring the tragic debate into particular focus.

Titus Andronicus is very much a trial run. However, although the play self-consciously presents different interpretations of ideas of tragedy, and specifically revenge tragedy, ultimately stereotype wins out. The play collapses back into nightmarish cruelty, perhaps responding to the demands of popular theatre *Titus Andronicus*, then, is an early prototype of Shakespearean tragedy, not the finished article.

¹⁰³ *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Other ‘Classical’ Plays: Titus Andronicus, Troilus and Cressida, Timon of Athens, Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1966), VI, p. 31.

Chapter Two

Romeo and Juliet: A Hybrid Tragedy

There are significant differences in theme, form and structure between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Titus Andronicus*, and yet each, according to the title pages of their quarto editions, as well as the categorisation of the First Folio, were regarded contemporaneously as ‘tragedies’. This chapter will suggest that *Romeo and Juliet* is a comic tragedy that sees Shakespeare deliberately searching for a new taxonomy of tragedy through an experimental structure that is focused on two protagonists. This variation of tragic form, along with a new emphasis on love in tragedy, and the ongoing attempt to synthesise poetry and tragedy suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* is an important part of the exploration of the emerging tragic paradigm in Shakespeare’s work.¹

Romeo and Juliet marks a distinct movement away from the savage brutality, classical ideas and revenge tragedy that are exploited in *Titus Andronicus*, using as its primary inspiration Arthur Brooke’s narrative romance, *The tragicall historye of Romeus and Juliet written first in Italian by Bandell and nowe in Englishe by Ar. Br.*² Printed in 1562, and widely accepted as Shakespeare’s immediate source – although as demonstrated by the title, the story was not original

¹ Although the composition date for *Romeo and Juliet* is uncertain, the first quarto was published in 1597, suggesting a performance date of 1596-7.

² Reprinted in 1582 and 1587 and subsequently referred to as *Romeus and Juliet*. The first edition of *The tragicall historye of Romeus and Juliet written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in Englishe by Ar. Br.* printed in 1562 is ‘generally accepted as Shakespeare’s immediate source’. See Jill L. Levenson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; repr. 2008), p. 5. See also *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; repr. 2003), p. 7, Muir, *Sources*, p. 39 and *The Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series: Romeo and Juliet* ed. René Weiss (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2012; repr. 2013, 2014). The edition of Brooke’s poem that I have referred to, following the information given above, is the 1562 Folio edition. All of the following examples are taken from this source and will be referenced in the text parenthetically. See <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search> [accessed December 12th 2014 and on numerous dates subsequently]

The edition of *Romeo and Juliet* used for reference is *The Arden 3rd Series* and all subsequent references to the play are taken from this edition unless otherwise commented and will be noted parenthetically in the text.

to Brooke – there are telling differences in Shakespeare’s interpretation of the story that point to a calculated exploration of the idea of a tragic romance begun in comedy.

An important innovation in *Romeo and Juliet* is the introduction of two main protagonists, a deviation from the previous model that was based on the idea of a single principal character, an alteration that appears to set the agenda of the play. This approach informs the play’s structure, which focuses on significant episodes constructed from both a comic and a tragic perspective.³ The introduction of comedy in a variety of forms, not solely based on the physical presence of a clown, is a new departure in Shakespeare’s exploration of the constituents of tragedy, as is the focus on romance.⁴ While the idea of a love tragedy is inherited from Brooke’s poem, the comic emphasis in *Romeo and Juliet* is an entirely new initiative explored through a multiplicity of devices that emphasise its deliberateness.

Within this new model, there are characteristics inherited from *Titus Andronicus* that identify *Romeo and Juliet* as part of an ongoing examination of the poetic tragic genre. Although clearly different from the tragic bloodbath of the earlier play, *Romeo and Juliet* is equally multi-layered, its mix of genres appearing to argue against the classical idea of tragedy as a single unified genre that Sidney espouses in *The Defence of Poesy*. Rather, *Romeo and Juliet* seems to embrace the idea of a ‘gross absurditie’, as it is ‘neither right tragedies nor right comedies’.⁵

Following the pattern of the preceding chapter, this chapter will focus in Part One on Shakespeare’s use of his primary source material, considering his changes from the standpoint of genre, before Part Two contemplates what Susan

³ This alteration in focus is also reflected in the mutability of the play’s titular billing between Q1 and Q2, discussed later in this chapter, potentially reflecting the differing perceptions that the alteration in tragic focus creates.

⁴ The presence of comedy in the play is not theoretical speculation: the stage direction, ‘Enter Will Kemp’ in Q2 supplies evidence of the presence of the decade’s most popular clown.

⁵ Sidney, p. 244.

Snyder refers to as the ‘comic-matrix’ of the play,⁶ developing her argument that Mercutio’s death is the pivot between the play’s shift from comedy to tragedy and identifying the idea of the play as a love tragedy. An analysis then follows of the innovation of a clearly defined clown figure before a consideration of the place of language and poetry as part of a search for a new taxonomy of tragedy that recognises the play’s romantic focus. Finally, the intertextual relationship between *Romeo and Juliet* and Shakespeare’s complementary comedy, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is examined in the light of the problematic issue of tragic endings.

Part One. Sources

That the Romeo and Juliet story was commonly known in the sixteenth century is not in dispute.⁷ Jill L. Levenson notes that ‘When Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* sometime in the 1590s, he dramatised a story well-known to his audiences through popular sources for at least a generation’.⁸ The earliest identifiable version appears in 1476 in Masuccio Salernitano’s *Novellino*. This includes most of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* in the story of ‘Mariotto and Ganozza’, although the idea of the *liebestod* myth is a trope of romantic fiction and folklore from classical antiquity onwards.⁹ Although these pre-existing European versions of the story are relevant to Shakespeare’s play inasmuch as there are twelve identifiable points of congruity across all renditions,¹⁰ Shakespeare’s primary source, as noted by

⁶ Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare’s Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello and King Lear* (Princeton, New Jersey and Guildford, Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁷ Weiss notes the registering of a ‘new ballad of ROMEO AND JULIET’ registered in the Stationers’ Register on August 5th 1596, printed by Edward White. See Weiss, ‘Introduction’, p. 43. The existence of this ballad confirms the renewed interest in the story, and this, along with Shakespeare’s play (as Weiss comments), is the only time that the names of the lovers appear together in this form (p. 43).

⁸ Jill L. Levenson, ‘Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare’, *Studies in Philology*, 81 (1984), 325-347 (p. 325).

⁹ Richard Wagner first used the term ‘liebestod’, (‘love-death’), in his 1859 opera *Tristan und Isolde* but the term has come to be widely associated with various art forms in which the lovers consummate their relationship in death. See Levenson, ‘Romeo before Juliet’ and also Levenson, ‘Introduction’, pp. 2-15.

¹⁰ The main incarnations of the story are Italian novellas, specifically Luigi Da Porto’s *Historia novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti*, a prose translation by William Painter and Arthur Brooke’s poem of 1562. See Levenson, ‘Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare’ and ‘Introduction’ to the Oxford Shakespeare for a full discussion on the variant pre-existing forms of the story. In ‘Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare’, Levenson identifies the novella antecedents before concluding that by adapting the conventions of the novellas and experimenting with contemporary theatrical practices, Shakespeare injects a new vibrancy into the story.

Kenneth Muir, was Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*,¹¹ although Muir comments that 'he probably knew [of] Painter'.¹² Levenson suggests that, although contemporary allusions to the story illustrate its popularity in England from the 1560s onwards, it remained 'fundamentally unchanged until Shakespeare transformed it'.¹³ A consideration of Shakespeare's innovations and how they inform the generic status of the play will be the primary focus of the following section.

I. *Romeus and Juliet*

As already noted, there are twelve events that provide a continuous link across all editions of the love story: Romeo's first, unfulfilled love affair; the Capulet party where the lovers encounter each other; their clandestine meeting where they plan to marry; the assistance of a friar; the Montague-Capulet brawl leading to Romeo's banishment; Juliet's arranged marriage; Romeo and Juliet's parting; the friar assisting Juliet and the genesis of the potion idea; Juliet's false death; the tomb scene; the authority figure's dispensation of justice and the feuding family's reconciliation.¹⁴ As Bevington comments, 'Shakespeare, then, inherited the 'tragic' dimensions of the story he chose to dramatise about fated young lovers. The idea of tragedy came with the sources and it is not one for which either the Fall of Princes or revenge tragedy provided a formula'.¹⁵ The tragic blueprint of *Romeo and Juliet* is rooted in the original story, but the use of comedy, character development, symmetry of composition and linguistic focus all point to the idea that *Romeo and Juliet* is a consideration of the position of romance and comedy within the tragic

¹¹ Although Brooke in his address 'To the Reader' claims that 'Though I later saw the same argument lately set forth on stage with more commendation than I can look for – being there much better set forth than I can or do', the story appears only to have been dramatised in Italy in 1578 in a version by Groto entitled *Hadriana*. Brooke's poem purports to be didactic: 'And to this end, good Reader, is this tragical matter written, to describe unto thee a couple of unfortunate lovers [...] Hereunto, if you apply it, ye shall deliver my doing from offence and profit yourselves'.

¹² Muir, p. 39. See Muir, pp. 38-46 for a full analysis of all of Shakespeare's sources. William Painter translated a French rendition by Pierre Boistreau from 1559 and included it in his *Palace of Pleasure* in 1567.

¹³ Levenson, 'Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare', p. 327.

¹⁴ Levenson, 'Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare', p. 329.

¹⁵ David Bevington, 'Tragedy in Shakespeare's Career', p. 55.

genre. The fundamental alterations that Shakespeare makes to his primary source material illustrate the deliberation behind this exploration.

Certain of Shakespeare's primary innovations are consistent with the differing demands of theatre over literature. He focuses the plot, condensing the time line into a much smaller framework, from Brooke's nine months into three days, increasing both the dramatic tension and emotional intensity.¹⁶ Brooke's narrative order is essentially followed, with the only significant exception being the reduction of what Blakemore Evans refers to as 'the lovers' period of happiness' to a single night after Tybalt's death, rather than Brooke's extended marriage, a decision that is consistent with theatrical rather than literary demands.¹⁷

Shakespeare's variations reflect his multi-dimensional approach to the subject, with his focus on comedy and expansion of the idea of tragedy. Although his substantive changes relate to the introduction of comedy – the invention of a dedicated comic figure, both Mercutio and the Nurse's roles are expanded – he also augments Tybalt and Paris, introducing these characters far earlier than Brooke, expanding their characterisation, and consequently the sense of loss on their deaths.¹⁸

Shakespeare's approach to his source material, then, is not based solely on the idea of comedy in tragedy, but rather is multi-faceted, drawing together diverse elements into a new balance of genres.

While Brooke accepts Tybalt's involvement in 'The Argument', in the poem proper his role is solely as an agent provocateur; in the fight that leads to his death he is depicted clearly as the aggressor.¹⁹ Viewed as an integral part of the

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of Shakespeare's timeline, see Weiss, pp. 25-27.

¹⁷ Blakemore Evans, p. 9.

¹⁸ Lady Capulet's role is significantly smaller in Shakespeare's play than in Brooke's poem where she is much more involved, specifically in Juliet's proposed marriage to Paris.

¹⁹ 'Love hath inflamed twain by sodayn sight/And both do grant the thing that both desire/They wed in shrift by counsell of a friar/Young Romeus clymes fair Juliet's bower by night/Three monthes he does enjoy his cheefe delight/By Tybalt's rage provoked unto yre/He payeth death to Tybalt for his hyre/A banish't man he scapes by secret flight/New marriage is offred to his wife/She drinks a drin that seemes to reave her breath/They bury her that sleeping yet hath lyfe/Her husband hearte the tydinges of her death/He drinks his
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lovers' story, his death leads to Romeo's banishment: 'By Tybalt's rage,
provoked unto yre/He payeth death to Tybalt for his hyre' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol.
'The Argument'), although his character within the poem is largely non-existent.

His only function is as the initiator of the fight that leads to his death:

The Capilet's as cheefe,
a young man have chose out,
Best exercised in feates of armes
and noblest of the rowte.
Our Juliet's Uncle's sone
that clepéd was Tybalt,
He was of body tall and strong
and of his courage halt.
(*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 27^r).

In Brooke's work Tybalt does not kill Mercutio but rather it is a general brawl that leads to the fight between him and Romeo. Shakespeare's enhancement of his importance to the Capulet family, and specifically to Juliet, increases the tragic impact both of his death and Romeo's banishment. Including Tybalt in the Capulet party, in common with much of Shakespeare's approach to the play, adds a further dimension to the tragedy, creating a consistency of character. Tybalt is the figure that most engages with the inter-familial argument: 'Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe/A villain that is hither come in spite/ To scorn at our solemnity this night' (1.5.60-2). This change both emphasises the significance of the feud between the two families, and enhances the audience's understanding of Juliet's subsequent grief on hearing of his death in 3.2, as Tybalt is shown as a part of her family: 'My dearest cousin and my dearer lord?/Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom/For who is living if those two are gone?' (3.2.66-8).

The extension of Paris' character from the source material indicates a similar authorial approach to the treatment of Tybalt. In the poem these characters exist solely to fulfill narrative functions – Paris appears when Juliet needs another suitor, Tybalt only as the primary protagonist of the feud – although both Brooke

bane and she with Romeus' knife/When she awakes her selfe (alas) she slay'th'. See Brooke, *Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 'The Argument'.

and Shakespeare depict the character as an advantageous match. Shakespeare, however, introduces Paris as a suitor for Juliet before she and Romeo have even met in a short sequence with Capulet: ‘And now my lord what say you to my suit?’ (1.2.6). Although Capulet’s response is to ‘Let two more summers whither in their pride/Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride’ (1.2.10-11), the scene provides a cohesion and a circularity to the play that is missing from the poem. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Paris – like Tybalt – is a part of the play’s world, a consistent character within the narrative, not solely a device to drive the plot. Shakespeare’s alteration to Brooke’s poem thus illustrates Paris’ narrative importance. Moreover, Shakespeare transposes the lines that Brooke gives to Juliet’s mother encouraging her union with Paris to her Nurse, increasing Juliet’s sense of abandonment at the Nurse’s subsequent change of allegiance from Romeo to Paris, as she is consistently depicted as her closest confidante:²⁰

The person of the man,
 the fewters of his face,
 His youthfull yeres, his fayrenes, and
 his port and semely grace.
 With curious wordes she payntes
 before her daughters eyes,
 And then with store of vertues prayse,
 she heaues him to the skyes.
 (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 53^v).

O, he’s a lovely gentleman!
 Romeo’s a dishclout to him. An eagle madam
 Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
 As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
 I think that you are happy in this second match,
 For it excels your first.
 (3.5.219-224).

The extension of Paris’ character as an important part of the tragic imperative is further illustrated by his appearances at Friar Laurence’s cell and at the Capulet tomb. Both are part of Shakespeare’s innovation, although there is a meeting in the

²⁰ In Brooke’s poem, Juliet’s reaction to the news of Romeo’s banishment and Tybalt’s death brings about a sort of collapse, another ‘false death’: ‘Her limmes she stretched forth/She drew no more her breath/Who had been there, might well have seene/the signs of present death’ (*Romeus and Juliet*, f.33^r). This does not appear in the play.

poem between Paris and Juliet in which Brooke's Paris is depicted as, to some degree, being entrapped by Juliet: 'As cunning craftsmen to the sale/ do set their wares on row/That ere the County did /out of her sight depart/So secretly unawares to him/she stole away his heart' (*Romeus and Juliet*, f. 64^r). This is a rare instance within the poem of Juliet obeying her parents:²¹

The mother, warnde before
her daughter doth prepare;
She warneth, and she chargeth her,
that in no wyse she spare
Her curteous speche, her pleasant
looks, and commely grace,
But liberally to geve them forth
when Paris commes in place.
(*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 63^v).

This is an aspect of his sources that Shakespeare omits – the meeting between Juliet and Paris before their planned marriage is an accidental meeting at the Friar's cell before Friar Laurence suggests a way out of Juliet's predicament. Juliet, then, in Shakespeare's play is not seen as deliberately misleading Paris in the way that she is depicted in his primary source. As part of Shakespeare's tragic innovation, he creates Paris as a fuller and, consequently, more sympathetic figure, considerate towards Juliet's feelings, so that his death at her tomb reinforces the play's inherent sense of tragedy. As Blakemore Evans comments, 'Shakespeare bestows a pathetic integrity on Paris'.²² Shakespeare's inclusion of Paris' death increases the play's tragic scope, extending from purely that of the lovers to include those around them.

The enhanced roles of Mercutio and the Nurse similarly illustrate Shakespeare's revisionist agenda. Whilst ostensibly the changes seem part of the play's comedic focus – both are comic characters whose roles are essentially increased – it is also a part of the issue of balancing genre. Mercutio in particular

²¹ By this stage Juliet and Friar Laurence have made their plan for her 'false death'. Brooke, unlike Shakespeare, emphasises Juliet's deception earlier in the poem referring to her acting ability: 'So well she faynde, mother ne nurce/the hidden harme descride' (fol. 11^r), before twice referring to Juliet as a 'wily wench' (fol. 20^v and 64^r). Shakespeare's Juliet is not tainted by such considerations of her behaviour.

²² Blakemore Evans, p. 21.

becomes an intrinsic part of the narrative shift from comedy to tragedy. His death is the catalyst for Romeo's brief adoption of the role of the revenger and, as Raymond V. Utterback notes, 'affects the action critically and alters the tone of the play'.²³ In a similar, although less significant way, the Nurse's rejection of Juliet's marriage provides the impetus for her isolation: 'Go counsellor/Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain' (3.5.240-1). Shakespeare's changes from Brooke indicate his engagement with the issue of the intermingling of genres. Snyder suggests that 'If we divide the play at Mercutio's death, the death that generates all those that follow, it becomes apparent that the play's movement up to this point is essentially comic'.²⁴ Mercutio's death, then, appears as a considered structural and narrative break, dividing the play as Caesar's death will do later in *Julius Caesar*. That Shakespeare, in a studied departure from his primary source, makes the death of a deliberately comic character intrinsic to the exploration of tragedy indicates the careful plotting of the play's hybrid nature.

Although Brooke's Mercutio appears only briefly, Shakespeare amplifies his existing characteristics. In *Romeus and Juliet* he is 'coorteous of his speche/ and pleasant of device' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 8^r), a description developed into a fully-fledged character who retains the qualities of Brooke's poem. One of the play's primary comic exponents, his humour is both satirical and earthy, while exposing the insincerity of Romeo's Petrarchan approach to romance: 'Speak but one rhyme and I am satisfied/Cry but 'Ay me', pronounce but 'love' and 'dove'' (2.1.9-10). The inspiration for the sexual emphasis of some of Mercutio's humour appears to be found in Brooke: 'Even as a Lyon would/emong lambes be bolde:/Such was among the bashfull maydes/Mercutio to behold' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 8^r). Shakespeare constructs a substantial character, increasing his role to

²³ Raymond V. Utterback, 'The Death of Mercutio', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 24 (1973), 105-116 (p. 107).

²⁴ Susan Snyder, 'Romeo and Juliet: Comedy into Tragedy', *Essays in Criticism*, 20 (1970), 391-402 (pp. 392-393).

become the most important of Romeo's friends, indicated by his long 'Queen Mab' monologue of 1.4. He is tangibly more than a plot device. The build-up to the Mercutio -Tybalt conflict, again an authorial invention, in which he, to use Utterback's phrase, is 'amusing and satirical',²⁵ indicates his (and Benvolio's) character development. A counterpart to their interaction of 2.1, they are shown existing outside of their relationship with Romeo. He thus fulfills a dual function – he is part of the play's engagement with the idea of comedy and the broader world of the play away from the lovers, while his extension from a minor to a major character justifies his role in the narrative of the tragedy.²⁶

The most compelling innovation involving Mercutio is his death, the critical event that alters the play's trajectory from that of a comic romance to, albeit briefly, a revenge tragedy. His death, the single event that shifts the course of the play, is part of a structural pattern that acknowledges the importance of fate to the construction of tragedy, seen in Romeo's avenging response: 'This day's black fate on moe days doth depend/This but begins the woe others must end' (3.1.121-2). Further examples are Juliet's 'O Fortune Fortune, all men call thee fickle' (3.5.60), 'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds/That sees into the bottom of my grief' (3.5.197-8), and Romeo's 'Then I defy you stars' (5.1.24).²⁷

The development of Mercutio's role illustrates that, while death is a necessary part of tragedy, the death must be that of a significant character. Shakespeare's extension of originally minor characters indicates that peripheral characters are not important enough to the main protagonists to be considered a

²⁵ Utterback, p. 109.

²⁶ In Brooke's poem, Juliet sits between Mercutio and Romeo at their original meeting, holding Mercutio's hand: 'With friendly gripe he seized fair Juliet's snowish hand' (fol. 8^r). Romeo then takes Juliet's other hand: 'Within his trembling hand her left/hath loving Romeus caught' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 8^r). It is tempting to see Shakespeare's inspiration for 'If I profane with my unworldliest hand' (1.5.92) as taken from this sequence in *Romeus and Juliet* where Brooke continues 'Then she with tender hand/his tender palme hath prest' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol.8^r).

²⁷ Utterback sees a circular pattern of threat, decision and disaster: 'The play moves from an ominous or threatening situation through the decisions of individuals to the limiting contexts in which their decisions and actions took place' (p. 113). See 'The Death of Mercutio' for his full argument.

part of tragedy and so have to be developed. This is a consistent approach to Brooke's poem parallel to the augmentation of Paris and Tybalt, while the elaboration of the comedic aspects of the Nurse and Mercutio is seen further in the establishment as already indicated of a recognisable clown figure, the servant Peter.²⁸

II. The Creation of the 'clowne'

Although the textual evidence for the identifiable character of the 'clowne' is not straightforward, undoubtedly an important part of the innovation of *Romeo and Juliet* is the verifiable presence of a specific comic character. This is a significant alteration from Shakespeare's earlier tragedy: in *Romeo and Juliet* the comedy is both obtrusive and embedded and the impetus cannot be found in the primary source.

Within Brooke's poem, there are easily identifiable sources for Shakespeare's inspiration, as Blakemore Evans notes: 'Shakespeare worked directly with Brooke's *Romeus*, for verbal echoes resound throughout the play.'²⁹ The play's emphasis on the domestic scenes of celebration preparation, for example, appear to stem from Brooke: 'Against the bridall day/the parents did prepare/Such rich attyre, such furniture/such store of dainty fare' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 64^r). This scene correlates exactly to 4.4, the scene before Juliet's second marriage: 'Hold take these keys and fetch more spices Nurse/They call for dates and quinces in the pastry' (4.4.1-2). A part of this domestic focus, the first substantial comic opportunity in the play, is the clown's soliloquy of 1.2. There is

²⁸ Although the Nurse's treatment of Peter in 2.3 identifies him as a domestic servant of the Capulet family ('My fan Peter' (2.4.102), and he is portrayed as such in 4.4, there are textual differences between Q1 and Q2 about the character depicted in 1.2. Q1's nomenclature is of 'serving man', whereas Q2 identifies him as 'the clowne'. The textual evidence of Q2 and the 'lamentations scene' of 4.4 identifies Peter as being played by Will Kemp, meaning in which case that the 'serving man' of Q1 would have been Kemp as the play's 'clowne' of Q2. As Q1 is generally regarded as 'a so-called 'bad' quarto, a defective text' in contrast to Q2 as the longer and more authoritative version of the play, this thesis accepts the idea that Peter is the play's definitive clown role and as such it is Peter who appears in 1.2. It is worth noting that the *Norton* text names him in the scene, whereas *The Oxford Shakespeare* and *The Arden* edition and *The New Cambridge* all use either 'servant' or 'serving man'. Interestingly, *The New Cambridge* edition uses 'clowne' in the entry stage directions, but 'servant' in the scene proper.

²⁹ Blakemore Evans, p. 7.

no corresponding episode in *Romeus and Juliet*, although there is a reference to the guest invitations: ‘But Capilet himselfe/ hath byd unto his feast/Or by his name in paper sent/ appoynted as a geast’ (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 5^r). Potentially, this is the source of Capulet’s instruction to his servant: ‘Go sirrah, trudge about/Through fair Verona, find these person’s out’ (1.2.33-4), as there are discernable similarities in Brooke’s poem: ‘No lady fayre or fowle/was in Verona towne:/No knight or gentleman/of high or lowe renowne’ (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 5^r). The significant point, of course, is that Shakespeare creates an intentional comic sequence based around a scant allusion.

This pattern of expanding the narrative into comic action is repeated in the ‘lamentation’ scene. Brooke’s poem seems to provide the impetus for Shakespeare’s mourning scene:³⁰

Then ‘gan she so to sobbe
it seemde her hart would brast;
And while she crieth thus, behold,
the father at the last,
The County Paris, and
of gentilmen a route,
And ladies of Verona town
and country round about,
Both kindreds and alies
that her a pace have preast,
For by their presence there they sought
to honour so the feast;
But when the heavy newes
the hydden geastes did heare,
So much they mournd, that who had seene
theyr count’nance and theyr cheere,
Might easily have judged
by that that they had seene,
That day of wrath and eke
of pity have beene.

(*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 68^v-69^f).

Shakespeare reduces the number of mourners to Juliet’s parents, the Nurse and Paris, but his depiction of their extreme grief seems consistent with that of Brooke.

This is especially the case with Capulet:

³⁰ For a discussion of the generic issues surrounding this scene, see pp. 98-103.
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But more than all the rest,

The father's hart was so
smit with the heavy newes, and so
shut up with sodain woe,
That he ne had the power
his daughter to beweepe
Ne yet to speake but long is forsd
his tears and plaint to keep.

(*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 69^r).

In Shakespeare's play this becomes 'Death that has ta'en her hence to make me wail,/Ties up my tongue and will not let me speak' (4.5.31-2). There are clear parallels between the two texts, but, again, Shakespeare's choice is the insertion of comedy into what J.L. Styan refers to as 'the controversial 'burlesque' of mock-mourning, the simultaneous expression of the comic and the tragic performed by the awkward quartet of Lady Capulet, the Nurse, Paris and Capulet'.³¹ This scene and its importance to the issue of genre will be analysed more fully later in this chapter.

There are, of course, further excisions and inclusions between Shakespeare's play and Brooke's poem, but what the above illustrates is the mixed nature of Shakespeare's deliberations. He reinforces both the tragic aspects of the poem, with the extensions to the characters of Tybalt, Paris and Mercutio, as well as creating a definitively comic character in the clown and extending the humorous potential of Mercutio and the Nurse.³² His treatment of Mercutio – and to a lesser degree the Nurse – epitomises this multi-dimensional approach as Mercutio unites the essential issue at the heart of the play. His character defines the tension between comedy and tragedy that is inherent in the play, a tension that informs Shakespeare's exploration of the nature of tragedy and can be seen in the mutable titles of the play's first two quartos that will be addressed later.

³¹ J. L. Styan, *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 20.

³² The genesis for the Nurse's bawdy humour is found in *Romeus and Juliet* specifically in her meeting with Romeo before their marriage: 'A thousand times and more/I sat her on my lappe/And clappd her on the buttock soft/And kist where I did clappe' (*Romeus and Juliet*, fol. 19^f).

Part Two. Tragedy, Comedy or Romance? Genre and the Shape of the Play

Susan Snyder in *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* suggests that comedy is an inherent constituent of Shakespeare's tragic vision. Identifying a number of contemporary expectations, Snyder posits that Shakespeare 'would use the dramatic convention in which he was most at home, the world of romantic comedy, as a point of reference and departure in developing tragic forms'.³³

Extending Snyder's hypothesis, this section will suggest that, following on from the changes that Shakespeare made to his primary source material, *Romeo and Juliet* explores two principal methods of mixing comedy and tragedy. While this approach is more usually reflected in the mirroring structure of comic episodes later seen from a tragic perspective, the 'lamentation scene' of 4.5 employs the second method and is a tragic-comic hybrid. Repetition is an integral part of the play's structure, so that, as Lloyd Davis notes, 'Characters constantly restate what has previously been staged'.³⁴ The idea of comedy in the tragedy is a key part of Shakespeare's developing idea of tragedy, and is intrinsic to his dramatic response to Sidney's theory of literature espoused in *The Defence of Poesy*.

This section will consider the idea of comedy in the play from firstly the linguistic aspect, and then subsequently from the perspective of the comic characters. The analysis suggests that while Mercutio's death is, as Snyder comments, the pivot for the play's movement from comedy to tragedy, the possibility of a comic resolution remains until the play's final sequence. The section will then evaluate the presence of the clown, specifically in 4.5, positing that this scene articulates the authorial attempt to 'match hornpipes and funerals'.³⁵

³³ Susan Snyder, *Comic Matrix*, p. 4.

³⁴ Lloyd Davis, 'Death-marked love': Desire and Presence in *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Romeo and Juliet: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. R. S. White (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 28 – 46 (p. 40).

³⁵ Sidney, p. 244.

I. Mercutio and The Nurse

Snyder suggests that ‘*Romeo and Juliet* is different from Shakespeare’s other tragedies in that it becomes, rather than is, tragic’.³⁶ Certainly much of the play’s initial action revolves around comedic expectations: a familial concern with matrimony, young lovers attempting to overcome paternal objections, comic servant commentary on their relationship, confused courtship rituals and, as John Creaser points out, giving ‘the heroine all the prominence in the drama’.³⁷ Moreover, the lovers inherit the situation that separates them; there is an absence of intentional malevolence specifically directed at Romeo and Juliet, rather they are victims of circumstance, an important change from *Titus Andronicus*. Even Tybalt’s ire is not directed at Romeo as a lover but as a part of the Capulet-Montague feud. Further, there is a profligate use of recognised comic devices – letters go missing, ensuing misunderstandings, a ‘false’ death before a resurrection – that provide the narrative impetus, all indicating an innovative approach to the inclusion of comedy in tragedy.

This perspective is encapsulated by two of the play’s comic figures. As already noted, Mercutio has long been acknowledged as the nucleus of the play’s comic and tragic movements, although the Nurse also has a significant role, as her attitudinal change signifies the play’s increasingly tragic motion. Mercutio embodies both comedy and tragedy – he is a comic figure whose unexpected death is both early and unnecessary – and his death, as already commented, provides a deliberate structural break between the play’s two genres.³⁸ Mercutio is the epitome of the play’s use of word play – his speech, both sexual and intellectual – is verbally dazzling. He is, as Snyder comments, ‘the clown of romantic comedy,

³⁶ Snyder, ‘*Romeo and Juliet: Comedy into Tragedy*’, p. 391.

³⁷ John Creaser, ‘Forms of Confusion’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. Alexander Leggatt (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 81- 101 (p. 84).

³⁸ This division opens up the possibility that structural breaks are part of the early exploration of tragedy that is further explored later in *Julius Caesar*.

recast in a more elegant mold but equally ready to take off from the plot in verbal play and to challenge idealistic love with his own brand of comic earthiness'.³⁹ His verbiage is an extension of the darkly comic punning of *Titus Andronicus*, although it is literary rather than literal.⁴⁰ He is the conduit for the play's engagement with literary practice. His jokes engage with a spectrum of verbal conceits, but he also satirises Romeo's Petrarchan tendencies as well as being the exemplar of Shakespeare's rhetoric: his 'Queen Mab' speech, in Levenson's terms, 'offers the most elaborate array of rhetorical devices'.⁴¹ His monologue is a performance. It serves no discernable purpose other than as a display of verbal and intellectual acrobatics and typifies Mercutio's attitude towards words. He sees word play as a part of social discourse, clarified in his exchange with Romeo of 2.4: 'Why, is this not better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now art thou what thou art' (2.4.85-7).

Mercutio lampoons Romeo's feelings for Rosaline, 'Alas poor Romeo, he is already dead, stabbed with a white wench's black eye, run through the ear/with a love-song' (2.4.13-15), while equally engaging with the bawdry that is a part of the play's linguistic preoccupation: 'O Romeo, that she were, O that she were/An open-arse, thou a poperin pear!' (2.1.37-8). More than a conduit for the comic-tragic matrix, Mercutio is involved as a significant part of Romeo's friendship group, while also being separated as a 'kinsmen' to the Prince. He is therefore both of the play world but also distanced from it. His death encapsulates the idea of the play's turning of comedy into tragedy. He dies punning: 'Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man' (3.1.99-100). This indicates the patterning of the play: its shape shifts as the narrative progresses.

³⁹ Snyder, *Comic Matrix*, p. 61.

⁴⁰ For example, the exchange between Aaron and Titus of 3.1 that revolves around Titus' chirectomy and the word 'hand'.

⁴¹ Levenson, 'Introduction', p. 47.

This approach is illustrated by the movement from comedy through violence and then towards tragedy, of the opening scene proper. Samson and Gregory are both comic and violent. In 3.1 the paradigm is the same. The scene opens with word play between Benvolio and Mercutio, before moving through an engagement with a member of the Montague clan – in this instance Tybalt as opposed to Abraham and the other Montague servants – that culminates in violence. The resolution is similar in both scenes, with the significant difference being that as the play progresses towards tragedy, death becomes a part of the pattern. Whereas the opening scene ends in romance with Romeo's entrance, as the play moves towards tragedy, so 3.1 ends with death and banishment. In turn, the ending of this scene establishes the play's final tragic trajectory. All of the subsequent events stem from Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment.

Mercutio's death precipitates a further movement of genre than that solely of comedy into tragedy. His death expedites the play's engagement with revenge, itself part of this tragic movement, as it is the events caused by Romeo's actions as the revenger that accelerate the slide towards the play's final death scene. Mercutio's death thus causes a further generic mutation, something that Romeo acknowledges: 'Away to heaven respective lenity/And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now' (3.1.125-6). He endorses the idea of a malicious fate, something that has been suggested earlier by both Romeo and Juliet.⁴²

If Mercutio's death is pivotal to *Romeo and Juliet's* exploration of genre, the behaviour of the Nurse suggests that the shift in the play's genres is a conscious authorial innovation, an argument that appears to be further sustained by Juliet's transformation from giddy expectation to grief in 3.2, that will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. Like Mercutio, the Nurse is a recognisably comic character who is implicated in the play's idea of tragedy. The Nurse, and to a lesser

⁴² The role of Fate in the tragedy has already been suggested by Romeo: 'This day's black fate on moe days doth depend/This but begins the woe others must end' (3.1.121-122).

degree, Friar Laurence, are recognisable extensions of traditional comic roles, as Martha Tuck Rozett notes: ‘The Friar is [...] an intrinsically comic character type with analogues in those comedies and romances which employ the false death and resurrection motif’.⁴³ Robert Weimann suggests that the Nurse is one of Shakespeare’s characters that ‘stand out, however, because they draw so clearly from popular tradition or present new ways in which traditional practices were adapted to new dramatic forms and functions’.⁴⁴ The Nurse, in a similar way to Mercutio, is a richly drawn character, and her function is equally conflicted, establishing her as part of the play’s tragic pattern.

Although the depiction of the Nurse appears from her initial entrance as essentially comic, in common with the rest of the play, an ominous note is also introduced with her, drawing both the comic and tragic arcs together. In her discussion of Juliet’s weaning, ostensibly a funny monologue by a garrulous bawdy family retainer which includes an element of sexual ribaldry, a note of caution is sounded in the affinity of Juliet from her childhood with bad luck: ‘And she was weaned, I shall never forget it,/Of all the days in the year upon that day.’ (1.3.25-6). The juxtaposition of breastfeeding with ‘bitter’ and ‘wormwood’ enhances this association: ‘When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple/Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool’ (1.3.31-2), a portentous insertion confirmed by the omnipresence of death in her mention of her dead husband: ‘And then my husband – God be with his soul/’A was a merry man’ (1.3.40-1). A part of the comic-tragic matrix appears to be the universality of death.

Integral, as is Mercutio, to this blend of genres, the Nurse is the pivotal figure in establishing the identities of the lovers to each other. Romeo approaches

⁴³ Martha Tuck Rozett, ‘The Comic Structures of Tragic Endings: The Suicide Scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36 (1985), 152-164 (p. 156). Rozett’s comment highlights that the conceits that Shakespeare uses to propel that narrative are analogous to traditional comedy.

⁴⁴ Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, p. 224.
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the Nurse to find out who Juliet is: ‘What is her mother?’ (1.5.111), following her response with ‘Is she a Capulet?/O dear account! My life is my foe’s death’ (1.5.117-18). Equally, Juliet surreptitiously enquires of the Nurse, ‘Go ask his name/If he be married/ My grave is like to be my wedding bed’ (1.5.132-4). The Nurse is the lynchpin in the lovers’ relationship, providing cohesion between the two parts of their bond. Involved from the beginning, her subsequent abandonment of Romeo increases the emotional burden on Juliet. Her changing perspective signals the change in tone. Initially, she supports the lovers, facilitating the relationship: ‘Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence’ cell/There stays a husband to make you a wife’ (2.5.68-9). As the play moves away from comedy towards tragedy, she switches her allegiance: ‘I think it best you married with the County’ (3.5.218). While the death of Mercutio is the fulcrum of the movement away from comedy to a ‘darker purpose’, the shift of genre can be equally tracked through the changing perspective of the Nurse.

To some degree, the Nurse is thus the corollary of Mercutio, a further part of the play’s dualistic configuration dictated by the split focus on its primary characters. Both are depicted as the closest characters to each of the respective lovers, and both demonstrably share a similar sense of bawdy humour, although Mercutio equally values the intellectual aspect of the play’s comic invention. The patterning that runs throughout the play is therefore continued through these comic characters, both of whom are subsequently implicated in the movement from comedy to tragedy. While Mercutio’s death is, as Brooke comments, ‘used to precipitate a change of key in the play’, the effects of his death are, at least in part, delineated through the Nurse’s shift in focus.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Nicholas Brooke, *Shakespeare’s Early Tragedies* (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 83.
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II. Romantic Convention

Evaluating the idea of the play as a multi-genre mix extends the analysis from purely that of comedy and tragedy and focuses attention on the interpretation of the love story of Romeo and Juliet. Catherine Bate describes the anticipated narrative arc of romantic comedy: ‘Men and women meet, match, marry and mate. This is the eternal story which Shakespeare’s comedies retell again and again.’⁴⁶

Superficially, *Romeo and Juliet* conforms to this assessment with some additions, notably boy loses girl through mutual death but, although the play initially appears to follow these conventions, this association is unstable, signalling that the play’s primary focus is always consistently tragedy, rather than romance. Although Bevington suggests that ‘a major portion of the play is funny and delightful in the vein of the romantic comedies that Shakespeare was writing at about the same time’, the following discussion considers that Shakespeare’s approach to the role of romance in his ‘love tragedy’ illustrates his original perspective.⁴⁷ A close reading of the depiction of romance, although ostensibly conforming to the expectations of the genre, reveals a more considered formulation that undermines what at first glance seems to belong purely to the world of romantic comedy.

Snyder identifies audience expectations of romantic comedy in the 1590s:

To sum up: the knowledgeable theatregoer when he went to see a comedy, anticipated a love story with a happy ending, in which the obstacles to the marriage of true minds were removed by providential chance and human ingenuity [...] When disaster threatened the principals, he could feel secure under any momentary agitation, trusting the playwright to reverse the course of events and even, if necessary, to resurrect the dead [...] He would look forward to diversity of action and character, and though he might enjoy scenes of romantic wooing and high policy, he would be pleased by sudden switches to servants in the pantry or rustics in the field. [...] he would fain see the Fool. [...] Our theatregoer would enjoy puns, malapropisms and insult contests for their own sake [...] Fortune

⁴⁶ Catherine Bates, ‘Love and Courtship’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, pp. 102-122 (p. 102).

⁴⁷ Bevington, ‘Tragedy in Shakespeare’s Career’, p. 56.
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provides both near-catastrophes and providential escapes in a world full of strange chances yet ultimately benevolent to faithful lovers.⁴⁸

There are obvious correlations between Snyder's analysis and Shakespeare's play – *Romeo and Juliet's* opening two acts correspond with the above assessment as their focus is predominantly on the lovers' meeting and marriage – but what changes the play from a romance to a tragedy is the absence of 'providential escape' or 'benevolent fortune'. For *Romeo and Juliet*, the reverse is true. The play is dominated by a dark sense of foreboding: Juliet's initial premonition 'If he be married/ My grave is like to be my wedding bed' (1.5.133-4) is matched by Romeo's pervading fear of fate: 'I fear too early for my mind misgives/Some consequence yet hanging in the stars/ Shall bitterly begin his fearful date/ With this night's revels' (1.4.106-9).

Shakespeare's seeming ambivalence towards the categorisation of genre is signified from the play's opening lines, although this impression is deliberately undermined. While the Prologue functions both as a metatheatrical device in the manner of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the separation of the play proper by a framing technique is also prevalent in Elizabethan comedy, specifically, as Janette Dillon notes writing on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the comedies of Robert Greene: 'In particular [Shakespeare's] use of framing devices in comic structure may owe as much to Greene as to Kyd'.⁴⁹ The Prologue introduces the concept of death as a significant part of tragedy from the beginning of the play, although it also implies, at least partially, a comic narrative.⁵⁰ This is indicated by the acknowledgement in the Prologue of a number of standard signifiers of comedy: 'star-crossed lovers', 'parents' strife' and 'parents' rage'. The emphasis on parental disapproval is a

⁴⁸ Snyder, *Comic Matrix*, pp. 36-38.

⁴⁹ Janette Dillon, 'Elizabethan Comedy', in *A Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, pp. 47-63 (p. 57).

⁵⁰ Tiffany Stern in *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004; repr. 2005), suggests that 'Prologues and epilogue were not part of a unified text, sharing the same rights and lasting qualities. They were ephemeral and were not thought of as having the importance or the permanence of the text of the play itself' (p. 120).

staple of Shakespearean comedy of the 1590s illustrated by *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The comedic implications are, however, undermined by the sense of threat in 'ancient grudge', 'new mutiny' and 'civil blood', all a part of the play's intermingling of genres. More overtly death and love are intrinsically linked – the 'star-crossed lovers take their life' in their 'death-marked love' (Prologue.8) – to suggest that it is this connection that is the source of the play's tragedy; that tragedy develops from comedy.

Ostensibly, in the Prologue, the setting of 'fair Verona' suggests the world of romantic comedy. As Louise George Clubb notes, five of the seven of Shakespeare's Italianate plays, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *All's Well that Ends Well*, are romantic comedies.⁵¹ Verona's immediate depiction, however, is one of violent threats in the way that the Prologue indicates, and indeed, the play's opening scene proper veers between ideas of violence and love. Seemingly peopled by humorous servants, these same characters are the conduits for the eruption of violence onto Verona's streets. Fulfilling the comedic expectation of servant stereotypes in romantic comedy, the servants' interaction unites the twin preoccupations of sex and death: 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant: when/I have fought with the men, I will be civil with the/maids, I will cut off their heads'. (1.1.20-1). It is into this confusion of sex and death that Romeo, as an archetypal lover, is introduced.

The exchange between Benvolio and Montague immediately prior to Romeo's entrance delineates Romeo as a romantic stereotype. The imagery used reflects the movement towards convention: 'peered forth the golden window of the east' (1.1.117); 'With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew' (1.1.130), but, as

⁵¹ Louise George Clubb, 'Italian Stories on the Stage', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, pp. 32-46 (pp. 32-33). These obviously exclude the Roman plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.
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it is clichéd, it appears as meaningless rhetoric. This is confirmed by Romeo's subsequent appearance. He is depicted as the lover of Jacques' 'Seven Ages of Man' speech: 'And then the lover/Sighing like a furnace with a woeful ballad/Made to his mistress' eyebrow' (*As You Like It*: 2.7.146-8), and so is concomitant with the expectations of romantic comedy. His opening line underlines this: 'Ay me, sad hours seem long' (1.1.159). His language is the language of parody, while his imagery, of love as blind, is banal: 'Alas, that love, whose view is muffled still/Should without eyes see pathways to his will' (1.1.169-70). His rapturous pretence is indicated in his subsequent line: 'Where shall we dine?' (1.1.171), underlining the insincerity of his presentation as 'the lover'. Romeo's entrance conforms to romantic comedic expectation, as Harry Levin comments:

Rosaline's prior effect upon him is all that we ever learn about her; yet it has been enough to make Romeo, when he was presented to us, a virtual stereotype of the romantic lover. As such, he has protested a good deal too much in his preliminary speeches, utilizing the conventional phrases and standardised images of Elizabethan eroticism, bandying generalizations, paradoxes, and sestets with Benvolio, and taking a quasi-religious vow which his introduction to Juliet would ironically break.⁵²

Although Romeo's initial appearance suggests the conventions of romantic comedy, this is undermined by his confirmation of the inherent tension between the play's twin themes of love and violence through a series of oxymorons: 'O brawling love, O loving hate' (1.1.174). Although Weiss sees this linguistic technique as a parody of a typical lover 'intended to show up the subjectivity of lovers', it also encapsulates the antithetical pull at the generic heart of the play.⁵³ The line immediately preceding, 'Here's much to do with hate, but more with love' (1.1.173) is a précis of the play.

⁵² Harry Levin, 'Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 11 (1960), 3-11 (p. 3).

⁵³ 1.1.173-80n.

The opening scene, with its alternate focus on comedy and violence, is a microcosm of the generic intermingling that is here a part of Shakespeare's tragic lexicon, and is consistent with the darker elements that are found in Shakespeare's concomitant comedies: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* makes explicit the impact that the fairy quarrel has on the real human world: 'The human mortals want their winter cheer/No night is now with hymn or carol blessed' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.101-2); *The Comedy of Errors* contains the very real threat of violence: 'If any friend will pay the sum for him/He shall not die so much we tender him' (*The Comedy of Errors*, 5.1.132-3). Mercade, the agent of Death, interrupts the festivities of *Love's Labour's Lost*, dividing the pairs of lovers at the point of resolution: 'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo/You that way, we this way' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.903-4), so signalling the ominous encroachment of death into a comic world. Similarly, the comedy and romance in *Romeo and Juliet* are consistently tinged with a sense of approaching menace.

The play's patterning follows that of the opening scene, promoting romantic expectations by using recognisable tropes. Parental opposition, insincere romance before substantial real love and fake death are already part, or become a part, of Shakespeare's romantic comic vocabulary.⁵⁴ This undermining of the romantic ideal as a consistent feature of the play is emphasised in its use of language. Although the language employed by the lovers is full of stock imagery with references to fate, premonitions, stars and the moon, their usage is continually undercut by the idea of threat. For example, in *The Merchant of Venice* Lorenzo woos Jessica through the medium of recognisable romantic imagery:

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholds't
But in his motion like an angel sings

⁵⁴Parental opposition is key in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well as being hinted at in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; fake death in *A Winter's Tale* and *Much Ado About Nothing* and false love before real love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are, among others, used to signal genre.

(*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.57-60).

In direct contrast, Juliet's use of the idea of stars as a romantic trope is undercut by the idea of Romeo's death, introducing ominous undertones into her epithalamium:

Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world shall be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.
(3.2.21-5).

Her lyrical imagery inverts traditional ideas of night and day, recalling Romeo's earlier cosmic premonition in 1.4:

I fear too early, for my mind misgives;
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels
(1.4.106-9).

The instability of traditional romantic imagery is something that is emphasised by Romeo and Juliet's exchange in 2.2:

Romeo: Lady, by yonder blessed moon,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops-
Juliet: O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.
(2.2.107-110).

The unreliable moon is an anti-romantic conceit, as Weiss comments: 'However romantic and evocative the moon may be, it belongs to the wooing world of Romeo and Rosaline'.⁵⁵ There is a deliberate contrast, then, in the depiction of the two lovers, Romeo appearing predominantly as a typical Petrarchan lover, while Juliet's view of true love is deeper and more metaphysical.

The presentation of the two main characters is a crucial aspect of Shakespeare's approach to his generically intermingled play. The unorthodoxy of their characterisation is confirmed by Romeo's effeminacy. At the play's crisis point, after Mercutio's death and Tybalt's murder, he is consistently referred to in female terms: 'womanish' (3.3.109); 'stand up an you be a man' (3.3.88);

⁵⁵ Weiss, p. 22.

‘Unseemly woman in a seeming man’ (3.3.111). The complementary scenes of 3.2 and 3.3 reflecting the play’s symmetrical nature and illustrating the contrasting responses of the lovers’ reactions to Romeo’s banishment, highlights this apparent gender reversal. Levenson sees Juliet’s risk-taking as ‘manly’,⁵⁶ and Sasha Roberts argues that she ‘breaches [the] orthodox codes of ideal femininity’, and certainly some of her behaviour conforms to this reading. However, her characterisation is also as sincere and self-aware.⁵⁷ She realises her linguistic betrayal of Romeo, ‘Ah poor my lord, what tongue shall soothe thy name/When I thy three hours wife has mangled it?’ (3.2.98-9). While Romeo appears as a romantic hero, this impression is compromised by his emotional collapse, a response that, within the realms of the play, is indicated as being womanly. The depiction of the lovers, then, supports the subversion of the play’s romantic theme. As Catherine Belsey notes, although Juliet demonstrates ‘a degree of conventional coyness’, she is also the dominant sexual protagonist, suggesting their marriage and anticipating its consummation:⁵⁸ ‘If that thy bent be honourable /Thy purpose marriage’ (2.2.143-144); ‘And learn me how to lose a winning match/Played for a pair of stainless maidenhoods’ (3.2.12-13). This articulation of desire is the antithesis of traditional romantic comedy where marriage is the play’s conclusion and sexual activity is confined linguistically to flirting rather than actuality.

The reversal of convention is sustained by the use of contrasting metaphors, further destabilising the idea of the play as a romance. Romeo and Juliet frequently speak in opposites to the other. Juliet consistently rejects Romeo’s attempts to cast their love as that of a stereotypical romance: ‘*Romeo*: What shall I

⁵⁶ Levenson, ‘Introduction’, p. 41.

⁵⁷ Sasha Roberts, ‘Reading Shakespeare’s Tragedies of Love: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in Early Modern England’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works: The Tragedies*, pp. 108-133 (p. 113).

⁵⁸ Catherine Belsey, ‘Gender and Family’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 123-141 (p. 126).

swear by?/*Juliet*: Do not swear at all' (2.2.112-13). In 2.6 the contrast becomes even more pronounced, with Juliet articulating the difference between them:

Romeo: Ah Juliet, if the measure of thy joy
 Be heaped like mine, and that thy skill be more
 To blazon it, then sweeten with thy breath
 This neighbour air, and let rich music's tongue
 Unfold the imagined happiness that both
 Receive in either by this dear encounter.
Juliet: Conceit more rich in matter than in words
 Brags of his substance not of ornament.
 (2.6.24-31).

'Substance' is the critical word in the contrasting characterisations of the lovers. Romeo's articulation of the Petrarchan ideal of a Romantic lover appears more concerned with form than substance. Robin Headlam Wells points out that 'From the very start Juliet is uneasy about their love',⁵⁹ suggesting that Juliet's depiction is anti-Petrarchan, that Shakespeare's presentation of Romeo is as a pastiche of the traditional lover and that the authorial tone is satiric and ironic.

In the play's final act, Romeo is still anticipating a typical romantic resolution: 'My dreams presage some joyful news at hand/[...] I dreamt my lady came and found me dead [...] /And breathed such life with kisses in my lips/That I revived and was an emperor' (5.1.2-9). At this point in the play, everything is presented to make this plausible; there is no reason to think that Juliet will not wake up as the Friar has predicted, so that the play's only tragedy would be the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio. Romeo's expectations illustrate the continuing corollary between comedy and tragedy, even at such a late stage in the play. The tragic outcome is not guaranteed and is frequently deferred, even up to the point at which Romeo arrives at the tomb. It is Juliet's failure to wake up at the same time as Romeo's arrival, as promised by the Friar, 'and he and I/ Shall watch thy waking' (4.1.115-16), that guarantees the tragedy, an outcome that Juliet comes close to foreseeing: 'How if when I am laid into the tomb/I wake before the time

⁵⁹ Robin Headlam Wells, 'Neo-Petrarchan Kitsch in *Romeo and Juliet*', *The Modern Language Review*, 93 (1998), 913-933 (p. 916).

that Romeo come to redeem me?’ (4.3.30-2). Although she fails to anticipate the ultimate reality, the possibility of a comic ending remains present to a significantly late stage in the play, and is based on the conventional romantic comedy devices that underpin the early scenes.⁶⁰

III. Structural Patterning

As discussed above, *Romeo and Juliet* appears to follow a dual pattern – comedy in the earlier part of the play that, in the post-Mercutio world, has its tragic counterpart in the play’s second part. Mercutio’s death acts as a fulcrum around which the play’s generic mix divides. The pattern appears to be based around a number of accepted comedic tropes – notably the idea of letters, accidents of timing and ‘false death’. These devices allow the possibility of comedic resolution up until the play’s final tragic movement, as things (if the timing is kind) could still ‘turn out fine in the end’.

The idea of the letters as a comedic device is critical to *Romeo and Juliet*. The first significant comic scene, Capulet’s servant’s attempt to deliver the party invitations in 1.2, has its counterpart in the failure of Friar John to deliver Friar Laurence’s letter to Romeo in 5.2. ‘Peter’s inability to deliver Capulet’s invitation, ‘but I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ and can never find what names the writing person here hath writ’ (1.2.40-3), firstly allows for a comic exposition, but more importantly, as a crucial part of the plot, results in Romeo and Juliet’s first meeting.⁶¹ In direct contrast, Friar John’s abortive attempt to deliver Friar Laurence’s explanation to Romeo, ‘I could not send it – here it is again –’ (5.2.14) is directly responsible for the play’s final collapse into tragedy. There is thus a circularity in the use of letters. The letter was an accepted Shakespearean comic device, having already been used in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

⁶⁰ Among other examples, Georg Benda, in 1776, famously rewrote the play as an opera, *Romeo und Julie*, with a happy ending in which Juliet wakes up before Romeo has time to kill himself. Prokiev, in the original ending to his ballet of 1935, also allowed the lovers a future together.

⁶¹ See n28 for clarification on the issues surrounding the name of the Capulet servant.

Subsequently, Lorenzo and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* communicate by a letter, again sent via a servant, in this instance Gobbo, and part of the comic plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* relies on misplaced letters. Letters therefore help to establish the play's partly comic mode even as they bring about its tragic ending.

The narrative of the servants in *Romeo and Juliet* also conforms to the dominant pattern of the play, as they serve a double function. They are both the established domestic world of romantic comedy, but as they are here, are also used to counterpoint the comic and tragic.⁶² Structurally, the preparations for the Capulet party of 1.5 are mirrored in the domestic planning for Juliet's wedding to Paris of 4.4. So 'Where's Potpan that he helps not to take away? He shift a trencher, he scrape a trencher' (1.5.1-2), is repeated by 'I have a head sir that will find out logs/And never trouble Peter for the matter' (4.4.17-18), but, as already noted, one set of preparations leads to the beginning of the romance and so an expectation of comedy, while the other ends in the discovery of Juliet's 'death', albeit a false death. Although the latter scene is full of dramatic irony – the audience as well as Friar Laurence are well aware that Juliet is not, in fact, dead – this domestic interlude still unsettles the tragedy. As the play does not have a happy ending in the way that certain troubled comedies, for example *The Winter's Tale* or *The Merchant of Venice* do, the comedy appears as an intrusion into the encroaching tragedy. At this point, although there is still the potential for a happy resolution, the outcome already seems tragic for the Capulet household. Their narrative is a story of 'death-marked love' (Prologue.8).

Equally, the two critical scenes delineating the Nurse's involvement with the lovers' relationship, 2.5 and 3.2, appear complementary. Both scenes open with Juliet in a state of romantic anticipation: 'O she is lame! Love's heralds should be thoughts' (2.5.4): 'Spread thy close curtain love-performing night' (3.2.5). Juliet's

⁶² The emphasis on the servants is illustrated by their naming – Peter, Samson, Gregory, 'Potpan', Susan Grindstone, Nell. Anthony, Simon Catling, Hugh Rebeck and James Soundpost.
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speeches in the respective scenes focus on the image of time passing and use similar romantic tropes and classical references: ‘Therefore do nimble pinioned doves draw love/And therefore hath the wind swift Cupid wings’ (2.5.7-8); ‘Gallop apace you fiery-footed steeds/Towards Phoebus’ lodging. Such a waggoner/As Phaeton would whip you to the west’ (3.2.1-3). Each scene acts as the corollary to the other: 2.5 results in Juliet’s marriage, 3.2 is the beginning of her final tragedy. The Nurse’s role is critical to each scene. In the earlier, she is the bearer of good news, ‘Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence’ cell/There stays a husband to make you a wife’ (2.5.68-9). In the second she brings the news of Romeo’s banishment: ‘Tybalt is gone and Romeo banished/Romeo that killed him, he is banished’ (3.2.69-70). In the earlier scene, the delayed announcement of the Nurse’s news is a part of its comedy:

Nurse: Go thy ways wench, serve God. What have you dined at home?
Juliet: No, no. But all this I did know before.
 What says he of our marriage, what of that?
Nurse: Lord, how my head aches! What a head have I!
 It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.
 My back a’t’other side, ah, my back, my back!
 Beshrew your heart for sending me about
 To catch my death with jauncing up and down.
Juliet: I’ faith I am sorry that thou art not well.
 Sweet, sweet, sweet Nurse, tell me, what says my love?
 (2.5.44-54).

In the later scene, this misunderstanding is not part of the comic narrative and characterisation. Rather the misconstruing increases the tragic intensity, as Juliet initially believes Romeo to have died, before understanding the Nurse’s meaning:

Juliet: Ay me what news? Why dost thou wring thy hands?
Nurse: Ah weraday, he’s dead, he’s dead, he’s dead! [...]
Juliet: If he be slain, say ‘Ay’, or if not, ‘No’
 Brief sounds determine of my weal or woe. [...]
Nurse: I saw the wound I saw it with mine eyes [...]
Juliet: O break, my heart, poor bankrupt, break at once! [...]
Nurse: O Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had!
 O courteous Tybalt, honest gentlemen
 That ever I should live to see thee dead!
Juliet: What storm is this that blows so contrary?
 Is Romeo slaughtered and is Tybalt dead?

(3.2.36-65).

Creaser comments that comedy creates a ‘state of confusion, with consequences which, ultimately, are benign’.⁶³ While true in the first example, where the confusion is deliberate and leads to Juliet’s marriage, in the second, where the confusion is accidental, it leads to Juliet’s isolation and is the beginning of the movement towards her death. The second scene, 3.2, seems as important to the idea of the comic-tragic matrix as Mercutio’s death. It epitomises the play’s changing tone, beginning with Juliet’s anticipatory epithalamium, yet ending with her searching for a way out of her incipient despair.

The play’s approach to the insertion of comedy is thus multi-layered, constructing a double narrative that reflects the reality of the play being constructed around two primary characters. And while comedy and tragedy are usually separated, the comic and tragic perspectives are merged in a single significant scene, the ‘lamentation scene’ of 4.5. This scene, an attempt at unifying two seemingly opposing genres, is reliant on the other significant innovation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the creation of a specific clown role, a character that further fundamentally contributes to the play’s generic mix.

Part Three. The Place of the Clown

Romeo and Juliet marks a departure from the idea of the clown in *Titus Andronicus* as the role is embedded in the plot. Whereas the pigeon seller of the earlier tragedy appears to exist only to provide a degree of ‘comic relief’ from the brutality and bloodshed before being despatched by Saturninus, ‘Peter’, in direct contrast, is a pivotal part of the narrative. He is responsible for the play’s comic confusion, a responsibility that endorses his traditionally comic role. While fulfilling the function of the ignorant servant prototype, he is an important part of the plot - his

⁶³ Creaser, p. 85. Confusion, however, as Creaser comments, is not always comedic, as Malvolio’s ‘gulling’ indicates.

illiteracy leads to Romeo and Juliet's first meeting.⁶⁴ This, then, is a comic innovation into Shakespeare's romantic tragedy. The clown is not extraneous to the plot, but rather an intrinsic part of it. Within this construct, he is also given specific opportunities for a dedicated comic 'turn', specifically in 1.2 and 4.4. This suggests the intentionality of the inclusion of his role, delineating purpose behind the generic mix. The following section will propose that Peter's first soliloquy of 1.2 is the more accomplished of the clown's comic 'turns', arguing that the second, Peter's interaction with the musicians in 4.4, is an attempt to meld the comic and tragic genres together as a unified scene, a properly 'mongrel tragi-comedy'.⁶⁵ It will argue that the mix of comedy and tragedy in this scene is significantly less successful than the separation of the two movements that is the pattern for the majority of the play. Comedy in *Romeo and Juliet* appears effective when embedded into the play through characters such as the Nurse and Mercutio, rather than imposed onto the narrative.

I. A Specific Clown: Peter or The 'Serving Man'

Romeo and Juliet, as already noted, has a number of characters, in particular the Nurse and Mercutio, that fulfill a comic function.⁶⁶ The Capulet servant is the only definitive clown part, but Peter's introduction of 1.2 serves a greater comic purpose than solely facilitating the idea of a traditional clown.⁶⁷ His speech illustrates Shakespeare's awareness of literary engagement, parodying, as it does, Lyly's *Euphues: the Anatomy of Wit*.⁶⁸ To the articulate playgoer this in itself is a part of the play's multi-layered approach to comedy, providing further ironic humour with

⁶⁴ Shakespeare's earlier clowns use their ignorance as part of their comic function. See Gobbo in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as examples.

⁶⁵ Sidney, p. 244.

⁶⁶ Certain of Capulet's lines are humorous, for example, the exchange between Capulet and his wife of 1.1: *Capulet*: 'Give me my long sword, ho!'/*Lady Capulet*: 'A crutch, a crutch, why call you for a sword' (1.1.73-74), and 'Ladies that have their toes/Unplagued with corns will walk about with you' (1.5.16-17).

⁶⁷ See n27 for a discussion of the issues surrounding the name of the clown.

⁶⁸ First published in 1578.

the idea of an illiterate character in a pastiche of a passage of a didactic romance. Lyly's passage reads as follows:

The shoemaker must not go above his latchet, nor the hedger meddle with anything but his bill. It is unseemly for the painter to feather a shaft, or the fletcher to handle the pencil. All which things make most against me, in that a fool hath intruded himself to discourse of wit.⁶⁹

Shakespeare's caricature is obvious:

It is written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets, but I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ and can never find what names the writing person hath here writ.
(1.2.37-43).

This imitation, characteristic of the play's bawdy humour, embeds the meta-literary moment cohesively into the play. It is further fixed as part of the narrative, rather than a separate monologue, as it serves a dramatic purpose. Peter's illiteracy, 'I must to the learned' (1.2.43), leads to his meeting with Romeo, that, in turn, results in Romeo's initial encounter with Juliet. So the clown is critical to the plot, rather than an extraneous comic device. The letter, then, is much more than, in Sidney's phrase, 'an extreme show of doltishness'.⁷⁰ Even as the parody of Lyly is more than 'scurrility'⁷¹ in the way that it suggests a subversive approach to comedy mocking Lyly's attempt at wit, the scene reveals how the play is constantly engaged with literary debate and redefining the boundaries of genre.

II. The Lamentation Scene

The most significant appearance of the clown as far as this thesis is concerned is in 4.5, a critical transitional scene, similar to 3.1 where Mercutio's death changes the balance of the play from comedy to tragedy.⁷² The predominant role of the clown in

⁶⁹ John Lyly, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit and Euphues and his England*, ed. Leah Scragg (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003; repr. 2009), pp. 28-29.

⁷⁰ Sidney, p. 244.

⁷¹ Sidney, p. 244.

⁷² Q2, arguably the more literary, and certainly longer version of the play, contains two definitive acknowledgements of the importance of comedy within the tragedy. There are two recognisable footprints of Will Kemp, the predominant clown of the 1590s and certainly the foremost clown in both the companies referred to by the quarto title pages. Kemp was known for his physical clowning and propensity for

4.5 suggests that this is a deliberate attempt to combine the two genres, rather than a single event changing the play's trajectory. It is worth commentating that the difference between the 3.1 and 4.5 is audience knowledge. The action of 3.1, Mercutio's death, is genuinely tragic. In the later scene, the audience are aware that Juliet's is a 'fake' death. It is this audience knowledge that sanctions the attempt at intergeneric mingling. The scene illustrates Shakespeare's experimental approach to the play, as it attempts to combine two opposing emotions.

Throughout the scene there is a fine balance between the comic and tragic, with comic potential that does not include the clown. This is an aspect of Shakespeare's pattern of expectation and deferral, a part of his innovatory approach to his source material as the play sets up tragic expectations, only to undermine them with a comic sequence.⁷³ As Tuck Rozett comments, the domestic emphasis 'returns us to the comic world'.⁷⁴ This scene, known commonly as the Capulet 'lamentation' scene, although apparently an exposition of extreme mourning, returns the audience, whether intentionally or not, to the world of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', the play-within-the-play of Shakespeare's earlier comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The mourning dirge of the Capulet parents, the Nurse and Paris is so excessively and dramatically anguished that it borders on hysterical parody. The

extemporisation: his presence signifies an emphasis, rather than a marginalisation, of the comedy within the play. Q1's 4.4.16 reads 'Will will tell thee where thou shalt fetch them', whereas Q2 and the F text have 'Call Peter he will show thee where they are'. Wiles suggests that this first 'Will' makes explicit that Will Kemp played Peter. If this is accepted as accurate, then the removal of Will Kemp by Q2 suggests an attempt to contain the demonstratively anarchic clown figure within the tragedy. Conversely, of course, the inclusion of such a comedian immediately prior to the discovery of Juliet's 'dead' body demonstrates that the comic inclusion is a calculated authorial decision intended to disrupt or strengthen by contrast, the tragedy that follows. If we accept that the stage directions in Q2 appear to attempt to limit the comedy and assert the authority of the tragedy, then the stage direction, 'Enter Will Kemp' in Q2 4.5.99 is an anomaly. Critics such as Giorgio Melchiori have suggested that the scene that follows, coming after the stage direction 'Exeunt omnes' is deliberately augmented to showcase Kemp's talents: 'The most obvious suggestion is that this part of the scene is a later addition for the benefit of the most popular clown of the time' (p.780). Demonstrably, then, there are conflicting messages in the textual analysis of the first two quartos of *Romeo and Juliet*. The reworking of the title in the later quarto seems to acknowledge a need to reassert the tragic genre of the play, although the content of this quarto, specifically the stage directions, focus on the presence of the most anarchic clown of the sixteenth century. See Giorgio Melchiori 'Peter, Balthasar and Shakespeare's Art of Doubling', *The Modern Language Review*, 78 (1983), 777-792.

⁷³ A further example is Mercutio's death and Romeo's banishment immediately followed by Juliet's anticipatory epithalamium of 3.2.

⁷⁴ Rozett, p. 157.

Nurse's lines especially resemble both Pyramus and Thisbe's speeches in the repetitious depiction of excessive grief:

O woe, O woeful, woeful, woeful day!
 Most lamentable day, most woeful day
 That ever ever I did yet behold
 O day O day O day O hateful day!
 Never was seen so black a day as this.
 O woeful day, O woeful day!
 (4.5.49-54).

Asleep, my love?
 What dead my dove?
 O Pyramus arise
 Speak speak. Quite dumb?
 Dead dead? A tomb
 Must cover thy sweet eyes....
 Thus Thisbe ends
 Adieu adieu adieu
 (*MND*, 5.1.311-334).

The rhetorical technique is the same in both lamentations. Repetition and poetic parallelism create the bathos that is common to both speeches, leading to what E. Pearlman refers to as ‘a dirge so excessively lugubrious that there is no agreement whether Shakespeare has failed as a poet or has composed a hilarious parody of true grief’.⁷⁵ At the very least, the rhetoric is flamboyant: ‘Accursed, unhappy, wretched, hateful day’ (4.5.43). There is a difference in this aspect of the scene and that involving Peter, as the lamentation sequence is intrinsic to the plot. It is important for the narrative that the Capulets and Paris believe that Juliet is dead, whereas in the second part of 4.5, the exchange between the clown and the musicians is extraneous and does not drive the play forward. Although this episode is extrinsic, it supports a scene of narrative importance and so appears part of a cohesive approach to the embedding of comedy into this tragedy. As such, the complete lamentation sequence appears as a metatheatrical response to Sidney in an almost literal way as it ‘match[es] hornpipes and funerals’.⁷⁶ Capulet

⁷⁵ E. Pearlman, ‘Shakespeare at Work: *Romeo and Juliet*’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 24 (1994), 315-342 (p. 327).

⁷⁶ Sidney, p. 244.

acknowledges this tragic impetus, ‘All things that we ordained festival/Turn from their office to black funeral’ (4.5.84-5), before the clown returns the play back towards comedy.

After the other characters leave the stage, the clown is allowed to become the main focus, providing Peter with the opportunity for a ‘comic turn’. This comic possibility mirrors that given to Capulet’s serving man in 1.2, so providing the clown with two significant performative opportunities. Although the mirroring pattern suggest a cohesive approach to the role of the clown, his comic interaction with the musicians destabilises the tragedy. The humour, while concomitant with the play’s emphasis on comedy, appears inappropriate within the play while Juliet is lying apparently dead. However, as a part of the tragic-comic pattern, the scene moves from Capulet mourning to the comic world, albeit a slightly compromised one, as Peter indicates: ‘O and you will have me live play ‘Heart’s Ease’ (4.5.101). The sexualised exchange between the Nurse and the musicians’ underlines the impropriety of the humour: ‘Honest good fellows, ah put up, put up/For well you know this is a pitiful case’ (4.5.97-8).⁷⁷ Peter’s dialogue with the musicians is structured around punning and so is in keeping with the emphasis on word play, but also with the omnipresence of violent threat, reminiscent of the opening brawl of 1.1: ‘Then I will lay the serving creature’s dagger on your pate. I will carry no crotchets. I’ll re you, I’ll fa you. Do you note me?’ (4.5.114-15).

Peter’s exchange with the musicians seems on a number of levels to be conflicted. On the one hand, the textual evidence of Q2 and its stage direction ‘Enter Will Kemp’ appears to confirm the opportunity for the tragedy to be disrupted by the ludicrous interpolations of Kemp as a ‘star turn’.⁷⁸ On the other, it

⁷⁷ The sexual intention behind the use of ‘case’, a slang term for ‘vagina’, appears confirmed when coupled with the explicitly sexual ‘put up’.

⁷⁸ Wiles interprets the stage directions of Q2 thus: ‘Kemp is named here because this is thought of as *his* scene, a scene in which he no longer has to play a subordinate part’. See David Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, repr; 2005), p. 88.

can be argued that the attention on the servants and the idea of domesticity is in keeping with the emphasis on the comic ‘lower orders’ of the rest of the play. What is apparent, however, is that this scene is not fully integrated into the narrative in the manner of the earlier opportunity for the clown. Although Molly Mahood has argued that the quarrel between the musicians and Peter echoes the quarrel at the centre of the play and is part of the clown’s ‘double function’, this argument seems undermined by the sheer determination of the clown to perform.⁷⁹

Regardless, Shakespeare’s generic experimentalism and hybrid narrative at this point complicate the tragedy, being ‘neither right tragedies nor right comedies’.⁸⁰ Although Kemp’s textual presence confirms the intermingling of the two genres, the process is not straightforward. Rather it creates a problematic comedic space that distorts the increasing movement towards tragedy and potentially decentres the play. The scene threatens to overwhelm the tragedy, creating the opportunity for the clown to perform as a solo turn, rather than as part of an integrated narrative.⁸¹ The sequence epitomises the problems of generic experimentation, appearing as what Sidney refers to as a ‘gross absurditie’.⁸² The success of Shakespeare’s experiment with comedy and tragedy, therefore, seems mixed, appearing to succeed when the narrative focus is on romantic comedy but to fail when the plot trajectory becomes increasingly tragic. The conclusion seems to be that comedy and tragedy are not natural bedfellows – even allowing for the change in comedian in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men after 1595 and Kemp’s departure, it is surely not coincidental that neither of Shakespeare’s subsequent

⁷⁹ Mahood argues that part of the clown’s ‘double function’ is to ‘offer a respite from the action yet reinforcing its hold over us’, effectively to offer comic relief while still maintaining the tragic focus. See M.M. Mahood, *Bit Parts in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 84.

⁸⁰ Sidney, p. 244.

⁸¹ The problematic nature of the scene, certainly in terms of performance, seems to be confirmed, as Weiss notes, by the musicians ‘regularly being cut in performance’. See Weiss, 4.5.95.1n.

⁸² Sidney, p. 244.

tragedies of the 1590s includes any specific comic scene or comedic role.⁸³

Sidney may, after all, have had a point.

While the clown scene raises a number of questions about how *Romeo and Juliet* works in terms of genre, there are other aspects of the play that draw attention to its rich experimentalism. In particular, the play is notable for its lyrical language of love, its poetry, and this has to have a place in any account of the play.

Part Four. The Language of Tragedy and the Place of Poetry

Romeo and Juliet demonstrates a self-conscious awareness of the power of language, part of the play's self-reflexivity and its theatrical nature, integrated within the arc of the play. In its examination of language as part of the tragic pattern, *Romeo and Juliet* is the natural successor to the linguistic exploration of *Titus Andronicus*. The reduction of language seen in Romeo's weeping of 3.3 correlates with Titus' 'Ha, ha, ha' (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.265), but the semantic focus of the later play is more consistent.

The play itself is built around a compelling debate about language and its function: 'What's in a name?' (2.2.43), 'Some word there was worsen than Tybalt's death that murdered me' (3.2.108) – both quotations suggest the ability of words to determine love and death. This emphasis on language is a part of the play's deliberate self-consciousness, a focus which, as Levenson notes, 'calls attention to its own display of rhetoric, questioning oratorical strategies and objectives, engaging critically with the art of persuasion and inquiry'.⁸⁴ A further part of the play's self-reflexivity is the embedding of poetry into the narrative, similar to the attempt at the inclusion of comedy. The opening sonnet of *Romeo and Juliet* for example, establishes that this is a play in which poetry is positioned at the forefront of the drama's structure. Following on from Shakespeare's initial attempt to posit

⁸³Robert Armin replaced Kemp as the main clown for the Lord Chamberlain's Men in early 1599.

⁸⁴Levenson, 'Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: the places of invention', in *Shakespeare and Language*, ed. Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 122-138 (p. 122)).

poetry as an acceptable response to bloodthirsty violence in Marcus's speech on being confronted with the bleeding, mutilated and, crucially, silent body of his niece in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's approach to the language of tragedy is significantly different in *Romeo and Juliet*. Poetry is ingrained into the text from the very beginning, using the contemporarily accepted poetic form of romance, the sonnet, appropriate to the theme of romantic tragedy.⁸⁵ Examining the play's poetic emphasis from this angle, the preoccupation with poetry coincides with contemporary fashion, but more significantly is reflective of the play's heightened tragic awareness.⁸⁶

I. Linguistic Profligacy

The play proper opens with a reckless use of language. If Bates is right in her assertion that 'In Shakespeare's time, a lack of respect for language was equivalent to a lack of respect for authority', then the civil unrest of Verona is related to the linguistic freedom that the servants of both houses manifest.⁸⁷ The opening sequence is a riot of puns:

Sampson: Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.
Gregory: No, for then we should be colliers.
Sampson: I mean and we'll be in choler, we'll draw.
Gregory: Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.
 (1.1.1-4).

This association is underlined by the Prince's comment: 'Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word/By thee old Capulet and Montague/Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets' (1.1.79-81). The roots of the quarrel lie in 'an airy word'. Language is the basis for the tragedy.

⁸⁵ Gayle Whittier notes that Shakespeare's composition of *Romeo and Juliet* is concomitant with English interest in Petrarchan sonnets being near or at its zenith: 'This was true for Shakespeare as it was for Romeo since he wrote at or near Petrarch's English zenith'. See 'The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetized in "Romeo and Juliet"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), 27-41 (p. 27).

⁸⁶ There was a spate of sonnets written or published during the 1590s. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* was published in 1591, Spenser's *Amoretti* in 1594, and Daniel's *Delia* in 1592. It is probable that Shakespeare was himself composing sonnets around the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* although they were not collected and printed as a sequence until 1609.

⁸⁷ Bates, 'Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love', p. 198.

The sheer number of different semantic techniques employed in the play calls attention to the search for a taxonomy of tragedy. Rhetoric, epitomised by Mercutio, can be extravagant, but, as in Friar Laurence's speech of 3.3, is also employed as disputation: 'Wilt thou slay thyself/And slay the lady that in thy life lives/By doing damned hate upon thyself?' (3.3.115-17). The Nurse comments on this self-referential aspect: 'O lord I could have stayed here all the night/To hear good counsel' (3.3.158-9). Meaning is continually analysed, notably by Juliet: 'What's in a name?' (2.2.43); 'Do not swear at all' (2.2.115); 'Brief sounds determine of my weal or woe' (3.2.51). This aspect of Juliet's character emphasises the difference between her and Romeo. As already noted, a feature of their opposing representation is their different attitudes to romantic discourse. Romeo's Petrarchan idealistic love is found to be hollow and meaningless when confronted with 'real' love as Juliet understands it: 'Conceit more rich in matter than in words/Brags of his substance' (2.6.30-1). Wit and word play are delineated as important social skills, as Mercutio comments to Romeo after their battle of puns: 'Now art thou what thou art by art as well as nature' (2.4.87), although as Levenson notes 'this dialogue is less a hot, fast match than an uneven contest'.⁸⁸

The tragedy of the lovers is, however, a linguistic tragedy. They are literally separated by single words: 'And I'll no longer be a Capulet' (2.2.36). 'What's Montague?' (2.2.40). Juliet, at the beginning of 2.2, the 'balcony' scene, unwittingly acknowledges that their names are their tragedy: 'O be some other name!' (2.2.42). Romeo responds in the same manner: 'My name dear saint is hateful to myself/Because it is an enemy to thee' (2.2.55-6). The play's slide towards tragedy is intertwined with this semantic problem. Romeo recognises as much when he meets Tybalt immediately after his marriage: 'And so, good Capulet, whose name I tender/as dearly as my own, be satisfied' (3.1.70-1). His

⁸⁸ Levenson, 'Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: the places of invention', p. 131.
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subsequent recognition of his emasculation at Juliet's hands, and his re-adoption of his own name, prompts his response to Mercutio's death:

My reputation stained
 With Tybalt's slander – Tybalt that an hour
 Hath been my cousin. O sweet Juliet
 Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
 And in my temper softened valour's steel!
 (3.1.113-7).

The tragic recognition of the power of a single word is reinforced after Tybalt is slain: 'Some word there was worser than Tybalt's death/That murder'd me' (3.2.108-9). As already noted, Juliet's epithalamium of 3.2 prefigures the developing tragedy and is another significant turning point in the play. While the scene starts with a classical wedding hymn of anticipation, dramatic irony is at the heart of her speech: 'Give me my Romeo and when I shall die/Take him and cut him out in little stars' (3.2.21-2). The juxtaposition of excitement and extreme grief increases the tragic impact, with the linguistic focus acting as a counterpart to the balcony scene of 2.2. The association of language with tragedy is made explicit in Juliet's recognition: 'There is no end, no limit, measure, bound/In that word's death, no words can that woe sound' (3.2.125-6). Language in its various modes and forms shapes the play's tragic arc.

II. The Sonnet, Poetry and Metadrama

Romeo and Juliet's opening sonnet, the Prologue, encapsulates the paradox of the play. It engages with love and death, so that, while it appears to set the opening mood as that of a romantic comedy – employing similar tropes including young lovers divided by their families – it equally introduces the theme as tragic love, whilst also addressing the self-reflexive nature of the ongoing search for a new tragic paradigm. Ostensibly Petrarchan with an Italian rhyming scheme, the octave suggests the play's concern with both comedy and tragedy. The setting is that of a romantic comedy, 'In fair Verona where we lay our scene' (Prologue.2), and the theme is thwarted love: 'From forth the fatal loins of these two foes/A pair of star-

cross'd lovers take their life' (Prologue.5-6). The anticipated resolution of a romantic comedy is, in this instance, tragic: 'Doth with their death bury their parents' strife' (Prologue.8). The sestet is both meta-literary and self-reflexive, acknowledging within the poetic form theatrical reality: 'Is now the two hours traffic of our stage' (Prologue: 12). The final couplet, 'The which if you with patient ears attend/What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend' (Prologue. 13-14), potentially recalls the closing lines of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, prefiguring the consistent links between the two plays: 'Give me your hands if we be friends/And Robin shall restore amends' (*MND*, Epilogue. 14-16).⁸⁹ The précis of the plot that the sonnet delivers suggests that the play is, in part, a conscious decision to explore the dramatic context of poetry. Brooke comments that 'the play depends very much on formal patterning, like that of a sonnet; but explored, criticised and penetrated so that the formal surface not only restrains but also reveals the inner experience',⁹⁰ rather like the idea of the plays exploring their own genre. This deliberate self-reflexivity of the poetry is a part of the drama.

Levenson suggests that 'In the Verona of *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare releases sonnet conventions from their traditional frame of reference'.⁹¹ The opening scene is full of Petrarchanisms: anthropomorphism,⁹² 'What art thou drawn among these heartless hinds' (1.1.64); antithesis, 'What? Drawn and talk of peace' (1.1.68);⁹³ culminating, just before Romeo's entrance, with the descriptive epitome of a Petrarchan lover: 'Many a morning hath he there been seen/With tears augmenting the fresh morning dew/Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep

⁸⁹ This is only a possibility as there is currently no consensus on which play was written first.

⁹⁰ Brooke, *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*, p. 87.

⁹¹ Levenson, 'Introduction', p. 56.

⁹² See Petrarch, Sonnet CLII 'He Compares Her to the Phoenix' in *The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch* ([n.p]: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014). All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹³ Antithesis is a common feature of Petrarch's work. Examples include: 'So much I fear to encounter her bright eye/Always in which my Love and Death reside' (Sonnet XXXI), 'For all the moisture mine is drain'd and dry/Save that which falleth from mine eyes in tears' (Sonnet 20).

sighs' (1.1.129-131).⁹⁴ Romeo's entrance confirms Montague's description, and the Petrarchan link is made explicit. Romeo's Rosaline, like Petrarch's Laura, is unavailable to him: 'Out of her favour wherein I am in love' (1.1.166). This analogy is undermined by his interest in food: 'Where shall we dine?' (1.1.171), although Romeo's subsequent use of recognisably Petrarchan ideas and antithesis appears to resume it: 'Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs/Being purged a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes/ Being vexed a sea nourished with loving tears' (1.1.187-190). The opening scene thus appears that of a romantic comedy - the badinage between Samson and Gregory is comic – but this is eroded by the violent realities of the Montague-Capulet feud, a continuation of the paradox of the Prologue.

The tragedy of the play is contained in the space between the Prologue's prediction of the tragic events and Escalus' closing summary but, initially at least, the narrative is punctuated tonally by the sonnet form. Benvolio and Romeo share a further sonnet (1.2.89-102) that is integrated with the later 'pilgrim' sonnet of 1.5 by its twin themes of love and religion. The significant features are, again, antithesis:

When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires,
And these who, often drowned, could never die,
Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars.
(1.2.89-92).

The final couplet, 'I'll go along no such sight to be shown/But to rejoice in splendour of mine own' (1.2.101-2), encapsulates the irony inherent in the play's early part. The sonnet, the poetic choice of lovers, is used to undermine Romeo's depiction as a Petrarchan lover. In 1.2, he declares, 'One fairer than my love, the all-seeing sun/Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun' (1.2.93-4), but by

⁹⁴ See *Canzoniere* 'Sonnet 5': 'In sighs when I outbreathe your cherished name', 'Down my cheeks bitter tears incessant rain/And my heart struggles with convulsive sighs' (Sonnet 17) and 'Alone and lost in thought through desert glade/Measur'ring I roam with ling'ring steps and slow' (Sonnet 28).

1.5. proclaims ‘My lips two blushing pilgrims ready stand/To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss’ (1.5.94-5) to somebody else. Simultaneously, or nearly so, the sonnet is used to establish and undermine Romeo’s credentials as a lover. At the same time, idealistic love is deliberately counterpointed by Mercutio’s cynical ‘Queen Mab’ speech of 1.4 that separates the two love sonnets and offers a sexualised misanthropic view of love with its suggestions of venereal disease: ‘O’er ladies lips which straight on kisses dream/Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues’ (1.4.74-5).

The pilgrim sonnet of 1.5, a further shared sonnet, with Romeo speaking the first quatrain, Juliet the second, the sestet equally divided and Romeo concluding with the couplet, gives the poem fluidity and an intimacy – each quatrain ends with ‘kiss’ – that differentiates it from the artificiality of the previous incarnations. The physical contact between the speakers suggests that the Petrarchan conventions are too limiting to contain such a love and elevates it from poetic metaphor and into ‘real’ life: ‘O then dear saint let lips do what hands do’ (1.5.101). This is the first indication that the sonnet is ultimately too false a form to be imposed on the ‘realities’ both of ‘true love’ and of the play itself. James Calderwood notes of Lionel Abel’s definition of metadrama: ‘Metatheatre is a dramatic genre that does go beyond drama [...] becoming a kind of anti-form in which the boundaries between the play as a work of self-contained art and life are dissolved’.⁹⁵ This is the meta-literary approach taken towards poetry in the play: the boundaries imposed by the sonnet are dissolved by Romeo and Juliet’s kiss. The importance of the sonnet form within the play from this point diminishes, its function, fitting of a romantic form of poetry, seemingly to engineer the meeting of the lovers.

⁹⁵ James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama: The Argument of the Play in ‘Titus Andronicus’, ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost’, ‘Romeo and Juliet’, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ and ‘Richard II’* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 4.
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The play's final sonnet, the Chorus that opens Act Two, acts as the preface to the balcony scene and is a choric sonnet, a bridging device delineating the death of Romeo's love for Rosaline and the birth of his love for Juliet. 'Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie/And young affection gapes to be his heir' (Prologue.2.1-2) reiterates the dominant themes of love and death and marks a change of focus, not of genre but of Romeo's romantic direction.⁹⁶ It acknowledges the encroachment of reality, 'Being held a foe he may not have access/To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear' (Prologue.2.9-10), concomitant with the possibility that the reality of tragedy cannot be contained by poetic artifice. The use of the sonnet thus appears as an ongoing exploration of the symbiotic relationship between drama and poetry. Romantic idealism enriches the tragic narrative, giving this element of the play its shape and form, but it is superseded by the unfolding tragedy that becomes the play's increasing focus. The artificiality of Petrarchan romance is a part of the play's comedic innovation, but it cannot be sustained as the play's trajectory gradually alters towards tragedy.

However, the poetic focus in *Romeo and Juliet* is broader than purely an emphasis on the sonnet form. The play opens with a Petrarchan sonnet, and the meeting of the two lovers in 1.5 which occurs as a sonnet, confirms this poetic form's pre-eminence. But the full poetic focus is broader, the drama incorporating an aubade (3.5.1-36), an epithalamium (3.2.1-31) and even a glance at the pastoral in Friar Laurence's meditation on nature (2.3.1-26). All of these share a commonality of theme in their perspectives of death, reinforcing the play's poetic pattern.⁹⁷ Shakespeare's approach to poetry in *Romeo and Juliet* is therefore wider than his initial exploration of its place in tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*. Contributing

⁹⁶ This sonnet appears only in Q2 and the subsequent quartos.

⁹⁷ Romeo and Juliet's shared aubade concerns the reality of Romeo's death if he is caught in Verona having been banished: 'Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death/I am content so thou wilt have it so' (3.5.17-18); Juliet comments on Romeo's cosmic metamorphosis after her death: 'And when I shall die/Take him and cut him out in little stars' (3.2.21-2); Friar Laurence addresses the idea of the cyclical aspect of nature: 'The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb/What is her burying grave that is her womb' (2.3.5-6).

to the multi-layered pattern of the play's tragedy, the different poetic styles are linked by the preoccupation of the drama with love and death. This is, as already noted, epitomised in Juliet's epithalamium where the speech, as Brooke notes, is 'an experience of what might have been'.⁹⁸ Paradoxically, death is here acknowledged as an inevitable part of love and the analogy of sex and death is made explicit: 'Come gentle night, come loving black-brow'd night/Give me my Romeo' (3.2.20-1).⁹⁹ Part of the play's generic self-consciousness, Juliet's epithalamium, hints at the developing tragedy, an analogy that its position at the beginning of the scene in which Juliet discovers Romeo's banishment, illustrates. Her wedding hymn thus ends in despair, 'What tongue shall smooth thy name/When I thy three hours wife have mangled it?' (3.2.98-99). As the play shifts from sonnet romance to despair, so its comic mode gives way to a darker poetry.

Part Four. Intertextuality and the Ending

A significant part of the problem with the endings of tragedy is, as commented on in the opening chapter, the need to provide a sense of resolution. This issue in *Romeo and Juliet* is made more complex by the inclusion of romance and comedy as part of the play's mix. The need in *Romeo and Juliet* is therefore to provide a conclusion that satisfies these different dramatic imperatives, a solution that is complicated by the play's affinities with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This intertextuality illustrates the comic potentiality of death as a tragic resolution. As there is still no academic consensus over which play preceded which,¹⁰⁰ and, as Levenson remarks, 'Elizabethan tragedy and comedy had so much in common that a stroke of the pen could change one into the other', the following section will

⁹⁸ Brooke, *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*, p. 100.

⁹⁹ This is a pun on the seventeenth-century associations of orgasm and death. Commenting on this speech, Blakemore Evans says that 'The most powerful evocation of death [...] is, of course, as Juliet's surrogate husband' ('Introduction', p. 20).

¹⁰⁰ Weiss says 'That *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* share common ground is widely accepted' (p. 41). Blakemore Evans dedicates a section of his 'Introduction' to a discussion of the dating of the two plays (pp. 5-6) and Levenson commenting on dating priority notes that 'The Oxford editors give a linguistic test which makes *Romeo and Juliet* precede *A Midsummer Night's Dream*' ('Introduction', p. 103).

examine how the comic example of ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ informs the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁰¹ While clearly a burlesque, ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ suggests the expectations of romantic tragedy that appears to demand the death of both the main protagonists. Following a discussion of the links between *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, I will subsequently, briefly, consider the implications of the play’s mutable title, from ‘AN / EXCELLENT/conceited Tragedie / OF / Romeo and Iuliet’ in 1597 to ‘THE / MOST EX-/cellent and lamentable / Tragedie, of Romeo / and Iuliet’ of 1599.

I. The Capulet Tomb and Ninny’s Tomb

There are numerous compositional intersections between *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, presumably because of the proximity of composition.¹⁰² These parallels have meant that the plays are considered almost as companion pieces, one comic, one tragic. This affinity is most apparent in a comparison of the tomb scene of *Romeo and Juliet* and the parodic play-within-a-play of ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’. There are, of course, comparisons between the wider content of *Romeo and Juliet* and ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ – a Prologue, separated lovers, assumed death followed by real death – but it is the tomb scene of *Romeo and Juliet* that parallels the parody. Rozett comments that ‘The final scenes of *Romeo and Juliet*, although tragic in outcome, are comic by nature inasmuch as everything hinges on accidents of timing’,¹⁰³ a comic potentiality that is the more apparent when compared to ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’.

As well as the obvious scenic links – the tomb, whether the Capulet’s or ‘Ninny’s’ is seen a place of resolution – there are linguistic parallels between both Romeo/Pyramus and Juliet/Thisbe’s final speeches. Pyramus and Romeo both assume a death where in reality there is none: ‘Thy mantle good/What! Stain’d

¹⁰¹ Levenson, ‘Introduction’, p. 51.

¹⁰² Reiss and Walton Williams comment that ‘Editors of either play are inclined to consider the play that they are editing the later play’. See ‘Tragical Mirth: From *Romeo to Dream*’, 214-218 for full details.

¹⁰³ Rozett, p. 154.

with blood?’ (*MND*, 5.1.271-2); ‘Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath’ (5.3.92). Romeo’s rhetoric is startlingly similar to that of Pyramus in the repetition, for heightened emotional effect, and as a part of the similarity in the repetition of ‘Come’: ‘O Fates, come, come!’ (*MND*, 5.3.273): ‘Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide’ (5.3.116). This line, in which Romeo directly addresses his poison, is matched by Pyramus: ‘Out sword and wound/The pap of Pyramus’ (*MND*, 5.1.285-6). There are also stylistic similarities in the personification and anthropomorphising of physical attributes: ‘Come tears confound [...] Tongue lose thy light’ (*MND*: 283-293): ‘Eyes, look your last;/Arms, take your last embrace, and lips, O you/The doors of death’ (*Romeo and Juliet*: 5.3.112-14). There is, finally, further synchronicity in the use of ‘thus’ at the point of death: *Romeo*: ‘Thus with a kiss I die’ (5.3.120): *Bottom/Pyramus*: ‘Thus die I, thus, thus, thus’ (*MND*, 5.1.289).

This patterning continues with the death throes of Juliet and Thisbe. Both fail to realise that their lovers are dead: Juliet does not initially see Romeo while Thisbe believes Pyramus to be sleeping. They choose the same mode of death, that of their erstwhile lovers’ daggers, and there are linguistic parallels that continue the connection between the two death scenes. Thisbe’s final speech is written in the same style as that of Pyramus, relying on trite rhyme for comic effect. This internal rhyme is mirrored by Juliet’s ‘O churl, drunk all’ (5.3.164), an effect that sits uneasily with the rest of her speech, and an association that is hinted at in the half rhyme of ‘hand’ and ‘end’. Further parallels are seen in their announcements of their deaths: ‘Come blade my breast imbrue’ (*MND*, 5.1.331): ‘This is thy sheath, there rust and let me die’ (5.3.170).

These corollaries highlight the difficulty with the endings of tragedies, when the growing body count makes the balance between comedy and tragedy difficult to negotiate. In common with *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*’s final

scene contains a number of deferrals before the unveiling of the final resolution, deferrals that are a part of Shakespeare's tragic patterning. In this instance, these suspensions serve to enhance the idea of the play as a tragedy, and can be seen as intrinsic to the solution of the comic-tragic matrix. In a departure from his primary source, Shakespeare, as already noted, includes Paris in the final death count, refracting the tragedy onto a broader canvas. There is a further delay to the play's final resolution in the interplay between Friar Laurence and Balthasar, an exchange that Wiles argues 'adds a final comic touch'.¹⁰⁴ These discernable links illustrate the generic proximity of comedy and tragedy, a relationship that the titular textual variations potentially comment upon.

II. 'Concord in Discord': Titular Changes From 'Conceited' to 'Lamentable'

Although the concern of this thesis is not with textual differences, the titular variations in the first two quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* appear to comment on the play's hybrid nature. While the popularity of the play can be perceived through the sheer number of quartos - there were five editions in total between 1597 and 1637 - the differences in the titles of the 1597 and 1599 quartos suggest that Shakespeare's experimental mingling had contemporary implications.¹⁰⁵ The following will briefly examine these two significant variations that, even considering the hyperbolic tone of publisher's advertising, appear to comment on the play's compound nature.

The title page of Q1 reads as follows:

AN / EXCELLENT/ conceited Tragedie / OF /Romeo and Iuliet./As it hath
been often (with great applause/ plaid publicly, by the right Ho-
/nourable the L. of Hunsdon/ his Seruantes. / [printer's device]
/LONDON / Printed by Iohn Danter. / 1597.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Wiles finds evidence of 'ample opportunities in performance for the clown' (p. 90) in the textual discrepancies of the graveyard scene between Q1 and Q2. See Wiles, pp. 89-92.

¹⁰⁵ The quarto versions date from 1597, 1599, 1609, 1622 and 1637 respectively, although the three later quartos are reprinted versions of Q2 with minor compositional changes.

¹⁰⁶ See Plate 2.

The title page of Q2 reads:

THE / MOST EX-/cellent and lamentable / Tragedie, of Romeo / and Iuliet.
/ Newly corrected, augmented, and amended: / As it hath bene sundry rimes
publiquely acted, by the right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine / his
Seruants. / [printer's device] LONDON / Printed by Thomas Creede, for
Cuthbert Burby, and are to / be sold at his shop neare the Exchange. /
1599.¹⁰⁷

Among the obvious changes, the compelling alteration is that of the play's billing that, having acquired a status in the two years between 1597 and 1599, mutates from a 'AN EXCELLENT conceited tragedie' to 'THE MOST EX-cellent and lamentable Tragedie'. This seems to signal a shift in emphasis from the comic towards the tragic that can perhaps be understood by examining the coincident meaning of the respective vocabulary.

Contemporary play titles containing 'conceited' are concomitant with *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's* assertion that it had, among other meanings, connotations of 'clever, witty, amusing'.¹⁰⁸ In 1594, *A pleasant conceited comedie, called, A knacke to know an honest man As it hath beene sundrie times plaied about the citie of London* was printed in London by T Scarlet for Cuthbert Burby, and was reprinted in 1596 as *A pleasant conceited historie, called The taming of a shrew As it was sundrie times acted by the Right honorable the Earle of Pembroke his seruants* imprinted by Peter Short and again sold by 'Cuthbert Burbie, at his shop at the Royall Exchange'. 'Conceited' was not only used as a feature of play titles, but rather was also part of common usage, as the following lines from *The cobler of Caunterburie, or An inuectiue against Tarltons newes out of purgatorie A merrier iest then a clownes iigge, and fitter for gentlemens humors*,¹⁰⁹ printed in 1590, illustrate:

¹⁰⁷ See Plate 3.

¹⁰⁸ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th edn, 2 Vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I, 477. This meaning was current from 1530 to 1699.

¹⁰⁹ See <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/com?> [accessed January 12th 2014]. A further example of this usage is seen in *The Merrie conceited iests of George Peele Gentleman, sometimes a student in Oxford VVherein is shewed the course of his life how he liued: a man very well knowne in the Citie of London and elsewhere*.

if Cato Censorius had been there, he woulde either haue laughed at their knauish iests, or else at the confusion of their prattles, which séemed like a very Chaos of sundry conceites.

The comedic associations of ‘conceited’ are made further explicit by the Prologue of Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* that refers ‘To all good Fellowes, Professors of the Gentle Craft; of what degree soever. Kinde gentlemen, and honest boone Companions, I present you here with a merrie conceited Comedie called *The Shoemakers Holiday*’.¹¹⁰ The range of texts cited above indicates that the replacement of ‘conceited’ from Q1 of 1597 is not a reflection of any change in the vernacular but appears as a conscious publishing decision that alters the title’s semantic focus. Given that the title pages are effectively part of a publisher’s marketing, there seems to be a distinct move after the initial quarto to underline the tragic nature of *Romeo and Juliet*. ‘Lamentable’, a substantial description, reinforces the idea of the play as a tragedy, and changes the emphasis in the play’s billing.¹¹¹ The change in emphasis reflects the title pages of the three editions of *Titus Andronicus* published during Shakespeare’s lifetime, where the 1594, 1600 and 1611 quartos all name the play *The most lamentable Romaine tragedie of Titus Andronicus*.¹¹² The titular alteration between 1597 and 1599 creates a uniformity of the advertising for Shakespeare’s earliest tragedies.

The tension between comedy and tragedy is demonstrably referred to in Shakespeare’s previous play. ‘Lamentable’ is used in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* where the full title of the play-within-the play is ‘The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe’ (*MND*, 1.2.9-10). While obviously a deliberately comic authorial ‘mistake’, Theseus further comments on this inherent tension: ‘How shall we find the concord of this discord’ (*MND*, 5.1.60), signalling

¹¹⁰ Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, ‘The Epistle’, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?> [accessed February 23rd 2016]

¹¹¹ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that the word had been in usage since the late Middle Ages and that its primary definition is ‘Full of or expressing sorrow or grief, mournful, doleful’ (p. 1539).

¹¹² See <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search> [accessed November 11th 2015]

authorial awareness of the issue. *Romeo and Juliet* is similarly divided between a tragic and comedic emphasis. Shakespeare's deviations and alterations to his primary source illustrate the intentionality of the inclusion of a significant comedic emphasis into the romantic tragedy of the lovers, while also reinforcing the subject's tragic nature. The titular changes between the two earliest quartos of the play suggest the self-reflexive need to find a new nomenclature for this experimental hybrid form, at once 'conceited' and 'lamentable'.

III. Conclusion

Romeo and Juliet is a very different tragedy from the earlier bloodbath of *Titus Andronicus*. The innovatory emphasis on two main protagonists appears to dictate the structural pattern that primarily divides between comedy and tragedy, with a pronounced attempt at mixing both genres in one scene, to create a hybrid. The play indicates its tragic credentials through the conflicted nature of its use of both romance and comedy, epitomised, perhaps, in the character of Mercutio. The familial issue is at the heart of the play, resulting in the preoccupation with the tropes of romantic comedy, suggesting that the play is a self-conscious attempt at a synthesis of genres, an argument that is supported by Shakespeare's alterations to his inherited tragic source material.

Juliet unwittingly clarifies the idea behind the tragedy: 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy' (2.2.38). *Romeo and Juliet* is a response to the violence that had previously characterised Shakespeare's venture into tragedy, deliberately moving away from the stereotype of revenge tragedy and creating a radically different tragic compound. This experiment appears in the light of Shakespeare's subsequent tragedies as not entirely successful, perhaps indicated in the reappraisal of the play's subtitle between the first two quartos. While the remaining tragedies of the 1590s do not engage with either comedy or romance, John Marston's *The Scourge of Villainie* alludes to the possibility that this new genre intermingling was, at least,

contemporaneously remarked. The earliest direct reference to *Romeo and Juliet* appears in ‘Satire X’ of the third book of his *The Scourge of Villanie* of 1598, reprinted in part below:¹¹³

Luscus what's playd to day? faith now I know
 I set thy lips abroach, from whence doth flow
 Naught but pure *Iuliat* and *Romio*.
 Say, who acts best? *Drusus*, or *Roscio*?
 Now I haue him, that nere of ought did speake
 But when of playes or Plaiers he did treat.
 H'ath made a common-place booke out of plaies,
 And speakes in print, at least what ere he sayes
 Is warranted by Curtaine *plaudeties*,
 If ere you heard him courting *Lesbias* eyes;
 Say (Curteous Sir) speakes he not mouingly
 From out some new pathetique Tragedie?

Marston appears to assess *Romeo and Juliet* as ‘a new pathetique tragedie’.¹¹⁴

Whether or not the link with Kemp in the preceding stanza can or should be read as a comment on the play’s hybrid nature,¹¹⁵ the association of the play as a ‘new’ tragedy is noteworthy. *Romeo and Juliet* is thus, I suggest, a further tragic prototype. It is an attempt at a very different type of tragedy, but it is also an experiment that is not, at least in the 1590s, repeated.

¹¹³John Marston, *The Scourge of Villainie* (1598).

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A07078.0001.001/1:8.4?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> [accessed November 18th 2015]

¹¹⁴‘Pathetique’ according to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* from 1570-1599 was used in the context of emotional: ‘producing an effect upon the emotions, moving, stirring’ (p. 2122).

¹¹⁵‘Will daunce *Kemps* *Iigge*. They’le reuel with neate iumps’.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A07078.0001.001/1:8.4?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> [accessed February 23rd 2016]

Chapter Three

Richard II: History Becoming Tragedy

The complex interrelationship between history and tragedy is clearly central to Shakespeare's *Richard II*, as suggested by the mutability of the play's title. Printed as *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second* in the First Quarto of 1597, and as *The Life and Death of Richard the Second* in the First Folio of 1623, although placed in the section of *Histories*, the play seems poised between the two genres. This chapter examines both the tension and the issues that surround the combination of history and tragedy.

Richard II is a play that creates theatrical tragedy out of history, and by examining the pattern of the drama, its intertextuality and its metatheatricality, this chapter will seek to establish the deliberately self-reflexive experimental methods that create this intermingling of genre. *Richard II*'s engagement with the presentation of history, specifically in the use of the primary sources, suggests that history is mutable, an instability perhaps reflected by the changing presence of the deposition scene, included in the Folio text of 1623 but not in the earlier quartos of 1597 and 1598, although a version appears in Q4 of 1608.

The chapter is divided into four parts, beginning by discussing how generic tension is reflected by the play's changing titles and content. The influences of the play's sources, primarily Hall and Holinshed but also Samuel Daniel's *First foure books of the civile wars*,¹ are then discussed in detail, considering the implications

¹ The full titles are *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587), *The Union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke, beeyng long in continual discension for the crowne of this noble realme with all the actes done in bothe the tymes of the princes, bothe of the one linage and of the other, beginnyng at the tyme of kyng Henry the fowerth, the first aucthor of this deuision, and so successiuelly procedyng to the reigne of the high and prudent prince kyng Henry the eight, the vndubitate flower and very heire of both the sayd linages* (1548) and *The ciuile wars betweene the howses of Lancaster and Yorke corrected and continued by Samuel Daniel one of the groomes of hir Maiesties most honorable Priuie Chamber* (1595). I have accessed the source material from the following online resources. All quotations have been taken from them:

in Shakespeare's handling of this material with the focus on the creation of the king as a tragic figure.² The chapter goes on to suggest that one of the main aspects of Shakespeare's originality in *Richard II* is the introduction of pathos and an increasing awareness of the idea of metadrama in the exploration of the King's reinvention as a sort of martyr, before suggesting that a further aspect of the movement of the play from history to tragedy is seen through the changing language and its effect on the narrative. The deposition scene and the influence on *Richard II* of *Woodstock*, an anonymous play dating from the early 1590s, are subsequently considered before returning to an examination of the sources considering the differences in the depiction of Richard towards the end of his life. The chapter concludes by positing that the play's final movement is the merging of the historical with the tragic to create a type of mythology around Shakespeare's deposed king.

Part One. Textual Differences and their Implications for Genre

Although, as already noted, the variations between the play's quarto classification and that of the Folio of 1623 suggest a degree of instability or openness in genre classification, there is also a question of the difference between performance content versus printed text. Relevant to this idea is the changing focus of the play determined by the inclusion or not of the politically contentious deposition scene,

[http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/toc.php?edition=1587 - vol-1587_6](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/toc.php?edition=1587-vol-1587_6) [accessed December 15th 2014 and on numerous subsequent occasions]

The main source of the information from Holinshed is from volume 6.

The main source of the information from Hall is from 'An introduction into the history of Kyng Henry the fourthe', with some information coming from 'Reign'. For clarity, references to the relevant 'chapters' are noted in the text either as 'Introduction' or by 'The first yere' following Hall's divisions.

http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search?FILE=../session/1456679304_23118&SCREEN=CITATIONS [accessed December 15th 2014 and on numerous subsequent occasions]

For Daniel:

http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgthumbs.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99844904&FILE=../session/145358271_9058&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=AUTHOR [accessed December 16th 2014 and on numerous subsequent occasions]

² Although considered in some detail, this thesis is not concerned with providing an exhaustive account or comparison of these primary sources. Rather, the examples given serve to illustrate some of Shakespeare's treatment of them.

absent from the early quartos and not appearing (at least in print) until Q4 of 1608, after Elizabeth's death and five years after James' accession.

I. Quarto and Folio

The quarto of 1597, *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second*, went through two further impressions (Q2 and Q3 of 1598), testifying to the play's popularity, before the critical deposition scene of 4.1 was first published in Q4 of 1608.³ This significant textual difference raises the question of what was performed on the Elizabethan stage and whether the printed text is an accurate reflection of the performance. While this is unlikely to be definitively resolved, the facts of the situation are as follows.

The title page of Q1 acknowledges that the play has been performed 'As it hath beene publickely acted / by the right Honourable the / Lorde Chamberlaine his servants', suggesting a composition date of 1594-96 and a definite performance date of before 29th August 1597 when the play was entered into the Stationers' Register. Q4 of 1608 states that the play is, 'With new additions of the Parlia -/ ment Sceane and the deposing of King Richard, / As it hath been lately acted by the Kinges / Majesties servants, at the Globe'.⁴

The exclusion of the deposition scene is only one of a number of textual differences between the early and later editions but is clearly the most significant. Taken at face value, Q4's title page implies that these 'additions' post-date the previous quarto versions, and perhaps have been performed by Shakespeare's company during a revival of the play between the printing of Q3 in 1598 and Q4 in 1608. The obvious inference is that Shakespeare wrote the 'Parliament sceane and the deposing of King Richard' as new material for *Richard II* at some point during

³A further quarto, Q5, was published in 1615, with a final quarto printed in 1634. Q5 contained the deposition scene as printed in Q4, indicating that Q4 was used to prepare the later edition of the play. See Appendix One in *The Arden 3rd Series: King Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker (London: Thomson, 2002; repr. 2005), pp. 506-541 for a full consideration of the textual issues surrounding the play. All references are to this edition unless otherwise noted and will be noted parenthetically in the text.

⁴ It also adds 'By William Shake-speare', although both Q2 and Q3 in 1598 acknowledge Shakespeare's authorship (see Plates 4, 5 and 6).

the late 1590s and the early 1600s. This, of course, precludes the possibility that the ‘new additions’ were written exclusively for the printed text. As Andrew Gurr notes, ‘The editions published in Elizabeth’s lifetime all lack the central deposition scene’,⁵ suggesting an element of authoritarian censorship. However, he also points out that theatrical censorship as opposed to censorship of the printed word were, at this time, very different things, making it unlikely that the ‘playing’ text would have been examined in this way.⁶ ‘An astonishing amount of political comment or display seems to have been acceptable’, Gurr adds, suggesting a degree of theatrical freedom.⁷

At the time of Q1’s publication, Elizabeth I was obviously coming towards the end of her reign and the question of succession was the subject of much contemporary discussion. Robert Parsons’⁸ *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, published under the pseudonym of R. Doleman,⁹ contributed to the debate in 1594, so that by the time of Q1’s publication in 1597, taking into account Elizabeth’s ever-increasing age, the issue of the succession would have intensified. That the debate increased in urgency is illustrated by Peter Wentworth’s 1598 direct addressal to the Queen in *A Pithie Exhortation to Her Majestie for Establishing Her Successor to the Crowne*.¹⁰

Rebecca Lemon suggests that Shakespeare was very much aware of the debate,

⁵ Andrew Gurr, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: King Richard II*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; repr. 2003), p. 9.

⁶ See Janet Clare, ‘Art made tongue-tied by authority’: *Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990) and Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997; repr. 2003) and ‘By the choise and intuition of al the realme’: *Richard II* and Elizabethan Press Censorship’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48 (1997), 432-448 for further information on this issue.

⁷ Gurr, *New Cambridge*, p. 10.

⁸ There is discrepancy amongst critics as to the spelling of the author’s name. Cyndia Susan Clegg and Richard Dutton use Parsons, while Rebecca Lemon uses Persons. For the sake of clarity I have gone with the prevailing consensus and have used Parsons.

⁹ Clegg notes that this was published under the pseudonym, R. Doleman. See *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 85. That this was published under a pseudonym would seem to highlight the contentious nature of the subject.

¹⁰ The full title is *A Pithie Exhortation to her Majestie for Establishing her Successor to the Crowne Whereunto is Added a Discourse Containing the Author’s Opinion of the True and Lawfull Successor to Her Majestie*. The full text is available at <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search> [accessed 26th June 2012]. Parson’s work came out of a long history of pamphlets debating Elizabeth’s successor.

citing similarities between Parsons' work and *Richard II*, suggesting that Shakespeare's play is 'surprisingly resonant with Parsons' polemical tract'.¹¹

Shakespeare's engagement with the subject and history of *Richard II* at the end of Elizabeth's reign suggests a conscious involvement with the prevailing political preoccupation.¹² The inclusion of the deposition scene underlines the political nature of the piece and makes explicit its primary concerns – those of succession and royal authority. As already discussed, the authority of the extant Q4 suggests that the deposition scene was neither printed nor, by implication, performed during the sixteenth century. However, academic consensus appears to be that the deposition scene would have been included in the 1590s, with Charles R. Forker commenting that 'Most scholars now believe that Q1 would have contained the deposition scene'.¹³ Gurr, arguing that the restoration of such a scene in Q4 deleted through censorship in 1597 would have been the only known instance of such a restoration and would have required significant involvement by both the players and printer, concurs. He further notes that the inclusion of the deposition scene in the performance text would have given the supporters of the Earl of Essex 'much more reason to want it if they knew that it contained the scene where Richard hands over his crown to the new king'.¹⁴

The question of the deposition scene is thus caught up in several different arguments. What is definite is that without it, *Richard II* is a very different play than that it is with it, and, in many ways, it is the deposition scene that pinpoints the difference – as well as the sameness – between history and tragedy.

¹¹ Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law and Rebellion in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 53.

¹² Examples include Cardinal William Allen's *A Declaration of the Sentence and Deposition of Elizabeth, the Usurper and Pretended Queene of England* (1588), *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland, concerning the Present Warres made for His Holinesse sentence, by the highe and mightie Kinge Catholicke of Spain by the Cardinal of England* (1588). See <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search> for the full texts of both pamphlets.

¹³ See Forker, p. 508n.

¹⁴ Gurr, 'Introduction', p. 9. The Essex Rebellion is briefly discussed later in the chapter.

Part Two. Mutability of Genre: Holinshed, Hall and Daniel

Pertinent to any discussion of the relationship of *Richard II* to history is an examination of Shakespeare's sources. Relevant because of Shakespeare's treatment of them, Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, specifically the 1587 edition, Edward Hall's *The Union* from 1548 and Samuel Daniel's 1595 *The civile wars* are the primary source of contemporary knowledge and perception of Richard's reign. Shakespeare's rewriting of this history casts light on the tension endemic in the play.¹⁵ The view of history can be seen prismatically through his manipulation of his source material, prismatic because his approach is multi-faceted.¹⁶ Although Shakespeare demonstrates an innovative approach to the depiction of historical events - events are extended, omitted and deviated from those depicted by his primary sources to allow for the emergence of Richard's tragic narrative – this approach is consistent across other of Shakespeare's plays as Stephen J. Lynch comments:

In his early plays, Shakespeare often challenges but does not entirely overturn the dominant genre of his sources. *Richard III* offers a typical example: Shakespeare follows the tragic contours of his historical sources but, at the same time, complicates the drama by developing an alternative generic trajectory of providential comedy. Shakespeare borrowed the basic historical matter for the play from Edward Hall's *Union of the Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548) and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), although he freely compressed, rearranged and sometimes altered events.¹⁷

¹⁵ My intention is not to provide an exhaustive account of all of Shakespeare's sources. For example, I make no mention of any of the French Chronicles that have been suggested as source material for the play or indeed *The Mirror for Magistrates*, partly because Holinshed made use of Froissart, Creton and *Traison*. Forker's *Richard II* provides an account of any of Shakespeare's sources and Kenneth Muir's *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* continues to be the source of much more detailed information. See Forker, p. 124.

¹⁶ I have adopted the term 'prismatic' from Rosalie L. Colie in *Some Facets of King Lear: Essays in Prismatic Criticism*, eds. Rosalie Colie and F.T. Flahiff (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto, 1974) as the multi-dimensional approach is fundamental to my approach to my subject.

¹⁷ Stephen J. Lynch, 'Turning Genre on Its Head: Shakespeare's Refashioning of His Sources in *Richard III*, *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*' in *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies*, ed. by Anthony R. Guneratne (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 121-137, (p.122). The idea of theatrical refashioning is also seen in Shakespeare's contemporaries, and extends from the idea of manipulating source material to extending the connection between specific plays. Ruth Lunney argues for example that Marlowe's *Edward II* 'in particular defines itself against two early works of Shakespeare: *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*'. See Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). Lunney further suggests that Marlowe's new rhetoric, the 'mighty line', challenged traditional audience expectation

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Shakespeare's significant introduction into the play of *Richard III* is, as Lynch goes on to note, that of comedy, the character of Richard himself owing a debt to the theatrical tradition of the Vice. His treatment of the source material for *Richard II*, in contrast, emphasises the tragic trajectory of the title character. Other contemporary playwrights used the same transformative perspective with their sources. Counteracting Graham Holderness' suggestion that Marlowe's treatment of *Edward II* was 'unusually slavish towards [his] literary sources', Benjamin Griffin points out that 'The will to tragedy lies in the selective capability of the playwright'.¹⁸ It is Shakespeare's 'selective capability' that, I suggest, indicates his tragic agenda in the treatment of Richard II's history.

Forker notes that Shakespeare 'In *Richard II* [...] deviated less from Holinshed than in the other histories',¹⁹ although there are significant omissions stemming from the fact that Shakespeare, unlike Holinshed, is dramatising the fall of a tragic king, not looking to present a categorical overview of his reign. It is a play that largely divides into two parts. The first part focuses on the actual source-based history – the quarrel, John of Gaunt's death and the subsequent response to it – but it is a selective history constructed in order to present an image of a petulant, selfish Richard. The second part, again highlighted by the deviations from and development of specific selected episodes, allows for Richard's evolution as a tragic figure. This idea correlates with the play's 'history', that is the depiction of actual historical events, predominantly based around the public face of King Richard, allowing the tragedy to emanate through the imagined private moments. Critical episodes are the positing of the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray and the treatment of John of Gaunt and the confiscation of his goods, showing the 'public' face of Richard, and the invented scenes between Richard and his Queen

of the experience of play-going through a variety of re-workings of conventional signs and signals including exempla (in the case of *Edward II*), late morality (*The Jew of Malta*) and psychomachia (*Dr. Faustus*).

¹⁸ Benjamin Griffin, *Playing the Past*, p. 78.

¹⁹ Forker, 'Introduction', p. 124.

illustrating Richard the private man. The following section will suggest that this is a calculated strategy, that the initial image of a putative tyrannical king is deliberately established in order that his subsequent fall and ultimate redemption are the more tragic. The approach to the character of the king is consequently binary.²⁰

I. The Mowbray – Bolingbroke Quarrel

Shakespeare does not take a canonical approach to his primary source material, but rather is selective, presenting a view of history that appears to reflect his dramatic intentions.²¹ Ivo Kamps suggests that this was both an acknowledged and to some degree, licensed, contemporary dramatic approach towards history: ‘The Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights [...] we know read the historical texts available to them with considerable care, and, of course, with an eye to how history might be transformed in to a profitable commodity for the theatre’.²² Viewed from a generic perspective, then, Shakespeare’s deviation from his source material appears as a self-reflexive approach. To this end, the play seems to revolve around the Duke of York’s warning to Richard, ‘If you do wrongfully seize Hereford’s rights/ [...] You pluck a thousand dangers on your head’ (2.1.201-5). This caution provides the nucleus for the play’s descent from history into Richard’s personal tragedy, and takes as its inspiration the warning note sounded by Hall in his *Union*: ‘The death of this duke abbreviated the life of king Richard’,²³ the ‘duke’ referred

²⁰ Although Shakespeare’s focus is on a single central character, the binary approach to his central figure appears as an extension of the tragic attempt in *Romeo and Juliet* to write a tragedy about two main characters, a focus returned to in *Julius Caesar*, his subsequent tragedy.

²¹ Shakespeare adapts history to serve his dramatic purpose but, as Bevington acknowledges it is not his only influence: ‘The English History play was more Shakespeare’s own but even here, he was profoundly influenced by medieval religious plays, Christopher Marlowe and the author of the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V*’. See David Bevington, ‘Shakespeare’s Development of Theatrical Genres: Genre as Adaptation in the Comedies and Histories’ in *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies*, pp.85-101 (p. 85). The idea of the inter-relationship between Marlowe and Shakespeare contributes to the suggestion of a theatrical dialogue that I explore in Chapter One between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*.

²² Ivo Kamps, ‘The Writing of History in Shakespeare’s England’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works: The Histories*, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 4 – 25 (p. 6).

²³ Hall, ‘An Introduction’.

to is John of Gaunt. Richard's history, as described by Hall and dramatised by Shakespeare, is a self-inflicted tragedy.

The presentation of Richard in the early part of the play illustrated by his volatility at the interrupted tournament, the extension of John of Gaunt's character and treatment at Richard's hands and the invented farewell scene of 1.3 between Gaunt and Bolingbroke are all evidence of a considered and dynamic perspective creating the public image of a selfish and easily manipulated king. The alterations to and deviations from the source material have a double function – firstly, they establish Richard as a putative tyrant before repositing him as a tragic figure. Underpinning Shakespeare's treatment of both Hall and Holinshed is an apparent desire to acknowledge Richard's failings, but not to establish him as an out and out villain.²⁴ There is an inherent awareness towards the idea of the development of Richard as a tragic figure, reflected, for example, by the omission of the representations of his inherent degeneracy that is a focus of Holinshed but not of Hall.²⁵ The dramatisation of Richard's Queen, the introduction of their private interactions and the manner of Richard's theatrical death, conversely all demonstrate the calculated repositioning of Richard as a tragic figure. Analysing some of the discrepancies between Hall and Holinshed demonstrates Shakespeare's protean approach.

The treatment of the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke is illustrative of Shakespeare's establishment of Richard as a weak-willed and selfish

²⁴ E. M. W. Tillyard in *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1944; repr. 1962) suggests that the writing of history during the Tudor period contributed to the creation of the 'Tudor myth': 'With the accession of Henry VIII the practice of historical writing becomes more complicated [...] the Tudors, to suit their ends, encouraged their people to look on the events that led to their accession in a special way' (p. 29). Tillyard argues that Hall's pro-Tudor agenda is illustrated in the title of his history, focusing as it does on 'The Union of the two noble and illustre families of Lancaster and York' (pp. 42-3). Kamps supports this idea, referring to 'Edward Hall's providential pro-Tudor historical vision' (p. 4), although he argues that 'playwrights were more acutely aware than most historians of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the various historical methods that all purported to yield a true and accurate account of the past' (p. 22). Kamps thus supports the idea of the historical selectivity of Elizabethan playwrights.

²⁵ It is worth noting that Hall's representation of Richard's reign opens with the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, whereas Holinshed considers the entirety of his reign as part of what Tillyard refers to as his 'omnibus volume' (p. 50). This deviation from Hall is representative of Holinshed's selectivity.

monarch. Holinshed sees Bolingbroke accusing Mowbray of treachery without making the circumstances explicit:

Henrie duke of Hereford accused Thomas Mowbraie duke of Norfolke, of certeine words which he should vtter in talke had betwixt them, as they rode togither latelie before betwixt London and Brainford, sounding highlie to the kings dishonor.²⁶

Earlier in Holinshed's text, however, Richard's involvement is definitive, although Holinshed's acknowledgement of the disparity in his source material is noteworthy in the context of the construction of history. Shakespeare's own sources were, at times, conflicted, demonstrating the idea that history is a construct rather than an absolute. Thus Holinshed:

Here we find some variance in writers. For as by an old French pamphlet (which I haue séene) it should appeare, the king commanded first, that this duke should be conueied vnto the tower, where he ment to commen with him, & not in any other place: but neuerthelesse, the king shortlie after appointed, that he should be sent to Calis, as in the same pamphlet is also conteined. Others write, that immediatlie vpon his apprehension, the earle marshall conueied him vnto the Thames, and there being set aboard in a ship prepared of purpose, he was brought to Calis, where he was at length dispatched out of life, either strangled or smothered with pillowes (as some doo write).²⁷

Hall's version has Bolingbroke confiding his doubts about Richard to Mowbray, who then betrays his confidence by relaying them straight to Richard:

And after when he had oportunitie and sawe his tyme, was very glad (as tell tales and scicophantes bee, when thei haue any thyng to instill in to the eares and heddes of Princes) to declare to the kyng what he had heard, and to agrauate and make the offence the greater, he mucche more added but nothyng diminished.²⁸

The ambiguity in *Richard II* surrounding Richard's involvement in Gloucester's death appears to balance the information in both sources. It is certainly not made explicit in 1.1 where Bolingbroke's accusation is leveled at Mowbray: 'Further I say and firmly will maintain/Upon his bad life to make all this good/That he did

²⁶ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 493. Holinshed does present both sides of the argument later during the tournament where two unnamed knights speak for each respective party.

²⁷ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 488.

²⁸ Hall, 'An Introduccion'.

plot the Duke of Gloucester's death' (1.1.98-100). It is left to the Duchess of Gloucester and John of Gaunt to make the association of Richard with Gloucester's murder, a denunciation that Gaunt attempts to justify:

God's is the quarrel, for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death, the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge
(1.2.37-40).

There is an equivocation in establishing Richard as complicit in Gloucester's death, with Gaunt leaving space for Richard's actions to be seen as defensible. As Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin note, 'Shakespeare frustrates easy condemnation of the King, especially by preventing the character from alienating altogether the esteem of the audience'.²⁹ The importance of keeping the 'esteem of the audience' seems to relate to Richard's ultimate redemption and so appears a generic consideration. In order for the play to succeed as a tragedy, Richard's creation as a tragic martyr has to retain currency. Shakespeare's 'solution' to the question of Gloucester's murder, balancing the differing versions, sets the reasons for the quarrel in 'pre-history', that is the history before the play of *Richard II* begins. Within the view of history that *Richard II* encompasses, the question of what could be termed 'pre-history' is raised; that is, to what extent previous historical events influence historical choices. This presentation of history is addressed by the authorial use of metadrama; from the play's beginning, history is presented as a performance. As Richard Wilson comments, 'the play-within-the-play at the opening of *Richard II* also puts the truth test into a theatrical context, when the King rigs a show trial-by-combat to suppress the facts about his incrimination in the murder of his uncle, the regent Gloucester, for which

²⁹ Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Richard II*, eds. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 'Introduction', p. 50.
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Bolingbroke has indicted Mowbray'.³⁰ While Richard is depicted as stage-managing this event, 'Face to face/And frowning brow to brow ourselves will hear/The accuser and the accused freely speak' (1.1.15-17), Shakespeare deviates from his source material to create an impression of Richard's unpredictability.

Holinshed's description of the feud between Norfolk and Bolingbroke, while emphasising the pageantry, allows for Richard to consider fully his decision in relation to the two combatants:³¹

The duke of Norfolke was not fullie set forward, when the king cast downe his warder, and the heralds cried, Ho, ho. Then the king caused their speares to be taken from them, and commanded them to repaire againe to their chaires, where they remained two long houres, while the king and his counsell deliberatlie consulted what order was best to be had in so weightie a cause. Finallie, after they had deuised, and fullie determined what should be doone therein, the heralds cried silence.³²

In direct contrast, although scant mention is made of a consultation with his advisors, Shakespeare's Richard appears whimsical and capricious: 'Sound trumpets and set forward combatants' (1.3.117) invites both parties to begin the combat, but this is followed immediately by, 'Stay! The king hath thrown his warder down' (1.3.118). Although the 'two hours traffic of our stage' would not allow for a two-hour long conference on the way to handle the situation, this rendering of the historical event highlights the depiction of Richard as erratic and volatile, as Forker indicates: 'the rapid decision to banish the combatants (which suggests greater arbitrariness and instability in the King)'.³³ This, then, is Richard in a public sphere, where Shakespeare's seemingly insignificant changes creates a conscious impression of the king's volatility.

Shakespeare's depiction of this incident, and in particular his representation

³⁰ Richard Wilson, 'A Stringless Instrument': *Richard II* and the defeat of poetry', in *Shakespeare's Book*, pp. 103-119 (p. 105).

³¹ Hall largely concurs with Holinshed, allowing Richard a full discussion with his council: 'Then the kyng caused their speres to be taken from them, and commaunded them to repaire again to their chayers, where thei remained two long houres, while the kyng and his counsaill deliberatly consulted what waie was best to bee taken in so waighty a cause'. See 'An Introduccion'.

³² Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 495.

³³ Forker, p. 124.

of Richard, appears deliberately to work in conjunction with other historical distortions, suggesting a pattern in the narrative construction illustrated by the extension of the character of John of Gaunt. The following will analyse how Shakespeare deviates from both Hall and Holinshed to create Gaunt as a key figure in the presentation of history.

II. 'This Sceptered Isle': John of Gaunt

Gaunt, a shadowy and indistinct character in both Holinshed and Hall is substantiated by Shakespeare, becoming an emblematic figure critical to the construction of the early part of the play.³⁴ Gaunt becomes a trustworthy elder statesman, representative of the 'old' values of chivalry and patriotism in the face of Richard's corrupt modernity. Again, Shakespeare's use of his sources demonstrates how the past in *Richard II* is dramatised. It is not necessarily finite and established, but rather it is malleable and fluid, enabling history to be altered in order to suit dramatic purpose.

Gaunt's invented exchange with the Duchess of Gloucester of 1.2 establishes him as a part of the play's 'pre-history', but also delineates him as a patriot loyal to the crown. He can see the problems with Richard but accepts his authority: 'But since correction lieth in those hands/Which made the fault that we cannot correct/Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven' (1.2.4-6). Positioning him as a foundational figure gives his subsequent opinions legitimacy, and coupled with Bolingbroke's banishment, Richard's actions towards Gaunt are, within the play, the most significant indication of Richard's callous nature. The juxtaposition of scenes is not accidental: Gaunt's trustworthy character is fixed before Richard sees his death as a financial opportunity. Taken in conjunction with Richard's subsequent attitude towards Gaunt, 'Now put it, God, in the physician's mind/To help him to his grave immediately' (1.4.59-60), an approach driven by financial

³⁴ The idea of John of Gaunt as an emblematic figure is perhaps emphasised by the phrase he uses to describe England as 'this little world/This precious stone set in a silver sea' (2.1.45-6).

imperative, and further clarified by the banishment of Bolingbroke in 1.3, Gaunt is used in the first act as the lynchpin around which the initial image of Richard as an unworthy king is constructed. Richard's capriciousness is illustrated by his behaviour at the duel, his self-serving cruelty is seen in his attitude towards Gaunt's impending death and his relationship with his favourites is seen in their preferential relationship of 1.4: 'Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green/Observed his courtship to the common people' (1.4.23-24). Shakespeare largely chooses to ignore the information in the sources concerning his sybaritism, although York addresses this in 2.1: 'Where doth the world thrust forth a vanity/So it be new, there's no respect how vile/That it is not quickly buzzed in his ears' (2.1.24-26).³⁵ The role of Richard's favourites, one emphasised by the two primary sources, Hall and Holinshed, while not ignored by Shakespeare, is hinted at rather than given the prominence of history. Holinshed sees this as the primary reason for Richard's unpopularity:

the king gaue credit to these tales, and therefore had the lords in great gelousie, notwithstanding they were thought to be his most true and faithfull subiects, and the other craftie, deceitfull, and vntrustie; but such an affection had the king to them, that no informations, nor accusations, though neuer so manifestlie prooued, could bring them out of his fauour, in so much as at the feast of Christmasse next following, he caused the earle of Suffolke to sit with him at his owne table, in robes accustomable appointed for kings to weare, and not for meaner estates, which was much noted, and no little increased the enuie against him.³⁶

In Shakespeare's play, Richard's relationship with his favourites is not the primary reason for his downfall, and although not ignored, is rather glanced at in Bolingbroke's summary prior to Bushy and Green's execution: 'You have in manner with your sinful hours/Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him/ Broke the possession of a royal bed' (3.1.11-13). It is noteworthy that even at this point, Richard's behaviour is, to some degree, excused, allowing for Richard's later

³⁵ Hall refers to this aspect of Richard's character, 'but did all thyng at his pleasure, setting his will and appetite in stede of law and reason'. See 'An Introduccion'.

³⁶ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 453.

redemption to be partly sanctioned by his marital relationship: ‘You have misled a prince, a royal king/A happy gentleman in blood and lineaments/By you unhappied and disfigured clean’ (3.1.8-10). As Dawson and Yachnin comment, ‘Shakespeare differs from the source texts [...] by leaving out any persuasive account of Richard’s degeneracy’.³⁷ The role of the Queen is an important factor in Richard’s ultimate rehabilitation and will be discussed fully later.

Shakespeare rather takes his cue from Hall in the allocation of responsibility for Richard’s downfall.³⁸ Supported by Daniel’s view that refers to the seizure of Gaunt’s estates as ‘This open wrong’,³⁹ this is represented as the single most significant of Richard’s actions, and the key factor in Bolingbroke’s return from France.⁴⁰ The importance of this is delineated within the play by Richard’s invented visit to the dying Gaunt. Gaunt’s ‘Sceptred Isle’ soliloquy and his later interaction with Richard in 2.1 paraphrase the reasons in the sources for Richard’s subsequent deposition. The emphasis throughout the scene is on Richard’s approach to his custody of England, ‘Landlord of England art thou now, not king’ (2.1.113), an approach that provokes Richard into revealing more of his volatile nature: ‘This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head/Should run thy head from thy irreverent shoulders’ (2.1.122-3). This scene, although invented, encapsulates much of the narrative of Shakespeare’s sources, although Richard’s decision to disinherit Bolingbroke has already been reached. This impression of volatility and capriciousness is clearly intended, as Shakespeare draws out the key historical

³⁷ Dawson and Yachnin, p. 50.

³⁸ Inevitably there is a greater emphasis on Gaunt in Holinshed as his *Chronicle* covers a much larger historical period than that of Hall who begins his *Union* with the Mowbray-Bolingbroke quarrel with which Shakespeare’s play also opens.

³⁹ Daniel, *Civil Wars*, 1. 75. All other quotations will be referred to parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁰ This correlates with the earlier assertion that it is Gaunt’s death that provides the nucleus for the play’s movement from history to tragedy as this provides the opportunity for Richard’s actions.

moments that hasten on the tragedy. Hall's history sees the disinheritance of Bolingbroke as the key decision that leads to Richard's deposition:⁴¹

for he notwithstanding y^e the duchy of Lancaster was to this duke Henry lauffully disceded, not onlye seized without ryght or title all the goodes of duke Ihon his parent, but also defrauded his heire of his lauffull inheritaunce, receauing the rentes and reuenues of al his patrimony, and geuing to other that which was not his, & distributed the dukes landes to his paresites and flattereing foloers. This facte was adiudged to al the nobiltee to bee vnlauffull, vniust & vngodlye, to depriue a man beyng banished out of y realme without deserte, without culpe, and without cause, of his inheritaunce and patrimony.⁴²

Richard's actions seem to be one of the play's critically defining events, not only illustrating Richard's avaricious nature but also accounting for Bolingbroke's return from France. Holinshed equally sees Bolingbroke's disinheritance as significant:

The death of this duke gaue occasion of increasing more hatred in the people of this realme toward the king, for he seized into his hands all the goods that belonged to him, and also receiued all the rents and reuenues of his lands which ought to haue descended vnto the duke of Hereford by lawfull inheritaunce, in reuoking his letters patents, which he had granted to him before, by vertue wherof he might make his attorneis generall to sue liuerie for him, of any maner of inheritances or possessions that might from thencefoorth fall vnto him, and that his homage might be respited, with making reasonable fine: whereby it was euident, that the king meant his vtter vndooing.⁴³

The links between history and the play's tragedy are made clear in York's warning to Richard, a warning that Hall anticipates: 'The death of this duke abbreuiated the life of king Richard':⁴⁴

⁴¹ Holinshed does not make Gaunt's death a preminent episode of his text, distilling it down to a paragraph, although it is still delineated as significant: 'In this meane time, the duke of Lancaster departed out of this life at the bishop of Elies place in Holborne, and lieth buried in the cathedrall church of saint Paule in London, on the northside of the high altar, by the ladie Blanch his first wife. The death of this duke gaue occasion of increasing more hatred in the people of this realme toward the king, for he seized into his hands all the goods that belonged to him, and also receiued all the rents and reuenues of his lands which ought to haue descended vnto the duke of Hereford by lawfull inheritaunce, in reuoking his letters patents, which he had granted to him before, by vertue wherof he might make his attorneis generall to sue liuerie for him, of any maner of inheritances or possessions that might from thencefoorth fall vnto him, and that his homage might be respited, with making reasonable fine: whereby it was euident, that the king meant his vtter vndooing'. The stylistic similarities between the texts are evident here. See Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 496.

⁴² Hall, 'An Introduccion'.

⁴³ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 496.

⁴⁴ Hall, 'An Introduccion'.

If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights,
 Call in the letters patent that he hath
 By his attorney-generals to sue
 His livery and deny his offered homage,
 You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
 You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts
 And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
 Which honour and allegiance cannot think
 (2.1.201-8).⁴⁵

Shakespeare's dramatic history, while grounded in the history of his sources, defines Richard as an unworthy king, but not as an out and out villain. The consistency in this narrative approach is continued by Bolingbroke's return to England.

III. Bolingbroke's Return

This interrelationship between Richard's presentation and the manipulation of the source materials is further indicated by Shakespeare's treatment of the reasons for Bolingbroke's return to England. Both Holinshed and Hall emphasise that Bolingbroke is invited to return to England for the good of the realm.⁴⁶ This is not an element of history that Shakespeare utilises. This is significant because the invitation gives Bolingbroke's return legitimacy, an authority supported by the list of those involved, that appears not to suit Shakespeare's dramatic purpose of Richard's eventual tragic reclamation. Holinshed comments that 'diuerse of the nobilitie, aswell prelates as other, and likewise manie of the magistrats and rulers of the cities, townes, and communitie, here in England', as critical to Bolingbroke's return.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ This warning is also referred to by Holinshed, noting that 'but namelie the duke of Yorke was therewith sore moued', vol. 6, p. 496.

⁴⁶ Daniel is ambiguous about Bolingbroke's motives for returning whether to reclaim only his lands or whether his intention was deposition. As Gillian Wright in 'Samuel Daniel's Use of Sources in 'The Civil Wars'', *Studies in Philology*, 101 (2004), 59-87 comments, 'The poem can be plausibly read both ways'. (p. 78).

⁴⁷ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 497. For Hall also, this event is equally significant, noting, as does Holinshed, that a delegation, including the 'reverent father', the Archbishop of Canterbury, is dispatched with sundry nobles to reinforce the letter's message: 'the graue persones of the nobilitie, the sage prelates of y^e clergy, the sad Magestrates & rulers of the cities, townes & communitie, perceiuyng daily more & more the realme to fall into ruine & desolacion (in maner irrecurable as long as kyng Richard either liued or reigned,) after long deliberacion, wrote into Fraunce to duke Henry, whom they nowe called (as he was in dede) duke of Lancastre and Herfford, solicityng and requiryng him with all diligent celeritie to conueigh himself into
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requiring him with all conuenient speed to conueie himselfe into England, promising him all their aid, power and assistance, if he expelling K. Richard, as a man not meet for the office he bare, would take vpon him the scepter, rule, and diademe of his natiue land and region.⁴⁸

Shakespeare condenses, not dramatises, Bolingbroke's return, reducing it to a discussion between Northumberland, Ross and Willoughby, emphasising again, Richard's flaws: 'The King is not himself but basely led/By flatterers' (2.1.241-2); 'Reproach and dissolution hang over him' (2.1.258). Northumberland during this scene reports that Bolingbroke is 'making hither with all due expedience' (2.1.287), with the complement of men indicated by Holinshed. Clearly, then, the idea of Bolingbroke being requested to return to save England is not a part of Shakespeare's dramatic vision. No specific reason is given in the play for his return, although he is cast as coming back to save the kingdom, as Northumberland, in 2.1 comments: 'If then, we shall shake off our slavish yoke/Imp out our drooping country's broken wing' (2.1.291-2). It is rather Bolingbroke himself who states the reason he came back from France: 'But as I come, I come for Lancaster' (2.3.114). This is a significant distortion of the sources. Although both Hall and Holinshed highlight the injustice of Richard's behaviour towards Bolingbroke, the idea of him returning to reclaim his birthright is mentioned only in passing by Holinshed: 'where he sware vnto those lords, that he would demand no more, but the lands that were to him descended by inheritance from his father, and in right of his wife'.⁴⁹ The chronicles' emphasis is rather on deposition, an idea that is definitively stated by both Hall and Holinshed as behind the invitation to return. This is also a clear example of the interrelationship between the two texts, as Holinshed's representation is an exact copy of that of Hall:

England, promisyng him all their ayde, power, and assistance, if he expellyng king Richard as a man not mete nor co~uenient for so princely an office and degree, would take vpon him the Scepter, rule, and Diademe of his natiue cou~trey and first nutritiue soyle'. See 'An Introduccion'.

⁴⁸ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 497.

⁴⁹ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 498.

promisyng him all their ayde, power, and assistance, if he expellyng king Richard as a man not mete nor couenient for so princely an office and degree, would take vpon him the Scepter, rule, and Diademe of his natiue cou~trey and first nutritiue soyle.⁵⁰

This deliberate shift from political to personal motive for Bolingbroke's return in *Richard II* sets the play's two main protagonists in opposition and is clearly an authorial choice. This equally contributes to the character of Bolingbroke as he is depicted by Shakespeare as more self-interested and consequently less of a saviour figure; as Yachnin and Dawson note, 'we are never quite sure whether his return to England is motivated initially by a wish to dethrone Richard or whether his desire for the crown develops as he becomes aware both of his own advantage and his rival's increasing powerlessness'.⁵¹ The ambiguity of Bolingbroke's motives allows the dramatic focus to remain almost entirely on Richard. Bolingbroke, comparatively, is practically silent.

The idea of the shift from history to tragedy is further underlined by the absence in the play of Richard's effective kidnap by Northumberland, recorded by Holinshed. Holinshed's Richard is tricked into accompanying Northumberland, an episode not mentioned by Hall and is, in effect, captured and held prisoner: 'And thus of force he was then constrained to go with the earle'.⁵² Shakespeare's Richard is not deceived by Northumberland and handed over as a captive to Bolingbroke, but rather he chooses to take refuge at Flint Castle and eventually it is his decision to surrender. Forker notes that 'By shifting focus from the Machiavellian strategy of the King's enemies to his own passive emotionalism, the dramatist makes Richard himself almost as much the architect of his own defeat as was Bolingbroke'.⁵³ This is entirely the point. Richard's defeat does lie in his passivity but it is also in this that he finds his emotional depth, allowing him to be recreated

⁵⁰ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 497.

⁵¹ Dawson and Yachnin, p. 72.

⁵² Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 500. It is not clear whether Bolingbroke has sanctioned Northumberland's plan to kidnap the King, Holinshed noting only that 'the duke with the aduice of his councill sent the earle of Northumberland unto the king'.

⁵³ Forker, p. 131.

as a tragic figure. In deviating from Holinshed and inventing Richard's passivity, Shakespeare portrays Bolingbroke as not devious. This dual effect highlights the presentation of the two main protagonists. Bolingbroke is not obviously seeking power and Richard is the architect of his own tragic destiny. In *Richard II*, if the tragedy is not necessarily provided by history, then it has to be provided by the tragic figure constructed around Richard. Hall appears to suggest the impetus for Shakespeare's scene of 3.3 at Flint Castle: 'whiche a man may call the dolorous Castell, because there king Richarde declined from his dignatie and lost the tpe of his glorie and preheminance'.⁵⁴ Both Holinshed and Hall also emphasise Bolingbroke's martial power.

To conclude, then, the treatment of the primary sources, notably Hall and Holinshed, is dictated by the dramatic imperative to create Richard as a tragic figure. History is consistently manipulated to this effect. The two significant events of Act One, the Mowbray-Bolingbroke quarrel and Gaunt's death and the confiscation of his lands – position Richard as willful, capricious, self-interested and volatile, but important other aspects of his source-based depiction, namely his debauchery and the issue of his sexuality, are glossed over or ignored. These manipulations set up his later redemption. He is bad, but not irredeemable. This idea is supported by the ambiguity in the play's attitude towards the deposition. Richard is consistently seen as making his own choices. Again, this sanctions the representation of his later self-martyrdom. It is Richard's choice to hand over his crown; he determines his own destiny – an alteration from the idea of predetermination seen in *Romeo and Juliet*. The following section will examine how Shakespeare alters the historical record to determine his tragic recreation.

Part Three. Richard as Tragic Martyr

Daniel's teleological poem, *The Civil Wars* is the significant influence on

⁵⁴ Hall, 'An Introduccion'.
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Shakespeare's re-creation of Richard as a tragic figure supported by the development of the Queen. Largely ignored by Holinshed and Hall, the influence for the extension of her character appears to stem from Daniel. This section then will predominantly focus on the importance of Daniel to Shakespeare's creation of Richard as a tragic figure, suggesting that the use of metadrama, seen initially through Richard's self-awareness at Barkloughly Castle, is a key factor in the generic idea of the play as a tragedy.

I. Creating the Tragic Impetus

Shakespeare's treatment of Holinshed on Richard's return from Ireland, who, as Dawson and Yachnin note, he follows 'almost step by step' in the creation of his history, clearly indicates his revisionist agenda in the creation of Richard as a tragic figure.⁵⁵ He not only condenses numerous episodes into one scene to increase the isolation and desperation of Richard's position, but in what is probably his most important departure from Holinshed, changes the history to allow Richard to choose to resign his crown. Richard's return from Ireland in 3.2 delineates the beginning of his re-creation from unworthy king to tragic figure, set up in opposition to the returning Bolingbroke. The groundwork for Richard's self-recognition begins in 3.2 with the collapse of his power. In Holinshed, Worcester does not desert Richard until it is very obvious that the King's position is untenable.⁵⁶

Sir Thomas Persie earle of Worcester, lord steward of the kings house, either being so commanded by the king, or else vpon displeasure (as some write) for that the king had proclaimed his brother the earle of Northumberland traitor, brake his white staffe, which is the representing signe and token of his office, and without delaie went to duke Henrie. When the kings seruants of household saw this (for it was doone before them all) they dispersed themselues, some into one countrie, and some into an other.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Dawson and Yachnin, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Both this incident and the timeline are absorbed and expanded from Hall, indicated by the similarity in detail, with references to the 'white staffe' as the 'ensigne and token of his office' inherited from the earlier text, and demonstrating the intertextuality of Shakespeare's inherited history.

⁵⁷ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 499.

Shakespeare, however, presents Richard as isolated from the minute he returns late from Ireland, as Salisbury suggests: ‘One day too late I fear me noble lord/Hath clouded all thy happy days on earth/O call back yesterday’ (3.2.67-9). In a further change, some of Shakespeare’s deserting ‘twelve thousand fighting men’, as in Holinshed, ‘scaled and departed awaie’,⁵⁸ choose instead to join Bolingbroke: ‘For all the Welshmen, hearing thou wert dead/Are gone to Bolingbroke, dispersed and fled’ (3.2.73-4). Holinshed also makes explicit that Richard’s delay in returning from Ireland due to bad weather is responsible for the rumour amongst his assembled troops that he had died: ‘But when they missed the king, there was a brute spread amongst them that he king was suerlie dead’.⁵⁹ Shakespeare includes this information in 2.4, the scene between Salisbury and ‘a Welsh Captain’: ‘’Tis thought the King is dead. We will not stay’ (2.4.7). Richard’s isolation is made absolute from this point onwards, but it is his understanding of his position that produces the pathos that is an innovation in Shakespeare’s exploration of the idea of tragedy.

The absence in *Richard II* of the episode in Holinshed regarding Richard’s kidnapping by Northumberland appears to demonstrate the intentionality behind Shakespeare’s attitude towards history. History is there to serve his dramatic purpose, indicating that, while to some extent each play is generically dictated by its subject matter, that subject matter is mutable and fluid. It is important for Shakespeare’s view of Richard’s deposition that it is self-inflicted and a personal choice. He chooses not to challenge Bolingbroke. Holinshed’s Richard, while not directly coerced, is encouraged to resign his crown through his abduction by Northumberland:

for the earle being there with his men, would not suffer him to returne,
as he gladdie would haue doone if he might; but being inclosed with

⁵⁸ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 499.

⁵⁹ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 499.

the sea on the one side, and the rocks on the other, hauing his aduersaries so néere at hand before him, he could not shift awaie by any meanes, for if he should haue fled backe, they might easilie haue ouertaken him, yer he could haue got out of their danger. And thus of force he was then constrained to go with the earle, who brought him to Rutland.⁶⁰

Shakespeare shapes his inherited history. It is clearly a part of his vision that Richard is not a victim of an ambush, but rather makes a conscious decision to retire his troops: ‘There I’ll pine away/A King, woe’s slave, shall kingly woe obey/That power I have, discharge and let them go’ (3.2.209-11). He resigns himself to what he perceives is his fate.

In a further departure from Hall and Holinshed, Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke at no point states that his intention is deposition. Hall, although his Bolingbroke takes an oath that ‘he should not dooe to Kyng Richard any bodelye harme’,⁶¹ Hall expresses that Bolingbroke’s intention is explicit: ‘and was clerely determynd to depose kynge Rycharde from his rule and dignitie, he proclaimed open warre agaynst hym and all his partakers fautours and frendes’.⁶² In Holinshed, the stated intention is ‘to bring the king to good gouernment’, confirmed by ‘where he sware unto those lords that he would demand no more but the land that were to him descended by inheritance from his father’.⁶³ There is much emphasis in Holinshed on Bolingbroke’s military power and support throughout the country and, regardless of the intention, Bolingbroke’s arrival and subsequent actions read like a planned military campaign. The emphasis on his support and raised armies lead to an understanding of Richard’s deposition.⁶⁴

II. Daniel and the Construction of Pathos

As already discussed, Edward Hall’s *The Union of the two noble and illustre*

⁶⁰ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 500.

⁶¹ Hall, ‘An Introduccion’.

⁶² Hall, ‘An Introduccion’.

⁶³ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 498.

⁶⁴ Hall’s focus is less on military strength and rather more on Richard’s mismanagement of the country, although he notes that the Duke had ‘a great companie’ and ‘he had assembled together a conuenient number of people for his purpose’. See ‘An Introduccion’.

families was a significant source for Shakespeare's depiction of history, but it is also, along with the image of Richard presented in Daniel, part of the source for Shakespeare's perspective on Richard as a tragic figure.⁶⁵ His suffering during his incarceration at Pomfret castle articulates the pathos that Shakespeare here introduces as a constituent of tragedy for the first time.⁶⁶ Also important is a new kind of soliloquy seen in 5.5, only the second soliloquy in the play where pathos combines with metadrama to delineate Richard's descent into tragic martyrdom.

Stephen Halliwell comments, 'It is not surprising that in the first major English document of neo-classical poetics, Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, [...] we find fragments of Aristotelian thought'.⁶⁷ As already suggested, Shakespeare's exploration of tragedy in the 1590s may have been influenced by Sidney's *A Defence of Poesy*. The incomplete notes that constitute Aristotle's *Poetics* comment in part that tragedy consists of three main strands of plot structure: reversal, recognition and pathos: 'Reversal, as indicated, is a complete swing in the direction of the action [...] Recognition, as the very name shows is a change from ignorance to knowledge [...] to the definitions of reversal and recognition we can add that of suffering'.⁶⁸ *Richard II* appears to fulfill all three criteria: from king to deposed monarch, from arrogance to humiliation and finally self-knowledge and suffering at Pomfret Castle. Reversal and recognition have both already been explored in Shakespeare's earlier tragedies of the period; the introduction of pathos is a new development.⁶⁹ Shakespeare's previous tragedies have not explored the

⁶⁵ Wright points out the difficulty in evaluating Daniel as 'rendered especially difficult by two factors; the various stages of revision [...] and the poet's use of numerous source documents' (p. 59). Wright further comments that 'Daniel's narrative is evidently influenced by Hall but does not exactly follow the precedent of the *Vnion*' (p. 66).

⁶⁶ Aristotle includes pathos as one of the three components of tragedy in his definition of the genre in *Poetics*. In *The Rhetoric* he expands upon this definition as the 'power of stirring the emotions of his hearers'. See Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. Edward P. J. Corbett (New York: Random House, 1954; repr. 1984), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1987), p. 18.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 10 and 11. pp. 42-43.

⁶⁹ Reversal, translated as 'a complete swing in the direction of the action', in *Romeo and Juliet* for example can be seen in Mercutio's accidental death under Romeo's arm. This event, then, precipitates the play into

personal aspect of the tragedy to anything like the same degree of introspection, although the beginnings of this exploration can perhaps be seen in Juliet's anxious soliloquy, the 'potion speech' of 4.3 of *Romeo and Juliet*.⁷⁰ This development, beginning with Richard's return from Ireland, is a distortion of history as the change in focus shifts from events to character, and from history to tragedy.

This less pejorative attitude towards Richard can be seen in both Hall's *Union* and Daniel's *Civil Wars*, suggesting that the idea that Richard as a tragic figure was not without precedent.⁷¹ At various times, Hall makes allowances for Richard, referring to 'the frailtee of his wanton youth then to the malice of his heart' and later, betraying his sympathy for the captured king, as 'pore king Richard ignorant of all this coniuracion kept in miserable captiuitie, knowyng nothyng but that he sawe in his chamber'.⁷² Daniel's teleological poem demonstrates both a more sympathetic attitude towards Richard and a decidedly ambiguous attitude towards Bolingbroke,⁷³ an attitude that reinforces his compassion towards Richard. Early allowances are made for Richard's youth; he claims that the 'scepter' 'was left vnto a Child' (*Civil Wars*, 1.26), a claim repeated later: 'had left this child' (*Civil Wars*, 1.29). Richard's growing sense of isolation is emphasised: 'O *Maiestie* left naked all alone' (*Civil Wars*, 2.5), culminating in

tragedy. Romeo's intentions towards Tybalt were reconciliatory, but the result of his involvement was tragedy. Recognition, defined by Stephen Halliwell in *Aristotle's Poetics* as 'the acquisition of knowledge which concerns the success or failure of the characters [...] one of the hinges on which the change in fortune in a complex tragedy turns'. See pp. 204-5. *Romeo and Juliet* involves Friar Laurence's abortive plot to smuggle Juliet away from Verona. The failure of Friar John to deliver Friar Laurence's letter to Romeo results in his ignorance about the plan to fake Juliet's death and reunite the lovers. His return to Verona expedites the play's final tragedies.

⁷⁰ This speech illustrates, but does not examine in depth, Juliet's fears prior to taking Friar Laurence's potion.

⁷¹ Kamps refers to Hall's 'providential pro-Tudor historical vision'. See Kamps, p. 4. Holinshed at times does express sympathy for Richard's predicament, notably after Richard's deposition when he comments: 'But if I may boldlie saie what I thinke: he was a Prince and most unthankfullie used of his subjects' (vol. 6, p. 508).

⁷² Hall, 'The firste yere of The vnquiete tyme of Kyng Henry the fourthe'.

⁷³ Prevailing academic consensus is that Daniel's poem precedes *Richard II*, a consensus that, if accepted, as Wright comments, 'the ambiguity of Daniel's Bolingbroke is sufficiently well-established in the 1595 edition that [...] *The Civil Wars* must be seen as the decisive source for this memorable aspect of Shakespeare's dramaturgy'. See Wright, (p. 86).

‘Thyselfe of all, besides thyselfe, bereft’ (*Civil Wars*, 2.5). Daniel compares Richard to Actaeon, set upon by his own hounds: ‘And he who late was feard is set upon/And by his own Acteon-like pursude’ (*Civil Wars*, 2.12). Richard’s growing self-awareness is also highlighted in Daniel, something that Shakespeare subsequently exploits in his re-creation of Richard as a tragic figure: ‘Amazed standes to note how great a wracke /Of faith his riot caused, what mortall spight/The beare him’ (*Civil Wars*, 2.10).

Carlisle’s prophetic speech of 4.1 also appears to have its equivalent in Daniel:

Never shall this poore breath of mine consent
That he that two and twentie yeeres hath raignd
As lawful Lord and King by iust descent
Should here bu iudg’d, vnheard, and vnarraigned;
By Subiects too (Iudges incompetent
To iudge their King vnlawfully detaind)
(*Civil Wars*, 3.22).

In Shakespeare’s play, there is a clear correlation in the sentiment expressed by the bishop: ‘What subject can give sentence on a king/And who sits here that is not Richard’s subject?’ (4.1.122-3). This supports Richard’s own belief in the ‘divine right of kings’ that places the king firmly at the top of the earthly order, subsequently dramatically undermined by Bolingbroke’s actions.⁷⁴

Although Daniel and Hall are explicit in their conclusion of Richard as a victim of circumstance, Shakespeare deviates from his source material in his creation of Richard as a tragic figure. Hall comments:

What trust is in this worlde, what suretie man hath of his life, & what constancie is in the mutable comonaltie, all men maie apparantly perceiue by the ruyne of this noble prince, whiche beeyng an vndubitate nobilitee, obeyed and worshipped of the comon people, was sodainly disceiued by them whiche he moste trusted, betrayed by them whom he had preferred, & slain by them whom he had brought

⁷⁴ The essential issue of Elizabethan kingship is the schism between the medieval notion of divine right kingship and contractual theory, that kingship was a contract made between the king and his commons, that the king was merely the chief member of the politic body and that as such, kings were ordained for the people and consequently answerable to them. See William C. Carroll, ‘Theories of Kingship in Shakespeare’s England’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works: The Histories*, pp. 125-145 for a more complete understanding of the debate.

vp and nourished.⁷⁵

Although this idea is expressed in the deposition scene: ‘Yet well I remember/The favours of these men. Were they not mine?/Did they not sometime cry ‘All hail’ to me?’ (4.1.168-170), Shakespeare chooses not to emphasise it. Rather, Richard’s tragedy is both self-inflicted and self-acknowledged. He does not look for excuses. It is in his passive acceptance of his situation that he discovers his tragic stature: ‘I wasted time, and now Time doth waste me’ (5.5.49). Richard’s final soliloquy will be discussed fully later, but it is worth noting here that, while the impetus for the position of Richard as a tragic figure is provided by Hall and Daniel, Shakespeare’s rejection of excuses for his predicament indicates that his dramatic reconstruction is a specific authorial choice. Richard’s tragic status ultimately lies in his own self-discovery rather than in his treatment by other people.

III. Shakespeare’s Queen

Part of Shakespeare’s answer to the issue of the components of tragedy and what propels the play from history into an increasingly tragic focus, is to establish Richard as a more rounded figure by expanding the character of the Queen. As a character, she is largely ignored by Holinshed and Hall, although Holinshed mentions her coronation in passing: ‘The morow after she was conueied to Westminster with all the honor that might be deuised, and finallie there crowned queene vpon sundaie being then the seauenth of Ianuarie’.⁷⁶ It is again in Daniel that Shakespeare finds the inspiration for the image of the grieving Queen, developing the image into a significant, though still insubstantial, figure. In an important change from his primary source, Shakespeare increases both her age and her role – significant because her relationship with Richard displays a more sympathetic aspect of the king while her distress increases audience sympathy for

⁷⁵ Hall, ‘The first yere’.

⁷⁶ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 487.

her and, by default, Richard.⁷⁷ Although she remains somewhat undefined – she is present but largely silent through Richard’s confrontation with Gaunt, for example – she exists to demonstrate another side to Richard, and her continual sense of unease and foreboding is part of the play’s movement towards tragedy. Yachnin and Dawson comment that ‘Her inward, nearly inexpressible sorrow is therefore a form of prophetic knowledge’.⁷⁸ This focus is linked by the Queen with the idea of Fortune, ‘Some unborn sorrow, ripe in Fortune’s womb/Is coming towards me’ (2.2.10-11), and this connection is part of Shakespeare’s approach to the place of fate in tragedy explored in the play. Fate has developed from the external force described in *Romeo and Juliet* and here is a part of the identification of character. Fate has become internalised: ‘my inward soul/persuades me it is otherwise’ (2.2.28-9); ‘But what it is, that is not yet known what/I cannot name. ‘Tis nameless woe I wot’ (2.2.39-40). Described as ‘too much sad’ (2.2.1), her sense of apprehension and her grief for Richard begins the substantiation of the emotional depths that Richard subsequently achieves.

In this context, the invented garden scene of 3.4 works on two levels. Firstly, it suggests an allegorical parallel – the garden is as disordered as the state – but it also allows for the Queen as a further conduit for exploiting the pathos from the situation. She is kept in the dark about the true desperation of Richard’s position, and hears from a third party: ‘Why dost thou say King Richard is deposed?’ (3.4.77). Her involvement invites audience sympathy and humanises the events of the play: ‘And am I the last that knows it’ (3.4.94). Shakespeare’s protean approach, as already suggested, is to adapt the information from the sources to suit his dramatic purpose. Two scenes in *Richard II* are developed out of Daniel’s

⁷⁷ Gurr notes that in the expanded 1609 version of his poem, Daniel apologises for creating a figure ‘not suiting her passion to her yeares’. See Gurr, ‘Introduction’, p. 11. Holinshed, on first mentioning her, says that she was only eight years old when the marriage was agreed: ‘The cause of their going ouer, was to intreat of a marriage to be had betwixt him, and the ladie Isabell, daughter to the French king, she being as then not past eight yeares of age’. See Holinshed, vol.6, p. 485.

⁷⁸ Yachnin and Dawson, p. 55.

account of the Queen's witnessing Richard's humiliating entry into London. In Daniel, this sequence comes before Richard's deposition, but Shakespeare, changing history, transposes her emotion into the expressions of love between the characters at the farewell after Richard's deposition. Daniel's Queen expresses their union, 'For without me, thou art not all thou art' (*Civil Wars*, 2.91), an idea that dominates their farewell of 5.1: 'And must we be divided? Must we part?' (5.1.81); 'So two together weeping make one woe' (5.1.86). This fictionalised farewell is a part of Richard's creation as a tragic figure, underlining his emotional depths:

Learn, good soul
 To think our former state a happy dream
 From which awaked, the truth of what we are
 Shows us but this
 (5.1.17-20).

The Queen's comments on the change in Richard, again inspired by Daniel, 'To come a captive that wentst out a King' (*Civil Wars*, 2.88), suggest the validity of this different aspect of Richard: 'What is my Richard both in shape and mind/Transformed and weakened?' (5.1.26-27). The creation of a very real emotional marriage inspired by *The Second Book of the Civil Wars* exploits the tragic nature of the situation as well as allowing Richard's self-reflexive response, and forms part of Shakespeare's development of history and tragedy: 'Tell thou the lamentable tale of me/And send the hearers weeping to their beds' (5.1.44). Richard's image of the Queen being returned again to France is powerful, emphasised by the shift into rhyming couplets: 'My wife to France, from whence set forth in pomp/She came adorned hither like sweet May/Sent back like Hallowmas or short'st of day' (5.1.78-80). The stichomythic exchange following underlines the equality and balance in the relationship as well as the overriding focus on the emotion of the parting:

Queen: And must we be divided? Must we part?
 Richard: Ay, hand from hand my love and heart from heart

(5.1.81-82).⁷⁹

Shakespeare's transposition of Daniel's scene to take place after the deposition establishes that Richard has indeed lost everything. There is a correlation between the loss of his kingdom and the loss of his wife, an idea that Richard acknowledges: 'Doubly divorced! Bad men, you violate/A twofold marriage, 'twixt my crown and me/And then betwixt me and my married wife' (5.1.71-3).

The introduction of metadrama to the scene both creates a consistent theme, recollecting, as it does, Richard's metadramatic comments in 3.2, and is also a part of the idea of history. Richard acknowledges that his story is just that, a story:

In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages long ago betid.
And ere thou bid good night, to quite their griefs,
Tell thou the lamentable tale of me
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.
(5.1.40-5).

Richard sees that his story is a part of a wider narrative, an idea that Alison Findlay calls an 'example of his deliberate strategy to transform present impotence into historical significance'.⁸⁰ But he also understands that his is a tragic narrative, 'Tell thou the lamentable tale of me' (5.1.44), again demonstrative of the synthesis of tragedy and history.

Shakespeare, as already noted, does not set out to write an historically accurate account of Richard's reign. As Nigel Saul points out, he ignores 'everything that happened between the King's coronation and 1397. The Peasant's Revolt, the Appellant crisis, the pacification with Ireland and the making of peace

⁷⁹ The impetus for this image of divided union that dominates the scene again stems from Daniel: 'yet I will take thy part/I doo remaine the same, vnder thy hand/Thou still dost rule the kingdome of my hart' (*Civil Wars*, 2.85).

⁸⁰ Alison Findlay, 'Good sometimes Queen: *Richard II*, Mary Stuart and the Poetics of Queenship', in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, eds. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 67-82 (p. 68).
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with France: these are all omitted'.⁸¹ Shakespeare was after dramatic, rather than historical truth, creating a meta-text, with Richard as the dramatist, to construct an alternative view of history, by Richard's re-writing himself as a tragic figure. The idea of metadrama and meta-textuality as part of the tragic imperative will be discussed fully in the following section.

In conclusion, Shakespeare's revisionist agenda can clearly be seen in his creation of Richard's tragedy. His approach to his sources is selective, adapting what suits his dramatic purpose but equally rejecting excuses for Richard's behaviour. The introduction of pathos is a significant innovation, reflected by the increasing attention to the idea of metadrama as part of his developing tragic conception.

Part Four. Metadrama, Meta-text and the Language of Tragedy

As I have suggested, the central issue at the heart of *Richard II* is in the tension between history and tragedy. This tension is delineated by the play's divisions, where the first two acts focus on the establishment of Richard as a weak-willed, vainglorious king predominantly using actual historical incident, followed by the play's shift into character-driven tragedy, although these divisions are illustrative rather than absolutes. This comparative separation of the two genres is further marked by the change in language. *Richard II*, written entirely in verse, delineates Richard's role as king through formal rhetoric, but then takes on a different set of images and concerns reflected in the breakdown of language. The following section examines the place of metadrama as an instrumental element in the evolving tragic archetype, considering first Richard's return from Ireland where the metadramatic conceit is introduced and then Richard's soliloquy of 5.5 while imprisoned at Pomfret Castle, before subsequently considering the shift towards a tragic language.

⁸¹ Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 4.
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I. Metadrama, Meta-text and Barkloughly Castle

Richard's arrival at Barkloughly Castle in 3.2 is the transitional scene from history to tragedy, illustrated by Richard's changing attitude to the 'care' of kingship.

Aware of his audience from the scene's beginning, 'Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords' (3.2.23), Richard uses theatrical metaphors to indicate his growing understanding of the realities of his position. His meditation on the nature of kingship, 'And tell sad stories of the death of kings' (3.2.156), proceeds to personify Death, allegorising 'him' as a court jester character: 'And there the antic sits' (3.2.162). The metadramatic nature of this trope is continued with, 'Allowing him a breath, a little scene' (3.2.164). He is creating a meta-text, casting himself as both playwright and tragic 'hero'. On his return from Ireland, Richard prophesies the subsequent trajectory of the play: 'Let's talk of graves and worms and epitaphs' (3.2.145). To use Forker's phrase, he 'invites the worst before it actually happens'.⁸²

It is at Barkloughly Castle that Richard begins to write his own tragedy, casting himself as an author-king, employing the imagery of writing, 'Make dust our paper' (3.2.145); 'Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth' (3.2.146). However, history still informs his tragic model:

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings -
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed -
All murdered.

(3.2.155-160).

The use of anaphora in Richard's rhetoric, in the repetition of 'some', has the effect not only of emphasis but also suggests the frequency of kings meeting unnatural ends. Richard's sense of foreboding is illustrated in his 'For what can we bequeath/Save our deposed bodies to the ground' (3.2.149-50). This semantic

⁸² 3.2.150n.

cohesion presents a link between deposition and death, made explicit by ‘Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed’ (3.2.158). The physical movement implied in ‘For God’s sake let us sit upon the ground’ reinforces the language, for, as Forker notes, ‘such sitting was also a sign of mourning’.⁸³ This leveling of the body of the king coincides with his subsequent temporary abandonment of his adherence to the idea of divine right rule: ‘For you have but mistook me all this while/I live with bread like you, feel want/Taste grief, need friends’ (3.2.174-6). Both literally and figuratively, he accepts his expected demotion.

This meta-textual inference is completed in the deposition scene of 4.1, where Richard makes the analogy complete. Seemingly accepting Northumberland’s insistence on reading the thirty-three articles detailing the accusations made against him, Richard includes himself as part of the ‘book’ of his transgressions: ‘I’ll read enough/When I do see the very book indeed/Where all my sins are writ, and that’s myself’ (4.1.273-5). This apparent acceptance is immediately undermined by Richard shattering the mirror in which his sins are reflected: ‘No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath Sorrow struck/So many blows upon this face of mine/And made no deeper wounds?’ (4.1.277-9). The iconography is explicit. Richard looks to read his sorrows in his face: ‘Give me that glass and therein will I read’ (4.1.276). Richard’s action in breaking the glass articulates the meta-textual image. His inner grief, which he claims is not exposed on his face, is made visible by his action: ‘As brittle as the glory is the face/For there it is cracked in an hundred shivers’ (4.1.288-9). Richard further acknowledges the metatheatrical implications of his action: ‘Mark, silent King, the moral of this sport/How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face’ (4.1.290-1). This is self-conscious and ironic. Richard accepts that the deposition scene is a performance, underlined by his stage management of the situation. It is he who is in control, not

⁸³ 3.2.155n.

Bolingbroke, the 'silent' King.

There is a progressive logic to Richard's emotionally distancing himself from his crown that marks the beginning of the play's generic shift. The intersection of history and tragedy is encapsulated in the use of the phrase 'hollow crown'. Richard self-consciously includes himself in his litany of 'the death of kings'. There is a consistency between the idea of tragic history as a story, 'And tell sad stories of the death of kings' (3.2.156), and his insistence that he has written himself into the tradition of oral history in his instructions to his Queen during their parting: 'Tell thou the lamentable tale of me/And send the hearers weeping to their beds' (5.1.44-5). At Barkloughly Castle, Richard anticipates not only his downfall but also the fictionalisation of his deposition, as well as his own entry into the catalogue of tragic kings.

Registered through the change of use in his personal pronoun, from 'we' in 2.1 to 'I' by 3.2, the scene at Barkloughly Castle tracks his altering perspective through initial attempts to persuade himself of his majesty, 'Am I not king?' (3.2.83), and ending with his self-acceptance that he is part of a parade of disenfranchised monarchs, 'Save our deposed bodies to the ground' (3.2.150). His use of the personal pronoun fluctuates throughout the scene, indicating his changing – and changeable – position. Richard's initial reliance on the idea of divine right kingship, an idea that places the king firmly at the top of the earthly order, is shaken by Bolingbroke's actions: 'The breath of worldly men cannot depose/The deputy elected by the Lord' (3.2.56-7). His response to the questions that Bolingbroke's actions ask of his belief in his right to reign propels him towards his tragic end.

There are also distinct links between Richard's speech in 3.2, the beginning of his self-creation as a tragic figure, and his soliloquy while imprisoned at Pomfret castle in 5.2. In 3.2, Richard comments, 'As if this flesh which walls about our

life/Was brass impregnable' (3.2.167-8). The use of architectural metaphor is mirrored in 5.2: 'May tear a passage through the flinty ribs/Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls' (5.5.20-1). The metadramatic idea, correlating kingship as theatrical character, is also repeated: 'To monarchize, be feared and kill with looks' (3.2.165); 'Thus play I in one person many people' (5.5.31). If Barkloughly Castle delineates the beginning of Richard's association of the role of the king with inevitable tragedy, 'and farewell king!' (3.2.170), then Pomfret Castle, immediately before his murder, is the completion. Richard's speeches in this scene define the play's trajectory towards his deposition, imprisonment and death. Although he claims that 'This age fit of fear is overblown' (3.2.190), his reality is that it is in this scene that he refashions himself as a self-fulfilling prophecy, inevitably moving towards his deposition and death even as the play moves ever more towards tragedy from history.

II. Pomfret Castle and Richard's Soliloquy

Richard's isolation in Pomfret castle strengthens the image of him as a tragic martyr. His soliloquy unites the primary themes of the play – kingship, ideas of time, death and metadrama.⁸⁴ The speech opens with Richard making explicit the previously implied analogy between himself as a character and the idea of him as architect of his own history. He has no audience in prison, so has to 'people this little world' (5.5.9), and provide his own. This metadramatic conceit is consistent with his later assertion, 'Thus play I in one person many people' (5.5.31), and the earlier theatrical analogies of 3.2. Richard has written his own 'sad story'; the

⁸⁴ Although this soliloquy represents Richard as the 'private' man at his most vulnerable, its genesis is suggested in Daniel's poem. Daniel's Richard spends his last day musing on his situation: 'The morning of that day, which was his last/After a wearie rest rysing to paine/Out at a little grate his eyes he cast/ Vpon those bordering hils, and open Plaine/And viewes the towne, and sees how people past/Where others libertie, makes him complaine/The more his owne, and grieues his soule the more/Conferring captiue-Crownes, with freedome poore' (*Civil Wars*, 3.64). It is worth noting that the inspiration for the play's final movement still seems to have its roots in Shakespeare's sources, albeit in the poetically dramatised version of Richard's history. Daniel, as much as Shakespeare, is aware of his own narrative. Writing of the 'wretch' who killed Richard he comments: 'It is because I will not here defile/My vnstained verse, with his opprobrious name/And grace him so' (*Civil Wars*, 3.60).

prison scene and his subsequent murder are its climax. The inclusion of biblical references adds to the self-identification of Richard with the martyrdom of Christ in 3.2 with his reference to Bushy, Bagot and Green as ‘Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas!’ (3.2.132).

Richard’s self-delineation as a tragic figure is developed further by his awareness of language in this soliloquy. His self-dramatisation is made explicit as he equates himself as an author, although not explicitly a playwright, peopling his own ‘little world’ with words and thoughts. Richard becomes the architect of his own world – ‘Yet I’ll hammer’t it out’ (5.5.5). Losing his title, for Richard, is the loss of everything – including language: ‘I cannot do it’ (5.5.5) – illustrates his struggle to sustain the conceit. The loss of his crown dictates the loss of his world: the soliloquy is his attempt to regain some command over both. He acknowledges this: ‘I have been studying how I may compare/This prison where I live unto the world’ (5.5.1-2). His method of control is to turn again to the linguistic conceits that sustained him before his deposition, although, as already noted, he struggles to maintain the logic. This speech moves from one image to another in search of logic and order: ‘How sour sweet music is/When time is broke and no proportion kept!/So is it in the music of men’s lives’ (5.5.42-4). The antithesis of ‘sour sweet’ and the extended metaphysical association of musical time to life reiterate Richard’s renewed attempt to make sense of things through images and parallels.

The conceptual use of language encapsulates the dilemma that he is facing. He seeks to regain authority through language while at the same time being well aware of the impossibility of this attempt at substantiation. Language consequently is both his friend and enemy. He can create ‘this little world’ (5.5.9), but it is mimetic and ‘all-hating’ (5.5.66). His reality is ‘my ragged prison walls’ (5.5.21). His continuing focus on what he has lost is illustrated in the repeated references to Bolingbroke: ‘Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke’ (5.5.37), ‘But my

time/Runs posting on Bolingbroke's proud joy' (5.5.58-59). His only conclusion is the release that death brings: 'But whate'er I be/Nor I nor any man that but man is/With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased/With being nothing' (5.5.39-41). The language used to reach this conclusion emphasises Richard as an actor – the repetition of 'man' and the interplay between 'nothing shall be pleased ... with being nothing' is dramatic and encapsulates Richard's dilemma. He has relied on the authority of language throughout the play, but it is also the root cause of his problems: 'O God, O God, that e'er this tongue of mine/That laid the sentence of dread banishment/On yon proud man should take it off again' (3.3.133-5). Words defined his deposition: 'Ay no. No, ay. For I must nothing be/Therefore no, 'no', for I resign to thee' (4.1.201-2). Now words and word play define his descent into nothingness: 'Then am I kinged again and by and by/Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke/And straight am nothing' (5.5.35-37). The use of opposites, 'kinged again', 'unkinged' is typical of the word play that defines Richard's use of language, a technique that underlines his role as player-dramatist.

III. The Language of Tragedy

The opening of *Richard II* identifies Richard's status as king through the use of formal rhetoric. He speaks in the third person: 'We thank you both. Yet one but flatters us' (1.1.25). By the time of his return from Ireland, Richard is speaking in the first person, a linguistic alteration that largely becomes consistent: 'I weep with joy' (3.2.4). The ritualistic language between Mowbray and Bolingbroke in the opening scene indicates the ceremonial nature of their exchange, reinforcing the idea of courtly formality, culminating in the repeated use of rhyming couplets involving Richard and Gaunt, as well as Mowbray and Bolingbroke. As Gurr points out, this exchange consists of twenty-one consecutive couplets.⁸⁵ Rhyming couplets indicate the attempt to repress strong emotional feeling, illustrated by the

⁸⁵ Gurr, p. 32.

homophones Mowbray uses, while retaining some sense of ceremonial decorum. Bolingbroke's personification of 'Shame' continues the same sense of ceremony:

Mowbray: I am disgraced, impeached and baffled here
Pierced to the soul with Slander's venom'd spear [...]
Bolingbroke: And spit it bleeding in his high disgrace
Where Shame doth harbor, even in Mowbray's face
(1.1.170-195).

The play's linguistic focus emphasises the abstraction between words and the actual meaning, between the aristocratic and the personal, exemplified in the deposition scene in the word play that Richard engages in over the handing over of his throne. Richard uses a variety of personal pronouns for emphasis:

My crown I am, but still my griefs are mine
You may my glory and my state depose
But not my griefs, still I am king of those
(4.1.191-3).

The corollary between nomenclature and identity that the repetition of 'my' and 'mine' indicates is illustrated by Bolingbroke's titular change from 'Hereford', through 'Lancaster' and finally to 'King', underlined by the emphasis placed by Richard on his 'unking': 'God save King Henry unkinged Richard says/And send him many years of sunshine days' (4.1.220-1). As the play progresses, there is a pattern between Richard losing titles while Bolingbroke gains them. The use of language shifts from the formal language of the court and combat to the personal. The value Richard places on himself is entirely based on his role as king. Without this, Richard's perception of himself is as invisible.⁸⁶ This is reflected in his reaction to Northumberland on being addressed as 'My Lord'. The repetition of 'No' underlines the depth of feeling: 'No Lord of thine, thou haught insulting man/Nor no man's lord! I have no name, no title' (4.1.254-5).

There is a linguistic space between Richard's understanding of the role of king – that of a God's anointed monarch – and that of Bolingbroke and the wider

⁸⁶ This idea is fully articulated when Richard smashes the mirror in 4.1.
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court. Richard, at Barkloughly Castle, claims: ‘Not all the water in the rude rough sea/Can wash the balm off from an anointed king’ (3.2.54-55).

Northumberland, in direct contrast, equates Richard’s ‘bad’ kingship with the need for deposition, making the point that it is the ‘souls of men’ who hold the final authority:

Committed by your person and your followers
Against the state and profit of this land,
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily deposed.
(4.1.224-7).

This difference in the idea of kingship, divine right versus a contract between king and subject, is a further example of the multiple dualities within the play.

As Richard begins to lose his grip on the crown, so language becomes increasingly unstable, and the reliance on metaphor increases, another demarcation of the movement from history towards tragedy. This shift begins with the pivotal scene at Barkloughly Castle. Rather than responding to reports of Bolingbroke’s military power, Richard positions himself as a tragic figure reflected in the contrasting imagery that is employed. At the beginning of the scene, he posits himself as a sun-king, with Bolingbroke cast in the shadows, the employment of the idea of ‘throne’ reiterating his role as king:

So, when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,
Who all the while hath revelled in the night
Whilst we were wandr’ing with the Antipodes,
Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,
Not able to endure the sight of day.
(3.2.47-52).

Richard’s final couplet in this scene shows how far he has fallen. His imagery deserts him, along with his supporters, and he relies again on a rhyming couplet to contain his emotion: ‘Let them hence away/From Richard’s night to Bolingbroke’s fair day’ (3.2.217-18). This reversal in imagery shows that, linguistically, Richard resigns the crown even before he engages with Bolingbroke.

There are two clear instances of linguistic space between words and action in the play. Richard manages to give up his crown without it being definitively demanded of him, ‘Your own is yours and I am yours and all’ (3.3.197), and Bolingbroke manages to ask for Richard’s murder without ever being shown to have articulated it: ‘Didst not thou mark the King, what words he spake/Have I no friend will rid me of this loving fear?/Was it not so?’ (5.4.1-3). This is the breakdown between words and meaning. Bolingbroke’s request is not staged, but is instead reported by Exton. There is consistent opposition throughout the play between Richard’s loquaciousness and Bolingbroke’s relative silence, cementing the idea of them as deliberately contrasting figures.⁸⁷ Bolingbroke’s unarticulated – or at least unstaged – desire for Richard’s death is the epitome of the discrepancy (as Bolingbroke later claims) between what is said, and what is heard.

The difference that is the gap between language and interpretation is begun in 3.3 with the ‘request’ for Richard’s deposition. Northumberland acts as Bolingbroke’s intermediary, further underlining Bolingbroke’s predominantly silent role: ‘His coming hither hath no further scope/Than for his lineal royalties’ (3.3.112-3). The language Northumberland uses is ceremonial, standing on formality, ‘doth humbly kiss thy hand’ (3.3.104), ‘one most gracious head’ (3.3.108), ‘faithful service of your majesty’ (3.3.118). There is, however, a gap between Northumberland’s apparently respectful words and Richard’s interpretation of their meaning, commented on by Richard: ‘We do debase ourselves, cousin, do we not?/To look so poorly and to speak so fair’ (3.3.127-8). Aumerle makes the point about the importance of language: ‘Let’s fight with gentle words’ (3.3.131). However, rather than fight, Richard acknowledges the mistakes

⁸⁷ Although Calderwood suggests that ‘verbal power in the play transfers from Richard to Bolingbroke’, this reading does not take into account either Bolingbroke’s silent request or the metaphor-laden soliloquy of Richard in prison. See Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, p. 171.

that his words have previously made: ‘O God O God that e’er this tongue of mine/That laid the sentence of dread banishment/On yon proud man should take it off again’ (3.3.133-5). Richard’s agitation is illustrated by his subsequent self-questioning. He reverts to speaking in the third person at the point at which he relinquishes his crown, also using repetition as if to underline his fading authority: ‘What must the King do now? Must he submit?/The King shall do it. Must he be deposed?/The King shall be contented’ (3.3.143-5).⁸⁸

The physical imagery of the deposition scene of 4.1 is a further indication of the ongoing divorce between words and meanings. Richard, although still employing poetical imagery, relies increasingly on metaphor. His conceit of the two buckets rising and falling is the verbal embodiment of the *de casibus* tradition of the fall of kings.⁸⁹ The bucket image provides a link with the idea of Richard and Bolingbrooke being weighed that the gardener employs in 3.4, when he speaks of ‘Their fortunes both are weighed’ (3.4.83). Richard extends this metaphor, creating an allegory of kingship, with the physical object of the crown between the two scales:

Now is this golden crown like a deep well
That owes two buckets, filling one another,
The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen and full of water.
That bucket down and full of tears am I
Drinking my griefs while you mount up on high.
(4.1.184-9).

⁸⁸ The discrepancy between words and their meaning is intrinsic to the idea of the play as an increasingly political one with the inclusion of the ‘parliament sceane’ of Q4. The difference between the idea of ‘the deposing of King Richard’ and ‘the parliament sceane’, both terms employed in Q4’s title, is interesting as it raises questions of abdication versus deposition. Deposition has far stronger political connotations and ramifications for the Tudor claim to succession, and yet Bolingbrooke never actually seizes Richard’s crown. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘depose, in the sense of ‘remove from office or authority, especially dethrone’ had been in common usage in England from 1150 onwards. The term was certainly in common use during the later years of Elizabeth’s reign, frequently appearing in anti-Elizabeth, pro-Catholic pamphlets, calling for Elizabeth’s deposition. See William Allen in his 1588 pamphlet, *An Admonition to the Nobility and people of England and Ireland* where he uses the term six times, culminating in calling for Elizabeth to be deposed.

⁸⁹ The ‘*de casibus*’ tradition, based on Boccaccio’s *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, written 1355-1374, a work of 56 biographies of the fall of famous people, spawned a literary tradition epitomised in England by John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (1438) and *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559). See, for example, Rebecca Bushnell, ‘The Fall of Princes: The Classical and Medieval Roots of English Renaissance Tragedy’, in *A Companion to Tragedy*, pp. 289-306.

This metaphor is symbolic of the power struggle within the play, and furthers the pattern of doubling that runs throughout. Richard equates his divine right kingship as the heavier burden, his is the weightier bucket, in contrast to the view espoused by the gardener, who sees in Richard's scale, 'nothing but himself/And some few vanities that make him light' (3.4.85-6). For the gardener, the heavier scale symbolised the weight of English nobility supporting Bolingbroke; for Richard, Bolingbroke's bucket lacks the weight of legitimacy.

The idea of doubling and perspective is continued in the physical metaphor of the mirror that Richard demands in the deposition scene. A clear reference to the *Mirror for Magistrates*, the mirror, as Graham Holderness notes, was also 'one of the key images of history'.⁹⁰ That Richard uses this image, 'That it may show me what a face I have' (4.1.266), to cement the idea of his own personal tragedy is reinforced by his transference of the sun-king iconography from himself to Bolingbroke: 'Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke' (4.1.261). This is a significant reversal from Richard's earlier 'Down down I come, like glist'ring Phaeton' (3.3.178), and underlines Richard's sense of personal tragedy. He stresses the effect of his care, as well as the importance of his title: 'Alack the heavy day/That I have worn so many winter's out/And know not now what name to call myself' (4.1.257-9). As his title is diminished, so language becomes redundant.

The build-up to the striking visual image of Richard smashing the mirror highlights the connection of Richard's history to his unfolding tragic story. He uses the emblem of the mirror to understand how history has brought him to this position. He refers to the past: 'Was this face the face/That every day under his

⁹⁰ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 204. Holderness refers to *The Theatre of God's Judgements*, written in 1597 by Thomas Beard, to make the point that this idea was contemporary to Shakespeare's play: 'Hence it is that Historie is termed of the auncient Philosophers, the ...looking glasse of man's life'.

household roof/Did keep ten thousand men?’ (4.1.281-3).⁹¹ Richard’s mirror reflects the opposite of his feelings; it is a distortion, not a true depiction. As he points out, his woes are not written in his face: ‘Hath Sorrow struck/So Many blows upon this face of mine/But made no deeper wounds?’ (4.1.277-279). The mirror forces him to face certain realities of his reign; he refers to ‘flatterers’ (4.1.306) and ‘follies’ (4.1.285). This is about the movement from history to tragedy. Richard’s mirror does not ‘hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature’ (*Hamlet* 3.2.20), as Hamlet encourages the players to reflect truth in drama. There is a distortion between truth and Richard’s reflection. Richard’s shattering of his own image is the physical culmination of this idea, delineated by the repetition of brittle: ‘A brittle glory shineth in this face/As brittle as the glory is the face’ (4.1.287-8). With the shattering of the glass, Richard highlights the play’s differentiation between the two kings: Richard, eloquent, Bolingbroke virtually silent, highlighted by Richard, ‘Mark, silent King’ (4.1.290). The image is tragic, stressing the fragile world of the king.

IV. The Deposition Scene

The deposition scene - as Gurr notes an invented scene - epitomises Shakespeare’s generic agenda.⁹² Shakespeare’s alterations to his sources all move away from the understood ‘history’ to present Richard as a tragic figure. He reorders events to augment Richard’s tragedy, beginning before the actual sequence of the deposition. Shakespeare’s depiction of Richard’s entry into London is markedly different from that of Holinshed, with Shakespeare altering Holinshed’s timeline.⁹³ Holinshed suggests that Bolingbroke’s custody of Richard is almost to protect him from the animosity directed at him by the ‘common people’:

⁹¹ An obvious intertextual reference to the ‘Helen of Troy’ speech in *Dr. Faustus*, ‘Was this the face that launched a thousand ships/And burnt the topless towers of Ilium’ (*Dr. Faustus*, 5.1.90-1). Richard repeats the rhetorical pattern, ‘Was this the face/That like the sun did make beholders wink?’ (4.1.283-4), again imputing his past royal life.

⁹² Gurr, p. 33.

⁹³ Hall entirely omits this aspect of Richard’s capture, commenting that ‘the Duke, which sent hym secretly to the Towre of London’. Hall, ‘An Introduccion’.

Manie euill disposed persons, assembling themselues together in great numbers, intended to haue met with him, and to haue taken him from such as had the conueieng of him, that they might haue slaine him. But the maior and aldermen gathered to them the worshipfull commoners and graue citizens, by whose policie, and not without much adoo, the other were reuoked from their euill purpose.⁹⁴

The enthusiasm and support for Bolingbroke is also highlighted. Shakespeare refers to this, but it is as reported action by York, and the timeline is altered so that York's rendition of the incident appears after Richard has firmly cast himself as a tragic figure in the deposition scene.⁹⁵ This focuses attention on Richard's humiliation, underlining the pathos of his situation.

Holinshed acknowledges his debt to Hall's earlier chronicle in relation to the deposition scene, 'according to the copie which I haue séene, and is abridged by maister Hall as followeth',⁹⁶ although there are significant differences between the two accounts. Both split the deposition into two separate events, although the focus in each is different.⁹⁷ Hall's Richard publicly abdicates in a theatrical scene at the Tower of London, where 'kyng Richard appared in vesture and robe royall the diademe on his head, & the scepter in his hand' formally renounces his crown.⁹⁸ This seems to be the origin of Shakespeare's very public deposition, although his Richard does not abdicate. The authorial choice is to allow Richard the opportunity to present himself as a suffering monarch. Although Richard is a prisoner, he is in control of the scene in *Richard II*. He dictates the action,

⁹⁴ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 501.

⁹⁵ This sequence should of course be considered in light of the absence of the deposition scene from the first three quartos.

⁹⁶ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 501.

⁹⁷ The significant difference is that Hall's Richard personally abdicates in front of a large crowd (see later). In Holinshed, Richard signs the Articles which are then read out without him being obviously present: 'Upon the morrow after being tuesdaie, and the last daie of September, all the lords spirituall and temporall, with the commons of the said parlement, assembled at Westminster, where, in the presence of them, the archbishop of Yorke, and the bishop of Hereford, according to the kings request, shewed vnto them the voluntarie renouncing of the king, with the fauour also which he bare to his cousine of Lancaster to haue him his successour. And moreouer shewed them the schedule or bill of renouncement, signed with king Richards owne hand' (Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 504). Both emphasise Richard's defeated nature, both using Hall's phrase: 'him beyng for sorowe withered, broken and in maner halfe deade' ('An Introduccion').

⁹⁸ In Holinshed's account, Richard's abdication is in the form of 'the copie of an instrument hereafter following he renounced and voluntarilie was deposed from his roiall crowne and kinglie dignitie,' which is subsequently read out. See vol. 6, pp. 503-4.

encapsulated by his refusal to sign the thirty-three articles. Shakespeare's Richard stage-manages the 'woeful pageant' (4.1.321), manipulating both Bolingbroke and Northumberland to facilitate his new image as a 'tortured soul' (4.1.297).

In *Richard II*, as opposed to both Hall and Holinshed, where they are replicated in full, Northumberland's articles are not read out.⁹⁹ Rather, Richard is able to insinuate that the accusations themselves are constructed, referring to them as 'weaved up follies' (4.1.229). Northumberland emphasises the need for Richard's crimes to be articulated, suggesting that this confers legitimacy on the rebels' actions. Richard is deliberately ironic, humiliating Northumberland's attempts to legalise the deposition:

There shouldst thou find one heinous article
Containing the deposing of a king
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath
(4.1.233-6).

The deposition has been arranged by Bolingbroke to legitimise his accession: 'In God's name I'll ascend the regal throne' (4.1.114). Instead, Richard undermines Bolingbroke's intentions by creating a distinct analogy with Christ's trial by Pontius Pilate. This parallel impression is designed to substantiate the idea of his suffering, reinforced by the repetition by Northumberland that Richard 'Read o'er this paper' (4.1.269), attempted three times, echoing the biblical narrative. Richard underlines the idea of himself as a biblical figure, a 'martyr-king', by referring to Christ's betrayal by Judas, 'So Judas did to Christ, but He in twelve/Found truth in all but one' (4.1.171-2), so allying Bolingbroke with Pontius Pilate: 'Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands' (4.1.239) and making the deposition analogous with Christ's crucifixion, 'Yet you Pilate/Have here delivered me to my sour cross' (4.1.240-1). Richard's stage management extends to

⁹⁹ This absence in Shakespeare's play suggests his revisionist agenda as Richard's 'crimes' are not directly articulated, thus avoiding emphasis on Richard as an unsuitable king.

using the traditional symbol of authority, the crown, as a prop, and, as Holderness notes, ‘a metaphor for representing a royal tragedy’.¹⁰⁰ Richard turns it into a symbol, not of the smooth transference of power, but instead, in his instruction to Bolingbroke, ‘Here cousin, seize the crown’ (4.1.182), into a proactive image of Bolingbroke seizing power.¹⁰¹ This is part of the public nature of this deposition, and a deliberate inversion of the idea of Richard as a broken man, depicted by both Hall and Holinshed.¹⁰²

The theatrical image of Richard, then, is significantly different from that of the sources. Conversely, although the presentation of the historical Richard is as ‘forsaken, reiect and abandoned of al’,¹⁰³ Shakespeare’s depiction allows for the greater tragedy of the man to emerge. *Richard II* shows a man who finds salvation in the realisation of his own flaws. The history shows a Richard who is in fear for his life. Both Holinshed and Hall note that Richard’s renunciation of the crown is his ‘onlie hope of his life and sauegard’,¹⁰⁴ observing ‘so that the duke of Lancaster might without murther or battell obtaine the scepter and [...] diademe’.¹⁰⁵ There is no direct threat implicit in *Richard II*; as already noted, Bolingbroke never voices his desire for Richard’s death. This alteration focuses attention purely on Richard’s self-creation as a tragic martyr. There is no obvious need for him to be fearful; although the Christ references suggest death, he seems to believe that he will remain a prisoner, as suggested in Holinshed. The only indication of a threat to his life is in 5.1 where he instructs the groom to ‘Taste of it first as thou are wont to

¹⁰⁰ Holderness, p. 201.

¹⁰¹ Holderness suggests that the crown becomes a ‘space in which an emblematic and figurative representation of history can be constructed’ (p. 202).

¹⁰² Hall portrays Richard as persuaded to renounce his crown, although he makes the point that ‘it was no mastery to perswade a man beyng desperate pensife and ful of dolour, to abdicate him selfe from his empire and imperiall preheminece’. See ‘An Introduccion’.

¹⁰³ Hall, ‘An Introduccion’.

¹⁰⁴ Hall, ‘An Introduccion’.

¹⁰⁵ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 503.

do' (5.5.99).¹⁰⁶

Although both Hall and Holinshed highlight that a peaceful transference of power is the most beneficial to both parties, both make the point that Bolingbroke guarantees Richard's safety. It is noteworthy that the history depicted in Hall and Holinshed insists on a formal renunciation of power by Richard. Both Hall and Holinshed describe Richard's formal abdication, something that is not dramatically represented. This is consistent with the choices that Shakespeare makes throughout the scene. All of his alterations allow for the idea of Richard as a martyr and for the opening up of a different idea of tragedy. Richard becomes a tragic figure long before he is murdered. This is a new departure for Shakespeare. Both *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet* accept the idea that tragedies are 'acts of death' (*Soliman and Perseda*, 1.1.7).¹⁰⁷ *Richard II* departs from this convention to explore other tragic potentials, especially that of the suffering martyr figure.

Shakespeare's emphasis on Richard's misery is a new development for the genre of the English history play, and one that underlines its movement towards tragedy. As Richard Helgerson notes, 'For all the other early modern English dramatists of history, stories of suffering subjects, including especially those of noble subjects who have devoted themselves to the welfare of the poor commons, seemed of far greater moment'.¹⁰⁸ Shakespeare, in departing from the norm and making Richard's unhappiness and miserable predicament his primary focus over and above that of his subjects, demonstrates his experimental approach to the burgeoning genre of the English history play by finding a certain tragic and unexpected nobility in what is ostensibly the story of a despotic king.

¹⁰⁶ Forker notes that this tasting of a king's food was an accepted part of the duties of an appointed servant, so perhaps the line contains no hint of threat. See 5.5.99n.

¹⁰⁷ Kyd, *Soliman and Perseda*, 1.1.7.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Helgerson, 'Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists of History', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Histories*, pp. 26-47 (p. 37).

V. Intertextuality and the Influence of *Woodstock*.

Considering *Richard II* against its direct theatrical antecedent, the anonymous play *Thomas of Woodstock*, sometimes called *King Richard the Second Part One*, illustrates the very different nature of Shakespeare's play. Benjamin Griffin notes that Shakespeare's history plays 'depart strikingly from the norms established by their predecessors'.¹⁰⁹ *Woodstock*, then, is an example of those established norms.¹¹⁰ The manuscript of *Woodstock* is incomplete, lacking both a title page and a conclusion, although it is believed to date from 1591-1595.¹¹¹ This date, making it concurrent with *The Life and Death of Jack Straw*, *Edward II* and *King John*, places *Richard II* as part of a theatrical fashion for plays with a clear historical bias, regardless of other generic considerations. *Woodstock* focuses on the early part of Richard's reign, almost up to the beginning of Shakespeare's play, the murder of Gloucester, resulting in its having been viewed almost as a companion piece to *Richard II*. With elements of a morality play using historical characters, it is neither the prequel to *Richard II*, nor is *Richard II* the conclusion of *Woodstock*. Its focus is far broader. Whereas *Richard II* has the king at its heart, *Woodstock* examines the effect of the King's actions on both the court and the country and does not consider the idea of one man's tragedy. Although both plays use Holinshed as an historical source, their approach to the 'real' history is markedly different. While neither purport to be actual historical record, Shakespeare's approach to the history of Richard's reign is linear, with the narrative focusing almost exclusively on his character. *Woodstock*'s handling of its historical material is, as Douglas Sedge and Peter Corbin comment, 'wayward, even careless'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Griffin, *Playing the Past*, p. 93.

¹¹⁰ The edition used is *Thomas of Woodstock or King Richard the Second, Part One*, eds. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002). All references are to this edition and further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹¹¹ Sedge and Corbin point out that although the manuscript had been supposed to date from the likely date of the play's composition, recent analysis suggests that the manuscript probably represents a Jacobean transcript of the original, leaving the manuscript open to the question of censorship intervention (p. 26).

¹¹² Corbin and Sedge, 'Introduction', p. 8.

Equally, theatrically, *Woodstock* has a far broader perspective, including masques, the supernatural, comedy and a wider social spectrum than that of *Richard II*.

Woodstock's king is a petulant narcissist, heavily influenced by his favourites, 'leasing out' England, before he finds a kind of redemption in his abortive attempt to prevent Gloucester's murder. The morality implicit in episodes such as 3.3, involving Ignorance and his extortion of money from characters such as 'A Farmer, a Butcher and A Grazier' illustrates the play's political and social conscience. *Woodstock*'s Richard is not a conflicted character. There is little or no emotional depth, even after the death of Anne O'Beam. His redemption, indicated in his abortive attempt to prevent Gloucester's murder, is insubstantial and unconvincing, lacking any dramatic power. Audience empathy towards this Richard is consequently restricted, even allowing for the fact that, as Forker puts it:

It would have been difficult to dramatise a totally reformed Richard who casts off his corruptors, for if audiences knew nothing else about this king, they surely knew of his deposition and death – historical facts that even this liberty-taking dramatist could scarcely have circumvented.¹¹³

What is interesting in a comparison between the two plays is the earlier text's dependence on theatrical conventions that are absent from *Richard II*. The inclusion of the supernatural, involving the ghosts of the Black Prince and Edward III, has echoes of *The Spanish Tragedy*, further reflected by the overtly metatheatrical device of the masque that sees Gloucester's abduction. The masque is carnivalesque and it inverts the order of things: the king leads his players in the kidnap (and subsequent murder) of his uncle, and, as Sandra Billington notes, the king represents 'the uncontrolled will, who continues his acts of destruction by

¹¹³ See Forker, 'Introduction', p. 145.
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removing his opponent, the symbol of good government'.¹¹⁴ This, then, is a subversive masque. It is a dramatic representation of the way in which *Woodstock*'s Richard negates his own identity. During the masque, he denies his kingship, insisting on Gloucester's criticism being silenced: 'Stop's mouth I say! We'll hear no more' (*Woodstock*, 4.2.207). Shakespeare's Richard, in contrast, is concerned with retaining his identity; even in his imprisonment he comments that 'Then am I kinged again' (5.5.36).

The significant difference between the plays concerns the role of comedy. Shakespeare includes no specific comedic role, noticeably contrasting with his previous approach in both *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. This different approach suggests that *Richard II*'s model is that of a 'pure' tragedy espoused by Sidney in *A Defence of Poesy*. The play has no dedicated comedy; rather the only slight humour is in the exchange between the Duchess of York and King Henry in 5.3 that will be discussed later. As a tragedy, *Richard II* is in a very different mode from the bloodbath that is *Titus Andronicus*, or the love tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, and this differing approach is reflected in the differences between the plays. The lack of comedy means that the intensity of Richard's fate becomes the primary focus, with no distractions from the martyrdom of the central character.¹¹⁵

Woodstock, sometimes referred to as 'the boldest and most subversive of all Elizabethan historical plays',¹¹⁶ takes a remarkably critical view of Richard's reign, questioning ideas of kingship and, by association (particularly through the inclusion of the 'Masque of Cynthia'), makes contemporary social comment.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 226.

¹¹⁵ The comedy in *Woodstock* serves a dual purpose. It is through the comedy that the play's social and political commentary is, at least in part, explored, from its broader social context delineating the direct impact of the king's corruption on the lower orders, even through to the ridiculing of the aristocracy's adopted fashions.

¹¹⁶ Margot Heinemann cited by Corbin and Sedge, p. 37.

¹¹⁷ Walter Raleigh famously used Cynthia as an alias for the Queen in his poetry notably, 'The Ocean's Love to Cynthia'. Numerous portraits of Elizabeth used this classical allusion to Cynthia the virgin, in their inclusion of moons and pearls.

Both plays have interesting contemporary parallels. The question of succession with an ageing monarch in the 1590s was a topic of contemporary preoccupation, so any play criticising – or even openly questioning – ideas of succession had the potential to be considered politically sensitive. Corbin and Sedge note that ‘it has long been recognised as being remarkably critical of kingship among Elizabethan history plays’.¹¹⁸ This overt criticism of Richard’s reign, and, by association, that of Elizabeth’s, raises questions of censorship and more importantly for this thesis, the idea of social and political comment as an expected facet of the Elizabethan history play.

Richard II, partly as a result of its association with the Essex uprising, has gained the reputation of a topically subversive text, perhaps cemented by the apparent self-association of Elizabeth I with Richard II.¹¹⁹ *Richard II* is only part of the proliferation of plays during Shakespeare’s career of at least four plays involving Richard II,¹²⁰ and so can potentially be viewed as part of a theatrical tradition of the 1590s, implicitly criticising the current political and social climate through the medium of the history play. Further evidence suggests that analogies between Richard and Elizabeth I, but also between Essex and Bolingbroke, were reasonably common.¹²¹ From a generic perspective, these associations are interesting as they indicate that contemporary perception of *Richard II* was as a history. At the same time, there is an apocryphal story alleging that Elizabeth I

¹¹⁸ Corbin and Sedge, p. 37.

¹¹⁹ Both Forker and Gurr refer to Elizabeth I’s alleged comment to William Lambarde in 1601, ‘I am Richard II. Know ye not that?’ See Forker, p. 5 and Gurr, ‘Intro’, p. 3.

¹²⁰ *Woodstock, The Life and Death of Jack Straw* (1590-3), Shakespeare’s own, and an anonymous, and now lost, play described by Simon Foreman as having been performed at The Globe in April 1611. See Forker, p. 5.

¹²¹ The perceived links between Essex and Bolingbroke are well documented. As Chris Fitter suggests, ‘the drama’s earlier apparent allusions to certain current events help establish a seeming celebratory evocation of the wildly popular Essex’. See Christ Fitter, ‘Historicizing Shakespeare’s *Richard II*: Current Events, Dating and the Sabotage of Essex’, *Early Modern Studies*, 11 (September 2005), 1-47 (p. 1). These allusions are on top of the obvious parallels that seem to be drawn between Essex and Bolingbroke. By 1601, associations between the two had been cemented by the publication of *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV, Extending to the End of the First Year of his Reign* by Dr. John Hayward, printed in 1599, which Hayward had dedicated to Essex. See Paul E. J. Hammer, ‘Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601 and the Essex Rising’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59 (2008), 1-35.

referred to the play: 'He that will forget God will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played 40 times in open streets and houses'.¹²² Whatever Elizabeth meant by this remark – whether she was alluding to the dramatic depiction of the deposition as a tragedy or the play itself – there is also a clear sense that contemporary perception accepted a degree of tragedy in the historicising of Richard II's reign.¹²³ *Richard II*'s own history delineates its genre as two-fold, regardless of the subsequent associations of the play with actual historical event. This idea of a dual perspective is mirrored by Bushy's comments: 'Which looked on as it is, is naught but shadows/Of what it is not' (2.2.22-4). As *Woodstock* is missing its conclusion, it is difficult to judge its overall effect with any certainty but the extant manuscript does not suggest a markedly tragic ending. There is an impression that the play delivers what an audience expects from a history play, particularly with the inclusion of a totally invented rebellion by Lancaster and York to avenge their brother's death. *Woodstock* plays with history to make political and social comment rather than tragedy.

There are, however, moments of similarity between the two plays, notably in the presentation of the views of John of Gaunt. Shakespeare's Gaunt reflects the orthodox view of Richard, overtly criticising his behaviour and so following the views of his counterpart in *Woodstock*. There are linguistic parallels in the emphasis that both plays place on Richard's 'blank charters', most notably to the 'leasing out' of the kingdom.¹²⁴

And we his son to ease our wanton youth

¹²² Forker, p. 14.

¹²³ Samuel Schoenbaum in his *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 1987), pp. 218-9, notes that Francis Bacon, writing in his *Declaration of the Practices and Treasons* [of the Earl of Essex], refers to the allegations surrounding the performance of *Richard II* in February 1601 as a 'tragedy'. It is worth considering the mutability of the play's title in light of this evidence. The evidence of Q1's colophon and Francis Mere's categorisation of the play as *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second* is superseded by the Folio's categorisation of the play as *The Life and Death in the Histories* section of the collection. The problem, of course, with this argument is the evidence of Q4 where the play remains a 'tragedie', albeit with the qualification of 'new additions of the Parleament Sceane and the deposing of King Richard'.

¹²⁴ For a full discussion of the linguistic similarities, see Forker, p. 148-9.

Become a landlord to this warlike realm
 Rent out our kingdom like a pelting farm
 (*Woodstock*, 4.1.146-8).

Dear for her reputation through the world
 Is now leased out – I die pronouncing it-
 Like to a tenement or pelting farm
 (*Richard II*, 2.1.58-60).

Taken in tandem both plays present differing versions of the role of the monarch.

Richard II has a king who clings to the idea of divine right, while *Woodstock* offers the opposing view of the contractual obligations of the monarch. *Woodstock* is an illustration of the consequences of a king breaking his contractual obligations to his country. The nobles are, therefore, by implication, right to demand explanations:

And England now laments that heavy time
 Her royalties are lost, her state made base
 And thou no king but landlord now become
 To this great state that terror'd Christendom
 (*Woodstock*, 5.3.104-7).

This Richard shatters political union, even to the point of dividing his kingdom between his four favourites.

While there are significant differences between the two plays, there are enough similarities to assess that *Woodstock* certainly influenced Shakespeare to some degree. It is worth noting, however, that perhaps the most salient difference, in terms of this thesis, is in *Woodstock*'s use of comedy and social commentary. Bearing in mind the associations between the plays, *Richard II* contains no specific comic characters, in contrast to Nimble and the comic 'low' country scenes of *Woodstock*.¹²⁵ If, as is largely accepted, *Woodstock* influenced Shakespeare's play, then the omission of the comic sequences would appear to be a deliberate decision, emphasising the self-consciously tragic nature of the later play. Shakespeare, then, as he does with Holinshed and his other historical sources, both selects and rejects theatrical antecedents to underline that *Richard II*'s focus is on the tragic stature of

¹²⁵ The 'garden scene' of 3.4 of *Richard II*, although featuring 'low characters' is not a comic scene. It is rather a choric sequence, allowing time for reflection and discussion on Richard's reign, and, in its depiction of the Queen, engenders further audience sympathy for Richard.

the deposed king, reshaping both history and the history play.

Part Five. The Role of Death

The final scenes of *Richard II* encapsulate not only the disparity between history and tragedy but also Shakespeare's developing compound genre. Shakespeare's diversion from the sources are again critical to an understanding of a play which ends, not as may be expected, with the death of the titular character, but rather with an acknowledgement of the complicity of responsibility for that death by the new king. There is no easy sense of resolution, and the genesis for this is suggested by Shakespeare's inherited history. The play returns to the historical fact of Richard's death, but it is a mythologised version.

I. Aumerle and the Issue of Comedy

Not perhaps unexpectedly, there is a discrepancy between Shakespeare's presentation of the conspiracy to murder Henry at Oxford, and the depiction of the same conspiracy by Hall and Holinshed. Inasmuch as *Richard II* contains any humour – as already discussed, the play lacks comic interruptions – the comedy is implicit in the interaction between the various members of the York family. By unveiling the plot in a family setting, its machinations are almost reduced to those of a domestic squabble. The portrayal of treason sits uncomfortably with the possibility of comedy: 'Bring me my boots!' (5.2.84), followed by the Duchess' instruction to 'Strike him Aumerle!' (5.2.85). There is intrinsic comedic value in the rapidity of the onstage action. The pace of the play changes from York's stately description in 5.1 of Richard's entry into London, to one of rapid action. The serving man, for example, enters, exits, and re-enters and re-exits in the space of sixteen lines. York's delay in articulating the content of the letter about his son's treason to the Duchess contributes to the sense of confusion and consequently to the idea of comedy. The reasons for York's response are not made clear until after he has shouted repeatedly for his boots. This divulgence of the plot 'To kill the

King at Oxford' (5.2.98) restores the seriousness of the scene, and the interaction between York and the Duchess makes explicit York's intention to impeach Aumerle: 'Were he twenty times my son/I would appeach him' (5.2.101-2). Aumerle's arrival at court articulates the solemnity of his treasonous involvement, 'My tongue cleave to the roof within my mouth/Unless a pardon ere I rise or speak' (5.3.30-1). Although the locking out of his father allows a space for humour, this is undercut by the threat of violence: 'Villain I'll make thee safe' (5.3.40). King Henry's emotional outburst denotes the seriousness of the situation, 'O heinous strong and bold conspiracy!/O loyal father of a treacherous son' (5.3.58-9), but the comic potential of the treatment of the conspiracy is reinvigorated by the arrival of the Duchess of York at the court, a degeneration that King Henry comments on: 'Our scene is altered from a serious thing/And now changed to 'The Beggar and The King'' (5.3.78-9).

The rhyming couplets employed emphasise the comedic aspects: 'Speak with me, pity me, open the door/A beggar begs that never begged before' (5.3.76-77); 'For ever will I walk upon my knees/And never see the day that happy sees' (5.3.93-4). This continuation of word play, specifically around the word 'Pardon', is reinforced by the visual picture of a (probably) elderly lady ('Is not my teeming date drunk up with time?' 5.2.91), refusing to rise from her knees until her son is forgiven. The humour is extrinsic, particularly in the repetition by the King of his request for his aunt to stand: 'Good aunt stand up' (5.3.109/128). The humour is fully acknowledged by, 'O happy vantage of a kneeling knee!' (5.3.131).

These two scenes are generically mixed between history and comedic potential. The treasonous plot and the threat to Henry are largely subsumed under the plot's familial implications for the York family. Holinshed and Hall, however, place considerable emphasis both on the conspiracy but Hall, particularly, on the fate of the conspirators. The conspiracy's intentions are defined in both chronicles:

Kyng Henry should bee inuited and desired, and when he were moste busely regardyng the marciall playe and warly disporte, he sodainly should bee slain and destroyed. And by this meanes kyng Richard whiche was yet a liue, should be restored to his libertie and repossessed of his croune and kyngdome.¹²⁶

The conspiracy's aims and the other conspirators are largely ignored in *Richard II*.

Instead, the realised comic potential of Shakespeare's treatment of this scene creates a 'breathing space' before the play's final scene. This partial gap in the narrative provides a release of tension before Richard's death.

II. Richard's Death

The manner of Richard's death, taken in conjunction with the ambiguity over King Henry's involvement, appears to cement the mythologising of Richard. His mythology becomes part of the dialectic of history beginning with Carlisle's prophetic apocalyptic vision of 4.1. Before Richard's deposition, Carlisle suggests that if God's anointed king is deposed and Bolingbroke accedes the throne, then 'The blood of the English shall manure the land/And future ages groan for this foul act' (4.1.138-9). Carlisle foresees the Wars of the Roses: 'O if you raise this house against this house/It will the woefullest division prove/That ever fell upon this cursed earth' (4.1.146-7). *Richard II*, in its ambiguous acceptance of Henry's guilt and by the manner of Richard's death, seems to be reinforcing this mythology to some degree. Richard's attitude with his dying breath is somewhat ambiguous. Although usually read as his reassertion of his royal authority, his final lines can also be seen as recognising Bolingbroke as king: 'Exton, thy fierce hand/Hath with a King's blood stained the King's own land' (5.5.109-110) implicates the spilling of his blood in the bloodshed that will follow his death and is the precursor of Exton's lines acknowledging both kings: 'This dead King to the living King I'll bear' (5.5.117). Richard's recognition of the battles to follow is implicit, a clear

¹²⁶ Hall, 'The First Yere'. The consequences for the conspirators are discussed in this section of Hall's work. In Holinshed, the conspirators' intention to depose Henry and restore Richard is exact: 'how to bring that to effect, which they earnestlie wished and desired; that was, the destruction of king Henrie, and the restoring of king Richard'. See Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 514.

reference to Carlisle's prophetic speech of 4.1. This reading seems supported by Richard's earlier line suggesting Bolingbroke's role in his death: 'The devil take Henry of Lancaster and thee!' (5.5.102). Richard at the end resembles the monarch that he was at the play's beginning. His reaffirmation of his divine right monarchy is indicated in his dying words: 'Mount mount my soul! Thy seat is up on high' (5.5.111). The dramatic representation of Richard's death restores Richard to the Tudor perception of his historical 'rightful place', that of a divine right king. The idea of Richard dying as if in battle, fighting Exton, comes from Holinshed and Hall, who both assert that before his death Richard 'valiantlie defended himselfe, that he slue foure of those that thus came to assaile him'.¹²⁷ Shakespeare's theatrical presentation of Richard's death merges both the source material and dramatic need for a certain degree of historical legend.

Each of the plays that this thesis has previously discussed has explored different sorts of endings. *Titus Andronicus* finishes with an onstage bloodbath, with few characters left standing. *Romeo and Juliet* culminates with the deaths of the main protagonists and with the promise of a statue raised 'in pure gold' to Juliet's memory. Both of these plays indicate a sort of resolution and a restoration of order, although the survival of Aaron and his lack of repentance undermines the conclusion of *Titus Andronicus*. The approach that is taken in *Richard II* follows the pattern of the previous tragedies, but is necessarily caught in the nets of history. The play does not end with Richard's onstage death. Instead, it ends with the new King Henry promising to: 'make a voyage to the Holy Land/To wash this blood off from my guilty hand' (5.6.49-50). Henry's acknowledgement of some degree of complicity means that the ending is unresolved.¹²⁸ The uneasy ending of *Richard II*

¹²⁷ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 517.

¹²⁸ This seems to have more in common with the ending of *Titus Andronicus*, where Lucius' accession as 'Rome's gracious governor' (*Titus Andronicus*, 5.3.145) is threatened by both Aaron's absence of contrition and by Lucius' final refusal to give Tamora's corpse any respect or dignity in death: 'No funeral rite nor man in mourning weed/No mournful bell shall ring her burial/But throw her forth to birds and beasts of prey' (*Titus*, 5.3.195-7).

is signalled by the brief mention of Prince Hal, Henry's successor, in 5.3. Prior to the scene's focus on Aumerle's treason, Henry enquires after his son: 'Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?/'Tis full three months since I did see him last' (5.3.1-2). This reference to Hal's dissolution, underlined by Harry Percy's later comment, 'His answer was he would unto the stews' (5.3.16), insinuates an uneasy succession on Henry's eventual death.¹²⁹

Both Hall and Holinshed are definitive in Henry's implication in the murder, whereas in *Richard II*, the request is never openly articulated. Hall's attitude towards Henry's involvement is noteworthy, filtered through the screen of 'One writer whiche semed to haue muche knowledge of kyng Rychardes affaires'.¹³⁰ Holinshed, in contrast, has no such qualms, inserting instead a caveat covering the possibility of Henry's involvement in Richard's murder:

king Henrie, to rid himselfe of anie such like danger to be attempted against him thereafter, caused king Richard to die of a violent death, that no man should afterward faine himselfe to represent his person, though some haue said, he was not priuie to that wicked offense.¹³¹

Shakespeare's approach, then, is to suggest the possibility of Henry's involvement, through Exton's claims that 'From your own mouth my lord, did I this deed' (5.6.37), without making it actually explicit.¹³² The confusion surrounding the issue allows Henry the possibility of denial: 'Exton, I thank thee not, for thou hast wrought/A deed of slander with thy fatal hand/Upon my head and all this famous land' (5.6.34-6). This contributes to the openness of the play's ending. While Henry denies his involvement, he equally vows to make restitution: 'To wash this blood from off my guilty hand'. If he is not guilty, then there is no need for his

¹²⁹ Its inclusion also sets up the idea of *Henry IV* 1&2, written in 1596 and 1598, respectively, and can be construed as the beginning of the marketing of these subsequent comedic histories. The emphasis on Hal's dissolute behaviour, 'he daily doth frequent/With unrestrained loose companions' (5.3.6-7), suggests that the idea for the plays was possibly gestating.

¹³⁰ Hall, 'The first yere'.

¹³¹ Holinshed, vol. 6, p. 516.

¹³² Forker notes that although Shakespeare invents Henry's disavowal of Exton, the 1609 version of Daniel's *Civil War* seems to have been revised in the face of Shakespeare's invention. Although this shows the interdependence between materials, it is necessary to remember that Daniel's version of events is a fictionalised poem and does not purport to be history as such. See 5.6.34-44n.

pilgrimage of conscience.¹³³ The play thus ends as it began with ambiguity surrounding a murder that may or may not have been ordered by the King.

III. Conclusion

Brian Walsh suggests that the development of the idea of history in Elizabethan England necessitated an evaluation that ‘history is not a naturally occurring form of knowledge’.¹³⁴ The acknowledgement of the interdependence between the accounts of Hall and Holinshed demonstrates the contemporaneous currency of this suggestion. As already noted, Holinshed refers to his debt to ‘maister Hall’. Equally, Hall accepts that his ‘history’ is selective. His admission that Richard’s campaign in Ireland ‘is no parte of my processe’ illustrates not only that history was constructed to the agenda of the historian, but that this was a valid and recognised approach. As Walsh further comments, ‘[History] cannot exist autonomously’.¹³⁵

This attitude is typical of the attitude taken by Shakespeare towards the construction of historical tragedy as he takes a selective view of history when it suits his dramatic purpose. To this extent, *Richard II* is neither a history nor a pure tragedy. Instead it is a dramatic amalgamation of the two genres. It is both *The Life and Death of Richard the Second* as the Folio proposes, but it is also *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second* as the quarto editions recognise. *Richard II* is significantly different from either *Titus Andronicus* or *Romeo and Juliet*, its tragedy stemming from the development of Richard’s character. *Richard II* is thus a different interpretation of a tragedy, expanding its generic understanding away from ideas of graphic violence and violent death towards suffering, doubt and the tragic hero figure.

¹³³ This pilgrimage, of course, never takes place as *1Henry IV* shows.

¹³⁴ Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 11.

¹³⁵ Walsh, p. 11.

Chapter Four

Julius Caesar: A Broken Tragedy

The earliest extant edition of *Julius Caesar* is that of the Folio text of 1623, although circumstantial evidence and contemporary theatrical accounts date the first performances of the play to around 1599.¹ A contemporaneous account by Thomas Platter, a Swiss diarist, has led to discussions as to whether this was the play chosen by the Lord Chamberlain's Men to open their new theatre, The Globe, on Bankside in 1599. Such speculation, imbuing the play with a significant theatrical legacy, contributes to the idea of *Julius Caesar* as, in David Daniell's words, 'Shakespeare's first great tragedy'.²

In terms of subject matter, there is a consistent link between *Julius Caesar* and Shakespeare's preceding tragedy, *Richard II*. Both plays address a similar subject – the removal of an incumbent ruler – but the structure and the approach is markedly different. *Julius Caesar* explores the idea of tragedy when the defining event of the play is the death of the titular subject halfway through, rather than the usual death of the title subject as one of the play's final events.³ As Coppélia Kahn comments, 'When Shakespeare began writing about Rome in the early 1590s, a tradition of plays drawing on Roman history and legend was already well established',⁴ and Shakespeare's explicitly inventive approach is indicated by his

¹ There is no entry for *Julius Caesar* in The Stationers' Register, so the play has been dated using contemporary circumstantial evidence. See Marvin Spevack, 'Introduction' in *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, ed. by Marvin Spevack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; repr. 2003), pp. 1-72 (pp. 1-6).

² David Daniell, *The Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series: Julius Caesar* ed. David Daniell (London: Methuen, 1998), p. 1. For clarification, all further references to the play refer to this edition and will be acknowledged parenthetically in the text.

³ Shakespeare's previous tragedies, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as other contemporaneous tragedies including *The Jew of Malta*, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Tamburlaine* place the death of the main character as the play's climax.

⁴ Coppélia Kahn, 'Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 204-223 (p. 207).

reimagining a well-known story⁵ and subverting the structural and generic expectations set up by the title.⁶ *Julius Caesar* is indeed a play about the death of the Caesar himself, but its tragic figure is Brutus.

Significantly, *Julius Caesar* has a different structure from Shakespeare's previous tragedies. The narrative is radically altered; no longer following a linear course, it instead is multi-dimensional. The single action of the death of Caesar almost exactly halfway through the play splits the narrative, offering the possibility of a different sort of tragedy. Correlating with the emphasis on metatheatre and the idea of the play, this innovation suggests, amongst other things, a deliberate questioning of the traditional concept of the 'hero'. As the play has two theatrical crises, firstly the assassination of Caesar followed by Brutus' death at the Battle of Philippi, so the idea of what it is to be a hero is also examined in the suggestion of two diametrically opposed potential 'hero' figures, Brutus and Antony.⁷ There are, it seems, at least two distinct explorations of this role and both are intricately connected to the depiction of Rome and Romanness, metatheatricality and the structure of the play. The portrayal of these characters in Shakespeare's primary source, Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *The Parallel Lives of the Most*

⁵ Daniell notes that 'the assassination of Caesar was the single best-known story from the pagan ancient world', (p. 9).

⁶ That genre classification continued to be a preoccupation of Elizabeth's late reign is seen in the opposing views of tragedy, comedy and history propounded in the 'Induction' of *A Warning for Fair Women*. Contemporary with *Julius Caesar* (the play was entered into the Stationers' Register in November 1599), the opening sequence focuses on a quarrel between the three personified genres about which genre shall have control of the play: 'My meaning was to have been hereto-day/But meeting with my lady Tragedy/She scolds me off' (Induction, 24-26). The Prologue equally establishes certain expectations. *Tragedy* asserts that 'I must have passions that must move the soul/Make the heart heave and throb within the bosom' (Induction, 38-39), suggesting conformity to a classical view of tragedy, while *Comedy* categorises tragedy: 'How some damned tyrant to obtain a crown/Stabs, hangs, empoysons, smothers, cutteth throats/... Then too a filthy whining ghost' (Induction: 44-47). *Julius Caesar* appears to conform to *Comedy*'s tragic expectations: Cassius refers to Caesar as a tyrant, 'And why should Caesar be a tyrant then?' (1.3.103); Shakespeare introduces the supernatural in the form of Caesar's ghost appearing to Brutus before Philippi. See

[http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99846882&ECCO=param\(ECCO\)&FILE=../session/1455562313_3699&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99846882&ECCO=param(ECCO)&FILE=../session/1455562313_3699&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR) [accessed September 12th 2013]

⁷ This structure appears as an expansion on the two theatrical crises suggested by Mercutio's death that alters the play's trajectory before the final crisis of the deaths of Romeo and Juliet in the preceding tragedy, and so is consistent with the idea of a developing idea of tragic form.

Noble Greeks and Romans, and the changes that Shakespeare implements, are also worth considering in relation to any discussion of the ‘hero’.⁸

This chapter divides, rather like the play itself, around the death of Caesar. The first part considers the generic implications of the metadramatic build-up to the assassination before the play’s approach to the idea of a tragic hero, Shakespeare’s use of Plutarch in the parallel pattern of Brutus and Antony and their funeral orations as part of the ongoing establishment of a language of tragedy is subsequently addressed. Finally, the introduction of the supernatural is evaluated as an important new aspect of tragedy before the idea of death as an integral part of a tragic ending is assessed.

Katharine Eisaman Maus suggests that *Julius Caesar* marks a watershed in [Shakespeare’s] career as a playwright.⁹ The play is at the fulcrum of Shakespeare’s works: its concerns are both reflective – the narrative addresses similar power issues that are part of the focus of Shakespeare’s history plays of the 1590s – but, in terms of structure and character, it marks the beginning of the developing complexity that leads to what are commonly regarded as the ‘greatest tragedies’ of Shakespeare’s career.

Part One. History, Genre and Metadrama

As already noted, in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare takes a well-known story and develops it in unexpected directions, clearly seen in the play’s relationship with the representation of history. *Julius Caesar* is at once a history and a tragedy, a perception that is reflected in the differing categorisations suggested by its print

⁸ The full title of Thomas North’s 1579 translation is available on *Early English Books Online*. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?source=configpr.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D10000202431840001&FILE=../session/1455015971_29940&DISPLAY=default&RESULTCLICK=N [accessed September 12th 2013 and on many subsequent occasions since]. All quotations are from this resource, cross-checked with *Plutarch’s Lives of Coriolanus, Caesar, Brutus and Antonius in North’s translation* ed. R.H. Carr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906; repr.[London(?): Forgotten Books, 2012). For ease of reference, this is the edition cited.

⁹ Katharine Eisaman Maus, ‘Introduction to *Julius Caesar*’, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, p. 1549.

history,¹⁰ and seen in the play in the shift of attitude towards history. There is a self-conscious creation of history in *Julius Caesar*, a focus that is equally intertwined with the increasing recognition of the place of metadrama in the play. Shakespeare is deliberately ambiguous in his representation of Caesar, creating a character that is as much defined by other people's opinions as by what is presented onstage. The focus on the idea of performance and the alternative 'reality' of the theatre reflects this ambiguity, and is linked to the idea of history in the emphasis of the main characters and their perception by future generations.

I. History and Caesar

As Colin Burrow observes, 'Rome in *Julius Caesar* is not about only one place or time. It is built up from several strata of pasts'.¹¹ This historical multiplicity is apparent from the play's opening when Murellus upbraids the plebeians for celebrating Caesar's victory over Pompey: 'Wherefore rejoice? What conquests brings he home?' (1.1.33). Although Caesar is referred to obliquely, this power shift defines the terms of the play as it categorises Caesar, in republican terms, as a tyrant. In 2.1, during his first exchange with the conspirators, Brutus refers to Caesar as such: 'So let high-sighted tyranny range on' (2.1.117), reflecting Cassius' opinion to Caska in 1.3: 'And why should Caesar be a tyrant then?' (1.3.103). An understanding of both the historical precedent and the prevailing situation in Rome is thus suggested as part of the play's historiographical approach.

As noted, the opening scene starts from a certain historical knowledge: 'But indeed sir, we make holiday to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph' (1.1.31-2). It is implicit that an audience will understand the reference here, further underlined by Murellus' naming of Pompey: 'O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome/Knew you not Pompey?' (1.1.38-9). The historical allusion is never

¹⁰ In the Folio of 1623, the play is included in the 'Tragedy' section of the Catalogue as *The Life and Death of Julius Caesar*, the only tragedy to be categorised here as *The Life and Death*. In contrast, its title page and running titles call it *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*.

¹¹ Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 215.
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contextualised, but rather the relationship between Caesar and Pompey and the significance of Caesar's triumph is implied and then repeated in Murellus' confrontation with the workers in 1.1: 'And do you now cull out a holiday?/And do you now strew flowers in his way/That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?' (1.1.50-2). This supposition of historical knowledge is consistent with that of *Richard II*, where Richard's alleged involvement in the murder of Gloucester is buried in the history before the play. Although in both cases the historical precedent that leads to the events of the play is acknowledged, there is a deliberate elusiveness that surrounds these events, allowing Shakespeare to create, even within the bounds of an extremely well known story, his own version of history.

This creative approach to history is epitomised in the representation of Caesar himself. Deliberately unsubstantiated, various representations of Caesar are explored, but are dominated by a sense of 'Caesar' as a performance. To the republicans, he is a tyrant, but the amorphous depiction equally allows for Antony's relationship with him to be understood as also valid. This process allows for the ambiguity that surrounds the character and as such, concedes a space for other characters to fill with their own opinions. Cassius can thus denigrate Caesar to Brutus, describing, in 1.2, his deficiencies:

But ere we could arrive the point proposed
 Caesar cried, 'Help me Cassius or I sink!'
 I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor
 Did from the flames of troy upon his shoulder
 The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
 Did I the tired Caesar.
 (1.2.110-115).

Interestingly, Cassius cites Caesar's failure using history as a reference point, delineating history as a point in time, but also exploring a pervading sense of historical dislocation seen in the contrasting opinions of Caesar. History is not fixed in one definitive view. Caesar can be the 'noble Caesar' (3.2.182), 'great Caesar' (3.2.187) and 'sweet Caesar' (3.2.218) of Antony's oration and the 'sick

girl' (1.2.128) that Cassius describes. This is a part of the complex approach to the character of Caesar; his reputation is manufactured offstage, not depicted onstage.

Caesar himself in 1.2 projects an expected image of himself: 'Danger knows full well/That Caesar is more dangerous than he' (2.2.44-45). His use of the third person is part of a metadramatic construct, as is the imagery that he uses to describe himself: 'We are two lions littered in one day/And I the elder and more terrible' (2.2.46-7). Antony's choice of words in his initial dialogue with Caesar is noteworthy and similarly refers to a performance: 'When Caesar says 'Do this' it is performed' (1.2.10). There are two impressions of Caesar created in this scene.

One, the apparently respected ruler, seen in Caska's line, 'Peace ho, Caesar speaks' (1.2.2), who insists on ceremony as part of his public image – 'Set on and leave no ceremony out' (1.2.11); the other, a much frailer and more vulnerable man: 'Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf' (1.2.212).

The inconsistency in Caesar's representation is illustrated by Shakespeare's calculated refashioning of the Caesar depicted in Plutarch. Cassius' alternative narrative, 'He had a fever when he was in Spain/ And when the fit was on him I did mark/How he did shake. 'Tis true, this god did shake' (1.2.118-120), has its roots in Plutarch:

For as he did set his men into battle array, the falling sickness took him, whereunto he was given, and therefore, feeling it coming, before he was overcome withal, he was carried into a castle not far from thence [...] and there took his rest till the extremity of his disease had left him.¹²

In direct contrast, Cassius' description of Caesar swimming the Tiber – 'Caesar cried, 'Help me Cassius or I sink' (1.2.111) – is the opposite of Plutarch's Caesar, where the strength of his swimming ability is emphasised:

But he, leaping into the sea, with great hazard saved himself by swimming. It is said, that then holding divers books in his hand he never let them go,

¹² *The Life of Julius Caesar*, p. 95.
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but kept them always with his head above the water and swam with the other hand.¹³

The reworking of these passages has a dual purpose, defining in part Cassius' character while illustrating the bifurcation of Caesar's characterisation. Cassius' retelling of Caesar stories establishes a pre-drama relationship between the characters, a development in Shakespeare's search for a tragic paradigm that is illustrated by the parallel scenes of 2.1 and 2.2 where Brutus and Caesar are both depicted at home, interacting with their wives in a private capacity. The inclusion of a shared history is part of Shakespeare's evolving emphasis on character, a continuation of the personal relationship seen in Richard II's farewell to his Queen. This innovation, as David Bevington comments, makes the tragedy in *Julius Caesar* 'at once personal and political',¹⁴ and is further explored through the metadramatic bias of 1.2.

II. Ideas of History, Tragedy and Theatre in 1.2

This section will examine the embedded theatricality that runs throughout 1.2. The assassination is here begun as a staged episode and the build-up of tension to this crisis reflects this, while the self-aware creation of history acts as the validation for the conspiracy and subsequent assassination. From the play's opening, a sense of performance is established: 'Is this a holiday?' (1.1.2) separates the subsequent action from the everyday, delineating it as occurring in an abstracted performance space. Theatrical process is immediately established as one of the play's themes.

This sense of the 'other world' is made explicit by Antony's presentation of a crown to Caesar in 1.2. The main action all occurs offstage, allowing the exchange between Cassius and Brutus to dominate. The race becomes an offstage ritual, both a practical staging solution to the mechanics of presenting an onstage running race and an acknowledgement of the processes of the theatre. The use of

¹³ *The Life of Julius Caesar*, p. 92.

¹⁴ David Bevington, 'Tragedy in Shakespeare's Career', p. 59.

the stage becomes part of the self-conscious metadramatic trope. The dialogue reflects this division: the onstage performers, Brutus and Cassius, react audience-like to the offstage action through the offstage acclamations of the offstage crowd: ‘What means this shouting? I do fear the people/Choose Caesar for their king’ (1.2.78-79). This performative self-consciousness and deliberate reflection of the performative realities of theatre has the effect of excluding the onstage characters from their own drama, increasing the sense of acknowledgement of and identification with the audience. In a play that is frequently concerned with the division between the public and private, Shakespeare in this scene plays with convention by turning the public playing space into a private conversation and holding the public event, the running race, offstage. Jonathan Goldberg interprets this division of the stage as paralleled by Brutus’ entry into public life: ‘But, in this scene, in which Brutus emerges into public life, the very deployment of the stage carries a parallel structure’.¹⁵

Cassius and Brutus, then, become observers in their own play. It is notable that the stage directions also reflect the physical process of play-going, emphasising the separation of the play from ‘real’ life. Each offstage acclamation is preceded by a ‘Flourish’ in the same way that contemporary performances were heralded by a trumpet fanfare. Sound associated with performance is thus used to underline the play’s inherent metadrama. The most obvious metadramatic allusion is Caska’s retelling of the offstage events of the running race, reinforcing the interpretation of events by Cassius, although the theatrical analogies are made explicit. For Caska, the event is a pantomime, ‘mere foolery’ (1.2.235), and Caesar is demonstrably the main performer. Caska views the latter’s actions as a cynical manipulation of the crowd, explicitly a performance: ‘If the rag tag people did not clap and hiss him according as he pleased and displeased them, as they use to do

¹⁵ Jonathan Goldberg, ‘The Roman Actor’, in *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Wilson (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 92-107, (p. 96).
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players in the theatre, I am no true man' (1.2.257-260). Ostensibly, the audience appears to hold some power. This is, however, taken from them when Caesar's manipulation is exposed:

Marry, before he fell down, when he perceived the common herd was glad he refused the crown, he plucked me ope his doublet and offered them his throat to cut [...] And so he fell. When he came to himself again, he said, if he had done or said anything amiss, he desired their worships think it was his infirmity. Three or four wenches where I stood cried 'Alas good soul' and forgave him with all their hearts. But there's no heed to be taken of them; if Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would have said no less.
(1.2.262-74).

Shakespeare here exposes the process of directing audience sympathy, and in so doing, rather than alienating the real audience, involves them in the process of playmaking. Referring to the realities of theatre offers the audience a priori knowledge and makes them complicit with the actors whom they are observing. Although seemingly contradictory – Caska insults the audience, calling them 'rag tag people' (1.2.255), a 'rabblement' (1.2.243), and refers to their 'stinking breath' (1.2.245) and 'sweaty nightcaps' (1.2.244) – the technique, both comic and ironic, is in reality a unifying one that establishes a rapport with the audience. The description of the Roman crowd disrupts the boundaries between actors and audience and reflects the carnival ideas that run throughout *Julius Caesar*. Moreover, there is a strong sense that the assassination and conspiracy operate as a play-within-a-play already rehearsed in 1.2. Caska's comments at the end of the scene read like a theatrical review: 'the rabblement hooted and clapped their chopped hands and threw up their sweaty nightcaps' (1.2.243-4). His commentary on the running race is entirely from a theatrical viewpoint. He refers to applause, 'the people fell a-shouting' (1.2.222), stage directions, 'I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown ... Then he offered it to him again...And then he offered it a third time' (1.2.235-42), before finally making the analogy explicit, 'as they use to do the players in the theatre' (1.2.259). Goldberg comments on the parallels between the onstage action in 1.2 and the running race being concurrently held offstage:

‘Offstage and on, a crown is being offered; Caesar refuses it, yet Casca says that his no means yes. Brutus will not even quite acknowledge that Cassius has made the offer’.¹⁶ The idea of dissembling and performance informs both the action and the speeches. Everywhere in Rome is in the grip of theatre.

The conspiracy itself functions on the idea of observation, a central trait of the relationship between audience and performance. In Cassius’ opening exchange with Brutus, he refers to this relationship: ‘Brutus, I do observe you now of late’ (1.2.32). Brutus replies that he has indeed been hiding his feelings: ‘If I have veiled my look/I turn the trouble of my countenance/Merely upon myself’ (1.2.38-40). Appearance and reality, public and private are constantly couched in terms of acting. Cassius acknowledges the metatheatricality of his interaction with Brutus in 1.2, when, towards the end of the scene, he decides to stage-manage Brutus’ decision: ‘I will this night/In several hands at his windows throw/As if they came from several citizens/Writings’ (1.2.314-7). The conspiracy as well as Brutus’ involvement in it is, like Caesar and his reputation, constructed.

Cassius, however, not only stage-manages the conspiracy, but he is also cast as playwright, determining both Brutus’ character and course of action. Of Brutus he says, ‘Thy honourable mettle may be wrought/From that it is disposed’ (1.2.307-8). Brutus, the conspirator, is thus created by Cassius, ‘the stage machaivel’ in John Drakakis’ account.¹⁷ He both authors and performs in the conspiracy, producing ‘Writings all tending to the great opinion/That Rome holds of his name – wherein obscurely/Caesar’s ambition shall be glanced at’ (1.2.317-9). Using the mechanics of performance to work on Brutus to his own ends, Cassius creates a kind of fiction within the play that complements Shakespeare’s own fictional history and metadrama plot.

¹⁶ Goldberg, p. 97.

¹⁷ John Drakakis, ‘Fashion it thus: *Julius Caesar* and the Politics of Theatrical Representation’ in *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*, pp. 77-91 (p. 83).

III. How to Stage a Murder: Metatheatricality and ‘Roman’ Values

The concern with the artifice of the stage – seen again in 2.1 in the conspirators’ costume and masks – is part of a deeper preoccupation with ideas of illusion and reality. Primarily, the following section will explore both the more traditional idea of metadrama, encapsulated by Anne Righter in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* as ‘to glorify the stage’,¹⁸ whilst also engaging with the deeper problem of how theatre, while clearly not the same as reality, has to pretend to be identical in order to explore the idea of tragedy, creating a type of double awareness that is shared by the audience.

The boundary between audience and performer is breached by the conspirators’ costume in 2.1. Lucius, Brutus’ servant, does not recognise them when they visit: ‘No sir, their hats are plucked about their ears/And half their faces buried in their cloaks’ (2.1.73-4). In a play where emphasis, from its opening, is placed on the importance of costume – Murellus chides the tradesmen for their inappropriate dress in 1.1.6.¹⁹ – the conspirators’ dark disguise merges with their bodies. In the case of Decius and Caska, who have already been seen in 1.2 as part of Caesar’s retinue, hats and cloaks literally hide their deceitful intention. Brutus’ subsequent lines underline this symbolism: ‘Hide it in smiles and affability’ (2.1.82). Their masking is a performative metaphor for their intentions. The conspirators in 2.1 have to don the costume of conspiracy to legitimise their actions. Their costuming is part of the build-up to the performance of the assassination. Although Alexander Pope found the reference to ‘hats’ anachronistic,²⁰ this ignores the metatheatricality of the sequence: drama is being created out of an inherently dramatic situation. The jarring interruption of reality

¹⁸ Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 141.

¹⁹ ‘Where is thy leather apron and thy rule?/What dost thou with thy best apparel on?’ (1.1.7-8).

²⁰ See 2.1.73n.

merely draws attention to this. The equally anachronistic reference to ‘The clock hath stricken three’ (2.1.192) can also be viewed through this prism of metatheatricality. Its striking provides a unifying moment between real life and the play, refocusing attention on the theatrical plotting of the assassination.

In 2.1 the essential dichotomy of metadrama is encapsulated in Brutus. He appears to be against dressing the murder up as something else, arguing that the purity of their intended action does not need to be substantiated by an oath: ‘But do not stain/the even virtue of our enterprise’ (2.1.131-2). He makes the correlation between the act of assassination and performance explicit: ‘To think that or our cause or our performance/Did need an oath’ (2.1.134-5). Associating the planned assassination with a ‘performance’ cements the event at the metadramatic heart of the play. Conversely, while Brutus suggests that no oath is needed, it is also Brutus who initiates the theatrical bonding of the conspirators: ‘Give me your hands all over, one by one’ (2.1.111). This is a strong visual image of their mutual dependency, an intense theatrical moment that sits at odds with his insistence on a lack of oath: ‘No, not an oath’ (2.1.113). He says one thing but means another, a further aspect of the theme of dissembling, of appearance and reality, an ongoing trope of the play. Brutus asks, ‘What other bond/Than secret Romans that have spoke the word/And will not palter’ (2.1.123-5), but yet needs the physical reassurance of their hands in comradeship.

The idea of acting as part of the performance of the assassination is further embedded in the instructions given by Brutus to the conspirators. Linking with the emphasis placed on observation, Brutus repeatedly acknowledges the need for dissemblance. The conspiracy is based around deception, as Brutus comments: ‘Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough/To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none conspiracy/Hide it in smiles and affability’ (2.1.80-3). His advice to the conspirators reiterates this need: ‘Let not our looks put on our purposes’ (2.1.223).

Again, there is the need for the construction of a performance, for an alternative reality. The conspirators must pretend to be other than they are, reflecting the ambiguity of the entire Roman construction. Caesar is not depicted as his reputation describes and equally Brutus' description does not match up to the experience of the character. Rome is a construction of pretense, and yet Romanness is essential both to the play and to the conspiracy.

Metadrama here links to history. The conspiracy is based around the need to re-engage with historical Roman values, an idea that is part of Cassius' initial recruitment of Brutus in 1.2: 'Rome, hast thou lost the breed of noble bloods!' (1.2.150). Cassius articulates this further in his exchange with Caska in 1.3:

What trash is Rome?
 What rubbish and what offal? When it serves
 For the base matter to illuminate
 So vile a thing as Caesar?
 (1.3.107-111).

Cassius appeals to the past image of Rome; for him, the conspiracy is about restoring Rome and Romans to past glories. As Burrow comments, 'The conspiracy against Julius Caesar is partly an attempt by Romans to recover the past – to reanimate a spirit of ancient Rome and ancient Roman virtue, which brings with it republicanism and tyrannicide'.²¹ As seen above, this approach by Cassius to focus on ideas of the past, on history, as part of the impetus for the conspiracy is begun in his exchange in 1.2 with Brutus, but develops as a trope throughout the build-up to the assassination and in the immediate aftermath.

The linking of the conspiracy with history and theatre is seen throughout the storm scene of 1.3. Again, Cassius is the main progenitor both of the conspiracy and the intention to revive ancient Roman values. In his dialogue with Caska, he further recalls the past, associating it directly with the perceived deficiencies of the Roman present:

²¹ Burrow, *Classical Antiquity*, p. 218.
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For Romans now
 Have thews and limbs like to their ancestors:
 But woe the while, our father's minds are dead,
 And we are governed with our mother's spirits:
 Our yoke and sufferance make us womanish.
 (1.3.80-4).

In Cassius' instruction to Cinna to 'Set this up with wax/Upon old Brutus' statue' (1.3.145-6), the conspiracy becomes a set of props and prompts as Cassius is again shown stage-managing the conspirators in his manipulation of Brutus, invoking Brutus' noble Roman ancestor in order to galvanise him into action. What is noteworthy, however, is Brutus' response to Cassius' manipulation in his soliloquy of 2.1. Rather than immediately responding to the links with ancient Roman values and his ancestors, he considers instead how the future Caesar may behave: 'He would be crowned:/How that might change his nature, that's the question' (2.1.12-13). This is continued in his repeated use of 'may': 'That at his will he may do danger' (2.1.17); 'So Caesar may' (2.1.27). The future of Rome is, for Brutus, uncertain under Caesar, as much as the past and its values are fixed for Cassius. But part of Brutus' characterisation, sometimes referred to, as Burrow notes, 'as the first character on the English stage to have an inner life',²² is in the complexity of his response. He does later cite his noble ancestor as part of his decision to engage with Cassius' plans: 'My ancestors did from the streets of Rome/The Tarquin drive when he was called a king' (2.1.53-4). Previous history does influence his decision as much as his concern about the future. History in the play is thus part of a continuum, looking both to the past as well as to the future.

History is also part of the play's tragic patterning – repeated references to Pompey permeate throughout, with Cassius still referring to him immediately before Philippi: 'Be thou my witness that against my will (As Pompey was)' (5.1.73-4). The assassination is placed as connected to the continuing rise and fall of men through great events, part of the tragic pattern of the play. John W.

²² Burrow, *Classical Antiquity*, p. 217.
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Velz, identifying this pattern as ‘undulating’, further comments that ‘The conspiracy is a microcosm of Rome itself – a world in which leadership changes hands’.²³ As already indicated, the conspirators are very aware of their actions on the broader canvas of historical perspective, a self-consciousness that manifests itself through the play’s consistent engagement with metadrama.

IV. The Assassination as a Performance

The build-up of tension that is a part of Shakespeare’s treatment of a significant event in tragedy, seen, for example in the delay between the rape of Lavinia and Titus’ revenge in *Titus Andronicus* and in the York scenes of 5.2 and 5.3 of *Richard II*, where the focus shifts from the story of Richard to Aumerle’s conspiracy, deferring Richard’s murder and increasing anticipatory tension, is mirrored in the closing lines of 2.1 of *Julius Caesar*. Having spent the scene planning the murder of the title character, Shakespeare now implies the possibility that it may not, after all, take place as planned: ‘But it is doubtful yet/Whether Caesar will come forth this day or no’ (2.1.192-3). As a theatrical conceit designed to build tension, its purpose is clear, but it is also an example of Shakespeare’s structural innovation. By this deferral technique, the assassination seemingly becomes the emotional climax of the play. Caesar’s murder is clearly a focal point. It is, in reality, the culmination only of the play’s first half. The play divides around this event, consequently asking questions about tragedy and its purpose. Can the tragic genre extend its expected parameters to embrace a double tragedy with two emotional climaxes, first Caesar’s death and then Brutus’?

Caesar’s assassination is the structural centre of the play. The tension is created through the use of a number of short, unsettling scenes, following on from the interpretation of Calphurnia’s dream – the reappearance of the Soothsayer, the introduction of Artemidorus, the interaction between Portia and Lucius all

²³ John W. Velz, ‘Undular Structure in *Julius Caesar*’, *Modern Language Review*, 66 (1971), 21-30 (p. 22).
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contribute to making Caesar's assassination the culmination of the first part of the play. Killing the title character half way through the play is in itself a metadramatic act, consciously drawing attention to subsequent events but also providing a space to question the play's intention. What happens when the titular character, the character whose tragedy the title names, dies part way through his play? Generic expectation is disturbed, creating new tragic possibilities. For the conspirators, the answer lies in the creation of history. It is in history that Brutus recognises the solution to his moral paradox and where Cassius and Brutus find the justification for their actions. Girard posits that the foundations for Caesar's murder lie in Brutus' ancestors' involvement in the murder of Tarquin: 'My ancestors did lie in Brutus' ancestors' involvement in the murder of Tarquin: 'My ancestors did from the streets of Rome/The Tarquin drive when he was called a king' (2.1.53-54). For Girard, Caesar's murder is a natural conclusion to the sacrificial violence engaged in by Brutus' ancestors:

Just as sacrifice, for Brutus, was a reenactment of Tarquin's expulsion, so sacrifice in the new Imperial world must be a reenactment of Caesar's murder, offered to Caesar himself.²⁴

This emphasis on sacrifice and violence is here inherently entwined with the idea of the past. The dramatisation of Caesar's death thus mingles history and tragedy but also with a firm eye on future posterity. Caesar's death itself is not about the man dying; he is given no long death throes, dying in a mere six words: 'Et tu Brute? Then fall Caesar' (3.1.77). His death becomes about the assassins. The brief acknowledgement of Brutus' involvement increases the dramatic power of the betrayal. No more words are needed. The recognition is enough to create a significant theatrical hiatus.

The performative aspect of the assassination is also the mitigation used by the conspirators for their actions. The political, historical and the theatrical are

²⁴ René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; repr. 2000), pp. 220-1.
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consistently linked, culminating in Brutus' construction of a political and dramatic image:

Stoop, Romans, stoop
 And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood
 Up to the elbows and besmear our swords.
 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'
 (3.1.105-110).

Nicholas Brooke notes that 'the conspirators offer their bloodstains as the revivifying of Rome',²⁵ further associating dramatic imagery with political motivation. Although Cassius is the architect of the conspiracy, it is Brutus who is responsible for the visual images that become part of the assassination. His insistence on their blooding, as Girard suggests, illustrates that 'he himself proves incapable of abiding by his own rule [...] Brutus gets carried away in most dangerous fashion at the most crucial instant, right after the murder'.²⁶ The theatricalisation of their actions, in direct contrast to Brutus' earlier instruction, 'Let us be sacrificers and not butchers, Caius' (2.1.165), illustrates the ambiguity of the act and of the play itself. The emphasis on blood becomes the emblem of the assassination, a concept that is reflected by Antony's use of Caesar's bleeding corpse as a prop.

In the immediate aftermath of the murder, Cassius and Brutus pose the rhetorical questions that lie at the heart of the symbiosis of the political, historical and theatrical pattern. In a play where so much is ambivalent, the theatre emerges as the key issue: 'How many ages hence/ Shall this our lofty scene be acted over/ In states unborn and accents yet unknown?' (3.1.111-13). Kiernan Ryan suggests that 'these lines link the urge to vault forward into the future with the desire to lay the

²⁵ Brooke, *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*, p. 156.

²⁶ Girard, 'Collective Violence and Sacrifice', in *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*, pp. 108-127 (p. 117).

mighty low',²⁷ associating Shakespeare's theatrical precognition with 'its ability to dramatise the temporal realm of history from an extemporal point of view'.²⁸ Dramatising such an act in this reading removes it from its historical reality and transposes it into the unique space of the theatre. Brutus recognises this separate theatrical space, again associating it with history in the mention of Pompey: 'How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport/That now on Pompey's basis lies along/No worthier than dust?' (3.1.114-16). The mention of Pompey's statue authenticates the theatrical, political and historical paradigm. The assassination consigns Caesar to the same historical and dramatic continuum with which the play opens.

V. The Orations

The funeral orations of Brutus and Antony, set over the bleeding corpse of Caesar and in front of the Roman crowd, are the significant speeches of *Julius Caesar*. These are the theatrical apogees, part of the metadramatic narrative of the play, involving not only compelling rhetoric, but including the symbolic use of Caesar and his belongings as theatrical 'props', thus exploiting the realities of the stage and playhouse. They are a microcosm of theatrical tragedy, dominated by the confrontation of the certainty of death, but also indicating a continuing awareness of the dramatic power of the visual over rhetoric originally explored in *Titus Andronicus*.

The funeral orations clarify the metadramatic preoccupation of the play. Opposing sides, republican and imperial, are set directly against each other in the most public forum. Brutus represents old-fashioned rhetoric. Although, along with his fellow conspirators, he wishes to be part of the historical and theatrical dialectic, he does not understand its power. Brutus and Cassius' self-dramatisation

²⁷ Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare's Universality: Here's Fine Revolution* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden, 2015), p. 29.

²⁸ Ryan, *Shakespeare's Universality*, p. 31.

is in the future: ‘How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport’ (3.1.114). They fail to understand the theatrical reality of the present. In direct contrast, Antony has already been situated within theatrical narrative: ‘He loves no plays/As thou dost Antony’ (1.2.202-3). Brutus does not understand the power of theatre, spectacle and the importance of the visual. Antony is the experienced dramatist. J.L. Simmons in his essay ‘From Theatre to Globe’ suggests that ‘Antony’s version triumphs because of the more effective performance of the actor over the orator, with all of the theatrical employment of a text interactive with the audience, a text employing dynamics, pauses, climaxes, gestures, properties’.²⁹ His speeches are a key moment of the narrative. They are the exposition of the process of theatre, demonstrating the linguistic and the visual as the two primary codes of dramatic practice. They expose the mechanisms that theatre uses to engage with its audience, and, in the manipulation of the crowd, demonstrate its power.

Crucially, this scene is a significant expansion of the content in Plutarch, although Plutarch comments on both Antony’s eloquence and his use of Caesar’s bloody garments:

And therefore, when Caesar’s body was brought to the place where it should be buried, he made a funeral oration in commendation of Caesar, according to the ancient custom of praising noblemen at their funerals. When he saw that the people were very glad and desirous also to hear Caesar spoken of, and his praises uttered, he mingled his oration with lamentable words, and by amplifying of matters did greatly move their hearts and affections unto pity and compassion. In fine, to conclude his oration, he unfolded before the whole assembly the bloody garments of the dead, thrust through in many places with their swords, and called the malefactors cruel and cursed murderers.³⁰

Afterwards, when Caesar’s body was brought into the market place, Antonius making his funeral oration in praise of the dead, according to the ancient custom of Rome, and perceiving that his words moved the common people to compassion: he framed his eloquence to make their hearts yearn the more, and taking

²⁹ J. L. Simmons, ‘From Theatre to Globe: The Construction of Character in *Julius Caesar*’ in *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, ed. Horzt Zander (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp.155-63 (p. 157).

³⁰ *The Life of Antonius*, pp. 175-6.
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Caesar's gown all bloody in his hand, he laid it open to the sight of them all, showing what a number of cuts and holes it had upon it.³¹

Shakespeare's extension of his primary source denotes this scene as a conscious decision to pitch Brutus against Antony. According to Plutarch, Antony's is the sole funeral oration: Brutus does not address the crowd at this point.³² The scene is thus a deliberate extension of the Brutus/Antony relationship. It is their final interaction before their meeting before Philippi.

The conscious symmetry between Antony and Brutus is made explicit in the linguistic mirroring pattern that Antony employs. Brutus' opening, 'Romans, countrymen and lovers' (3.2.13), is acknowledged by Antony in his trio of addressals: 'Friends, Romans, countrymen' (3.2.74). His rhetorical style self-consciously invites comparison with that of Brutus. This is explicit through the use of contradiction, repetition, questioning and most notably syllogism. Both speeches are syllogistic:

Brutus: As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate
I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him:
but as he was ambitious, I slew him.
(3.2.24-27).

Antony: The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answered it.
Here under leave of Brutus and the rest
(For Brutus is an honourable man;
So they are all, all honourable men)
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
But Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.
(3.2.78-88).

³¹ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 129.

³² In Plutarch's *The Life of Brutus*, Brutus addresses the crowd immediately after the assassination, not as part of the funeral: 'When Brutus began to speak they gave him quiet audience; howbeit immediately after, they showed that they were not all contented with the murder'. See *The Life of Brutus*, p. 128. In *The Life of Caesar*, there are no funeral orations, although Brutus and 'his confederates came into the market to speak unto the people', the day following the assassination. See *The Life of Caesar*, pp. 108-9. *The Life of Antonius* does not mention any oration or speech of Brutus after the assassination.

Brutus makes a significant mistake when he allows Antony to speak second: ‘I will myself go into the pulpit first/And show the reason of our Caesar’s death’ (3.1.236-7).³³ By reasoning that he can explain the high-minded motives of the conspirators, he gives Antony the advantage of deconstructing his argument. That this is an advantage that Antony fully exploits is illustrated by the linguistic similarities between the orations, specifically in the repetition of ‘ambitious’, ‘honour’ and ‘honourable’. Antony re-contextualises Brutus’ assertions, reflecting on Brutus’ alleged ‘honour’ in the light of his depiction of Caesar’s ambition. By demonstrating Caesar’s loyalty to and care of Rome, he is able to refute Brutus’ claims.

Antony’s oratory superiority over Brutus lies not just in his use of words, but his understanding of performance. His argument lacks logic, as Barbara J. Baines’ notes: ‘Only one of the three points of Antony’s refutation is relevant to the issue of the conspirators’ cause’.³⁴ The references to Caesar’s attitude towards the Roman poor and his martial success are not part of the conspirators’ grievances: they are not mentioned by Brutus whose sole preoccupations are Caesar’s ambition and his own love for him. Rather, their inclusion by Antony allows him to paint a picture of a caring and compassionate Caesar. The remaining reason, ‘You all did see that on the Lupercal/I thrice presented him a kingly crown/Which he did thrice refuse’ (3.2.96-7), refers to the probable stage-managed performance at the running race in 1.2. As such, it is both a meta-textual and an intratextual reference, consistent with the theatrical emphasis of the play, and more particularly of this scene. Critically, Antony’s oration is inclusive of his audience, a strategy that Brutus uses, but by speaking last, Antony is able to manipulate the

³³ This is acknowledged as a mistake by Plutarch, as is Brutus’ decision to spare Antony’s life: ‘The second fault was when he agreed that Caesar’s funeral should be as Antonius would have them: which indeed marred all’, *The Life of Brutus*, p. 129.

³⁴ Barbara J. Baines, ‘“That every like is not the same”: The Vicissitudes of Language in *Julius Caesar*’, in *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, pp. 139-153 (p. 146).
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crowd more successfully. He emphasises what he claims they already know to be true: ‘You all did love him once, not without cause:/What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?’ (3.2.103-4). Brutus, in contrast, seems dispassionate: ‘Had you rather Caesar/were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were /dead to live all freemen?’ (3.2.22-4). Brutus suggests what might have happened had Caesar lived whereas Antony’s approach is more comprehensive: ‘It is not meet, you know how Caesar loved you’ (3.2.142); ‘It will inflame you, it will make you mad’ (3.2.145); ‘Will you be patient? Will you stay awhile?’ (3.2.150). As Baines notes, Antony’s ‘triumph [...] resides in his theatricality; his ability to replay the assassination as he would have his audience experience it’.³⁵

Although Richard Wilson, in his essay ‘Shakespeare’s Roman Carnival’ argues that ‘At its core, *Julius Caesar* is a play about writing and reading, and its climactic scene is a Shakespearean version of that staple of bourgeois fiction, the discovery and announcement of the deceased’s last will and testament’,³⁶ a closer textual examination shows that it is the revelation of Caesar’s torn garment that is at the heart of this ‘climactic scene’. In a play that has been consistently assessed as literary, the visual moment has a greater emphasis, confirming that the play’s focus is on performance as much as on reading and writing. Antony’s reading of Caesar’s will engages the mob, but it is the visual spectacle of his bloody garment that turns the tide of their opinion. Antony taunts the crowd with the idea of the will, ‘I do not mean to read’ (3.2.132), ‘I must not read it’ (3.2.141), manipulating the crowd into insisting that he does. This semantic teasing is a calculated device to build tension, allowing the mob to believe that they hold power. Antony is ostensibly putting power back into the hands of the crowd by emphasising Caesar’s devotion to them. It is, however, his use of Caesar’s ‘mantle’ prior to the unveiling

³⁵ Baines, p. 147.

³⁶ Richard Wilson, ‘“Is this a holiday?”: Shakespeare’s Roman Carnival’, in *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*, pp. 55-76 (p. 66).
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of Caesar's body that sways the crowd ultimately in his favour. Again, Shakespeare creates a visual spectacle. The contents of the will are immaterial since, by the time Caesar's benevolence is revealed, the action of the crowd has already been decided: 'Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!/Let not a traitor live' (3.2.198-199). The exposure of Caesar's bloody corpse appears as a theatrical touchstone, a physical tableau that seems part of an evolution from the coffin containing Richard II's body that is brought on stage at the end of Shakespeare's preceding tragedy, as well as connecting the play to the spectacle of the mutilated Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Caesar's body is a grotesque display of the consequences of assassination. In a further metadramatic reference, as Simmons comments, 'Caesar's objectification is complete: actor becomes property',³⁷ and equally page becomes stage.

The utilisation of the body is a further illustration of the importance of such a confrontation with death to the construction of tragedy. Each examined tragedy has a version of this encounter; from the bloodbath at the end of *Titus Andronicus*, through the sanitised tomb scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, to Bolingbroke's remorse over Richard II's casket, an encounter with the reality of death is a part of tragic iconography. *Julius Caesar*'s engagement with this idea seems to revert back to the bloody graphic exposure to death of *Titus Andronicus*. Antony's language is visceral: 'ran Cassius' dagger through' (3.2.172), 'cursed steel' (3.2.175), 'the blood of Caesar ... rushing' (3.2.176-177), 'burst his mighty heart' (3.2.184). Antony re-enacts the assassination, using Caesar's torn gown as a visual aid. His descent from the pulpit to examine Caesar's torn cloak next to his body indicates that his emotive focus on the realities of the assassination is a conscious decision. The words are supported by the reality of the murder. The stage directions – the 2nd Plebeian says 'Descend' (3.2.162), contrasting with the 3rd Plebeian's earlier

³⁷ Simmons, 'From Theatre to Globe', p. 157.
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observation, ‘The noble Brutus is ascended’ (3.2.11) – indicate the difference of understanding of engagement with the audience. This is a part of the contrasting performances of Brutus and Antony, as well as revealing the confident use of the performance space. The scene articulates the process of theatre, accentuating the importance of movement, stage properties and visual spectacle, as well as rhetoric. Visual imagery clearly outweighs the literary power of the reading of Caesar’s will and Shakespeare’s understanding of its theatrical power is clear.

This is not the only example of the replacement of language by spectacle in *Julius Caesar*. The play explores the limits of verbal imagery; at acute moments in the play, language breaks down to be replaced by striking visual images. In the crucial moment preceding Caesar’s murder, the conspirators experience this catharsis. As Caska initiates the assassination, power lies with physical action, not with words: ‘Speak hands for me’ (3.1.76). Words fail to express emotion at this point and Shakespeare’s construction of the tragic relies in part on the power of visual tableau. This iconographic image is continued by Brutus’ decision to display the representation of their act of brutality:

Stoop, Romans, stoop,
And let us bathe our hands in Caesar’s blood
Up to the elbows and besmear our swords.
Then walk we forth even to the market-place,
And waving our red swords o’er our heads
Let’s all cry, ‘Peace, Freedom and Liberty’
(3.1.105-110).

The political message is superseded by the arresting theatrical image. This is a conspicuous expansion of Plutarch’s reference to the conspirators ‘having their swords bloody in their hands’ into a striking dramatic metaphor.³⁸ Plutarch notes that ‘Brutus caught a blow on his hand’ during Caesar’s murder.³⁹ Shakespeare does not include this injury in the act of the assassination. Instead, it is Brutus who creates this image, suggesting that they ‘bathe our hands in Caesar’s blood/Up to

³⁸ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 127.

³⁹ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 127.

the elbows' (3.1.106-7). Plutarch's note of Brutus' injured hand becomes a picture of Brutus literally with 'blood on his hands' in Shakespeare's play. This is also a metaphor for the conspiracy's lack of dramatic understanding. They create a 'savage spectacle' (3.1.223), anticipating that this will achieve their political point, 'So often shall the knot of us be called/The men who gave their country liberty' (3.1.117-18), without realising the implications of the picture demonstrated by Antony's comment: 'And here thy hunters stand/Signed in thy spoil and crimsoned in thy lethe' (3.1.205-6). Their dramatic failure is highlighted by Brutus' instruction to Antony: 'You shall not in your funeral speech blame us' (3.1.245). He is thinking only of Antony's potential words, but he does not consider the dramatic and visual possibilities.⁴⁰ A part of Shakespeare's ongoing tragic discourse of the 1590s, *Julius Caesar* further explores the space between words and images in the depiction of the brutal reality of Antony's speech in the scene immediately following his oration, the murder of Cinna the poet in 3.3.

VI. The Death of the Poet

The tableau of the death of Cinna the poet fulfills a dual purpose. Primarily, it illustrates the effect of Antony's inflammatory performance at Caesar's funeral, following immediately after its conclusion and demonstrating the reality of Antony's closing lines of 3.2: 'Mischief thou art afoot:/Take thou what course thou wilt' (3.2.251-2). The result is mob violence and the murder of innocents, defining the callous aspect of Antony's character that is confirmed later in his interaction with Octavius over Lepidus: 'Do not talk of him/But as a property' (4.1.39-40). More than this, Cinna's death also demonstrates the play's concentration on the power of theatre. Gary Taylor, in his essay 'Bardicide', remarks that Shakespeare's

⁴⁰ The literal idea of bloodstaining becomes part of the signs and discourse of tragedy, referred to further by Hamlet in his description of Pyrrhus: 'Head to foot/Now is he totally gules, horribly tricked/With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.435-8).

inclusion of this scene ‘asserted a relationship between literature and politics’.⁴¹

The spectacle of the death of Cinna, the murder of the poet, is another part of the exploration of metadrama. Creating a further coup de théâtre, this is also a continuation of the dramatic discourse about the power of words against visual pictures that was suggested in the depiction of Caesar’s funeral.⁴²

Shakespeare’s use of Plutarch sanctions this textual reading. In both *The Life of Brutus* and *The Life of Julius Caesar*, Cinna is specified as Caesar’s friend; indeed, in *The Life of Brutus* he is delineated as ‘one of Caesar’s chiefest friends’.⁴³ It is the random nature of the mob violence against one of Caesar’s friends and mourners that prompts Cassius and Brutus to flee Rome: ‘they falling upon him their rage slew him outright in the market place. This made Brutus and his companions more afraid than any other thing’.⁴⁴ *The Life of Caesar* specifies that ‘This stir and fury made Brutus and Cassius more afraid than of all that was past and therefore within few days after they departed out of Rome’.⁴⁵ *The Life of Antonius* makes no mention of the incident and the notable discrepancy between the accounts in the *Lives of Brutus and Caesar* is the omission in Caesar’s *Life of Cinna’s* occupation.

Taylor sees ‘Cinna the poet’s’ murder as an engagement with contemporary politics, suggesting that this is Shakespeare’s calculated response to the burning of books during the summer of 1599 by Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft.⁴⁶ Its self-conscious inclusion – Shakespeare embellishes Plutarch’s account of the event – seems equally part of the ontological discourse, begun in *Titus Andronicus*, of the relationship between tragedy and poetry. Cinna’s silencing is not the first muting in Shakespeare’s tragedies of the 1590s. Although

⁴¹ Gary Taylor, ‘Bardicide’, in *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*, pp. 188-209 (p. 188).

⁴² As Taylor comments, ‘It is not easy to dismember an actor in front of an audience; it would have been especially difficult on the Elizabethan stage’ (p. 189).

⁴³ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 130.

⁴⁴ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 130.

⁴⁵ *The Life of Caesar*, p. 109.

⁴⁶ Taylor, ‘Bardicide’, p. 190.

Taylor suggests a conscious reference to Ovid's account of Orpheus' murder, Cinna's death further recalls Lavinia's silencing and Marcus' poetical rhetoric over her mutilated body. Marcus directly refers to Orpheus, 'As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet' (*Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.51). Taylor suggests that 'Act 3. Scene 3 of *Julius Caesar* is Shakespeare's *Defence of Poetry*',⁴⁷ arguing that Shakespeare here accepts Sidney's advice to alter history to illustrate philosophy. He further sees Cinna's murder as a 'political act', adding that 'Shakespeare has constructed the political innocence of the poet by constructing a fiction of the political guilt of the plebeians'.⁴⁸ Regardless, Shakespeare's extension of the episode from Plutarch suggests a focus on the consequences of Antony's funeral speech. The emphasis on Cinna's occupation – he twice repeats 'I am a poet' (3.3.29) – suggests this ongoing preoccupation with the place of poetry begun in *Titus Andronicus*. In *Julius Caesar*, Cinna's dismemberment sees violence literally subsume poetry. Visceral images, 'Pluck but/His name out of his heart and turn him going' (3.3.33-4), are translated into horrific physical action, reminiscent of the extreme violence of *Titus Andronicus*, exploring an element of acute savagery as part of the construction of tragedy.⁴⁹

The murder of Cinna the poet, then, is a further comment on the linguistic evaluation that is part of *Julius Caesar*'s narrative focus. Semantically, Cinna dies because he does not have the words to keep him alive. He cannot change the mind of the crowd. They decide that he is a conspirator and consequently his words are

⁴⁷ Taylor, p. 190.

⁴⁸ Taylor, pp. 190-193 (p. 193)

⁴⁹ Cinna is not the only poet in *Julius Caesar*. The unnamed Poet who appears briefly in 4.3 in a further meta-literary reference, paraphrases Homer: 'Love and be friends as two such men should be/For I have seen more years I'm sure than ye' (4.3.129-30), cementing the preoccupation with poetry in tragedy. This intrusion, according to Taylor, 'cut from almost every recorded revival of the play' (p. 194), introduces a brief moment of levity, recalling the pigeon seller's strange inclusion in *Titus Andronicus*. Again, there is a deliberation in Shakespeare's choice of occupation. In *The Life of Brutus*, the character Marcus Faronius 'counterfeits a philosopher, not with wisdom and discretion but with a certain bedlam and frantic motion' (*Life of Brutus*, p. 143). The reference to 'bedlam and frantic motion' intimates a sense of clowning that seems to be confirmed by the character's behaviour in *Julius Caesar*. He is a device to break the tension between Cassius and Brutus, but the change from philosopher to poet affirms a preoccupation with the idea of both poetry and comedy in tragedy. His appearance suggests that Shakespearean tragedy condones the genre intermingling that Sidney condemns.

irrelevant: ‘Tear him to pieces, he’s a conspirator’ (3.3.28). Violent death overrides poetry in this instance. The disturbing vocabulary emphasises this point: ‘Pluck but his name out of his heart’ (3.3.33), ‘Tear him, tear him’ (3.3.35). This is the reality of Orpheus’ death. There is nothing poetic in its manner. It is a frenzied attack on an innocent man. The frenetic action of the crowd recalls the earlier murder of Caesar, where language is also reduced to action. Caska’s ‘Speak hands for me’ has its corollary in ‘Tear him, tear him’. This is a mimetic attack. It is the actuality of Cassius’ ideal of liberating the country. As Girard notes, ‘The crowd becomes the mirror in which the murderers contemplate the truth of their action’.⁵⁰ It is the realisation of Friar Laurence’s ‘These violent delights have violent ends’ (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.6.9). Real consequences in tragedy are rarely considered in advance of the action. Cinna’s death at the hands of the crowd is the culmination of Antony’s prophecy, ‘Blood and destruction shall be so in use’ (3.1.265), that reaches its apogee at Philippi.

Cinna’s murder for the crowd has no purpose. From a political perspective, the violence parallels the assassination. The death of the poet and his demonstrable failure of language is the assertion of the dramatic power that Antony used to incite the crowd in his funeral oration. In the portrayal of Cinna’s death, Shakespeare, as playwright, acknowledges in theatrical terms, that dramatic, visual representation is a significant element of the nature of tragedy. Cinna misreads the situation and his responses are mild mannered: ‘Then to answer every man directly and briefly, wisely and/truly: wisely I say, I am a bachelor’ (3.3.14-15). For the crowd, the very association of his significant word, his name, with that of a conspirator, is enough to merit his murder. But linked in with such ironies is the reiteration of the supernatural as part of tragedy. Cinna’s ominous dream of ‘feasting’ with Caesar is

⁵⁰ Girard, ‘Collective Violence’, p. 117.
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presented as a prescient indication of a terrible event, initially visualised in

Calphurnia's earlier warning dream of 2.2:

Caesar: She dreamt tonight that she saw my statue
Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,
Did run pure blood [...]
And these she does apply for warnings and portents
And evils imminent
(2.2.76-81).

Cinna: I dreamt tonight that I did feast with Caesar,
And things unluckily charge my fantasy
(3.3.1-2).

The emphasis on the supernatural in *Julius Caesar* marks a further development of Shakespeare's idea of tragedy in the 1590s and is a sign of his evolving conception of the genre of tragedy, as discussed in the following section.

VII. The Supernatural as part of the Theatrical Paradigm

The introduction of the supernatural in *Julius Caesar* incorporates a number of different aspects of the metaphysical – ghosts, augurers and unnatural portents in the form of what Daniell describes as 'cosmic disturbance'.⁵¹ Each of these additions increases the innate theatricality of the play and audience experience, but their function is more than to escalate the sense of drama. Rather, they are a part of the play's duality of plot, enabling Caesar, whether corporeal or ethereal, to dominate both parts of the play.

The Soothsayer is a critical enough figure to be introduced in 1.2, the scene in which the play's main protagonists, Caesar, Brutus, Cassius and Antony, first appear. Caesar's reaction to the Soothsayer's words is part of the construction of Caesar as an all-powerful ruler. In public, he is dismissive, 'He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass' (1.2.24), but not in private, and by 2.2 Caesar is ordering sacrifices in order to predict the future: 'Go bid the priest do present sacrifice/And bring me their opinions of success' (2.2.5-6). While this can be construed as a

⁵¹ 1.3.2n.

normal part of Roman religion, its juxtaposition with the opening lines of the scene belie Caesar's dismissal. The unsettling storm unsettles Caesar more than a little:

Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight.
Thrice hath Calphurnia in her sleep cried out
'Help ho: they murder Caesar'.
(2.2.1-3).

Coupled with Caesar's following line, 'Who's within', the scene of Caesar as a private man generates an image of his nervous unease. This fits in with Cassius' assessment of 2.1: 'For he is superstitious grown of late' (2.1.194). Caesar's presentiments also become a part of the theatrical delay towards the assassination:

It may be these apparent prodigies,
The unaccustomed terror of this night
And the persuasion of his augurers,
May hold him from the Capitol today.
(2.1.197-200).

It is Caesar's superstition that has the potential to derail the conspiracy. The contradiction between Caesar's public face and private insecurities is explored further in 2.2 where the gap between his words and his meaning becomes even more apparent, supplementing the contradictions in his character. While frequently asserting his fearless credentials, 'Yet Caesar shall go forth, for these predictions/Are to the world in general as to Caesar' (2.2.28-9), he is also easily influenced into staying by his wife: 'And for thy humour I will stay at home' (2.2.56). His changeability, indicated by Decius in 2.1 – 'Never fear that. If he be so resolved/I can o'er sway him' (2.1.201) – is clarified by Decius' persuading him of an alternative meaning to Calphurnia's dream appealing to his vanity: 'This dream is all amiss interpreted/It was a vision, fair and fortunate' (2.2.83-4). The introduction of the supernatural is not, then, purely a theatrical device. It has significance for the play's innovative characterisation as well, it is a part of the play's embedded theatricality. The conflict in Caesar's attitude to the metaphysical is indicated by his addressal of the Soothsayer on his arrival at the Capitol in 3.1,

the critical scene of the assassination. Caesar initiates the contact – ‘The ides of March are come’ (3.1.1) – suggesting that, for all his bravado, the prediction has been weighing on his mind. The Soothsayer’s response, ‘Ay, Caesar, but not gone’ (3.1.2) maintains the dramatic imperative that the supernatural provides.

The introduction of the supernatural into *Julius Caesar* also contributes to the play’s intertextuality within Shakespeare’s canon, reflecting the earlier play of *Richard III* whilst also looking forward towards the haunting by Hamlet’s father in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare had, of course, explored the idea of the supernatural in *Richard III*, probably written in 1592-3, and there are distinct parallels between the two plays, delineating a consistency in the search for a new sort of tragedy. In *Richard III*, the corpse of Henry VI bleeds again in the presence of his murderer, Richard: ‘Dead Henry’s wounds/Open their congealed mouths and bleed afresh’ (*Richard III*: 1.2.55-56). Antony comments on a similar phenomenon in *Julius Caesar*: ‘Over thy wounds now I do prophesy/(Which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips/To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue’ (3.1.259-261).

Caesar’s corpse then responds to Antony’s desire for revenge. Wilson comments:

So just as the ghost of the assassinated Roman stalks his enemies in *Julius Caesar*, in Shakespeare’s Histories Caesar’s spirit haunts the cells and stairs of ‘Julius Caesar’s ill-erected Tower’ (*Richard II*, 5.1.2).⁵²

Julius Caesar is part of Shakespeare’s dramatic narrative of the 1590s in which history and tragedy interact, and its similarity in the use of the supernatural to *Richard III* provides one aspect of this cohesion.

As in *Richard III*, Caesar’s ghost visits Brutus on the night before the battle. Beginning with the storm, continuing through Calphurnia’s dream and the presence of the Soothsayer, acknowledged by Antony in Caesar’s bleeding wounds, the ghost is part of a cohesive focus on omens and portents. The appearance of Caesar’s ghost equally influences the play’s narrative, aligning it

⁵² Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare: Julius Caesar* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 5-6.
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with the established expectations of revenge plays. As Michael Neill comments, the presence of ghosts is part of the dramatic imperative of the revenge tragedy: ‘In the play that established the generic mold for later dramatists, Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, the overwhelmingly agency of plot is represented by two supernatural figures’.⁵³ So the presence of Caesar’s ghost is a multi-functional device, aligning *Julius Caesar*, as the narrative trajectory changes following Antony’s vow of revenge in 3.1⁵⁴ after the assassination, with the expected tropes of a revenge tragedy.

That the supernatural is an integral and important aspect to tragedy is clarified by Cassius’ final change of opinion about omens: ‘Now I do change my mind/And partly credit things that do presage’ (5.1.77-8). As Spevack notes: ‘The whole assembly of melodramatic claptrap devices and appearances are more than Shakespeare’s employment of the paraphernalia of the revenge play [...] they are his expression of something beyond as well as within’.⁵⁵ Caesar’s ghost underlines the complex interplay of political history and revenge tragedy following the assassination. The appearance of his ghost questions the morality behind the assassination, as subsequently acknowledged by Brutus: ‘O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet/Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords/Into our own proper entrails’ (5.3.94-6). The play here extends the mingling of history and tragedy into a new tragic intention, continuing the approach towards history and tragedy seen in *Richard II*. Through the ghost, *Julius Caesar* asks questions of itself, in particular questioning the idea of the tragic hero, as Antony and Brutus offer two different models for that role. The killing of the titular character decentres the traditional expectations of tragedy, opening up an exploratory space in which to consider this key element of the genre.

⁵³ Michael Neill, ‘English Revenge Tragedy’, in *A Companion to Tragedy*, pp. 328-350 (p. 340).

⁵⁴ ‘And Caesar’s spirit, ranging for revenge/With Ate by his side come hot from hell/ Shall in these confines and with a monarch’s voice/Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war’ (3.1.270-3).

⁵⁵ Spevack, p. 19.

Part Two. Structural Parallels, Plutarch's *Lives* and the Idea of the Hero

Julius Caesar explores the idea of the hero from a number of different angles, presenting a choice of characters for the role. Delineating Shakespeare's exploratory agenda, even the depiction of Caesar himself is a part of this conscious examination. His presentation is as an ageing figure, a very different character from the legend, indicated in Cassius' albeit bitter assessment: 'Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed/That he is grown so great?' (1.2.148-9). Antony, in his funeral oration of 3.2, presents the opposing view of Caesar:

He hath brought many captives home to Rome
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept.
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
(3.2.89-93).

As the structure of the play itself bisects around the death of Caesar, so the hero figure is subsequently divided between two opposing figures, Antony and Brutus. Although a departure from the single tragic figure explored in *Titus Andronicus*, and a significant innovation in tragedy, the roots for this development can be seen in its initial exploration in *Romeo and Juliet*, and further examination in the positioning of Bolingbroke against the King in *Richard II*. The preoccupation with the issue of the tragic figure is, then, not just a predominant theme of this play, but of Shakespeare's evolving theory of tragedy. The following discussion will consider the representation of Brutus followed by that of Antony, including the changes that Shakespeare makes from his source material, Plutarch's *Lives*, before suggesting that the idea of the tragic figure is intrinsically linked with the place of theatre and an understanding of the power of drama. Brutus' failing is that he does not understand the importance of theatre to the narrative arc. He cannot mobilise the crowd to support the conspirators because he does not understand the impact of theatre. Antony, from the play's opening, is shown as a supporter of the stage. As

the play unfolds, this understanding is shown to be critical both to his position as Caesar's defender, but also is critical to the future of Rome itself.

I. Brutus and the Idea of the Hero

In the same way that there is a tension in the representation of Rome, the imperial versus the Republic, so these ideas meet in the conflicted characterisation of Brutus. Traditionally viewed as the play's moral centre and referred to repeatedly as 'noble' and 'honourable' by characters other than Antony in his ironic funeral oration, Antony's final assessment of Brutus in his epitaph, 'This was the noblest Roman of them all' (5.5.69), is the appraisal that has endured.⁵⁶ This conviction, though, appears consistently undermined by the onstage experience. Brutus makes poor decisions, acts peremptorily and behaves, as Jo McMurty notes, 'very much like Caesar himself'.⁵⁷ Brutus' reputation, like that of Caesar's in terms of the play, precedes him, influenced initially by the conspirators' perception that he will add gravitas to their cause: 'O Cassius, if you could/But win the noble Brutus to our party –' (1.3.140-1).

Brutus, according to Burrow, is 'continually attempting to realign himself against different versions of his nation's past'.⁵⁸ This manifests itself in his and other characters', notably Cassius', references to Brutus' ancestors: 'There was a Brutus once that would have brooked/Th' eternal devil to keep his state in Rome/As easily as a king' (1.2.158-160). The irony is, of course, that Brutus, in his soliloquy in 2.1, is responding to Cassius' secret manipulation. As Naomi Conn Liebler comments, 'He is persuaded best by arguments that refer to the past, to tradition, and especially to family traditions'.⁵⁹ Brutus is located in the same historical

⁵⁶ 'thou art noble' (Cassius, 1.2.307), 'noble Brutus' (Cinna, 1.3.141), 'noble Brutus' (3rd Plebian, 3.2.11) for example.

⁵⁷ Jo McMurty, *Julius Caesar* (London and Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998), p. 39.

⁵⁸ Burrow, *Classical Antiquity*, p. 219.

⁵⁹ Naomi Conn Liebler, 'Thou bleeding piece of earth': The Ritual Ground of *Julius Caesar*', in *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*, pp. 128-148 (p. 141).

continuum as Caesar, limited by the idea of the past.⁶⁰ As already commented, this is a continuation of the suggestion begun in *Richard II* of history overwhelming the trajectory of the present to bring about tragedy.

Brutus' continual emphasis, first suggested by Cassius in 1.2, is on his ancestors and their noble actions:

My ancestors did from the streets of Rome
The Tarquin drive when he was called a king.
'Speak, strike, redress'. Am I entreated
To speak and strike?
(2.1.53-6).

Brutus' motivation is Rome: he believes that he is acting solely for its good. This is a constant theme, linking his idealism with his sense of historical perspective, and is shown most plainly in the lines that indicate his decision to join the conspiracy: 'O Rome, I make thee a promise/If the redress will follow, thou receives/Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus' (2.1.56-8). Following on from 'Speak, strike, redress', the link between his ancestors and his choice is made explicit, an emphasis that extends throughout the play, even after Caesar's death and its disastrous consequences: 'Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?' (4.3.19). These honourable intentions are a consistent aspect of Brutus' character, however undermined they may appear by his behaviour.

Brutus' internal conflict is mirrored by his external representation, emphasising the contrast between his private virtues and his public limitations. As noted above, his judgment is flawed; his actions are shaped by Cassius but he ignores Cassius' wish to murder Antony as well as Caesar; he is outmanoeuvred by Antony, allowing him to speak at Caesar's funeral (over-riding Cassius' sensible caution); he is severely constrained in his military decisions, being at least partly responsible for Cassius' death. And yet his ideology gives him a certain heroic

⁶⁰ Brutus' motives, however, are not purely delineated, as already noted, by past history. He, of all the conspirators, is the only one to consider the future effect of the assassination on Rome shown in his use in 2.1 of 'So Caesar may' (2.1.27).

status: he acts out of his perception of the best interests of the population. ‘A piece of work that will make sick men whole’ (2.1.326) is Brutus’ assessment of the conspiracy. He is not interested in personal gain. This care of Rome is consistent with the emphasis on historical Rome and Rome as an ideal that constantly must be strived for. Rome is Brutus’ Achilles heel in terms of the conspiracy. It is not his better nature that Cassius appeals to: it is his idealism and nostalgia for an historical version of Rome.

There is, however, ambivalence in the presentation of Brutus’ heroism that is consistent with the ambivalence that permeates the play, epitomised by his soliloquy of 2.1. Examining this speech in detail highlights the use of literary tropes that change the complexion of the speech. Although traditionally viewed as an exemplar of Brutus’ logic and reasonable nature, the opening line states that his mind has already been made up: ‘It must be by his death’ (2.1.10). The speech is in fact the opposite of a logical exposition. The frequent use of ‘But’ suggests that, rather than a speech of a persuasive nature, it is instead a confirmation of a course of action that Brutus has already decided on. The extended use of metaphor, ‘It is the bright day that brings forth the adder’ (2.1.14), ‘And then I grant we put a sting in him’ (2.1.16), ‘And therefore think him as a serpent’s egg’ (2.1.32), and the absence of reasoned, structured logic seems to confirm this interpretation as self-justification rather than balanced analysis. The rhetoric is equivocal, illustrated by the use of the future conditional tense, ‘How’ (2.1.13), and ‘may’ (2.1.27), reflecting the argument. Brutus’ conclusion is reliant on the theoretical: ‘So Caesar may’ (2.1.26). He is anticipating the potential outcome, rather than on what he knows to be true. As Daniell comments, ‘Brutus resolves to act only on the theoretical premise that Caesar will become tyrannical against his own evidence of his friend’.⁶¹ Brutus’ soliloquy seems an extension of Richard’s soliloquy of 5.5 in

⁶¹ 2.1.10-34n.

Richard II, and suggests that a liminal moment alone on stage where the audience is the characters' only confidante and where the tragic protagonist attempts either to process or piece out the action, is part of Shakespeare's developing theory of tragedy. This suggestion is, of course, supported by the multiple soliloquies in Shakespeare's subsequent tragedy, *Hamlet*.

In a play heavy with metadramatic references, Shakespeare's depiction of Brutus against the Brutus presented in Plutarch's *The Life of Brutus* is interesting and apparently contradictory to the play's metatheatrical agenda. His focus on Brutus' conflicted character is at the expense of apparently obvious dramatic possibility, consequently emphasising the importance of character development to Shakespeare's own dramatic development. For example, he alters the dynamic of the relationship between Brutus and Caesar. They share no scenes alone together and yet, in Plutarch, their friendship is of paramount importance. The relationship in *The Life of Brutus* has familial potential. Plutarch refers to Caesar's belief of the possibility that he was Brutus' father:

For when he was a young man, he had been acquainted with Servilia, who was extremely in love with him. And because Brutus was born at a time when their love was hottest, he persuaded himself that he begat him.⁶²

The relationship is underlined across both texts. It is noteworthy that both *Lives* make reference to Caesar's rescue of Brutus after his capture at the Battle of Pharsalia:

It is reported that Caesar did not forget him, and that he gave his captains charge before the battle, that they should beware they killed not Brutus in fight, and if he yielded willingly unto them, that they should bring him unto him: but if he resisted, and would not be taken, then that they should let him go and do him no hurt.⁶³

⁶² *The Life of Brutus*, p. 115.

⁶³ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 115.

Shakespeare's primary source clearly shows a significant interrelationship between Caesar and Brutus, a relationship at which *Julius Caesar* barely glances.⁶⁴ Brutus refers to his friendship with Caesar on only two occasions: 'yet I love him well' (1.2.82) and 'and for my part/I know no personal cause to spurn at him' (2.1.10-11). The dramatic potentiality, then, of a patricide is ignored. There is no familial complication, implying that the authorial focus is on a political, rather than personal, tragedy.⁶⁵ The rationale again is the separation of the public and personal, as Kahn suggests: 'In the course of the conspiracy, the ethos of the republic demands that Brutus and his comrades separate their inner worlds from the public domain, by placing the public good above any personal consideration'.⁶⁶ Brutus' struggle between public duty and private emotion appears to be a deliberate narrative thread.⁶⁷

This tension reappears in Brutus' unemotional reaction to the news of Portia's death. Again, the emphasis is on expected Roman qualities: 'Now as you are a Roman, tell me true' (4.3.185), demands Brutus of Messala. Messala's response is to expect Roman behaviour from Brutus: 'Then like a Roman bear the truth I tell' (4.3.186). While Brutus' response, 'Why farewell Portia, we must die

⁶⁴ The same incident in the *Life of Caesar* extends Caesar's kindness to Brutus: 'For Caesar did not only save his life at the Battle of Pharsalia when Pompey fled and did at his request also save many more of his friends besides'. See *The Life of Caesar*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ This emphasis on the political as opposed to the familial seems to be a consistent decision as Shakespeare also makes no mention of Plutarch's assertion that 'Cassius had married Junia, Brutus' sister'. See *The Life of Brutus*, p. 117.

⁶⁶ Kahn, 'Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies', p. 213.

⁶⁷ Shakespeare's treatment of Portia's self-inflicted injury is, in contrast, at odds with the idea of Brutus' public life taking precedence over his private life. For Plutarch, Portia's stress illustrates Brutus' fidelity to Rome: 'Now in the meantime there came one of Brutus' men post-haste unto him and told him his wife was a-dying. For Porcia being very careful and pensive for that which was to come, and being too weak to away with so great and inward grief of mind [...] When Brutus heard these news it grieved as it was to be presupposed: yet he left not off the care of his country and commonwealth, neither went home to his house for any news he heard'. Shakespeare's omissions from Plutarch's narrative would indicate that this aspect of Plutarch confirms his chosen predominant theme. Yet Shakespeare uses these incidents to humanise Brutus and, surprisingly, emphasise his familial relationship: 'O ye gods/ Render me worthy of this noble wife!' (2.3.301-302). Portia's disquiet after Brutus' confession of intention, although interestingly this is not dramatised but only inferred, contributes to the image of a loving couple: 'Yes, bring me word boy, if thy lord look well/For he went sickly forth' (2.4.13-14). There is the possibility of her political engagement, although again this is implied and is not made explicit: 'O Brutus/The heavens speed thee in thy enterprise' (2.4.41-42). There is a conflict then in the personal and public that Shakespeare exploits but does not resolve.

Messala' (4.3.188), may be fitting to a Stoic Roman, theatrically it dramatises the public and private tension that conflicts Brutus' character. There seems to be an intentional ambiguity in the characterisation of Brutus that has its genesis, at least in part, in Plutarch. Plutarch does not depict Brutus' reaction to Portia's death, instead giving the couple a farewell scene that Shakespeare ignores: 'There Porcia, being ready to depart from her husband Brutus and to return to Rome did what she could to dissemble the grief and sorrow she felt at her heart'.⁶⁸ The inclusion of the farewell scene between the Queen and deposed King in *Richard II*, contrasted with the lack of such a scene in *Julius Caesar*, suggests that the tragic potential has developed from the personal to the political. There is a lack of the sentimentality in *Julius Caesar* that threatens to overwhelm *Richard II*. The theatrical possibility in sentimental goodbyes is not a part of the composite tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, although the introduction of Portia and the depiction of her relationship with Brutus in 2.1, indicate that relationships in *Julius Caesar* are considered part of the tragic exploration.

Ostensibly, Brutus' death confirms his nobility, both to himself and to the outside world. In reality, as Wilson points out, 'In fact he is incapable of suicide unaided [...] and must command a servant to expedite his death'.⁶⁹ Brutus' death is not a straightforward act of suicide; instead, he dies holding the hand of a servant who, in the absence of the willingness of his friends to be involved, he elevates to 'a fellow of good respect' (5.5.46). Brutus' death, as his life has been, is equivocal. His consistent justification has been of Rome's best interests and yet he dies without a mention of Rome's future. His final scene focuses exclusively on his own feelings: 'My heart doth joy that yet in all my life/I found no man but he was true to me' (5.5.34-35). Having condemned Cato earlier in the play for his suicide, 'I know not how/But I do find it cowardly and vile' (5.1.102-103), he fails to show

⁶⁸ *Life of Brutus*, p. 132.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *Julius Caesar*, p. 78.

similar courage, relying on Strato to hold the sword. His death becomes a part of the issue surrounding the depiction of death that informs the tragic discourse. Plutarch in *The Life of Brutus* states that he commits suicide: ‘He came as near to him as he could, and taking his sword by the hilts with both hands and falling down on the point of it ran himself through’.⁷⁰ He does acknowledge the possibility that Strato held the sword, although there is a caveat in the phrase ‘Others say’.⁷¹ Shakespeare’s choice of Brutus’ death is consistent with the ambivalence that permeates both his portrayal and the play as a whole.

The issue of a figure central to the play is shared between Brutus and Antony, and it is arguably Antony’s essential understanding of the necessity of theatre and drama to the narrative that is responsible for the failings of the conspiracy – and consequently Brutus as one of the conspirators. Antony, in his oration speech, manipulates the crowd in a similar way to Cassius’ manipulation of Brutus. Potentially, it is the presence of Antony that turns Brutus into a tragic character. Brutus’ position within the play certainly suggests that his anticipated role is that of the main protagonist. He is onstage for much of the action, his moral dilemma is at the heart of the narrative and he dies at the end of the play, in the expected place of the hero. And yet the characterisation is not straightforward, suggesting that the question of what makes a hero is a significant consideration of the definition of tragedy. Brutus does not fulfill the expected hero role, in the same way that the play is not definitively about Caesar’s tragic death. Brutus’ death, coupled with that of Caesar, makes the play a double tragedy, although unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, the two deaths create two theatrical apogees: Caesar dies halfway through the play, Brutus at the end. If a part of the matrix of a tragedy is a final death, then Brutus fulfills that expectation. Shakespeare, however, in his exploratory portrayal of Brutus is offering a different kind of tragic figure, one

⁷⁰ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 161.

⁷¹ *The Life of Brutus*, p. 161.

whose tragedy is not necessarily in his death but in his essential nobility.

Antony appears as the direct contrast to Brutus, but there are correlations between the two that delineate the significance of the central figure to the tragedy.

II. Antony: Hero and Revenger

Shakespeare's focus on Antony shares similarities with his treatment of Brutus, suggesting a coherent exploratory approach to the issue of what makes and who is the play's hero. Antony's role is also twofold. He functions both as a possible hero figure – he is deliberately portrayed as Caesar's faithful and true friend – and subsequently, as the play reflects aspects of an Elizabethan revenge tragedy, Antony is cast in the role of the avenger. The presentation of Antony is also ambivalent, part of the consistency of equivocation that runs throughout *Julius Caesar*.

The changes that Shakespeare makes from the depiction of Antony in Plutarch support those that are made in relation to Brutus, again delineating conformity of approach. The personal is removed to increase the focus on the political. Antony in Plutarch is portrayed as something of a playboy, an aspect of his character that, for Plutarch, is interwoven with the reasons for the conspiracy against Caesar:

The noblemen (as Cicero saith) did not only mislike him but also hate him for his naughty life: for they did abhor his banquets and his drunken feasts he made at unseasonable times and his extreme wasteful expenses upon vain light huswives: and then in day time he would sleep or walk out his drunkenness, thinking to wear away the fumes of the abundance of wine he had taken over night. In his house they did nothing but feast, dance, and mask: and himself passed away the time in hearing of foolish plays.⁷²

Shakespeare glances at this aspect of Antony's character, making the remnants of the reference part of the metatheatrical focus: 'He loves no plays/As thou dost Antony' (1.2.202-3). Stripping out the playboy aspect of Antony's characterisation in Plutarch focuses the attention on the political. Shakespeare thus removes one of

⁷² *The Life of Antonius*, p. 171.
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the motives for Caesar's assassination, crystallising the reasons for the conspirators' actions and making the political the imperative. This decision is consistent with the attention on the political that is made by the changes to Brutus' character from that of Plutarch. Political tragedy does not need to be dissolved by familial or personal considerations.

Further significant changes from the source material are made to Antony's behaviour immediately after the assassination. These are based around traditional ideas of heroism and direct attention to the meaning of that role. In Plutarch, Antony is portrayed as something of a coward, a depiction that is consistent across all three relevant *Lives*. In *The Life of Antonius*, he disguises himself in order to escape: 'Antonius, being put in a fear withal, cast a slave's gown upon him, and hid himself'.⁷³ *The Life of Caesar* says: 'But Antonius and Lepidus, which were two of Caesar's chiefest friends, secretly conveying themselves away, fled into other men's houses, and forsook their own'.⁷⁴ Clearly this behaviour – running away to save himself – while prudent, is inconsistent with the bravery associated with a traditional hero figure. Shakespeare does not clarify Antony's actions during the assassination, but his location is considered by Cassius in its aftermath: 'Where is Antony?/Fled to his house amazed' (3.1.96-7). This is immediately qualified by Trebonius adding: 'Men, women and children stare, cry out and run/As it were doomsday' (3.1.97-8). Antony is not alone in his response to Caesar's death; rather it is an accepted and understandable reaction, supported by Trebonius' use of 'Men'.⁷⁵ Antony's behaviour in Shakespeare's play is largely consistent with his later depiction as a martial warrior, callous and experienced on the battlefield.

⁷³ *The Life of Antonius*, p. 175.

⁷⁴ *The Life of Julius Caesar*, p. 108.

⁷⁵ The use of 'amazed' is also worthy of comment. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, between 1570-1599 usage was restricted to 'Lost in wonder or astonishment' (p. 66). There is no sense of cowardice.

Shakespeare goes further than altering Antony's cowardly behaviour after the assassination in Plutarch. Instead, Shakespeare's Antony confronts the assassins almost immediately after the assassination. He addresses Caesar's dead body before addressing his murderers, emphasising his role as Caesar's true friend: 'O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?/Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils/Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well' (3.1.148-150). Shakespeare creates a tragic spectacle, suggesting the importance of the 'hero' addressing Death in some way. This appears as the natural extension to Bolingbroke's engagement with Richard II's coffin. Bolingbroke expresses remorse; in comparison, Antony's address to Caesar's bleeding corpse results in his adoption of the role of revenger. But Antony's behaviour in this scene is also aligned with that of Brutus in 2.1. His insistence on shaking the bloodstained hands of each individual assassin creates a metatheatrical moment recalling Brutus' similar action of 2.1: 'Let each man render me his bloody hand' (3.1.184); 'Give me your hands all over, one by one' (2.1.111). Antony's bond, in contrast to the brotherhood that Brutus creates, is one of revenge, but its power as spectacle draws attention to the stage as a place of violent tragedy.

Shakespeare also changes Antony's complicity in Caesar's murder that is suggested in Plutarch. All references to Antony's prior knowledge of the intentions of Brutus and the other conspirators are ignored, supplementing the conviction of Antony as a heroic figure. In *The Life of Antonius* Trebonius dissuades the other conspirators from including Antony:

He told them that when they rode out to meet Caesar at his return out of Spain, Antonius and he always keeping company and lying together by the way he felt his mind afar off: but Antonius finding his meaning would hearken no more unto it and yet notwithstanding never made Caesar acquainted with this talk but had faithfully kept him to himself.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *The Life of Antonius*, pp. 174-5.
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Antony in *Julius Caesar* is not corrupted in any way by the conspiracy. This allows for his motivation to be entirely based around his friendship with Caesar. Shakespeare deliberately removes any suggested responsibility of Antony for the antagonism directed at Caesar. Plutarch depicts Antony's presentation of the crown to Caesar at the running race as 'a good encouragement for Brutus and Cassius to conspire his death', although Antony is not implicated.⁷⁷ In direct contrast, this action in *Julius Caesar* happens offstage, so that Antony's motives are not specified, only related by Caska. Shakespeare does, however, show Caesar instructing Antony before the event: 'Forget not in your speed Antonio/To touch Calphurnia' (1.2.6-7), suggesting his responsibility for the subsequent staged pageant.

There seems, then, to be a deliberate intent to keep Antony as a less corrupted character than presented in the sources, strengthening the possibility of Antony as a candidate for the role of main protagonist. The idea of Antony as a hero figure suggests a shift in the criteria for the hero of a tragedy. Antony does not die at the play's end; rather, he is included in the societal resolution. It is Antony who establishes Brutus as 'the noblest Roman of them all' (5.5.69), acknowledging the purity of his actions: 'He only, in a general honest thought/And common good to all, made one of them' (5.5.72-3). There is some sort of heroic resolution in Antony's acceptance and focus on Brutus' qualities, suggesting a different kind of central figure might be possible, one more fitted to history than tragedy. The moral victory, the ending of *Julius Caesar* implies, is Brutus'. Antony, in the end, lacks that quality.

III. Structural and Scenic Parallels

The symmetry in the handling of the play's two theatrical climaxes correlates to both the use of metatheatre and to the bipartite idea of the hero figure. The parallels

⁷⁷ *The Life of Antonius*, p. 174.
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in the appearance of minor characters, domestic settings and speeches identify the symmetrical positioning of Brutus and Antony as embedded into the narrative structure. This is an extension of the scenic symmetry, discussed in relation to *Romeo and Juliet* in Chapter Two, although its use in *Julius Caesar* coalesces around possibilities of the central tragic figure.

The deliberate authorial intent behind the pattern of the double hero is demonstrated throughout the play by the balance of scenes. Caesar and Brutus' first appearance is in a public forum (1.2). Subsequently, they are both shown in private discussion: Brutus with Cassius (1.2, 25-176), and Caesar with Antony (1.2.189-213). Furthermore, the subject of each private conversation is the opposite of the other; Cassius discusses Caesar: 'Why man, he doth bestride this narrow world/ Like a colossus, and we petty men/Walk under his huge legs and peep about/To find ourselves dishonourable graves' (1.2.134-8). Caesar then comments on Cassius: 'Let me have men about me that are fat/Sleek headed men and such as sleep a-nights/Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look/He thinks too much: such men are dangerous' (1.2.191-4). This verbal configuration, each mirroring the other, implies that this is not a random theatrical accident.

Both Brutus and Caesar are next presented in a domestic setting; the patterning continues even down to depicting each protagonist at home with his respective wife. There are further similarities in these private scenes (2.1 and 2.2 respectively), as both Brutus and Caesar interact with minor figures, Lucius and 'a servant'. Both men are depicted making decisions: Brutus confirms his collusion in the assassination plot, 'Let's be sacrificers but not butchers, Caius' (2.1.165), while Caesar's dialogue with his 'friend' Decius is what finally convinces him to attend the Capitol on the Ides of March, 'How foolish do your fears seem now Calphurnia!/I am ashamed I did yield to them' (2.2.105-6). This explicit scenic association between Brutus and Caesar cements the idea of self-conscious

structural deliberation. That the characters are continually presented in settings that make it easy for the audience to compare them, their respective behaviours and their moral positioning, suggest that morality and moral responsibility is delineated part of the tragic imperative.

The structural parallels between Brutus and Caesar are brought to an end by Brutus' involvement in Caesar's assassination. However, at exactly this point, heroic representation in opposition to Brutus is assumed by Antony. Cast into an heroic position by Shakespeare, his self-appointed role is that of revenger: 'Over thy wounds now I do prophesy/ [...] A curse shall light upon the limbs of men/Domestic fury and fierce civil strife/Shall cumber all the parts of Italy' (3.1.259-64). His actions throughout the play uphold his avenging manifesto. At this point, the play's trajectory also shifts toward a revenge tragedy, although still with a political focus. Antony's soliloquy of 3.1, in which he states his intention for revenge, is the companion to Brutus' of 2.1. It is a liminal moment between the character and the audience, and establishes Antony's motives for his subsequent actions. This patterning also identifies the importance of theatricality in *Julius Caesar*. It reiterates the impression created by the alteration of the sources, determining that Antony's motives, like those of Brutus, appear selfless. In his eyes, Caesar was 'the noblest man/That ever lived in the tide of times' (3.1.256-7). Semantic links, the repetition of 'That', the use of statement as well as the use of the future conditional tense between both monologues, further underline the parallels. It is worth noting that when Antony prophesies that Caesar shall 'with a monarch's voice/cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war' (3.1.272-3), he exposes the central irony in the conspirators' actions. In death, Caesar achieves the monarchical status that, according to the conspirators, he wanted in life.

The narrative structure, after Caesar's death, delineates Brutus and Antony as opposing heroes mimicking the way that Caesar and Brutus are matched in the

play's opening scenes. For each scene of Brutus, Antony has a parallel. Brutus' comments to Cassius urging compassion towards Antony, 'For Antony is but a limb of Caesar/ Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers Caius ... And for Mark Antony think not of him' (2.1.164-80), are contrasted with Antony's lack of compassion towards Lepidus: 'This is a slight, unmeritable man/Meet to be sent on errands: is it fit/The threefold world divided, he should stand/One of the three to share it?' (4.1.12-15). These developing parallels are signalled earlier in the play before the death of Caesar. Where Brutus urges caution: 'Our course will seem too bloody Caius Cassius/To cut the head off and then hack the limbs' (2.1.161-2), Antony demonstrates casual brutality: 'These many then, shall die; their names are pricked' (4.1.1). This desultory violence can be interpreted as another deliberate contrast between the two characters. Brutus' urging of mercy towards Antony ultimately represents the failure of the conspirator's cause. This attitudinal disparity demonstrates the differing approach to soldiering and, as subsequent events acknowledge, Antony's pragmatism is superior. Antony makes the difficult decisions that Brutus shies away from, demonstrably cast as a martial hero against a flawed yet noble Brutus, whose wrong decision-making is responsible for the ultimate failure of the republican coup.

Even the argument between Brutus and Cassius has a correlation in the Antony and Octavius dynamic. While Brutus and Cassius use the metaphor of soldiering to disguise the true reason for the argument between them, Antony and Octavius literally disagree about their tactics.

Cassius: Is it come to this?

Brutus: You say you are a better soldier:

Let it appear so

[...]

Cassius: You wrong me every way, you wrong me Brutus.

I said an elder soldier, not a better

Did I say better [...]

(4.3.50-7).

Antony: Octavius, lead your battle softly on,

Upon the left hand of the even field.
Octavius: Upon the right hand I. Keep thou the left
Antony: Why do you cross me in this exigent?
Octavius: I do not cross you: but I will do so.
 (5.1.16-20).

This deliberate helix between Brutus and Antony, where their behaviour mirrors that of the other but they do not meet, reaches its culmination in their confrontation of 5.1. A self-consciously ritualistic scene, acknowledged in Brutus' 'Words before blows: is it so, countrymen?' (5.1.27), this scene imitates the tradition of exchanging insults before battle, echoing the 'gage' sequence of *Richard II*'s opening scene. Antony's involvement in this confrontation underlines the strength of his feeling about Caesar's death, confirming his theatrical reinterpretation as an avenging friend: 'Witness the strokes you made in Caesar's heart', 'Villains! You did not so, when your vile daggers/Hacked one another in the sides of Caesar' (5.1.39-40). The correlations between the two characters are confirmed in Antony's enduring assessment of Brutus: 'This was the noblest Roman of them all' (5.5.69). His estimation of Brutus is that of Brutus himself, as motivated by the highest ideals: 'He only in a general honest thought/And common good to all made one of them' (5.5.72-73).

The treatment of Brutus in death once more raises the issue of the difficulty of the ending of tragedy. Even though Brutus has been Antony and Octavius' enemy, he is accorded honour in burial: 'Most like a soldier, ordered honourably' (5.5.80). The ending of the play, however, is not as straightforward as it appears. Antony's epitaph over Brutus has all of the hallmarks of a play's final words. Showing magnanimity towards Brutus, his 'generous epilogue' suggests resolution, the victor acknowledging the qualities of the vanquished:⁷⁸ 'So mixed in him that nature might stand up/And say to all the world, 'This was a man!'' (5.5.75-6). Antony's lines are subsequently undermined by those of Octavius, ending the play,

⁷⁸ 5.5.69-76n.

as James Shapiro points out, ‘before the struggle for pre-eminence between Antony and Octavius is settled’.⁷⁹ This potentiality is perhaps suggested in Octavius’ proprietary attitude towards Brutus’ ‘bones’: ‘Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie’ (5.5.79). The ending of *Julius Caesar* thus appears similar to that of *Richard II* in that the play’s resolution is not finite. History, it seems, will not allow tragic closure as the victors take the final epitaphs of the vanquished and move on to the next battle.

IV. Conclusion

Tiffany Stern in *Making Shakespeare* comments on intertextuality, mooting the possibility that the references in *Hamlet* to *Julius Caesar* ‘might be an advertisement’.⁸⁰ Regardless of the veracity of this suggestion, *Hamlet* demonstrably continues many of the preoccupations of the earlier play. The problematic role of the hero, the insertion of metadrama into a discussion of tragedy, the design of the multi-layered narrative with a focus on revenge, the experience of the supernatural, are all aspects of the tragic pattern that transfer from *Julius Caesar* into *Hamlet*.

The Roman location of *Julius Caesar* denotes the play as a history, but its political angle, coupled with the issues of history and death within the play, signifies the play as a generic compound, the very thing that Sidney’s *Defence of Poetry* argues against. Heather DuBrow in her book *Genre* argues that:

Established genres carry with them a whole series of prescriptions and restrictions [...] Through signals as the title [...] the poet sets up a contract with us. He in effect agrees that he will follow at least some of the patterns and conventions we associate with the genre or genres in which he is writing.⁸¹

⁷⁹ James Shapiro, *1606: William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), p. 262. Shapiro suggests that Shakespeare deliberately left the ending unresolved, allowing for the possibility of a sequel to *Julius Caesar*.

⁸⁰ Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, p. 75.

⁸¹ Heather DuBrow, *Genre* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 9-31.

Play titles, then, carry with them implications. There is an expectation that a play will ‘play’ by the rules of theatrical engagement.⁸² This is not true of *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare’s approach is calculating. He creates an expectation through the title that is that the play is about the tragedy of Julius Caesar. The play in the *First Folio* is listed under ‘Tragedies’ and called in the Catalogue *The Life and death of Julius Caesar*, but it is billed on its title page in the book proper and in its ‘running titles’ as *The Tragedie of Julius Caesar*. The play, then, ‘plays’ with the generic expectation that the word ‘tragedy’ creates. Although Shakespeare delivers on the promise made in the title – Julius Caesar is murdered and therefore it is his tragedy – the play offers much more than the title suggests.

A possible reason for this approach is the economic imperative of making a play stand out from the other Roman plays that proliferated during the mid to late 1590s. Clifford Ronan’s *‘Antike Roman’: Power Symbolology and the Roman Play in Early Modern England, 1585-1635* lists twenty-two extant and lost plays between 1590-1600.⁸³ Shakespeare’s tragedy is a part of this theatrical movement, potentially explaining its innovative approach. But the play is also a part of Shakespeare’s inventive exploration of tragedy. It addresses the preoccupations identified in his earlier experiments in tragedy, forming part of an evolving tragic discourse, and specifically identifying the place of theatre in tragedy. Its narrative is original, questioning the idea of the hero in its introduction of multiple candidates for the role, killing the titular character at the mid-section of the play, not identifying a clear villain and changing the anticipated climactic trajectory. *Julius Caesar* thus disturbs the prevalent tragic archetype and suggests that a generic interdependency is part of the pattern of tragedy, even as it suggests that

⁸² For example, although *The Comedy of Errors* has a character threatened with the death penalty, the titular assumption is, as the play is titled is a ‘comedy’, everything will be positively resolved in the end.

⁸³ Clifford Ronan, *‘Antike Roman’: Power Symbolology and the Roman Play in Early Modern England, 1585-1635* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995). See Table 4, pp. 180-181.

Polonius' generic assessment, 'tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.380-2), may not be that far wide of the tragic mark.

Conclusion

In many ways this thesis both begins and ends with *Hamlet*.¹ Any consideration of tragedy must inevitably address *Hamlet*, described by John Keble as ‘the noblest and greatest of Shakespeare’s tragedies’. While the preceding chapters have sought to explore and establish certain characteristics that seem to have been developed by Shakespeare as part of a deliberate consideration of the essential components of tragedy between his first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, in the early 1590s, and his final tragedy of the decade, *Julius Caesar* in 1599, the first stage of this self-conscious tragic exploration appears to reach its conclusion at the turn of the sixteenth century. Even bearing in mind that the economic imperatives under which Shakespeare was operating suggest the need for constant and consistent innovation, *Hamlet* appears to be the culmination of this early generic exploration in the way that it draws together numerous threads that have evolved through his previous tragedies. If, as the Introduction suggested, ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ is an indication not just of general expectations of tragedy, but more specifically Shakespeare’s own perspective of the genre, then *Hamlet*, with its metadramatic insertion of a play-within-a-play – ‘The Mousetrap’ or ‘The Murder of Gonzago’ – at the heart of its narrative, along with its emotional development of the central tragic figure, is the self-conscious result of this generic examination.

An aspect of this thesis has been a concern with the mutability of genre suggested by play titles. Taking the First Folio of 1623 as a ‘copy text’, of the plays discussed in the thesis, not one of the four is billed as ‘The Tragedy’ or even ‘A Tragedy’ on the contents page of the Folio. That honour is accorded to only three of the eleven plays listed in the ‘Tragedy’ category: *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth* and

¹ Cited by Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1950, reprinted 2005), p. 60 http://www.amazon.co.uk/Readings-Character-Hamlet-compiled-sources/dp/0415612292/ref=reader_auth_dp [accessed February 2nd 2016]

Hamlet. Reasserting their generic status, the ‘running titles’ on the top of each page agree with the authority of the opening Catalogue. And although the print history of *Hamlet* is far from straightforward, with the two extant quarto versions being radically different,² one point of coincidence is in the play’s title. Both Q1 of 1603 and the generally regarded more authoritative text of 1604/5 afford prominence to the play’s genre:

THE / Tragicall / Historie / of / HAMLET / Prince / of / Denmark.³

As Burrow comments, history can ‘in this period ‘mean little more than ‘story’ or ‘narrative’,⁴ but regardless, the evidence of both quartos confirms the weight of ‘tragicall’ that is bestowed consistently on the play by the Folio. It appears then that by the early 1600s genre boundaries have become significantly less fluid. While, as this thesis has acknowledged, such titular variations are not comprehensively generically definitive, they serve as a reflection of the genre mutability that was prevalent in the preceding decade, a mutability that we can trace in other aspects.

The differing importance afforded to the place of death in tragedy is an integral part of Shakespeare’s development of the genre. In Shakespeare’s first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, death is a part of the dramatic imperative from the play’s opening, with the killings of Alarbus and Mutius. In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, death occurs only when an integral part of the narrative: Romeo responds to Tybalt’s murder of Mercutio; there are then no further deaths until the play’s final scene at the tomb. Instead, Juliet’s ‘false’ death, a trope of comedy is considered as part

² For a full discussion of the issues surrounding *Hamlet*’s textual history, see Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, *The Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series: Hamlet*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, (London and New York: Bloomsbury, The Arden Shakespeare, 2006; repr. 2015), pp. 74-95. All quotations from *Hamlet* have been taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisamann Maus.

³ See Plates 7 and 8.

⁴ Burrow, ‘What is a Shakespearean Tragedy?’ p. 5. This is confirmed by the authority of *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, see page 1256.

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of the tragedy. The trajectory of *Richard II* resembles that of *Romeo and Juliet* – the deaths of John of Gaunt and Richard himself are dictated by the play’s history, in the same way that the pre-existing story of *Romeo and Juliet* specifies the necessity of the death of the primary protagonists. In *Julius Caesar*, the traditional expectation of tragedy as ending in death is undermined in the killing of the title character halfway through the play. By *Hamlet*, however, death in the ‘person’ of the ghost dominates from the play’s opening. In *Julius Caesar*, Caesar’s ghost appears to Brutus as a response to Brutus’ involvement in his murder. In *Hamlet*, the reason for the ghost’s appearance dominates the narrative. Death permeates the play and has been relocated from an essential aspect of the ending of tragedy to a primary theme affecting every aspect of life in *Hamlet*. The ambiguity – again a consistent feature of the last two plays, *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar* - that surrounds the ghost and his motivation in appearing to Hamlet results in the play’s reliance on Shakespeare’s most significant, at least in terms of this thesis, tragic innovation – the embedding of metadrama.

Metadrama dictates the genre of *Hamlet* with the play-within-the-play used to determine Claudius’ guilt:

I’ll have these players
 Play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle. I’ll observe his looks
 I’ll tent him to the quick. If a but blench
 I know my course.
 (2.2.571-5).

Claudius’ reaction to ‘The Murder of Gonzago’ turns the play into a fully developed revenge tragedy, but what is important is to recognise the extent to which metadrama has become a key feature.

As the Introduction, suggested the play-within-a-play device of ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* articulates, albeit in a parodic fashion, the criteria for a successful tragedy. *Hamlet’s* ‘The Mousetrap’ illustrates the metadramatic conclusion that Shakespeare appears to have drawn from his previous four tragedies, that its inclusion is part of the tragic exposition. If ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ is about the dynamic relationship between comedy and tragedy, ‘The Mousetrap’ is about the compelling relationship between tragedy and theatre, and the play-within-the-play is this genre’s self-announcement.

Following on from the focus on theatre, acting and observation in *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* dramatically extends these elements by having a central tragic figure who claims to be acting: ‘As I perchance hereafter shall think meet/To put an antic disposition on’ (1.5.172-3). In addition, there are two supposed ‘friends’ who definitely are pretending: ‘Call me what instrument you will, though you fret me you cannot play upon me’ (3.2.341-2), and the play as a whole is saturated with theatrical and intertextual references: ‘I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i’th’ Capitol’ (3.2.93-4); contemporary theatrical allusions, ‘But there is sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of the question and are most tyrannically clapped for’t’ (2.2.326-7); a troupe of actors – notably specified ‘tragedians’ – ‘Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city’ (2.2.315-6). There are, too, the instructions to actors to ‘Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue’ (3.2.1-2); a performative example of tragic precedent: ‘The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms/Black as his purpose’ (2.2.432-3), as well as Polonius’ famous generic categorisation and mingling of 2.2.379-84. The metadrama examined in the earliest tragedies is embellished and extended in this turn-of-the-century tragedy. As

Calderwood comments, 'In *Hamlet*, dramatic illusion becomes a route to truth after truth itself has turned illusive'.⁵

There is, then, a performative mimesis present in *Hamlet* and an engagement with the process and mechanics of both plays and acting; in Anne Righter's words, '*Hamlet* is a tragedy dominated by the idea of the play'.⁶ Robert Weimann suggests that 'these self-resembled' performance practices were an important part of the larger spectrum of the purposes of playing',⁷ and as such, should be cited within a tradition of Elizabethan performance. Hamlet's advice to the Players, as well as his ideas on the 'purpose of playing' (3.2.19-20), seem to be a self-conscious reference to theatrical tradition, although, in keeping with much of his character, Hamlet contradicts himself. Arguing for a naturalistic style and against those who 'have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought/some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them/well they imitated humanity so abominably' (3.2.29-31), Hamlet's claim that the 'one speech in it [the play] I chiefly loved' (2.2.426) does not 'hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (3.2.20). Rather it appears instead to return to the highly dramatic rhetoric explored in *Titus Andronicus* and associated with the 'blood and thunder' style of earlier playwrights such as Thomas Kyd:

But as we often see against some storm
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
The bold winds speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region so after Pyrrhus' pause
A roused vengeance sets him new a-work
And never did the Cyclops hammers fall
On Mars his armour, forged for proof eterne,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.

(2.2.463-73).

⁵ Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, p. 156.

⁶ Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, p. 142.

⁷ Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*, eds. Helen Higbee and William West (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 102.

The Player's speech breaches the boundaries between artifice and reality when his tears overcome him: 'Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears in his eyes. – Prithee no more' (2.2.499-500). This inherently metatheatrical moment – where illusion meets reality that then reverts back to illusion – thus breaks the space between actor and audience. It is the moment that motivates Hamlet's revenge, demonstrating the power and purpose of performance: 'What would he do/Had he the motive and the cue for passion/That I have? He would drown the stage with tears' (2.2.537-9). This expression of the potential of theatre inspires Hamlet to plot his own metadramatic purpose, within an accepted Elizabethan conceit:⁸

I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have declared their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ.
(2.2.566-71).

Theatre here provides Hamlet with a sense of purpose and thus is transformative, moving the character from the 'rogue and peasant slave' (2.2.528) to, however briefly, a man with a purpose, the revenger: 'Now might I do it pat, now a is praying' (3.3.73).

Hamlet here negotiates a new tragic discourse, acknowledging its theatrical antecedents as seen in the declamatory style of the Player King, while balancing the need for new sort of tragedy advocated by Hamlet: 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance: that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature' (3.2.16-18). Shakespeare regulates these two tragic imperatives using the metadramatic trope. Significantly, this shift in tragic style appears to be an attempt to solve the inherent problem of revenge tragedy, the dehumanising of

⁸ As Righter notes, 'The idea that a play could force guilty spectators to confess their crimes was, of course, a favourite Elizabethan testimony to the influence of illusion upon reality'. *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, p. 145.

the central tragic figure. As Bevington comments, ‘A seemingly inherent problem in the formula of the revenge play [...] is that the protagonist, in his obsessive drive for necessary revenge, becomes dehumanised and unsympathetic to such a degree that the cathartic effect of tragedy is diverted into the kind of savage and wanton destruction we see in the end of *The Spanish Tragedy*’.⁹ The emphasis on Hamlet’s emotional life, a pattern began in *Julius Caesar*, is a way of deflecting this problem. As Michael Neill comments, ‘Hamlet focuses to an unprecedented degree upon the inner life of a revenger’,¹⁰ an emotional progression that, I suggest, can be traced through the development of the characters of Richard II and Brutus.

A further revenge trope is seen in ‘The Murder of Gonzago’. Unlike Shakespeare’s previous play-within-a-play, this is not an obvious parody but rather, for as long at least as it is performed before interrupted by Claudius, it is a recognisable theatrical tragedy. If the purpose of metadrama is to locate the artifice of the theatre in the realities of life, then ‘The Mousetrap’ is a reflection of what Hamlet would like his life to be, a further artificial construct. As opposed to the comedic insertion of ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’, ‘the purpose of this play-within-a-play is entirely serious, although Margreta de Grazia suggests that the play itself might not be,¹¹ a suggestion that I will address later. ‘The Murder of Gonzago’, as already noted, defines *Hamlet*’s tragic agenda. The dumb show that opens the play establishes this, re-enacting the events that the ghost claims led to his death as well as what Hamlet knows of Claudius’ wooing and marriage of Gertrude. Although there are demonstrable similarities between ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ and ‘The Murder of Gonzago’ – hyperbolic rhetoric, stylised performances, a Prologue and audience interruptions – the play-within-the-play exists purely to establish

⁹ Bevington, ‘Tragedy in Shakespeare’s Career’, p. 59.

¹⁰ Neill, ‘English Revenge Tragedy’, in *A Companion to Tragedy*, p. 346.

¹¹ See Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007; repr. 2008), pp. 180-1.

Claudius' guilt.¹² Although what little is seen of 'The Murder of Gonzago' suggests that it is not a compound tragedy, de Grazia argues that Lucianus correlates to the Vice figure that 'brings action to a standstill',¹³ seeing in Hamlet's 'Leave thy damnable faces and begin' (3.2.231) the potential for 'Lucianus playing the scene for laughs by pulling faces'.¹⁴ If this is correct, Hamlet's response to Lucianus' antics is, as de Grazia further notes, 'another instance of the dilational Clowning censured by Hamlet'.¹⁵ Indeed, Hamlet's disapproval is an indication of the difficult relationship that *Hamlet* seems to have with the place of the clown.

The comic element in tragedy, as we have seen in the four tragedies under discussion, shifts from the identifiable comic figure suggested in *Titus Andronicus* and elaborated into a professional clown figure in *Romeo and Juliet*, but is a figure that largely vanishes from *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*. *Hamlet's* treatment of comedy shifts again, developing the comic role but within the tragic mode rather than as an additional feature. Although there is humour inherent throughout the play, the most significant and indeed well-known aspect of comedy in *Hamlet* is the dead clown, Yorick. The gravediggers, unlike the gardeners in 3.4 of *Richard II*,¹⁶ are comedians as well as philosophers and as such show a definite engagement with the clown role in tragedy. However, the meditation of the primary Gravedigger, while humorous, focuses exclusively on death:

2 Man: Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright or a carpenter?
 Gravedigger: Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.
 2 Man: Marry now I can tell.
 Gravedigger: To't!
 2 Man: Mass, I cannot tell

¹² No dramatic precedent has been found for its narrative, although Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor suggest that references to the length of the King and Queen's marriage, 'Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round' (3.2.139), are concomitant to the length of marriage of Gertrude and Old Hamlet. See *The Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series: Hamlet*, 3.2.148-51.n.

¹³ de Grazia, p. 180.

¹⁴ de Grazia, p. 181.

¹⁵ de Grazia, p. 181.

¹⁶ The Head Gardener in *Richard II*, 3.4 discusses relating the condition of the garden to the condition of the State but without any discernable humour.

Gravedigger: Cudgel thy brains no more about it for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating; and when you are asked this question next, say a grave-maker; the houses he makes lasts till doomsday.
(5.1.46-55).

Supporting the comic associations with death, all of the Gravediggers' songs and jokes are variations on the same theme. The professional clown in the play, as opposed to the humour that is inherent in many of Hamlet's lines,¹⁷ is included in the encompassing preoccupation of the play with death.

The use of the clown figure in *Hamlet* is not, then, straightforwardly comic. While there is clearly a comic presence in the play, a re-engagement with comedy that had largely disappeared from Shakespeare's tragedies after *Romeo and Juliet*,¹⁸ the comedy is inherently connected with death:

Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that.

(*Hamlet*, 5.1.175-80).

Using Yorick's skull as a stage 'prop', the suggestion is that there is no place for old style comedy or clowns in tragedy, albeit illustrated through an engagement with it. In some ways, the death of the clown is analogous to the 'death of the poet', Cinna, in *Julius Caesar*, and indicates an acceptance that Sidney was right in his repudiation of 'the mingling of clowns and kings' – that straightforward comedy has no place in tragedy, but equally must be acknowledged in some form.¹⁹

While this thesis has examined iterative characteristics that bond the four tragedies under discussion, it has also sought to track changes between the plays, suggesting that a part of Shakespeare's early exploration of the genre is a theatrical response to the issues raised by Sidney in his *Defence of Poesy*. *Hamlet* appears to

¹⁷ de Grazia points out that Hamlet has ninety puns to his credit, 'more than any other Shakespearean character' (p. 183).

¹⁸ The exception is the curious introduction of The Poet into 4.3 in *Julius Caesar* whose scant seven-line interjection insists on Cassius and Brutus rebuilding their relationship.

¹⁹ Certainly The Fool in *King Lear* (1606) is far from the idea of a typical clown, as is the function of the Porter in *Macbeth*, suggesting the ongoing alteration of the role.

re-introduce certain themes that the final tragedies of the 1590s had seemingly phased out, notably the idea of love and, as already discussed, the issue of comedy. Both are reintegrated into *Hamlet*'s tragic mix but in a widely different format than previously recognised. The Hamlet-Ophelia love story not only ends in Ophelia's madness and death but, by the time of the play's opening, the relationship has already been poisoned, as opposed to the burgeoning tragic love depicted in *Romeo and Juliet* and the sincere bond between Richard and his Queen indicated in *Richard II*. Hamlet's 'I did love you once' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.116) contextualises the affair, a cruel relationship that ends in the destruction of one partner. Love in *Hamlet* is always shown as discordant – witness the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude, described repeatedly as 'incestuous' (1.2.157), 'pernicious' (1.5.105), 'rank' (3.4.82), 'shame' (3.4.72) and 'corruption' (3.4.83). There is no suggestion, as there is in *Romeo and Juliet*, of love as a potential force for good; rather, there is a consistent bitterness and association with death in its portrayal: 'I thought thy bride-bed to have decked sweet maid/ And not t'have strewed thy grave' (5.1.228-9). Ophelia's funeral is the real tragic extension of the lamentations scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, although here there is no possibility of a happy reunion as there is in the earlier play.

In the tragedies of the 1590s, the significant component of the plays' endings' is, not surprisingly, the presence of death. Shakespeare's exploration of the importance of death to tragedy is delineated in the differing treatments of the plays endings. In *Hamlet*, there is a shift in the play's preoccupation with death that marks, in some ways, a return to the tragic conclusion of *Titus Andronicus*, and the expected endings of revenge tragedies, where the stage is littered with bodies. With a total body count – including offstage – deaths of nine to the fourteen of *Titus Andronicus*, death in *Hamlet* has far more in common with Shakespeare's earliest

tragedy than the later plays of the 1590s.²⁰ This association precludes *Hamlet's* final metadramatic conceit, when Fortinbras is cast as an audience member and Hamlet's body is placed on a stage, dissolving the boundary between the actors and audience: 'What is it ye would see?/If aught of woe and wonder cease your search' (5.2.306-7). The play becomes a performance even before it has finished: Horatio's litany of events in Elsinore itself reads as a definition of tragedy, albeit an old-fashioned tragedy:

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause
And in this upshot, purposes mistook,
Fall'n on th'inventors heads.
(5.2.324-329).

Horatio's analysis places death in all its various forms at the forefront of *Hamlet's* tragic ending, but it is *Hamlet* without the prince or Shakespeare's art.

This thesis has tried to suggest that Shakespeare self-consciously explored the idea of tragedy, moving away from the blood soaked revenge pattern, employing a prismatic approach to create a richer and unexpected, multi-faceted frame of reference, one that focused more on the interior self, indicated by the development of character beginning in *Richard II* and continued in *Julius Caesar*. It is in *Hamlet* that these varying approaches are drawn together. As Hamlet himself puts it in the final soliloquy, he does 'not know /Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do'' (4.4.33-4). Hamlet is talking about his promise to revenge his father's murder, but that sense of incompleteness lingers until the very end of the play and even beyond. Which, we might wonder, is the final tragedy of *Hamlet* – Q1, Q2, The Folio? Perhaps T. S. Eliot was correct when he suggested that the

²⁰ The variety of deaths also seems part of this return, with onstage deaths including stabbings and poisonings as well as an offstage drowning.
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play ‘was full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate or manipulate into art’, that the old revenge plot taken from Kyd could not be brought into meaningful harmony with the other materials Shakespeare used or borrowed.²¹

Hamlet may draw together the threads of the earlier tragedies discussed above, the play where, for a short period, the tragic form seems to be understood as the generic compound that Polonius describes: ‘tragedy, comedy, historical, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral’ (2.2.379-81). *Hamlet*, however, is not the final word on tragedy. With *Othello*, Shakespeare seems to have looked to other models or sources, including Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* and its Vice figure, while with *Macbeth* Shakespeare dramatises an action that might stand comparison with Marlowe’s *Faustus*. The double parallel plot of *King Lear* works in a way that the same structure in *Julius Caesar* divides the play against itself. After *Hamlet*, that is, Shakespeare examines further forms and types, including the great love tragedy of *Anthony and Cleopatra* and the soldier tragedy of *Coriolanus*. These later tragedies are a return to the themes of the earlier plays and the same concern with metatheatre is to be found. There is, however, a difference in the later plays. Metadrama seems no longer to be just about issues of theatre and tragic form but to be, in Lear’s words, ‘the thing itself’ (*King Lear*, 3.4.95). Life on stage and off has become ‘a walking shadow a poor player’ (*Macbeth*, 5.5.23), ‘this great stage of fools’ (*King Lear*, 4.5.173). After *Hamlet* the mood darkens as characters look into the abyss and find little to comfort there. If the early tragic plays make *Hamlet* possible, *Hamlet*, in turn, opens the way for other metadramatic tragedies.

²¹ T.S Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 85.
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Appendix

Plates

- Plate 1. *Titus Andronicus* (1594) title page
- Plate 2. *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) title page
- Plate 3. *Romeo and Juliet* (1599) title page
- Plate 4. *Richard II* (1597) title page
- Plate 5. *Richard II* (1598) title page
- Plate 6. *Richard II* (1608) title page
- Plate 7. *Hamlet* (1603) title page
- Plate 8. *Hamlet* (1605) title page

THE
MOST LA
mentable Romaine

Tragedie of Titus Andronicus:

As it was Plaide by the Right Ho
nourable the Earle of *Darbie*, Earle of *Pembrooke*,
and Earle of *Suffex* their Seruants,



LONDON,

Printed by John Danter, and are
to be sold by *Edward White & Thomas Millington*,
at the little North doore of *Paules* at the
signe of the Gunne,

1594.



AN
 EXCELLENT
 conceited Tragedie
 OF
 Romeo and Iuliet.

As it hath been often (with great applause)
 plaid publiquely, by the right Ho-
 nourable the L. of *Hunsdon*
 his Seruants.



LONDON,
 Printed by Iohn Danter.
 1597.

Plate 2. *Romeo and Juliet* Q1 (1597), title page

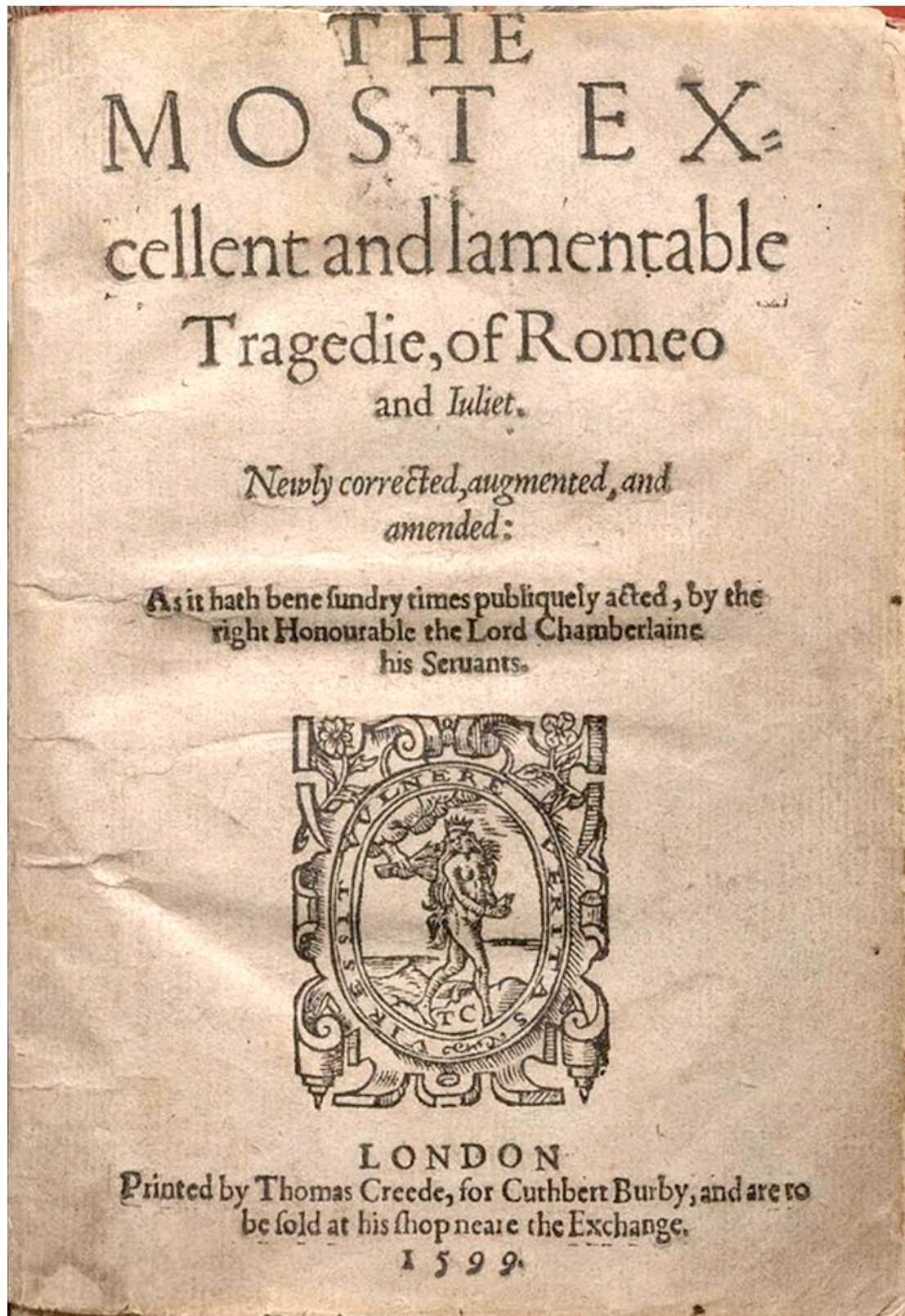


Plate 3. *Romeo and Juliet* Q2 (1599), title page

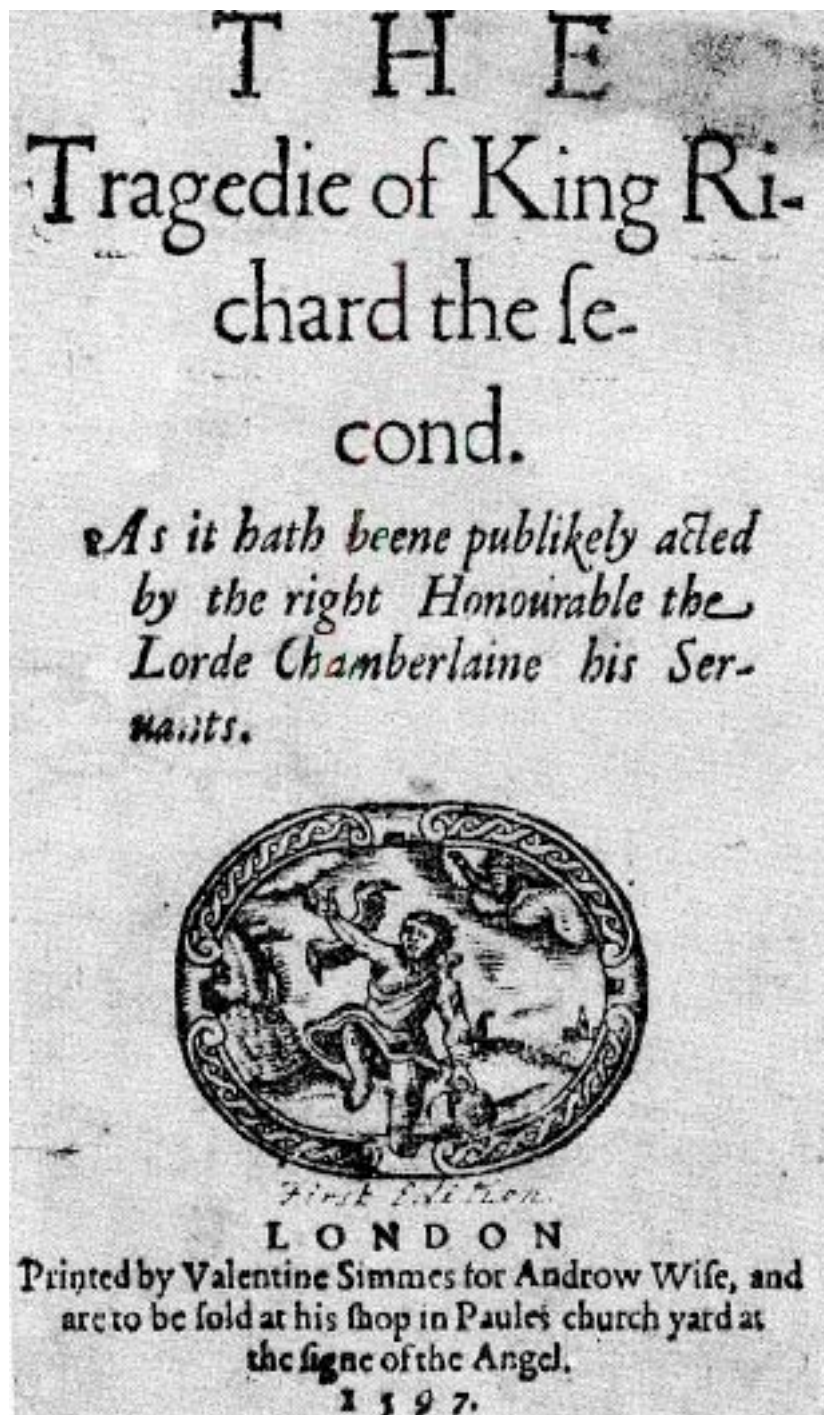


Plate 4. *Richard II* Q1 (1597), title page

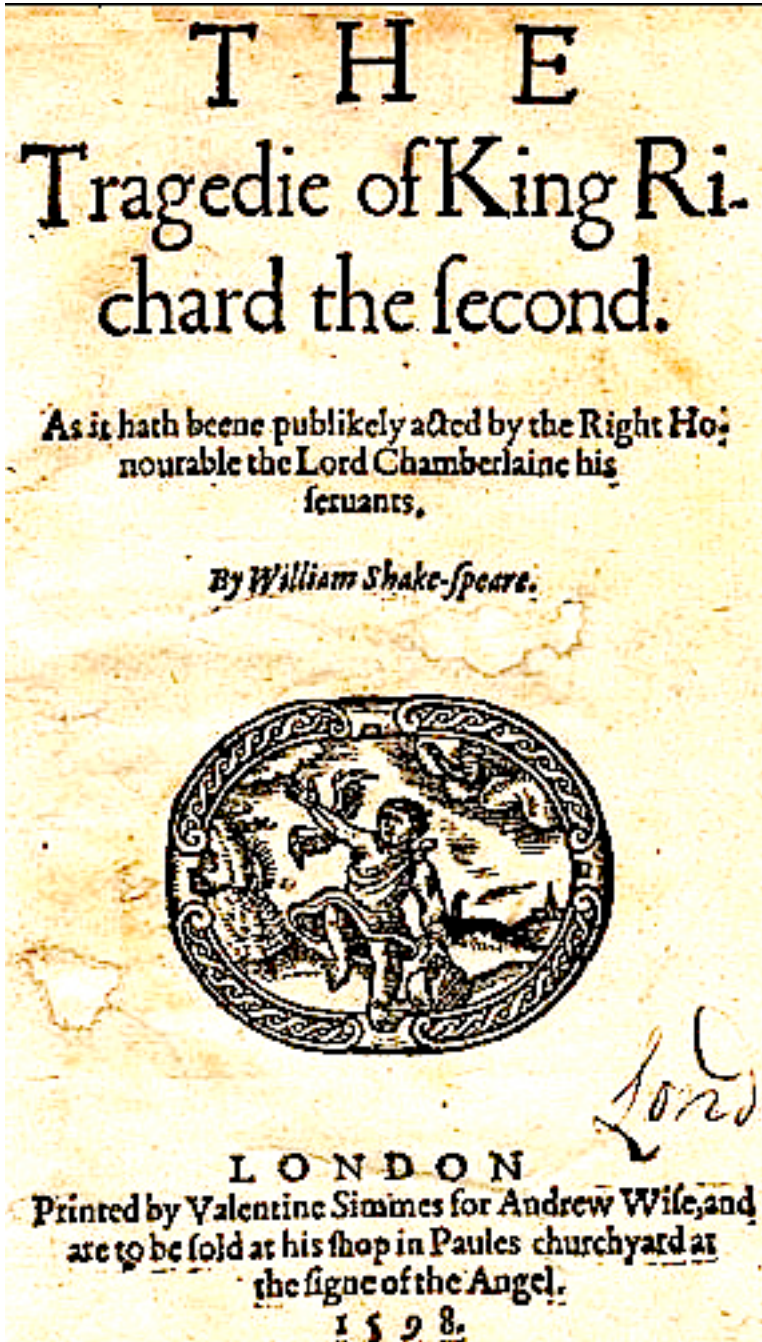


Plate 5. *Richard II (Q2) 1598*

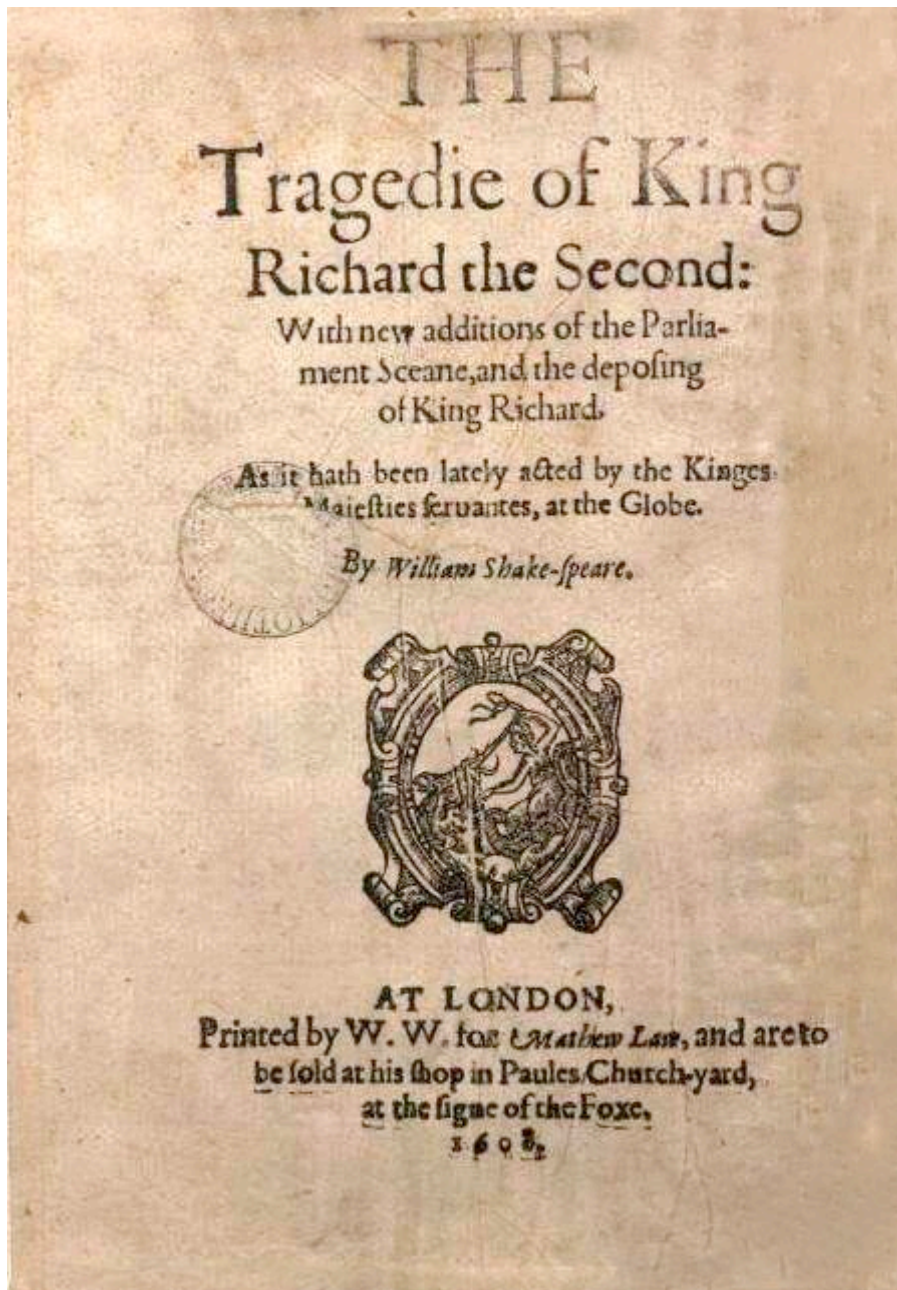


Plate 6. *Richard II* Q4 (1608) title page

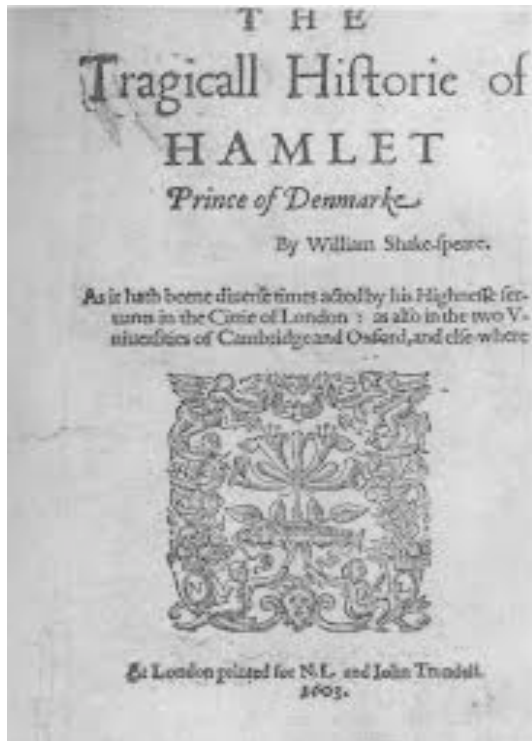


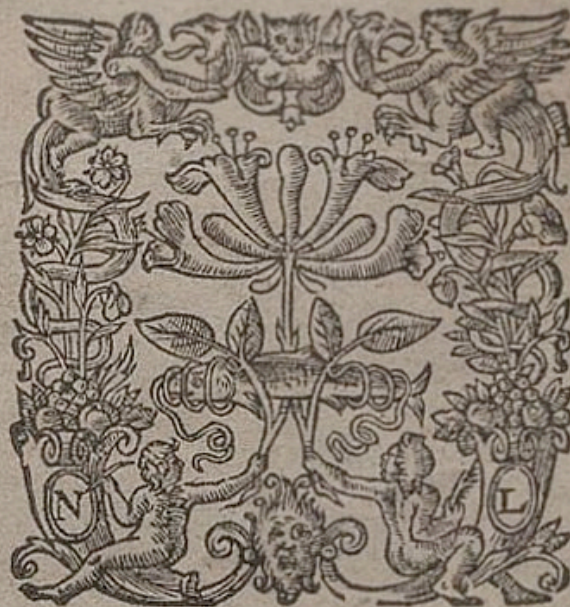
Plate 7. *Hamlet* Q1 (1603) title page

M. xxv

THE
 Tragical Historie of
 HAMLET,
 Prince of Denmarke.

By William Shakespeare.

Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much
 againe as it was, according to the true and perfect
 Coppie.



13

AT LONDON,
 Printed by I. R. for N. L. and are to be sold at his
 shoppe vnder Saint Dunstons Church in
 Fleetstreet. 1605.

Plate 8. *Hamlet* Q3 (1605) title page

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