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SHAKESPEARE'S ECONOMIC UNCONSCIOUS: REPRESENTATIONS OF
EMERGENT CAPITALISM IN SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMA

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Introduction: Reading Shakespeare's Economic Unconscious

In his highly cryptic work *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin makes the following point about the dialectic of particularity and totality in Western historical epistemology. Commenting on the rejection by a prominent nineteenth-century German historian, Hans Burdach, of the totalizing ethos of modern historiography, Benjamin attempts to provide a philosophical middle-ground between particularity and totalization through a critical focus on the problematic enabling critical thought—what Benjamin calls the “Idea.” Accepting Burdach’s objection to such totalizing concepts as “Humanism” and “Renaissance man,” Benjamin nevertheless provides the following important conceptual caveat:

The correctness of such an attitude [against shallow universalism]¹ is evident, inasmuch as it is opposed to the hypostatization of general concepts—although this does not include universals in all their forms. But it is a quite inadequate response to a Platonic theory of science, whose aim is the representation of essences, for it fails to appreciate its necessity.

Such a theory is, indeed, the only means of preserving the language of

¹ Burdach, quoted in Benjamin’s “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” to the *Origins of German Tragic Drama*, writes the following about historical designations/categories such as “Renaissance man”: “I have promised to speak of the origin of Humanism as if it were a living being which came a single whole into the world at one particular time and in one particular place, and then grew as a whole . . . To do so is to proceed in the manner of so-called Realists of medieval scholasticism, who attributed reality to general concepts, or “universals”. In the same way—hypostatizing after the fashion of primitive mythologies—we posit a being of uniform substance and complete reality and call it Humanism, just as if it were a living individual. But in this and countless other cases like it . . . we ought to be clear that we are doing no more than inventing an abstract concept in order to help us come to grips with an infinite series of varied spiritual manifestations and widely differing personalities. It is a fundamental principle of human perception and cognition that we can do such a thing only if, as a consequence of our innate need for systematization, we see in these varied series certain properties, which appear to be similar or identical, more distinctly and emphasize these similarities more strongly than the differences . . . Such kinds of Humanism or Renaissance are arbitrary, indeed they are false because they give life, with its multiplicity of sources, forms, and spirits the false appearance of a real unity of essence” (40).

scientific exposition, as it functions outside the sphere of mathematics, from the boundless skepticism which ultimately engulfs every inductive methodology however subtle . . . As far as historical types and epochs in particular are concerned, it can, of course with the aid of ideas such as that of the renaissance or the baroque . . . As ideas, however, such names perform a service they are not able to perform as concepts; they do not make the similar identical, but they effect a synthesis between extremes (41).

Slightly earlier in this chapter, Benjamin metaphorically attempts to clarify this idea of the synthesizing, but not totalizing, function of “ideas:”

Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The harmonious relationship between such essences is what constitutes truth. Its oft-cited multiplicity [ie. Burdach] for discontinuity is a characteristic of the ‘essences . . . which lead a life that differs utterly from that of objects and their conditions; and which cannot be forced dialectically into existence by our selecting and adding some . . . complex of properties which we happen to encounter in an object; but whose number is, by the same token, limited, and every single one must be searched for laboriously at the appropriate place in its world, until it is found, as a *rocher de bronze*, or until the hope that it exists is shown to be illusory (37).

In these passages, Benjamin anticipates key epistemological concerns of contemporary literary criticism and historiography. Like many critics working in new historicism and

cultural materialism, Benjamin here attempts an uneasy amalgamation of two historically competing conceptions operating in Marxist theory and historiography. Refusing to align himself either within a Hegelian Marxist conceptualization of epistemology or within a more modern –“these are the fragments which I shore against my ruin” –epistemology of the particular, Benjamin prefers to suggest a mediating element—the “Idea.” Although they are hard to distinguish, the “Idea” should not be equated to the concept, but should be understood as the epistemological conditions of possibility for the development of conceptions of historical and other kinds of phenomena. Ideas for Benjamin exist within the mediation of the element and its concept. They are at one and the same time the (indirect) determination and consequence of the momentary consummation of the two. As he notes, “ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of these elements” (34). “Just as a mother is seen to begin to live in the fullness of her power only when the circle of her children, inspired by the feeling of her proximity, closes around her” writes Benjamin in a surprisingly homey redaction of the “Idea,”

so do ideas come to life only when extremes are assembled around them.

Ideas—or to use Goethe’s term, ideals—are the Faustian ‘Mothers.’ They remain obscure so long as phenomena do not declare their faith to them and gather round them (35).

The idea may be considered the *ur-epistemology*, or using Frederic Jameson’s more appropriate spatial terminology—the *ur-horizon*, within which the “conception”—the mental representation of the particular takes shape. To further belabor Benjamin’s cosmology, a sun, for example, provides at best a gravitational context for the planets that

circle it. It, in other words, constitutes the astronomical ordering system under which planets exhibit their own particular orbiting behavior. In a similar way, the “Idea” can be seen as an epistemological ordering system—rather than the cosmos, the universe is here the theoretical conditions of possibility for the generation of the conceptualizations of the concrete phenomena under examination. A more scientifically current way of thinking about the “Idea” may be as a kind of epistemological chaos theory. As N. Katherine Hayles notes in *Chaos Bound*, chaos theory today involves the understanding “of the spontaneous emergence of self-organization” in chaotic systems. “Within chaos theory,” writes N. Katherine Hayles in her book, *Chaos Bound*, “two general emphases exist. In the first, chaos is seen as order’s precursor and partners, rather than the opposite . . . the second branch emphasizes the hidden order that exists within chaotic systems” (Hayles 9).

It may be said that recent early modern critical theory is also concerned with the chaotic in the sense of the particularity of literary representation and historical practices as well as the text’s more general relationship to the cultural system from which it arose. The particular anxiety in recent practice—which I will define as new historicism and cultural materialism—is to understand and concretize the interrelationship between the text and the forcefield of its production—the Idea, in other words, of the idea. There is, however, an important and consistent eddy around which most contemporary critics of Shakespeare inevitably circle in their desire to understand the relationship of the text with the social. Readers working on disparate subjects and in disparate fields are committed, to a greater or lesser degree, to continuing the work of such postmodernists as Jean Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida in their critique of the “master-narratives” of

enlightenment thought. In his work, *Truth and the Ethics of Criticism*, Christopher Norris points to the way in which contemporary literary theory defines itself against the enlightenment project that, as we have seen, animated Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, among others:

[E]very school of present-day critical thought, from deconstruction to New Historicism, acknowledges its debt—whether wittingly or not—to the legacy of enlightenment critique. It is a project carried out in the deconstructive questioning of ‘logocentric’ values and truth-claims, in the effort to redeem those marginalized voices that have suffered the violence of colonial rule or the enormous condescension of posterity . . .” (32-33)

Michael Neill echoes Norris in his insistence on the multi-vocal and dialogic nature of successful historicist criticism of early modern texts:

One of the underlying assumptions of this book is that the past can be as eloquent in its troubling familiarity as it is taciturn in alterity—and that the business of historical criticism is to trade as tactfully as possible between these contraries. This need not be as difficult as it sounds, however—especially if we assume that the Foucauldian insistence that history proceeds by paradigmatic leaps and bounds, rather than by comprehensible (if unevenly paced) processes of evolution constitutes . . . like a rhetorically useful paradox, a necessary corrective to the complacencies of Whig history, rather than an irreducible truth (5).

While Neill is anxious to sustain a nuanced historical understanding of the early modern texts he considers, he is also concerned to preserve the aesthetic integrity of the plays he reads:

To recognize the ways in which the kind of history I am interested in exploring may be inscribed in the minutest detail of dramatic texts is, of course, to recognize the final inseparability of the aesthetic from the social and political in literary works. To say this is not, I think, to edge toward a recuperation of the universal but to acknowledge that aesthetic values themselves are culturally inflected (5).

This sentiment, for me, closely approximates the Benjaminian dialectic discussed above—the Idea of the idea. For Neill, as for me in the present work, the goal is not to lose sight of the “idea”—the play-text or the “aesthetic”—within an overwhelming critical meditation of the Idea—the social and cultural context(s)—from which it arose and by which it is constituted. Rather it is to read both closely and carefully, so as not to miss the nuances of the historical and aesthetic dialogics that invigorate the Shakespearean project.

The specificity of critical interpretations consists in the different ways in which the relationship between the text and the cultural and social forces are conceived by the critic; whether the chaos system—the order of the text within the disorder of the social is, for example, conceived as registering the “circulation of social energy” or more comprehensively coding one or more determinant—such as the market, religion, gender, sexuality, class, among other possibilities. The way in which this interrelationship is conceptualized speaks volumes about the particular critic’s ideological outlook. The

debates around historiography in early modern studies, for example, are one such critical incursion into this issue; a close examination of the guiding assumptions of the different understandings of the social/cultural chaos system within which the text is imbricated reveals attitudes and anxieties that are crucial to understanding the direction of literary historiography and criticism today. The argument that I make in the following chapters participates in the debate around historiography in early modern studies. As will become apparent later, my approach may be characterized as a return to Marxist homology—a direction that critics of eighteenth-twentieth-century literature have returned to, and from which, in many instances, early modern studies continues to retreat.

In the chapters that follow, I suggest that the chaos of Shakespeare's plays—their “ordering system” or, as I would call it, “economic logic” is to a significant degree constituted by epistemological and ideological effects of the burgeoning market economy in early modern England. I argue, along with such writers as Jean Christophe Agnew and Fernand Braudel, that the profound restructuring of social relations of production brought about by the emergence of a world capitalist market made itself felt in key areas of social life and thought during this time.² I will contend that Shakespeare's plays bear the epistemological and semiotic marks of this profound social and economic reconfiguration, and that these indices may be read by attending to the ways in which conceptions of kingship, gender, loyalty and religion are represented in the plays under examination. Before discussing the chapters in detail, I would like to provide an overview of the methodological presuppositions of new historicism and cultural

² Immanuel Wallerstein's work in his series *The Modern World System*, Vol. I. and II. is a detailed account of the emergence of the world market in the late medieval and early modern periods. It is a text which I rely upon in my own understanding of the world market as operating as an integrated and sophisticated global economy from the fifteenth-century until the present day.

materialism, two approaches that dominate early modern literary studies today. Such a consideration will clarify the methodological presuppositions with which I approach the texts that I examine. For, while my own approach may be characterized as a return to a “Marxist” understanding of the social-textual homology, it is also influenced by new historicism and cultural materialism. As much as I might be reinventing a Marxist hermeneutic, I am also reacting against—and adopting—cultural materialist and new historicist epistemologies, especially in reference to the ways in which the text “encodes or marks” the social. Thus, in some sense, the study that follows is underwritten by the logic of the dialectic (in the Hegelian sense of the word) as it continually shifts back and forth from the reactants of Marxist hermeneutics of the social to the products of cultural materialist/new historicist practice, reaching for an equilibrium that bears the marks of the very methodological and epistemological quandary that I attempt to examine in the first place.

* * *

Early Modern Literary Methodology: Struggles with the Chaotic in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

Reason cannot stop with the dispersed parts, it has to build from them a new structure, a true whole. But since Reason creates this whole and fits the parts together according to its own rule, it gains complete knowledge of the structure of its product. Reason understands this structure because it can reproduce it in its totality and in the ordered sequence of its elements.—Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (22).

Since the publication of such works as *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* and *Shakespearean Negotiations* critics have closely examined the methodological presuppositions behind the new historicist criticism. Objections to new historicism range from a distrust of the newness of this approach—critics such as Richard Strier posit a clear line of critical descent from old historicist literature to the supposedly revolutionary new historicism to more politicized objections to new historicism’s arguably banal political commitment (Howard, Felperin), to profound distrust of the historiographical validity of the “anecdote” (Fineman, Felperin). In an attempt both to answer a number of critical objections and to clarify their critical practice, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher have collaborated on a manifesto of new historicist practice, *Practicing New Historicism* (2001). In their first chapter, Gallagher and Greenblatt set out the tenets of new historicist practice; in so doing, they reveal the degree to which new historicism (and as I will argue later, other forms of cultural materialist practice) still struggle with the “chaotic”—and its ordering in the analysis of the text. Anxious to recuperate what Greenblatt calls “the touch of the real” in literary methodology, Gallagher and Greenblatt announce a critical stance that resolutely valorizes the particular—at the expense of theoretical comprehensiveness:

The task of understanding [a text or other form of cultural artifact] depends not on the extraction of an abstract set of principles, and still less on the application of a theoretical model, but rather an encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual (6).

Gallagher and Greenblatt’s introduction is striking for the way in which it refuses theory; theory, for Gallagher and Greenblatt, appears to threaten the heart and soul of their

project, what they would characterize as the resurrection of those liminal moments in literary texts that “conjure” the early modern “real.”³ Ironically, their adamant refusal of theory leads them to theorize that refusal: “We speculated about first principles and respected the firmer theoretical commitments of other members of our discussion group” remark the authors in remembering discussions that provided the seed-bed for new historicist practice, “but both of us were and remain deeply skeptical of the notion that we should formulate an abstract system and then apply it to literary works” (2). This theorized avoidance of theory led Greenblatt and Gallagher to a love affair with the anecdote, a historiographical particularity that like Gilles Deleuze’s rhizome, rootlessly burrows in and around the theories—Marxism, historicism, psychoanalysis—that attempt to capture it. Eager to recover the “history of things that did not happen,” Gallagher and Greenblatt proclaim the anecdote as that which enables “foveation in cultural interpretation” (26). As Greenblatt explains in his chapter “The Touch of the Real,”

What we are calling the effect of compression enabled a literary historian like Erich Auerbach to move convincingly from a tiny passage to a sprawling, complex text (and finally, to “Western Literature.”) . . . Geertz did something similar with cultural fragments, small bits of symbolic behavior from which he could widen out into larger social worlds. The techniques thus helped to make possible for Geertzian anthropology something akin to what in optics is called “foveation,” the ability to keep an object within the high-resolution area of perception. Foveation in cultural interpretation is rather difficult because of problems of both scale

³ Of course, how we understand that “real” is left unanswered—lest Lacanians are quick to take credit. Greenblatt and Gallagher are quick to announce their non-indebtedness to Lacan’s formulation of the “real” (6).

and focus. The interpreter must be able to select and fashion, out of the confused continuum of social existence, units of social action small enough to hold within the fairly narrow boundaries of full analytical attention, and this attention must be unusually intense, nuanced and sustained (26).

By virtue of its isolatability and particularity, the anecdote serves as the ideal site for foveation, and thus provides the mechanism by which the new historicist critic may “call up” and “speak with the dead”: “We wanted the touch of the real in the way that in an earlier period people wanted the touch of the transcendent.”

In his article “‘Cultural Poetics’ versus ‘Cultural Materialism:’ The Two New Historicisms in Renaissance Studies,” Howard Felperin clarifies the methodological descent of new historicism. Unlike Greenblatt and Gallagher, who claim a Geertzian/Auerbachian pedigree, Felperin points to new historicism’s indebtedness to positivism and traditional historicist practice:

For the New-Historicist act of delimiting its subject matter along older empirical lines effectively cuts its ‘Renaissance’ out of the flow of history and turns it into a slice or cross-section of history. This can then be studied, like a slide, under the microscope, where it takes on the aspect of a synchronic system that is certainly culture-specific and conventional—and displays no shortage of ‘energy’ and ‘circulation’—but one that has been sealed off from any continuing historical process (86).

Earlier in the same article, Felperin notes that “research” for a new historicist signifies

a cool, disinterested (indeed, invisible) interpreter bracketed off in the here and now, and an objective body of 'data' sharply visible in the there and then, each standing in a self-contained space and separated from the other by enough distance to enable independence and objectivity in their scrutiny (79).

It is within this nexus of particularity and its relation to totalization that new historicist methodology participates philosophically. Perhaps unconsciously, new historicism (and cultural materialism) attempt to mediate historiographically between the particular and the total. In its production of a multivocal and multilogical "picture" of the early modern period,⁴ new historicism inevitably participates in this dialectic; however, as I will discuss briefly, this dialectic resolves in new historicist criticism into a practice of reification—and by necessity, totalization. Thus, the ordering system of new historicism is, in the last analysis, identical to that of traditional enlightenment thought, reconfigured in a literary universe. The constellation that new historicism creates is a mutually

⁴ Searching for an alternative homology of the text and the social, new historicists and their more Marxist British partners, cultural materialists, strove to recover what may be understood as a "people's history" (A major historiographical forerunner and influence of cultural materialist historiography was, of course, the *Annales* school in France.) This people's history was to be found in what traditional historiography ignored or left out—those liminal voices that were threatening both in their own time and to recent traditional historiography. "Materialist criticism," Jonathan Dollimore notes in his introduction to the seminal work of cultural materialism, *Political Shakespeare*, "refuses what Stephen Greenblatt calls the monological approach to historical scholarship, of the past, one concerned with discovering a single political vision, usually identical to that said to be held by the entire literate class or indeed the entire population" (*PS* 5). Part and parcel of this rejection of monological historiography was the idea that a more complex history, one that was both multilogical and multivocal, would be more able to recover "the truth" still hidden behind the screen of the dominant social and historical ideologies of the early modern period and today. The presumption of a recoverable and accurate picture of Elizabethan world(s) served as both the motivation and rationalization of the way in which cultural materialists engaged with history in their critical exegesis. Convinced of the suspiciousness of narratives that purported to encompass the breadth and process of historical movement, critics such as Jonathan Dollimore, Stephen Greenblatt, Alan Sinfield and Leonard Tennenhouse confined themselves to what they saw as true historical moments—*petites histoires*, which, like Michel Foucault's famous anecdotes, seemed to escape containment within the hegemonic ideological practices of the early modern period and today. Through an examination of many little moments, of many sites of the social in the early modern period, cultural materialists argued that a multivocal and multilogical picture of the early modern period could be brought to critical light.

ordering orbit between text and context and between anecdote (fragment) and historical/social totality.

Particularization and Reification: The Dangers of the Anecdote

In an oft-cited remark, Theodor Adorno contended “all reification is a forgetting.” Part of a letter written to Walter Benjamin in 1940, this remark concerned the totalizing ethos that Adorno felt characterized knowledge-production in Western thought, particularly Western knowledge’s prerequisite of a rigid separation of “subject” and “object.” In this separation Adorno discerned the *sine qua non* of enlightenment epistemology--the domination of the analyzed object by the analyzing subject--a domination that entailed, among other things, a hostile dismissal of heterogeneity within the object. Thus, the subject “subjects” the object by apprehending it within a paradigm that bases itself on the normative requirements of enlightenment epistemology: “Defining means that something objective, no matter what it may be in itself, is subjectively captured by means of a fixed concept” (“Subject and Object,” 498). This process of definition was, Adorno argued, the epistemological basis of enlightenment thought, particularly what he called its “tyranny of identity.” As Martin Jay explains in *Adorno*,

In philosophical terms, the domination of the object by the subject is expressed both in positivism and idealism. In the former, a subjectivity stands coolly part from its object in order to manipulate it; although seemingly passive, the positivist subject really has an instrumental relationship to the world, a world on which it unreflexively projects the scientifically ascertainable traits it claims merely to discover (63).

This fixing of an object within a concept is then hypostatized--transformed into a conceptual invariant--which is purported to encompass the object of its definition. The object is thus made subject to what Adorno calls "the tyranny of identity;"⁵ it is precisely this form of domination, this ontological "capturing," that Adorno names "reification."

Adorno is perhaps the most important Marxist theorist of totality and reification. In opposition to such Marxist thinkers as George Lukacs⁶ and Walter Benjamin, Adorno instantiated the notion of a negative dialectics. Instead of moving toward an ultimately resolving dialectics of totality, a negative dialectics resists the negation of the negation, and instead preserves the nonidentity of identity: "Totality is to be opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself--of the nonidentity it denies, according to its own concept" (*Negative Dialectics* 320). Adorno saw negative dialectics as the only philosophical resistance to the colonization of a totalizing enlightenment epistemology. Writing about history, Adorno notes the material ruthlessness that such identitarian thinking inevitably leads:

After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history--the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but

⁵ For an explanation of Adorno's notion of the "tyranny of identity," see, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written with Max Horkheimer.

there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb (*Negative Dialectics* 320).

For Greenblatt and Gallagher, the anecdote is the great escape artist—evading the homogenizing sifting of *grand récit* history. While the anecdote may at first seem to succeed in its evasion of broad-brush generalizations, it nevertheless ushers in a totalization of another kind. Epistemologically, the anecdote or the cultural fragment is posited as a totalized site in and of itself, capable by virtue of its very particularity—its nongeneralizability—of conjuring up the historiographically-resistant “real” which it supposedly embodies. Thus, what Greenblatt and Gallagher describe as “the touch of the real” resolves into the real itself; it is no longer simply a fragment of a complex totality, but becomes the seamless embodiment of that totality—the doorway, so to speak, which leads nowhere but to its own threshold.

Thus, the anecdote as an overdetermined site of historical remembrance becomes the ironic agent of historiographical homogeneity; by and through the anecdote, the complexity of the early modern period is washed away and rendered a critically transportable and readily digestible moment of cultural incongruity or strangeness. However, the context that gives meaning to this moment’s resistant history is “forgotten” in the very contemplation of the reified site of its supposed remembrance. Thus, the moment of historical non-identity, of strangeness and resistance—transposed into a twentieth-first century context and read by twentieth-first century minds—becomes the moment of identity—what we understand as the history worth considering. In some

^o Georg Lukács may be considered the first serious Marxist theoretician of the totality. All subsequent analyses of the totality—by Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Benjamin, among others—are responses to Lukács’ conceptualizations in *History and Class Consciousness*.

sense, the anecdote is an agent of critical violence; through this critical focus, the richness of early modern historiography is evaporated in the process of its supposed conservation.

In their book *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* (1994), David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair and Harold Weber note the epistemological dangers of new historicist practice. In their critique, they imply that new historicism is epistemologically similar to the old historicism against which it usually defines itself:

The empirical tendencies of "old historicism" direct its research toward the local and the particular, away from problems of how to describe the social totality. Cultural studies rejects this pragmatism in its effort to conceptualize the systems and institutions that condition particular situations, yet there is little consensus as to just how the particular and systemic are related. Marxism and postmodernism tend to influence the discussion in opposing ways, Marxism traditionally emphasizing precisely the kinds of deep structural determinism and "master narrative" that Lyotard, for example, calls into question. The "new historicism" in Renaissance literary study often finds itself suspended uneasily between these two alternatives, resorting to the strategic use of the anecdote to finesse theoretical problems raised by its analyses. The danger in this reticence, as various critics have shown, is that at crucial moments it can yield to prematurely totalizing conclusions, in a way that tends to reify partial explanations (3).

Cultural Materialism or Marxism-Light.

While the general characteristics of what we may call the contextual “force-field” of Shakespeare’s plays are agreed upon by critics working in both new historicism and materialism, the “physics” of this force-field—the way in which the text is dynamically related to its context—differs depending upon the critical approach. Jean Howard’s 1986 definition of political analysis provides a description that is generally shared by critics working both in new historicism and cultural materialism:

By a political analysis we mean one which examines how Shakespearean text have functioned to produce, reproduce or contest historically specific relations of power (relations among classes, genders and races, for example) and have been used to produce and naturalize interested representations of the real (3).

Whereas practitioners of both new historicism and cultural materialism recognize the necessity to understand the text as constituted by “relations of power,” the specific anxiety in these approaches is to concretize the form of engagement between the play and the “force-field” of its production—to understand the determinant (and non-determinant) connections between the particular concerns that animate the play and the more general cultural issues that surround it. As we have seen, in the case of new historicism, this anxiety resolves into a focus on the particular encapsulated in the anecdote. In cultural materialist practice, the resolution is more problematic and complex; recent critical practice has shown, however, that in the epistemological contest between the particular and the general, it is the latter that tends to lose. The fear of generating a “physics” of the text—a comprehensive theory of social/textual homology—causes even quite clearly Marxist-affiliated theorists to abandon theoretical rigor and precision. In some sense, this

fear of comprehensivity is the fear of homology. For materialist critics dealing with cultural systems that are dissimilar in content yet epistemologically interdependent, a critical approach that attempts to account for this interdependence runs into a dangerous minefield of homologies, analogies and identity. The fear of essentialism scares off many who might attempt to analyze the interconnections between the market and the text. Marxism, with its rigorous attention to such economic homologies, appears as the quintessential bogeyman for critics working within a hermeneutic that rejects methodologies in which such homologizing might be a possibility. Symptomatically, Jean Howard writes the following about Marxism as a critical practice in the introduction to *Marxist Shakespeares*:

It is said that Marx himself once irritably stipulated that “I am not a Marxist.” The remark must be taken seriously, as a constant reminder that Marxism, across its entire history and in the present volume, cannot be taken as a set of fixed doctrines and beliefs, nor as a simple methodological focus on the analytic category of “class” as opposed to race, gender or ethnicity (7).

Howard’s expansion of Marxism into a generalizable and critically portable hermeneutic or problematic is, I believe, an attempt to stave off theoretical comprehensiveness, to stop short before a “physics” of a text lest such a position threaten to order the text order too completely. Marxism—even to Marxists—is dangerous particularly because it posits too great a risk of homogenization—a theoretical processing that, because of the specter of economism, threatens to reduce the force-field of historical and cultural complexity into a flavorless and deterministic paradigm. In his introduction

to *Materialist Shakespeare: A History*, Ivo Kamps propounds a diluted Marxism as well. Discussing the question of homology, Kamps retreats from hypothesizing a relationship between the economic and the social, or the base and superstructure:

The question as to what the precise balance ought to be between the impact of the base and superstructure, in the analysis of literary texts has not yet been, and may never be, answered definitively. . . . Nonetheless it is clear that despite Althusser's forceful insistence on the economy as the determinant in the last instance, most materialist literary scholarship has been much more successful in analyzing texts in terms of the cultural and ideological moment of their production (and reception) than in explaining a determinate relationship between the means of production and a certain turn of phrase or rhythm or particular meaning in, for instance, a short lyric poem (4).

Although Kamps disparages what he sees as Louis Althusser's exaggeration of the role of the economic in the passage above, Althusser has nevertheless become a hero to many in cultural materialism. Althusser's famous non-conclusion in "Contradiction and Overdetermination" that "the economic is never active in the pure state . . . From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the last instance never comes" serves as his greatest selling-point to cultural materialists working today precisely because it seems to rescue Marxism from a reductive determinism. It is this preservation of critical disorder that makes Althusser a favorite of materialist criticism. Through his analyses, materialist and Marxist critics can work within a weightless Marxism, unencumbered by the potentially totalizing baggage of scientificity. Frederic Jameson's 1993 definition of

Marxism provides perhaps the best example of the critical watering-down that has occurred in early modern studies of late.⁷

Marxism is a problematic: that is to say, it can be identified, not by specific positions . . . but rather by the allegiance to a specific complex of problems whose formulations are always in movement (from Howard 7).

Expanding on Jameson's definition, Howard stresses Marxism's irreducibility to issues of class and relations under capitalism:

We thus would argue, as against what some may think of as "orthodox" Marxism, that "class" relations cannot be considered to possess a priority in the colloquial sense, a greater immediacy or practical relevance to any and all human situations. Such a conclusion remains faithful to what Althusser calls the "immense theoretical revolution" of Marxism which begins by insisting that neither the economic base nor the cultural superstructure, and neither theory nor practice, can serve as the singular and univocal determinant of the other (7).⁸

⁷ It is surprising that such a sentiment would come from Frederic Jameson, whose books are a model of Marxist literary criticism: see, for example, *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

⁸ Both Marx and Althusser would object strongly to the monological apprehension of social structures that characterize what Howard calls "orthodox" Marxism. At the same time, both were equally—if not more dedicated to developing a science—in Marx's case, a science of political economy, and in Althusser's case, a science of Marxism. While both Marx and Althusser recognized and allowed disorder (Althusser, himself, eschewed economic determinism for a more nuanced notion of interstructural complexity as the basis for social and historical analysis, what he called "the ever-pregivenness of a structured complex unity") they nevertheless attempted to systematize such disorder, if not to order disorder, then epistemologically to chart a way in which disorder may be represented, analyzed and thus subjected to "scientific" scrutiny. In *Reading Capital*, for example, Althusser himself announces the text as

the founding moment of a new discipline, the founding moment of a science—and hence a real event, a theoretical revolution, simultaneously rejecting the classical political economy and the Hegelian and Feuerbachian ideologies of its prehistory—the absolute beginning of the history of a science.

While Althusser provides a useful critical context for the celebration of irreducible complexity that animates current materialist criticism—an attitude that might be seen as a variant of Hegelianism rather than Marxism, perhaps a Post-Hegelianism—Althusser's own life work was to chart the methodological principles of

Althusser would undoubtedly object to the anti-scientific tone of the above passage. It was, after all, his life work to systemize Marxism—to reveal the methodological presuppositions of its “science” of political economy. Early modern studies, however, refuses such scientificity in the interests of a rich dialogics of the text and the social. It is my argument that such a dialogics may be best preserved by systematically attending to not only the cultural logic underwriting the texts under question, but their *economic logic* as well. If we conceptualize early modern cultural context as a force-field—dynamically energizing in complex ways the texts that we are examining, we are able to read beyond the visible dynamics and sense the “negative/invisible” dynamics that resist critical totalization. It is this model that I try to apply to the plays under consideration here. Rather than spotlight certain fashionable aspects of early modern culture, I attempt to make more profound connections between the way in which the play under consideration represents a key aspect of early modern social ideologies (fealty, kinship, religion, gender) and the burgeoning market economy that continually reformulated the early modern social landscape. While early modern criticism has failed, in my view, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationship between the market and the text, much promising work has been completed by scholars working with eighteenth through twentieth-century literatures.⁹

Among these critics it is widely accepted that an intimate association/homology existed between the creative work of the time (novels, theatre) and the economic

Marxism—the science of its science. For Althusser, working within a vibrant Communist party in France, no revolutionary theory meant no revolutionary practice.

⁹ One reason for the close examination of capitalism that proceeds in criticism of literature of this era is the predominance historically of the industrial revolution of this time. This historical event compels critics of the eighteenth-century novel, for example, to consider the impact that industrialization had on both the content and form of this emerging genre.

environment. Writers such as Nancy Armstrong, Terry Mulcaire, Patrick Brantlinger and Martha Woodmansee have documented the fundamental interdependence between the novel and other forms of literature and the new economic arrangements brought about by industrialization and colonial expansion. In a relatively new collection, *The New Economic Criticism* (1999), the literary texts considered range from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, with, however, an adequate overview of literary forms from this period, a welcome departure from the almost exclusive focus on the novel that characterizes most criticism in this field. In this wide-ranging and impressive book, there are no considerations of literature prior to the eighteenth-century, a gap that I think may be explained by a certain critical nervousness around considering early modern (and medieval) works in terms of the period's economic structure. While critics are comfortable in delineating the "applied force" of the market upon the eighteenth-century novel or even nineteenth-century poetry, there is a certain reluctance to engage in the same kind of operation when studying clearly pre-industrial literary works—such as Shakespeare.

This is not to say that there are no such studies of Shakespeare and other early modern dramatists—Walter Cohen and Richard Halpern are two notable exceptions.¹⁰ However, while Halpern and Cohen's works are anthologized and read in a variety of critical settings, the mainstream of early modern literary criticism resists adopting an economically-based focus on the literature of the period. Partly, this is a result of the generalized anxiety around Marxism and accusations of economism that we have

¹⁰ See Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Cornell, 1991) and Walter Cohen's articles in *Marxist Shakespeares* and especially his article "Political Criticism of Shakespeare" in Jean Howard and Marion O'Connor, eds. *Shakespeare Reproduced* (1987).

considered above: it is also, I think, a consequence of a historiographical aporia—the reluctance to seeing the early modern market as capitalist, and as producing discernable effects on the aesthetic expressions of the period. Whereas nineteenth-century industrial capitalism is difficult for the historian or critic to ignore, the more subtle if no less omnipresent markers of pre-industrial capitalism are easier to overlook in the early modern landscape.¹¹ Indeed, few post-eighteenth century literary critics feel the need to assert the presence of capitalism in the English and European context, while scholars investigating a similar problematic in the early modern period seem at pains to assert the presence of capitalist mode of production during this time, despite the copious research on this issue by historians such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Fernand Braudel, Karl Polanyi, Perry Anderson, Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie and Jean Christophe Agnew (among others). Thus, in three recent works of early modern criticism, all of which have promising titles for the reader hoping to see an exploration of the interconnections between the market and early modern drama, only three articles out of twenty-seven deal explicitly with the way in which early modern drama “responded to” or “registered” the cultural effects of emergent capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries.¹² In contrast, in the *New Economic Criticism*, nearly half of the articles interrogated the relationship between a particular text or set of texts and the cultural markers of eighteenth and nineteenth-century industrial capitalism. Furthermore, this collection argues for an essential

¹¹ In the chapters that follow, I discuss in detail the historical research on early modern capitalism, and show the pervasive presence of capitalist social relationships during this time. In his three-volume work on early capitalism, Fernand Braudel details the comprehensivity of capitalist relationships in the daily lives of its early modern subjects. Perry Anderson, Maurice Dobbs, Jean Christophe Agnew, Christopher Hill, Karl Polanyi and Keith Thomas provide rich histories of the early modern English and European capitalist context during this time.

¹² The texts that I am referring to are *Marxist Shakespeares* (2001), *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* (1994) and *Class, Critics and Shakespeare* (2001).

connectivity between literature (widely defined) and economics, a claim that, as we have seen, few early modern analyses dare to make, and few ostensibly Marxist analyses consider adequately.

“Economic criticism,” writes Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen in their introduction to the collection, “is predicated on the existence and disclosure of parallels and analogies between linguistic and economic systems” (14)¹³. This dissertation continues the spirit of the work undertaken in *New Economic Criticism*. Particularly, it asserts that the drama of the early modern period—even Shakespeare—may be read with a keen insistence on the economic social relations that invigorated the social context and the epistemological logic within which the plays were produced. The chapters that follow reproduce the rich historiography of market capitalism by integrating the important research of Immanuel Wallerstein, Fernand Braudel, Perry Anderson (among others) in the readings of the individual plays under consideration. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of market capitalism at this time and looks at the divergent effects the new market economy had on ideas about money, kingship, identity, honesty, labor, friendship, the merchant class, Jews, corruption, gender, femininity, and disease. In my readings of these plays I do not hesitate to assert a recuperable homology between the cultural products of a particular period and its economic substratum. Homology, however, is not identity—and nowhere do I claim or want to claim that Shakespeare’s plays are simply the looking glasses for new economic social relations. Rather, it is my belief that the economic logic of a text—its economic unconscious so to speak—may best

¹³ Towards the end of their introduction, Woodmansee and Osteen detail the particular ways in which economic criticism charts these economic/linguistic parallels: the critics focus on, for example, the conditions of literary production (patronage, publishing), the “internal circulation” of economic tropes within a literary work, the external circulation and consumption of the work and finally, the metatheoretical consideration of the assumptions (literary and economic) embedded and reproduced within the criticism itself.

be understood by attending to the particular social relations of production and exchange that predominated at the time. Since economic relationships--relationships of production, exchange and transfer--constitute the basis of all relationships and significantly form the identity of each individual in a particular culture--through class and educational background--it is imperative to consider the way in which these relationships are represented in the texts under consideration. If ideas of race, gender, sexuality are everywhere recuperable within the Shakespearean corpus, then certainly the pervasive everydayness of the social relations of production and exchange are similarly readable—and must be seriously attended to for a rich understanding of the works under consideration. In my readings, then, I have elected not to be blind to the complex and divergent ways in which the changing economic landscape of early modern England was engaged with in the drama of the period, but have adopted what Jameson has characterized as the eminently clarifying lens of Marxist analysis:

Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking his own blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth, and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long forgotten message in surrounding utterly alien to it
(*Political Unconscious* 2)

As I hope to demonstrate in the chapters that follow, the “alien”—in the sense of seemingly economically distant elements of the text—provide a rich source for Marxist analysis, in part, because of the surprising congruities that can be discovered when attending to the economic *urhorizon* of the text’s production. It is this sustained attention to the *economic unconscious* of the text that distinguishes the present work from much

contemporary cultural materialist and new historicist criticism. For me, the economic unconscious is, in these readings, the *Idea* of the idea—the orbit that enables a critical reconstruction of the economic *urhorizon* in which Shakespeare thought and worked. My reading of *Henry VI, Part I*, for example, considers the play and the character of Joan de Pucelle against the social backdrop of an emerging speculative market in early modern England. I argue that Joan de Pucelle provides a theatrical site wherein the anxieties inspired by the new market economy could be represented and rhetorically controlled. As Jean Christopher Agnew points out in *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought*, the protean nature of the market—its placelessness, facelessness and its dependence on an every transmutable signifier of exchange value (money) resulted in profound transformations in the early modern imaginary, best described by reference to Hobbes’ idea of a “commodity self: a mercurial exchange value or ‘bubble’ floating on the tides of what attention others were disposed to invest” (Agnew 13). These anxieties were frequently related in the early modern imagination to what was seen as the similarly deceptive palimpsest of gender.

My analysis of *Henry VI* considers another effect of the emergent capitalist market in early modern England. In this chapter, I examine the way in which the increasing commodification of social relationships through the burgeoning use of wage labor affected the way in which fealty, community and kingship were thought about at this time. Particularly, I compare the changing relationships within the guild to how social and political relationships between Henry and his followers, the nobility and Katherine are conceptualized and represented in the play. Although revivifying what many in England at the time considered their last great Christian king, the play bears the

indelible marks of the commodification of social relationships that were everywhere present in the early modern social landscape—even in the supposedly fraternal orders of the guilds. Further, although the play attempts to resurrect a key moment in medieval history, it cannot escape the very contemporary contaminant of capitalist rhetoric in the characterization of social relationships within the play. Thus, the rhetoric of the play—set in medieval period and heroizing the quintessential warrior-king—nevertheless displays the “marketing” of social relations supposedly free of such bald semiotics of commodification.

My reading of the *Merchant of Venice* examines the cultural anxieties around the rising merchant class in Shakespeare’s England. I argue that this class was plagued by its cultural and historical association with Jewishness, especially the increasing numbers of merchants who engaged in “usury” or the lending of money at interest. *The Merchant of Venice* is an attempt to recuperate the merchant-class—represented in the play by Antonio—from the specter of Jewishness and Jewish usury that haunted its identity. This recuperation functions through what I call the “super-Jewing” of Shylock, whom I see, contrary to much critical opinion, as the embodiment of a particular English conception of the Jew. As such, Shylock is a Jew frozen in time—representing a stereotype of the English money-lending Jews who were expelled in 1290.

In my reading of *Hamlet*, I consider the specter of kingship—of divine authority—upon which the play meditates. I argue that the play concerns not only the death of King Hamlet, but the demise of a particular idea of kingship—as divine, absolute and unaffected by the hurly-burly of social and economic reformulation. I read *Hamlet* against the backdrop of both the ascension of James I to the throne and the

consequent struggles over market control that characterized the early part of his reign. I also consider the way in which the play meditates on the end of the Elizabethan era, one marked by the considerable augmentation of merchant influence on the court, and the consequent imperative on the part of Elizabeth and her advisors effectively to mediate between the interests of the Crown and of the increasingly vocal merchant class.

* * *

A final word: When writing these analyses, I have often felt engaged in an act of rewriting the literary text under my consideration. To set Shakespeare against the backdrop of the emerging capitalist market is to adopt a sometimes startlingly new vision and to recuperate what has been palimpsestically overwritten by centuries of Shakespearean criticism and renaissance history. As Jameson writes in his masterwork *The Political Unconscious*,

The type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting and restructuring of a prior historical and ideological *subtext*, it being always understood that the “subtext” is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, nor even the conventional narratives of history manuals, but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact (81).

It is my hope that the readings that follow make present—even for an instant—the complex subtext of mercantile capitalism that is registered in the Shakespearean project. To focus on this subtext is not, of course, to tell the whole story, but it is to resurrect a horizon too often missing in contemporary materialist criticism.



Chapter One: “The Symptom Made Flesh: Gender and the Market in *Henry VI, Part 1*”

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek makes a remarkable statement regarding the epistemological origin of a key concept in Lacanian social theory, the “symptom.” In a chapter entitled “How did Marx Invent the Symptom?” Žižek pinpoints Marx’s analyses of commodity form as the first conceptualization in Western thought of what he and Jacques Lacan see as a significant component of ideological practice: the site of contradiction where the truth-values of a particular ideology are perceived—for a moment—as based in collective and voluntary self-deception—where, in other words, the ideological quilt is, in short, unquilted.¹⁴ The social cognizance of such points of ideological contradiction is what Žižek—following Lacan—calls the symptom. Thus, the symptom is nothing more than the realization of the epistemological deceptiveness within any generalized social truism. Rather than being a locus for ideological self-implosion, however, the symptom, according to Žižek, is that which constitutes and makes possible ideological practice. Refusing the possibility of an outside of ideology, Žižek claims that it is fantasy itself that sustains the social project. While one might think that the consciousness of the finitude of ideological truth would compromise its effectivity, Žižek argues that ideology functions precisely through a collective realization and assent to its underlying deceptiveness. Following Lacan, Žižek sees *misrecognition* as integral to ideological practice; specifically, he argues that its functioning depends upon our collective assent to its truth-claims, claims which can be seen as valid only if they are

¹⁴ According to Žižek, ideology may be defined as constituting “a multitude of ‘floating signifiers’ . . . [which] is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain ‘nodal point’ (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which ‘quilts’ them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning. . . . The ‘quilting’ performs the totalization by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed — that is to say by means

collectively *misrecognized* as such.¹⁵ Describing Marx's symptomatic discovery, Zizek writes:

Marx 'invented the symptom' (Lacan) by means of detecting a certain fissure, an asymmetry, a certain pathological imbalance which belies the universalism of the bourgeois 'rights and duties.' This imbalance, far from announcing the 'imperfect realization' of these universal principles . . . functions as their constitutive moment: the 'symptom' is, strictly speaking, a particular element which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus. In this sense, we can say that the elementary Marxian procedure of 'criticism of ideology' is already 'symptomatic': it consists in detecting a point of breakdown *heterogenous* to a given ideological field and at the same time necessary for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form (21).

In concretizing the processes of symptomatic misrecognition, Zizek describes the way in which market participants understand the function of currency in market exchanges. It is in this discussion that he formulates (via Sohn-Rethel) the psychic process of misrecognition that is the working of the symptomatic in thought. Quoting Alfred Sohn-Rethel in part, Zizek writes of the commodity that its nature is that of a *postulate* implied by the effective act of exchange—in other words, that of a certain as if [*als ob*]; during the act of exchange individuals proceed *as if* the commodity is not submitted to physical material exchanges: *as if* it is excluded from the natural cycle

of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning" (SO, 87).

¹⁵ Zizek in fact denies the possibility of knowing outside of fantasy; as Muclaire explains, "[t]he knowledge lost in ideology and and recoverable by ideological critique . . . is not the truth beyond fantasy but quite simply the fact that there is not substantial truth beyond fantasy or, to put it another way, that the truth of lived social reality is effectively the truth of fantasy" (1039).

of generation and corruption; although on the level of their “consciousness” they “know very well” that this is not the case (*SO* 18).

Money, as the commodity *par excellence*, partakes of the same process of misrecognition. Money may in fact be understood to be constituted of two bodies by virtue of this symptomatic process; its material form—the copper, silver and gold of which it is a material expression, and what Žizek calls its sublime material, that which is constituted by the fetishistic disavowal of money’s primary material (and hence mutable) form:¹⁶

We know very well that money, like all other material objects, suffers the effects of use, that its material body changes through time, but in the social effectivity of the market we nonetheless *treat* coins as if they consist of an “immutable substance, a substance over which time has no power, and which stands in antithetic contrast to any matter found in nature” (19).

Thus, the effectivity of money in social spaces is dependent upon this mental short-circuiting which is, in practice, the fetishistic disavowal of money’s mutable body. It is this wilful ‘blindness’ that is the *sine qua non* of the . . . act of exchange.” As Žizek continues, “if the participants were to take note of the dimension of ‘real abstraction’ the effective act of exchange itself would no longer be possible.” It is in this moment of wilful misrecognition—what Marxists might call “false consciousness”—that we may

¹⁶ Sublimity is a loaded term in critical discourse over the last 200 years. I would like to adopt a more generalized understanding of the “sublime,” following Žizek’s own implied—but never fully announced—delineation of the term. The sublime is that aspect of a social and cultural construction—money, king, G-d—that is conceptually removed from the vagaries of material mutation and change, yet still is conceptualized in terms of an embodiment. As Žizek describes, “The *sublime* material . . . [of money is that which] persists beyond the corruption of the body physical. This other body of money is like the corpse of the Sadeian victim which endures all torments and survives with its body immaculate” (*SO*, 18)

locate the psychic functioning of the symptom and hence, ideology:

The crucial paradox of this relationship between the social effectivity of the commodity exchange and the ‘consciousness’ of it is that . . . ‘this non-knowledge of the reality is part of its very essence’: the social effectivity of the exchange process is a kind of reality which is possible only on condition that the individuals partaking in it are not aware of its proper logic . . . This is probably the fundamental dimension of ideology: ideology is not simply a ‘false consciousness’, an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’—‘ideological’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence (21).

Thus, ideology is formulated through a psychic volunteerism; it is not a simple “I know not what I do,” but rather, “I know that this is not the case, but I will act as if it is.”¹⁷

The history of the market in English early modern period and its various manifestations is nothing less than a narrative of the collective assent to the “as if” of fetishistic misrecognition; it is the saga of the rise of the symptom in the early modern market imaginary. In this chapter, I would like to consider this peculiar history through, paradoxically, the analysis of what I see as one of its oppositional effects: the framing of gender, of woman, as the refusal of the symptom, as the site where the anxieties surrounding the paradoxical ontology of money are played out and made manifest—

¹⁷ In the early modern period, this voluntary false consciousness is most clearly manifest in the relation of the king to his subjects: being a king is an effect of the network of social relations between a ‘king and his ‘subjects’; but—and here is the fetishistic misrecognition—to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the king is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects; as if the determination of ‘being-a-king’ were a ‘natural’ property of the person of a king (*Mapping Ideology* 309). Ideologies of the state, of the market, of religion, may thus be read as psychic contracts; there must be a

where, in short, the symptom is revealed as a symptom. The refusal of the symptom, and the positing of woman as the site of this refusal, appears most clearly in the plays of the first tetralogy, particularly in the three parts of *Henry IV*. In these texts, there is what may be considered a fetishistic rehearsal of “recognition,” the staging of this recognition is precisely the revelation of corruption that is seen to (de)constitute the proto-sublimity of Joan de Pucelle in *Henry IV, I*. As we shall see, the fetishistic recognition that is everywhere present in the characterology of this play is the obverse in form and ideological function to the fetishistic *misrecognition* that is necessitated by the emergence of a capitalist money economy in England during this time. Whereas the market necessitated a willful blindness, the character of Joan Pucelle demands a willful vision on the part of the play’s male participants and the general audience. Before turning to / *Henry IV*, however, I would like to retrace this history of the capitalist “as if;” in so doing, I will also consider early modern texts about women, primarily texts of the “controversy—the English *querelle des femmes*” of 1540-1620 --where we may note the concomitant emergence of the “refusal of the symptom” to which I allude above.¹⁸

Whether Be Gold Shit?

In 1650, a fascinating pamphlet was published entitled “Newes from The New-Exchange, or the Commonwealth of Ladies, Drawn to the Life, in Their Severall Characters and Concernments.” Written by Henry Neville, this pamphlet bemoans the “free-state of women” that Neville claims has become predominant in the last few years.

willingness on the part of subjects to misrecognize, to accede, in other words, to the ideological “as if.”

¹⁸ While I will touch on some other related texts in this section, the bulk of my discussion will focus on the corpus of anti-feminist/misogynistic works that flourished during this period. These texts provide a rich site for my consideration of the displacement of anxieties around the speculative economy onto questions of women’s nature. The texts of the controversy are unique for their anatomizing impulse—for their attempt, as I note later, to reveal women’s nature as somehow counterfeit, and like transvaluative currency, chameleon-like.

This commonwealth of Ladies, one based in fraud and deceit, is signified by a pithy and bitter addendum to the pamphlet's title: "printed in the yeere of *woman without grace*, 1650" (my italics). While this document is primarily a series of insults and slanders addressed to various members of the female upper class, it ends with a crucial question for our purposes. Discussing the travails of a Master Pembroke, Neville writes:

Alas, poor Master Pembroke, who twelve months since was an Earle, but now being made a poore commoner of England, hath rallied his forces, and finds it necessary to cashire my Lady May, my Lady Banbury, and my Lady Crompton, having been very angry with her, and desired her to resolve him this question (she dunned him beyond reason for money) whether bee shit gold?¹⁹

The inverse of this question—rather than whether be shit gold, whether be gold shit—is perhaps one of the major concerns of the early modern market, and it is a concern that is articulated many times in texts about women. It was the collective quandary that signaled the psychic movement towards what I have named the assent to the "as if" of the functional capitalist market; significantly, for our purposes, it was a question that arose before the effects of ideology, of the symptom, had made themselves felt in the consciousness of market subjects.

Jean Christophe Agnew's *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought* is a crucial text for the examination of this process of ideological/symptomatic interpellation in the early modern period. Agnew traces the evolution of the market from its origin in medieval fairs to the speculative economy of the early modern world. His concern is to pinpoint the way in which Britons "felt their

¹⁹ Of course Pembroke asks this rhetorically to express his personal penury, and not in an attempt to understand money's double nature.

way around the problematic of exchange,” how, in other words, the emerging speculative and (thus) faceless market bought about the enunciation “of a coherent and repeated pattern of problems of questions about the nature of social identity, intentionality, accountability, transparency, and reciprocity.” Discussing Thomas Wilson’s *Discourse Upon Usury* (1572), for example, Agnew describes the psychic discomfort that accompanied the growing reliance on usury, a primary and necessary practice for the effective functioning of the market at this time:

Writing at the time of the statutory decriminalization of interest, Wilson expressed the misgivings of an age bemused by . . . the ‘spectral impalpability’ of money capital in a moral economy. The perplexing absence of solidity in the transactions of the money market—transactions that Wilson and others referred to as ‘dry exchange’—merely accentuated the growing obscurity of new commercial relationships. Wilson, for his own part, was unable to fathom how a standard of value could become a thing of value, for ‘moneye was not first devised for thys ende, to bee merchaundize, but to bee a measure and a beame betwixte man and man, for the buyinge and sellinge of weares.’ Money became increasingly disembodied, a means abstracted from its original intent, a sorcerer’s apprentice (71).

The early modern period is replete with quasi-economic analyses that attempt to apprehend the transvaluative operations that money makes possible. While Wilson ponders the ability of money to generate value through the practice of interest, others were concerned with conceptualizing money’s agency as a standard of value in and of itself. The ponderous and elementary nature of some of the attempts to define a history of money bear witness to the slow and difficult acceptance of money’s paradoxical

ontology:

Now it was a difficult thing to know who stood in need of what you could spare, or who had an overplus of what you wanted, and so to transport, preserve or divide them, as that both Parties might be accommodated. But necessity, the mother of inventions, taught Men to pitch upon certain place, where many meeting from different Parts with their Commodities, might the more fully supply one another, and this was the Origin of Fairs and Markets. Their Eyes were open'd by this convenience to discover a greater, that as they had chosen a particular place, so they might appoint some one thing that should bear an equivalent value to all others, and that every thing might be given or receiv'd for a certain quantity thereof, as if it had been the Medium or Fountain of the Universal Value of Things, their separate substance, or Idea (Bernardo Davanzanti, trans. *A Discourse upon Coins*, 1588).

In his *The Merchants Map of Commerce* (1688), Robert Lewes describes a more cabalistic origin of money:

[T]his mysterie crept up and was admitted, and therefore from these two minerall was found out a bodie, which once authorized by power of the Magistrate, had a predominancie over all earthly things, and but which was squared out and level'd (as by an indifferent measure) all things appertaining to mankind.

Earlier in this text, Lewes, like Davanzati, ponders the transvaluative properties of money—its functional abstractness—through a discussion of its material origins:

Amongst all the diversitie of Mettalls which G-D the Creator hath shut up in the closet and concavities of the earth, none is accounted more singular and excellent than silver and gold, of which the communication and Commerce of Mankind, have framed and invented the use of Money and coine, which money and coine may be properly termed to be the universall measure, of all things in the world, and though that thus naturally and originally they be but mettals, and so be in themselves accounted yet in value and estimation, the monyes and coines made thereof are to us (as all things) for they are to us (converted once to this use) as meate, cloth, house, horse, and generally what other things soever man hath els need of, and thereby it is evident and manifested that all things are obedient and in subjection to moneyes . . .”

This conception of money’s value as at once abstract (a transvaluative abstraction) and concrete (an empirical measurable entity) is also evident in early modern discussions of coinage. Although the early modern global market operated symptomatically and abstractly, there nevertheless were continual debates that focussed on the preservation of the material integrity of coinage against the threat of debasement and counterfeiting. While such concerns with the material integrity of money reflected the continuing necessity of unadulterated coinage in everyday transactions, they also reflect an attempt to resist a non-empirical abstraction of value, and thus the procedural *sine qua non* of capitalist markets.²⁰ The high number of anti-usury pamphlets attest to the

²⁰ Well into the early 1700s there was concern in England over adulterated coinage. During Elizabeth’s reign alone, there were no less than 16 proclamations attempting to regulate the quality of English money. Many of these proclamations concerned the practice of clipping or otherwise adulterating the currency. The majority were published within the first seven years of Elizabeth’s reign, when she was most concerned with rectifying

unwillingness of many early modern subjects to surrender to evaluative abstractions: John Smethwicke, for example, in *Usury Arraigned and Condemned* (1625) laments usury and its dependence on interest as unnatural because it “requires in lending an encrease of the same, which cannot encrease by nature.”²¹ Thomas Culpeper in *A Tract Against Usurie* (1621) similarly warns against tolerating profiting from that which is divorced from the natural occupations of labor:

Now let us see . . . and conceive if usury were tolerated at fifteene or twenty in the hundred . . . what the condition of things would then be and if it appeare how desperate the hurt would be which that would bring . . . Certainly, it must of necessity come to passe, that all Trades would in a short time decay; . . . We should onely eate upon one aother with Usury, have our commodities from other Nations, let the Land grow barren, and unmanured, and the whole state in short time, come to beggery.²²

Women: The Symptom Made Flesh

It is sufficient to conclude that money operated on two levels during this time; in the global market the specular “body” of money was predominant, on the more local level, however, there continued to be a less sophisticated, more empirical apprehension

the poor quality of English money. (In order to raise needed capital, Henry VIII had engaged in a practice of monetary debasement in which gold and silver coins were heavily alloyed and rendered virtually worthless for internal and external trade.) Attempts to stabilize English coin continued well after Elizabeth’s death. (See, for example, Gerald De Maynes, *A Treatise of the Canker of England’s Commonwealth*, 1601; A. Vickaris, *Essay on Coyn*, 1696; *Money’s Mischievous Pilgrimage or some considerations touching the ill-state of coyn of the kingdom*, 1697).

²¹ In *A Tract Against Usurie* Thomas Culpeper notes the miraculous quality of money’s self-generative abilities: “It will seem incredible to such as have not considered it, but to any that will but cast it up it is plainly manifest; that a hundred pounds managed at ten in the hundred, in seventy yeeres multiplies itself to a hundred thousand pounds.”

²² In *A Treatise of Usurie* (1611) Roger Fenton likens the acceptance of this practice to the cunning work of the devilish: “He that turneth himselfe into an angell of light, can set so faire a glosse upon a worke of

of monetary value. One of the effects of this “schizoid” apprehension of money’s properties, according to Agnew, was the popularity of rogue literature. Just as Agnew pinpoints rogue literature as a way of displacing the anxieties of the speculative market, I posit that writings on women were similar sites of displacement for the symptomatic unease of the emerging capitalist market. While the attacks on women’s nature that constitute the bulk of such writings were not concerned predominantly with the market but with the shifting terrain of gender during the early modern period, the way these attacks used market analogies suggest that these texts also—if indirectly—confronted anxieties surrounding the speculative market and the various “fictions” upon which it was based. As we shall see, the vagaries of gold and precious metals are frequently mentioned in conjunction with the vagaries of women in misogynist writing.

In her essay, “Public Credit or the Feminization of Virtue in the Marketplace,” Terry Mulcaire discusses the persistent association of credit with the feminine in the early eighteenth-century:

The female symbols of the early-eighteenth-century marketplace are important signs of cultural changes [occasioned by the rise of credit in market life], but they are most important, as I have contended here, for the way they link changes to transformations in the economic psychology of commercial society. In them the association of virtue with a psychologically stable empiricism is replaced by the alignment of virtue with the radically unstable creative power of aesthetic imagination. Credit’s symbolic femininity represents this instability not merely as a

darknes, that the iniquitie of it will hardly be discerned. He can so cunningly twist good and evill together, that the appearmce of usurie shall be presented without shew of injustice.”

frightening volatility but also as a potentially infinite resource (1035).

While Mulcaire is concerned with the reconceptualization of virtue within a feminine paradigm in eighteenth-century market society, she pinpoints the continual association in the market imaginary of the feminine with valuative abstractions. Eighteenth-century imaginary formulations of Credit involved imagining her as a charming and charmeable figure, one who can magically make something out of nothing:

Whig writers knew very well that Credit's bags are not really full of gold, and *therefore* they are charmed by her, precisely because of her astonishing power to make something out of nothing (1039).

If eighteenth-century writers were charmed by the ontological insubstantiability of credit valuation, sixteenth-century writers were appalled by such a possibility of such an “empty” kernel. It was precisely the specter of “dross” beneath the apparent gold of the new market that inspired early modern writers to abhor the “impalpability” of the new currency of speculation.

The vocabulary that underlay both misogynistic and “proto-feminist” writing in the early modern period suggest the pervasive analogizing of women’s nature and the nature of money. This analogizing is not surprising given the ritual commodification of women in and through marriage contracts (dowry agreements, for example). While virtually all kinds of writings about women—both in the particular and in general—make use of analogies that equate female characters in good and bad ways with precious gems, gold, or money, the way in which this analogizing works in misogynistic literature is my focus here.²³ The anti-feminist literature is a fascinating site not only to locate these

²³ Consider, for example, John Davies’ characterization of Elizabeth I in his hymn of Astraea. Rudenesse it self she doth refine

instances of analogical equivalence, but to examine the epistemology of suspicion that permeates these writings. In similar ways to the economic analyses of paper credit and valuation that are concerned with reconstructing an empirical valutive referent for transvaluative abstractions, misogynistic writings about women are concerned with uncovering the counterfeitness of supposed female goodness and beauty.

The formal characteristics—the rhetorical strategy—of this anatomization in the infamous early modern version of the “*querelle des femmes*,” begun by Edmund Gosynhyll’s *A Schoolhouse for Women* (1540) are striking in their similarities to the rhetoric surrounding counterfeiting and/or debased money in the early modern period. While discussions of the latter proceeded through an empirical anatomization of the metal under question—the most common manifestation of which is the scratching away of an apparently “golden” exterior to reveal an interior of inferior alloy—misogynistic “discoveries” of women’s character similarly “scratch away” with rhetorical sword-play in order to reveal an interior of dross and falsity. Women’s character, like false gold, is conceptualized in terms of an *ontology of disjuncture*, where what is “within” is discovered to be morally and aesthetically antithetical to what is revealed “without.”²⁴ This ontology of disjuncture is precisely that which is denied, rendered unthinkable by the ideology of the speculative market (the “as if” mentality). A coin, for example, that is

Even like an alchemist divine,
Gross times of iron turning
Into the purest form of gold,
Not to corrupt till heaven wax old,
And be refined with burning (my italics).

²⁴ Of course the conceptualization of women as paradoxically double has a long history in western culture: some literary examples are Spenser’s Duessa from the *Faerie Queen*, Agamemnon’s Clytemnestra, Middleton’s Gratiana, Marlowe’s Isabella, among others.

manifestly worn is still worth the same as one newly minted; its sublime body continues unsubjected to the variances of material reality. In some of these writings it is precisely the purported sublime of femaleness that is under attack; the attempt here is to reveal the dross beneath the gold, and so eradicate an ideology that celebrates female transcendence. In John Aylmer's *An Harborowe for faithfull and trewe subjectes* (1559), for example, a text that precedes the controversy and one which claims to be in defense of women (against John Knox), women's nature is described in terms of paradox. The introductory epistle to the Earl of Bedford and to Lord Robert Dudeley begins as follows:

The most noble and excellent philosopher Plutarck reporteth (most honorable) that bulles flesh be corrupted and rotten, be ingendred Bees, of horse flesh Harnets, and of mens serpentes. Whereby not only appeareth the great diversity of natures in the diversities of kindes, but also (which is no small wonder) how of that which is moste made of, and esteemed, is bred the worst and vilest corruption, of that, which in our eies is the beautifullest worke of nature, springeth forth the foulest frute, that is, or can be found in nature. . . . Whereby G-d geveth us to understand, that mischievous matter lieth oft hidden in fair vessels and no litle ill, where we think to find most good.

Joseph Swetnam, in his *Arraignement of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615), the text that along with Gosynhyll's much earlier *A Schoolhouse for Women* spurred on the pamphlet wars of the late 1500s and early 1600s, announces his evaluation of women in terms similar to Aylmer: "[T]he clearest River that is hath some dirt in the bottom; Jewels are all precious, but yet they are not all of one price nor all of

one virtue. Gold is not all of one disposition; no more are women all of one disposition.” This rather tepid attempt to differentiate types of women soon collapses into a wholesale indictment of the female sex, one which makes ample use of the notion of an existent disjuncture: “They [women] are also compared unto a painted ship, which seemeth fair outwardly and yet nothing but ballast within her; or as the idols in Spain which are bravely gilt outwardly and yet nothing but lead within them.” In a concluding warning to his male readers, Swetnam writes: “If a woman be never so comely, think her a counterfeit; if never so straight, think her crooked; . . . if well colored, a painted wall; if sad or shamefaced, then think her a clown” (89).

In Philip Stubbes’ *Anatomie of Abuses*, women are represented somewhat more complexly. Rather than a counterfeit, Stubbes describes women as chameleons.

Spudeus. As in a *chameleon* are said to be in all colours, save white, so I think, in these people are all things else, save virtue and Christian sobriety.

Proteus that monster could never change himself into so many forms as these women do, belike they have made an obligation with hell and are at agreement with the Devil, else they would never outrage thus, without either fear of G-d or respect to their weak brethren whom herein they offend.

Significantly, merchants at this time tended to be identified in similar terms. Writing in *The Merchant’s Map of Commerce*, Robert Lewes celebrates the merchants’ ability to shape-shift for his customers:

They that (like Thee) refuse no paine or toyle
With Forreigne Trade to’enrich their Native Soile

And (like discreet Camelions) can comply
 With each Mans humor for Commoditie.

G. J's *An Apologie for Womenkinde* (1605) postures as a defense of women, yet promulgates a similarly suspicious conceptualization of women's character as the writers discussed above:

Now let some Tyger-bred clowne speake his minde,
 Rayling his fill against all womenkinde,
 Terming them wanton, lustfull, letcherous
 Mincing decemblers, slye, fine vicious....
 Ah, but men blame all womens secrecye
 Their fearfull minds, changing and cowardly
 'tis true that malice neer wantes a marke,
 And huge great fires arise oft from a sparke.

Interestingly, this discussion ends with a more general lamentation of the now paradoxical nature of the social world; this bemoaned topsy-turviness is predictably related to the predominance of the speculative economy, "Ours is a golden worlde: the love of golde/Is more this day then it hathe been of olde/A somme of Coyne buyes honours, love and friends."²⁵ In the context of an ever-expanding speculative market and the concomitant social reorderings that ensue, examinations of women's nature are attempts to corporealize and anatomize the definitional paradoxes that constitute a

²⁵ Thomas Dekker describes a similarly gold-inspired chaos in *The Poore Belmen of London* (1616). Note how a primary agent of this chaos, Avarice, is represented as female. Describing the four ages of the world, Dekker writes, "In this iron bed of tyme (iron age) what unnaturall ingendrings, what prepostrous birthes have there beene? . . . In this bed was avarice borne, monstorous in shape, the divelish in conditions: her fingers are hookes, which usurers still are fyuling to keepe more sharpe then [sic] taylors needles. . . . She whispers every morning in a Lawyers eare, what shee said non knowes, but some think shee teaches him his prayer: she goest attired like a brokers wife, for her apparell is made of severall parcels, which by violence she has torn from

modern monetary system, that which we have called the “symptom”²⁶ By and through women, the faceless, placeless market attains a site of corporeal manageability, where, through careful examination, what was once indeterminate may be revealed as determinedly false or genuine (depending, of course, upon the predilections of the pamphleteer). In psychic terms, then, the women of these pamphlets may be considered the symptom, the ‘as if’ made flesh.

Joan: The “As If” Made Flesh

The reduction of women to the “body” is part of a long tradition of misogyny in Western thought, dating back to Biblical connections between female carnality and immorality (see *Genesis* Book I). Market-inspired anxieties in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-centuries intersected with an ongoing discourse about women’s nature and were, in many ways, displaced onto this tradition as a way of psychologically anatomizing the epistemological confusions caused by the increasingly double nature of money.

It is my argument that Joan de Pucelle of *Henry VI, Part I* provides a site where we may glimpse the early modern epistemological resistance to the demands of a symbolic market economy. Like the subjects of misogynist pamphleteers, Joan is interesting for the way in which she is wrenched out of a symbolic economy that depends for its functioning the “subliming” or the dephysicalization of its objects. While money in the early modern speculative market functioned through its progressive dephysicalization—its materiality had to be consistently denied for it to “circulate” effectively within the global market—women, such as Joan de Pucelle—are

sundry backes: she feedes upon Gold, as the Ostredge doth upon Iron . . .

²⁶ The titles of certain pamphlets attest to this anatomizing impulse: for example, *Women Unmasked and*

compensatorily rephysicalized as a way of alleviating the empirical and materialist anxieties wrought by the speculative market. Further I will contend that this desublimation and concomitant rephysicalization does not work to destroy the symptomatology of the early modern market, but rather serves to reify it by exposing the way in which the market is itself constituted by a progressive self-mystification as to the nature of money.

As we have briefly noted, one of the many paradoxes of money in the speculative economy is the way in which it must be divorced from its physical body in order to function as a general equivalent of value. Writing in “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes how the processes of monetary circulation dematerialize money:

We have remarked that in circulation as totality, or the moment of negation in Marx’s reading of money, money is seen as in a negative relation to circulation because, “cut off from all relation to (circulation) it would not be money but simply a natural object.” Circulation as such has the morphological (if not the “actual”) power to insert Money back into *Nature*, and to banish it from the textuality of Value. Yet it is also circulation that *bestows* textuality upon the Money-form. . . . Circulation in the following passage does precisely that with the restricted circuit of adequation within the money-form itself: “You may turn and toss an ounce of gold in any way you like, and it will never weigh ten ounces.” Marx describes this phenomenon as the “*dasein*” of the coin as “value sign” . . . The circulation of money is an outer movement . . . In the

Dissected, Anon. (1740).

friction with all kinds of hands, pouches, pockets, purses, the coin rubs off

... By being used it gets used up (*In Other Worlds* 163).

This process of dephysicalization—what Spivak discusses within a deconstructionist context as the textualizing of the money-form—is what I would like to understand as the “subliming” of money. In the early modern period, sublimity is constituted through dephysicalization. The doctrine of the monarchical sublime, for example, is predicated upon a separation of the physical body of the monarch from his spectral existence and genealogy.²⁷ *Henry VI, Part I* opens with a playing-out of this doctrine. Bemoaning the untimely death of Henry V before the coffin that contains his corpse, the Duke of Gloucester outlines the character Henry’s symbolic after-life will take in historical memory:

Glou. England ne’er had a king until his time;

Virtue he had, deserving to command;

His brandish’d sword did blind men with his beams;

His arms spread wider than a dragon’s wings;

²⁷ Ernest Kantorowicz’s seminal text, *The King’s Two Bodies*, provides an excellent summary of this medieval doctrine in the form of a quotation from Edmund Plowden’s *Commentaries or Reports*, “[N]o act which the King does as King, shall be defeated by his Nonage. For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural . . . is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the people, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.” The King’s Body Politic thus has all of the attributes of sublimity that we have noted above. Like the Sadeian victim of Žižek’s discussion, it is resistant in its very definition to all physical, cultural and ideological mutability. It is only through this sublimity—constituted of immutability—that it may function ideologically—as the social and cultural quilting point that is Lacan’s definition of ideology. Significantly, its functioning as ideology and thus as cultural, governmental, ideological and philosophical cornerstone rests on a difficult cognitive doubleness—a body that is unseen, opposite in constitution to the physical, empirical and mutable body that is its material embodiment and, more importantly, that is its sole existential and ideological guarantor. While as Plowden suggests the Body Politic can exist outside of the Body Natural, it is also the case that the Body Politic cannot exist without the Body Natural. The Body Natural is the ontological site which allows for the imagining/abstract construction of the transcendent entity of the Body

His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,
 More dazzled and drove back his enemies
 Than midday sun fierce bent against their faces.

What should I say? His deeds exact all speech (I. i. 8-15).

On one level Gloucester's description concerns Henry's imposing figure in battle, yet his characterization also functions to define the ideological significance that Henry will have in the English national consciousness. In this eulogy Henry's body is subject to a phantasmatic hagiography: as rhetorical conjurer *par excellence* Gloucester is here able to invoke an almost magical metamorphosis—no longer earthly king, Henry becomes a monstrous colossus of martial glory, and is thus made to inhabit the sublime realm of cultural adoration. Hence, while one body is interred in solemn ceremony, another rises up to define and inspire the English national consciousness.

This spectral reformulation of Henry V is followed closely by the narrative of Joan's ecstatic dephysicalization at the hands of the angels she claims speaks to her. Meeting the Dauphin, Charles, for the first time, Joan recounts her angelic conscription to the cause of France's liberation from the English:

Puc. Dolphin, I am by birth a shepherd's daughter,
 My wit untrain'd in any kind of art.
 Heaven and our Lady gracious hath it pleased
 To shine on my contemptible estate.
 Lo, whilst I waited on my tender lambs,
 And to sun's parching heat display'd my cheeks,

Politic—in much the same way as monetary signifiers—coins, bills, are that which make possible their own transvaluative abstractions.

G-d's Mother deigned to appear to me,
 And in a vision full of Majesty
 Will'd me to leave my base vocation
 And free my country from calamity.
 Her aid she promis'd, and assur'd success;
 In complete glory she reveale'd herself;
 And whereas I was black and stalwart before,
 With those clear rays which she infus'd on me
 That beauty I am blest with which you may see (1. ii. 72-86).

Like the narrative governing early modern currency and the speculative market, Joan's narrative demands a discounting of the physical form as inherently unreliable and insists on an apprehension of her as inherently divorced from the physical—in other words, as sublime (“Whereas I was black and stalwart before/With those clear rays which she infus'd on me/That beauty I am blest with you may see”).²⁸ In fact, it is precisely the transcendence of the physical that guarantees her functioning as the object through which France can gain liberation from the English. Like Henry V's spectral body for the English national consciousness, Joan enters the French symbolic economy through this narrative of dephysicalization; her cultural exchange-value is predicated upon her ability to “circulate” as the new French currency of national identity, martial vigor and eventual liberation; to be at once all things to all people. Introducing her to the French royal *coterie*, the Bastard of Orleans indicates the saving role Joan will *perform*—with all the connotations of the word—for the French. Addressing the collected French leaders,

²⁸ Of course. Joan's sublime is not a racially innocent one—there is a concern explicitly to “whiten” her as part of her transformation into the virginal maid who will lead the French to a holy victory over the English.

Orleans declares:

Methinks your look are sad and your cheer appalled.
 Hath the late overthrow wrought this offense?
 Be not dismayed for succor is at hand.
 A holy maid hither with me I bring
 Which, by a vision, sent to her from heaven,
 Ordained is to raise this tedious siege
 And drive the English forth the bounds of France (I. ii. 50-54).

While comforting to the defeated French army, Joan's transformability and her consequent ontological indeterminacy would have been perceived as another example of the particularly feminine proteanness with which the English in the early modern period were distressingly familiar. By rendering herself as at once a simple shepherd girl and one who has been purified by a divine force, Joan utilizes an ontology of disjuncture as the basis of her ecstatic reconstitution. The conceptualization of women's self as based in ontological contradiction was a particular characteristic of misogynistic texts about women.²⁹ As one whose blackness has been miraculously whitened—made pure-- Joan is inserted into this hackneyed metaphors of male suspicion: she is, in her self-construction, the kind of *gilt dirt* about which certain English pamphleteers were all too eager to warn their (male) readers. Popular narratives of disorderly women, in particular, were sites where early modern writers attempted to reconstruct an epistemological common ground. These narratives attempted to instantiate a site of cultural and social

²⁹ Women's nature may also be likened to the deceptiveness of metaphor. As Puttenham describes metaphor as "guilefull and abusing and occupied of purpose to deceive the ear and also the mind—for what else is your *Metaphor* but an inversion of sense by transport, your *allegorie* but a duplicite of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments (27)."

stability and legitimacy against which unconforming women—such as Joan de Pucelle—could be evaluated and rhetorically controlled. In one of the many texts that attempted to understand the identificatory machinations wrought by the rules of social decorum in market culture, Stefano Guazzo's notes the marketplace as the "ideal locale" for such self-obfuscation by women:

He found [in the marketplace] "a numberless multitude walking up and downe in every place, keeping a continuall marcate, where there is bargayning for all things." Words, not money, were the relevant currency, and serves the objects of exchange. Dialogue forced people to "put off as it were our own fashions and manners and cloath ourselves with the conditions of others" (Agnew 77).

Joan's narrative of physical reformulation partakes in this nervous cultural discourse. While her account represents her transformation as a divine refashioning—her shapeshifting, nevertheless, has uneasy parallels to the notion of a commodity self put forward by Thomas Hobbes, where, the self, like gold, becomes yet another cipher in the unknowable and unreadable world of transvaluative equivalence: "[Market] developments encouraged some thinkers to reconsider the notion—first broached by Hobbes—of a commodity self: a mercurial exchange value or bubble floating on the tides of what attention others were disposed to invest" (Agnew 13).

Even more worryingly, Joan's narrative of angelic purification shares similarities to the early modern discourse around alchemy. In the psychology of the speculative economy, alchemy functioned as a cultural semiotic of cabalistic chicanery. The alchemist, like Face in Jonson's play, inhabited the dangerous underworld of

commodification; he not only questioned whether shit is gold, but actually performed this unnatural reformulation as part of his main function. In his collection of alchemical engravings of the seventeenth century, entitled *The Golden Game*, Stanislas Klossowski de Rola includes the work of one Michael Maier, a renowned seventeenth century German alchemist. In his work, *Arcana arcanissima*, Michael Maier describes the practice of alchemy as the epistemological birthplace of “the false gods of the ancients.” As Maier is at pains to note, while alchemy gave birth to counterfeit objects of religious adoration in Ancient Greece and Egypt, in itself it was—and for Maier continues to be—a legitimate scientific practice. Introducing his *Arcana arcanissima* (1614), Maier writes,

The most secret secrets, that is, the Egyptian and Greek hieroglyphics, never hitherto known to the public, set forth in six books for the purpose of demonstrating that the origin of false gods, goddesses, heroes, animals, and institutions, received as sacred by the ancients, lies in one device of the Egyptians, which accomplished the golden medicine of body and soul.

Maier’s reading of the hieroglyphical emblems contains an interesting connection for our purposes. Frequently, the emblems make clear that one of the major obstacles to chemical purity—to gold—are those substances which are associated with the feminine/woman. In the emblem of the hermaphrodite, for example, feminine properties must be converted to masculine properties in order for the substance to be purified into gold. Explaining the alchemical significance of this emblem, Maier writes,

Hermaphroditus moruo simil, in tenebris jacens, igne indiget. In the darkness of Death, the Hermaphrodite (or Rebis)—the Subject—needs heat of the proper degree to guide its evolution toward Perfection. When the

cold humidity of the Moon is present in their Subject, the Philosophers call it their Woman; when in turn the dryness and heat of the Sun prevail they call it their Man. When all four qualities are present at the same time they call it their Rebis or Hermaphrodite. The Woman is easily converted into the Man (that is to say the Volatile into the Fixed), by means of the heat of the alchemical coction. The heat drives away, and separates, the superfluous humidity, and the Tincture is obtained . . . (101).

The content of Joan's account of her own physical purification is uncomfortably close to the above description. Her narrative of divination is from its inception contaminated by the counterfeiting connotations of alchemical practice, a connotation that only intensifies in the following scenes, particularly the one where she gains access to the city of Rouen.³⁰ While historically Joan's military maneuvers were examples of amazing martial forwardness, in *Henry V*, I they are reduced to instances of trickery and deception. In the course of her reconquest of the French cities under English occupation, Joan engages in the kind of chicanery that would have struck ontological terror in the hearts of early modern market participants. Having conquered Orleans, Joan and her compatriots conspire to retake Rouen, a city that has been under the occupation of the fierce John Talbot—the one English personage who best embodies the martial ideals of the late Henry V. In order to gain entrance into the town, Joan and her royal French cohorts disguise themselves as sellers of corn coming to market:

Puc. These are the city gates, the gates of Rouen

Through which our policy must make a breach.

³⁰ A quick glance at the OED reveals that from 1509 onwards, the word "alchemy" connoted deception and fraud as in "the gold was alchemied over with a false sophistication" (T. Adams, *The Blacke Devil*, 1615).

Through which our policy must make a breach.

Take heed, be wary how you place your words,

Talk like the vulgar sort of market men

That come to gather money for their corn.

First Soldier. Our sacks shall be a mean to sack the city.

And we be lords and rulers over Rouen.

Therefore we'll knock.

Watch. [within] Qui là?

Puc. Paysans, la pauvre gens de France,

Poor market folks that come to sell their corn.

Watch. [opening the gates] Enter, go in. The market bell is rung.

Puc. Now, Rouen, I'll shake thy bulwarks to the ground (III. ii. 1-17).

To the early modern market subject, such self-counterfeiting represented a disturbing if ultimately unavoidable aspect of the speculative economy. Whereas the medieval market was inherently stabilized by the clear bounds put on market participants—each market member was identifiably part of a community of producers, whether in the form of a guild or a known manor—the new speculative market did away with such boundaries. Unlike the medieval market that had a circumscribed site for exchange, the global market inherently operated outside of any boundary; the circulation of its commodities was no longer structured by *habitus* (in both senses of the word) but relied upon the assent to certain markers of value and upon heretofore unknown market participants. In this scene, then, Joan's deceptiveness only works to confirm the epistemological bases of early modern market anxiety. Not only does she shake the

bulwarks of fictive Rouen to the ground, in her counterfeiting she reveals the ontological bulwarks of the early modern market as always (potentially) subject to such mercantile fraudulence. In her crossing into Rouen as the false seller of corn, she forces her audience to, at least for a moment, depart from the comfortable illusions of the economy of the “as if.”

After this disturbing subterfuge, Joan torments the English leaders with her own chicanery. “*Puc.* Good morrow, gallants, want ye corn for bread/I think the Duke of Burgundy will fast/Before he’ll buy again at such a rate/’Twas full of darnel. Do you like the taste?” (III. ii. 41–44). In this sarcastic barb, Joan significantly mentions the Duke of Burgundy, a Frenchman who until converted by Joan later in the play, has been the major French support of the English cause. The mocking reference to his metaphorical purchase of the English “cause” only serves to underline for the audience the way in which international alliances—those of the market or of conquest—make native participants subject to the unknowable dangers of subterfuge and counterfeiting.

Given the richness of Joan’s cultural subversiveness it is remarkable that few critics—even feminist ones—have considered the way in which her character problematizes the epistemological bases of valuative abstractions. While not concerned with the early modern market but with the cultural analogues of Shakespeare’s representation of Joan of Arc, Gabriele Bernhard Jackson in her article, “Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons and Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc,” discusses Joan’s function as a source of demystification for such abstractions as glory and honor. As Jackson notes, in the second scene of *Henry VI, I* Joan comments upon the inherent impermanence of martial glory and honor, and asserts that all such valuative abstractions are subject to the

exigencies of the moment:

Puc. Glory is like a circle in the water
 Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
 Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought
 With Henry's death the English circle ends;
 Dispersed are the glories it included
 Now am I like that proud insulting ship
 Which Caesar and his Fortune bare at once. (I. ii. 133-139).

For Jackson, Joan is not so much the debased character of traditional literary criticism as a spokeswoman for a newly emerging early modern cynicism; one who, as she writes, is more congruent with the *realpolitik* of Elizabethan rule. Dismissing readings of the play that emphasize its jingoistic patriotism and hysterical misogyny, Jackson writes that “like the positive militaristic reading, with which it is closely connected, the negative misogynistic one neglects both the play’s topicality and the historical moment’s ideological complexity” (*Women in the Renaissance* 95). While I agree with Jackson that Joan is much more than the coarse caricature she has been made out to be in much of the play’s criticism, I disagree with the positive connotations of Jackson’s evaluation of her role. Joan is not, as Jackson suggests, the momentary spokeswoman for the changing political ideologies of the early modern moment. She functions, instead, as its dirty underside—the epistemological “monster under the bed”—of the aspect of the early modern social that I consider here—the speculative market. Her declaration of the impermanence of such confidently assigned markers of cultural value—glory and honor—only serves to remind the play’s audience of the way in which all valiative

abstractions—money, commodities—can be subject to the same ontological skepticism. As a character who is constructed in part through misogynistic analogues, Joan's remarks become self-reflexive and self-compromising. In announcing the pathetic transience of significant cultural cornerstones (glory, honor, value, identity), Joan becomes their presumptive challenger—she throws down, as it were, a rhetorical gauntlet (“Now am I like that proud insulting ship . . .”). Thus elided with the specter of cultural disorder, Joan becomes that which must be rhetorically and ontologically controlled in order to stabilize the valuative abstractions—“*asifinesses*”—through which the early modern market and early modern culture must function.

One might argue, in fact, that Joan announces herself from the beginning of the play as the major challenger of such ontological consistency. The drama confirms this characterization by setting up as Joan's challenger one who in the play refuses any outside attempts at his own commodification and transvaluation by his French capturers; it is only after his death that Talbot becomes for the English national consciousness the antithesis of a Joan de Pucelle. While Joan might challenge such ideals as “glory” or “honor” as mere phantasms of national ideology, Talbot's corpse provides the ontological soil in which the English may replant these ideological and nationalist bulwarks.

We are first introduced to Talbot as he is recounting his experiences as a French prisoner of war. Talking to his compatriot, Salisbury, Talbot describes his attempted ransoming by the French in the market at Rouen:

Salisbury. Talbot, my life, my joy again returned?

How were thou handled, being prisoner?

Or by what means got'st thou to be released?

Discourse, I prithee, on this turret top.
Talbot. The Duke of Bedford had a prisoner,
 Called the brave Lord Ponton of Santrilles;
 For him I was exchanged and ransomed.
 But with a baser man-of-arms by far
 Once in contempt they would have bartered me—
 Which I, disdaining, scored and craved death
 Rather than I would be so pilled esteemed. (I. vi. 1-12).

In refusing to be ransomed for a “lesser good” and thus to enter into a symbolic economy in which the self is made into a cipher—a bubble, as Hobbes writes, ready to assume the contours of any assigned equivalent—Talbot rejects the fundamental terms upon which a speculative market functions. “Craving death,” Talbot reverts to a pre-speculative market ideology of valuation. Further, in recognizing the inherent misvaluation of his first proposed ransoming—in this case a nonequivalence of rank—Talbot implodes the “asifness” of speculative market exchange. For in this proposed barter Talbot stubbornly recognizes what must be misrecognized in order for any non-empirical valuations to operate effectively—whether these valuations are the semiotics of the market or of other cultural ideologies/mythos. While for a moment this may seem a reassuring reversion to a feudalist apprehension of cultural value, it is as disquieting—albeit in a different way—as the challenge posed by Joan de Pucelle’s actions in the play. Talbot’s recognition and refusal of the potential “misrecognition” inherent in the first proposed exchange reminds us—as well as the early modern audience—of the way in which such willful self-delusions are the epistemological *sine qua nons* of all exchange relationships. In *Given*

Time, Jacques Derrida describes the psychic processes that accompany monetary exchange—counterfeit or not:

Counterfeit money is never, *as such*, counterfeit money. As soon as it is what is it, recognized *as such*, it ceases to act as and to be worth counterfeit money. It only is by being able to be, *perhaps*, what it is. This irreducible modality taken into account, and inasmuch as the title may belong to it, it obligates you. It obligates you first of all to wonder what money is: true money, false money, the falsely true and the truly false . . .
(*Given Time* 87).

Talbot's refusal of incommensurability—his refusal to allow the “as if” of exchange/of transvaluative equivalence to function in his own ransoming--reveals for the play's audience the “truly false” dimension of all symbolic equivalencies. For it is when semiotics of monetary and/or cultural value are recognized for what they are—identified *as such* rather than misidentified as so many transmutable ciphers, that the contracts of exchange are rendered null and void.

In a later encounter with another potential capturer, Talbot rejects all transvaluative commodification of the self. Summoned by the Countess of Auvergne to “visit her poor castle where she lies/That she may boast she hath beheld the man/Whose glory fills the world with loud report,” Talbot accedes to the request and presents himself to the Countess. Seeing him, the Countess disdains his unheroic appearance:

Is this the scourge of France?

Is this the Talbot, so much feared abroad

That with his name the mothers still their babes?

I see report is fabulous and false.

I thought I should have seen some Hercules,

A second Hector, for his grim aspect

And large proportion of his strong-knit limbs.

Alas, this is a child, a silly dwarf!

Encouraged by Talbot's seeming timidity, Auvergne declares him captured, her revenge for the way in which "his shadow"—his legend has terrified her and her countrymen. In response, Talbot agrees that he is indeed a shadow—his body in and of itself cannot function as a symbol/representation of martial/national hegemony—rather, like a counterfeit, it is *truly false*, conferring neither value or substance in and of itself.

Engaging with the Countess, Talbot expounds on his own symbolic insubstantiality:

Talbot. . . . I am but shadow of myself

You are deceived. My substance is not here;

For what you see is but the smallest part

And least proportion of humanity.

I tell you, madam. Were the whole frame here.

It is of such spacious lofty pitch

Your roof were not sufficient to contain 't.

Countess. This is a riddling *merchant* for the nonce!

He will be here, and yet he is not here.

How can these contraries agree?

Talbot. That will I show you presently.

Winds his horn. Drums Strike Up. A peal of ordinance, Enter Soldiers (II. iii. 51-61. my

italics).

The countess's concluding speculation—"He will be here, and yet he is not here/How can these contraries agree" is an apt question for our purposes. Her significant comparison of Talbot's confusing response to a riddling merchant also underlines the way in which unknowability was related to the emerging market at this time. For the contradiction suggested by the Countess's ontological confusion is precisely what Talbot here disallows in his own person. By refusing to insert himself within a semiotic system of abstract equivalence, Talbot simultaneously disavows the epistemological paradoxes upon which a speculative market is based. Rather than allow the "as if" of non-empirical valuation to operate through his personhood, Talbot insists that he, in and of himself, constitutes nothing of value ("My substance is not here . . ."). In so doing, he places himself under symbolic erasure and thus posits his personal identity inferentially insignificant, choosing instead to prove his "worth" through a direct empirical referent, the soldiers that come to his epistemological rescue:

How say you, madam? Are you now persuaded
 That Talbot is a shadow of himself
 These are his substance, sinews, arms, and strength
 With which he yoketh your rebellious necks (II. iii. 62-65).

Given his refusal in this scene to "commodify" himself within a paradigm of the specular, the Countess's naming of him as a "riddling merchant" seems ironic in the extreme. Yet the play later supports this characterization; whereas in this scene, Talbot rejects a metaphors of the self elsewhere, in true merchant-like fashion he here exploits the interest-value of his own notoriety. During his ransoming in the marketplace, for

example, Talbot manipulates his own terroristic image to frighten the French onlookers:

Talbot. In open market place produced they me
 To be a public spectacle to all.
 “Here,” said they, “is the terror of the French,
 The scarecrow that affrights our children so.”
 Then broke I from the officers that led me
 And with the nails digged stones out of the ground
 To hurl at the beholders of my shame.
 My grisly countenance made others fly;
 None durst come near for fear of sudden death.
 . . .
 So great fear of my name ‘mongst them were spread
 That they supposed I could rend bars of steel
 And spurn in pieces posts of adamant (I. iv. 41-48;50-52).

“Scorned by contumelious taunts” at his first appearance in the public market, Talbot nevertheless adopts the persona constructed for him by his capturers. According to Christopher Pye, in the “Theatre, Market and History in *Henry VI, I.*,” Talbot’s actions here serve to comment on the early modern confluence of spectacle and the market. As Pye notes,

Talbot’s narrative of the spectacle in the market gives local form to a more submerged and troublingly expansive version of surrogacy associated with the English Hero in this scene and the play, an unbounded representational economy in which the scene will engage in detail before

returning once again with Talbot's first victory, to a concrete and familiar thematization of the market (506).

Pye further argues that Talbot's actions with Salisbury reflect what he calls "this troublingly expansive surrogacy." Exclaiming against the monstrousness of Salisbury's execution by the French, Talbot "commodifies" the former's name as both the new symbol of English martyrdom and the new currency for English revenge.

Talbot. Hear, hear how dying Salisbury doth groan!

It irks his heart he cannot be revenged.

Frenchmen, I'll be a Salisbury to you.

Pucelle or pussel, Dauphin or dogfish,

Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels

And make a quagmire of your mingled brains. (II. iv. 104-110).

Phantasmagorically, Talbot here elides himself within the symbolic context of Salisbury's name and lineage ("Frenchman, I'll be a Salisbury to you.") Yet this confluence is rendered unstable by the power of Talbot's own inferential significance in the French wars, a significance which cannot be contained within the specular "heraldry"/"shield" of Salisbury's own military notoriety. For although Salisbury "Henry Fift . . . Trained to the wars/Whilst any trumpet did sound or drum struck up/His sword did ne'er leave striking in the field," it is Talbot who, for the play's audience, is the military hero *par excellence*. As Pye suggests, throughout this scene the exact referent for this epideisis remains unclear; as readers we are never sure whether Talbot is here sculpting the image of his own martial glory or whether he is doing so for his lost compatriot, Salisbury:

injunction that constitutes his martial identity— “avenge me on the French”—and, through the irreversibility of that loss, is able to stabilize the movement of exchange for the first time: “Frenchman, I’ll be a Salisbury to you” (Pye, *ELH* 61 1994: 510).

While I do not agree that Talbot constitutes his martial identity through Salisbury’s death, he nevertheless is uncannily apt at “coining” a semiotic of martial valor *through Salisbury’s dead body*. Whereas before he rejected all attempts to render his own body/selfhood as site of such patriotic transvaluation, Salisbury becomes for Talbot a legitimate cipher with which he may “trade battle and glory” with his French enemies: as Pye suggests, Salisbury’s specular existence is the valuative circuit for Talbot’s own symbolic reconstitution.

If Talbot provides Salisbury’s dead body as a site for the specular reconstitution of English identity, the play similarly posits Joan as the locus for a parallel epistemological deconstitution; where Talbot through Salisbury is reified as the valuative currency par excellence, Joan is, in the latter half of the play, anatomized as the counterfeit sublime through which the French have gained a spurious and momentary martial hegemony.

Interestingly, it is through their respective deaths that Talbot and Joan enter or leave the rarefied site of the transvaluative sublime. It is as if the play reverses its own teleology; as we have seen, Joan appears as the embodiment of a religious sublimity at almost the same moment when Henry V takes his place in this circumscribed ideological locus; at the end of the play, however, Joan is evicted from this locus at the moment when Talbot definitively inhabits a similarly constituted site of martyred heroism.

when Talbot definitively inhabits a similarly constituted site of martyred heroism.

Joan is present at Talbot's death and comments upon the spontaneous eulogy that the former's compatriot, Lucy, gives at the site of the battle. Joan's mocking comments at this moment serve to reinforce the sense of the divergent specular teleologies she and Talbot will soon be made to inhabit in the play's nationalist cosmos. Addressing Joan and her French followers, Lucy delineates the outlines of Talbot's ideological personage:

Lucy: Is Talbot slain, the Frenchmen's only scourge
 Your kingdom's terror and black nemesis?
 O, were mine eyeballs into bullets turned
 That I in rage might shoot them at your faces!
 O that I could but call these dead to life!
 It were enough to fright the realm of France
 Were but his picture left amongst you here
 It would amaze the proudest of you all
 Give me their bodies, that I may bear them hence
 And give them burial as beseems their worth.
Pucelle: I think this upstart is old Talbot's ghost
 He speaks with such a proud commanding spirit,
 For G-d's sake, let him have them! To keep them here
 They would but stink and putrefy the air! (IV. vii. 77-90)

It is interesting to note that in this exchange Joan is anxious to restore Talbot and his son to their physical and hence unenviable existences. Rejecting the idealization of Lucy, Joan emphasizes their essential and undeniable physicality; significantly, in response to

Joan's disparaging commentary, Lucy asserts Talbot's and his son's phoenix-like immortality: "I'll bear them hence; but from their ashes shall be read/A phoenix that shall make all France afeard" (IV. vii. 92-93).

Joan's own specularly is subject to a similar if more effective anatomization in the scene that follows this one. While Talbot's physical body becomes the site on which an English national heroic lineage may be delineated, Joan's spectral body becomes a locus for ontological revelation and devaluation. Opaque until this moment, the valuative referent of Pucelle's uncanny military puissance is revealed as a sublime of hellish origin. Rather than the archangels that Joan claims rendered her "white" in her first appearance, Joan here conjures a platoon of recalcitrant fiends, hellish personages with which Joan can no longer "trade" for martial success:

Joan. The Regent conquers and the Frenchmen fly.

Now help, ye charming spells and periapts,

And ye choice spirits that admonish me

And give me signs of future accidents.

.

This speedy and quick appearance argues proof

Of your accustomed diligence to me.

Now, ye familiar spirits, that are culled

Out of the powerful regions under earth

Help me this once, that France may get the field.

They walk, and speak not

O, hold me not with silence overlong!

Where I was wont to feed you with my blood

I'll lop a member off and give it you

In earnest of a further benefit

So you do condescend to help me now.

They hang their heads

No hope to redress? My body shall

Pay recompense, if you will grant my suit.

They shake their heads

(V. iii. 1-21).

Interestingly, it is here the specular as it is epistemologically constituted through the unresponsive fiends that now rejects the valuative source of their functioning. We are, in a sense, witnessing a nightmare vision of the “as if,” the transvaluative abstraction through which Joan has heretofore operated as sublime is conceptualized as an anti-sublime; the fiends are nothing else than a dramatic incarnation of the epistemological monsters- under -the -bed potentially present within all entities that are valued within a speculative economy—whether religious or not. Ironically, in this exchange with Joan, the fiends—in their rejection of Joan’s entreaties—become elided with the English audience that similarly rejects and realizes Joan’s sublime counterfeiting. This elision reveals the fragile constitutiveness of valuative abstraction in general—like the transient circle in the water which is glory, the legitimacy of cultural heroes is similarly subject to an ontological and epistemological tenuousness—only guaranteed by the ideological accession of their cultural spectators.

If even at the moment of her revelation as anti-divine, Joan is capable of conjuring forth a sense of epistemological unknowingness, the play’s disclosure of her as

a fraud provides a much needed cathartic site for the reconstitution of English national identity and for the epistemological anxieties occasioned by the opaqueness of the market economy. Although Joan as a dramatic presence in the play has functioned to destabilize certain cultural “sublimes”—glory, Englishness, etc, her characterological dissection at the end of the play serves as a base from which the play’s audience may reconstitute a sense of empirical and epistemological certainty. In some sense, Joan’s denouement is the medium through which the play’s audience may experience a psychic rescue from the “contingencies” of the “as if” economy and its bases in disembodied/unempirical valuative entities.

In dramatizing this dissection, the play first recapitulates the mythos in which Joan has dressed herself. Addressing her English capturers, Joan attempts to refashion herself in the sublime:

Puc. First, let me tell you who you have condemned:

Not me begotten of a shepherd swain,
 But issued from the progeny of kings,
 Virtuous and holy, chosen from above,
 By inspiration of celestial grace
 To work exceeding miracles on earth.
 I never had to do with wicked spirits.
 But you, that are polluted with your lusts,
 Stained with the guiltless blood of innocents,
 Corrupt and tainted with a thousand vices—
 Because you want the grace that others have,

You judge it straight a thing impossible

To compass wonders but by help of devils (V. iv. 36-49).

Accusing her capturers of epistemological delusion brought on by their own ethical misdeeds, the play nonetheless repudiates the seeming logic of Joan's defense by decisively revealing the site of its utterance as counterfeit. Instead of a locus of ontological certainty, Joan's body becomes that through which she is revealed as semiotically false. The value-sign of Joan's sublimity—her body, "virtuous and holy"—is here deconstructed in a confusing series of revelations and accusations and instead presented as the value-sign *par excellence* of female duplicity. Responding to Warwick's demand that the English "spare no faggots" in the decimation of her maidenly body, "Let there be enough./Place barrels of pitch upon the fatal stake/That so her torture may be shortened," Joan quickly claims the unmaidenly prerogative of pregnancy and thus undoes any former pretenses to corporeal sublimity:

Puc. Will nothing turn your unrelenting hearts?

Then, Joan, discover your infirmity

That warranteth by law to be thy privilege:

I am with child, ye bloody homicides.

Murder not then the fruit within my womb,

Although ye hale me to a violent death (V. iv. 59-64).

York quickly italicizes the ontological inconsistencies of Joan's self-fashioning, exclaiming, "Now Heaven forfend! The holy maid with child?" What follows is a noisome juggling act of potential French fathers, with Joan attempting to save herself by choosing one whose identity would potentially save her from the English flames. Joan's

“bargaining” only ends with the English command reiterating the contradictory nature of Joan’s constructed identities.

Puc. O, give me leave, I have deluded you.

‘Twas neither Charles nor yet the Duke I named,
But Reignier, King of Naples, that prevailed.

Warwick. A married man! That’s most intolerable.

York. Why, here’s a girl! I think she knows not well,
There were so many, whom she may accuse.

Warwick. It’s a sign she hath been liberal and free.

York. And yet, forsooth, she is a virgin pure!

Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee.

Use no entreaty for it is in vain.

Puc. Then lead me hence; with whom I leave my curse.

May never glorious sun reflex his beams

Upon the country where you make abode,

But darkness and the gloomy shade of death

Environ you, till mischief and despair

Drive you to break your necks or hang yourselves! (V. iv. 60-87).

Proved ontologically counterfeit, Joan’s ending words nevertheless carry significant predictive value. Directly following her curse, York and his comrades are forced to confront their own internal disorder, one that, ironically, is based in the counterfeiting of factions within the English camp. After York’s “farewell” to Joan

(“Break thou to pieces and consume to ashes./Thou foul accursed minister of hell!”),

Cardinal Beaufort enters with—for York--unwelcome news of peace:

Cardinal. Lord Regent, I do greet your excellence

With letters of commission from the King

For know, my lords, the states of Christendom

Moved with remorse of these outrageous broils

Hath earnestly implored a general peace

Betwixt our nation and the aspiring French;

And here at hand the Dauphin and his train

Approacheth, to confer about some matter.

York. Is all our travail turned to this effect? (V. iv. 92-102).

Indeed, while Joan’s parting remarks are ostensibly directed to York, they are more aptly applied to the Cardinal. The Cardinal and his French compatriots usher in the kind of “hell” of uncertainty that Joan represents and that she in her discussions of the transientness of honor and glory appears to predict earlier in the play. Debating whether or not to pledge allegiance to the Henry as their king, Charles and his cohorts decide to conclude a “false” peace than continue to fight a present war. Although in his pledge, Charles in some sense agrees to be “a shadow of himself,” his oath is constructed in similar terms—as a shadow/ an insubstantial pledge of fealty to (what will become in the next plays) but a shadow of a king:

Alen. [Aside to Charles.] To say the truth, it is our policy

To save your subjects from such massacre

And ruthless slaughters as are daily seen

Although you break it when your pleasure serve (my emphasis).

War. How say'st thou, Charles? Shall our condition stand?

C'ha. It shall; only reserv'd you claim no interest

In any of our towns of garrison.

York. Then swear allegiance to his Majesty:

As thou art knight, never to disobey

Nor be rebellious to the crown of England,

Thou, nor thy nobles, to the crown of England

[Charles and the rest give tokens of fealty]

So, now dismiss your army when ye please;

Hang up your ensigns, let your drums be still,

For here we entertain a solemn peace (V.v. 159-174).

In their actions of duplicity—the false contracts of peace to which they subscribe—King Charles and his cohorts represent what to an early modern mind would have been the logical “effects” of an economy of transvaluation upon other structures of social relations—such as fealty and contractual obligations. If in a speculative economy, the “living” contract of two market participants is replaced by an unreliable semiotic of equivalence—money and/or coinage—so too can other signifiers of “cultural” trade (such as pledge exchange) be similarly suspect. Thus, oaths of fealty—like oaths of market exchange fall into a vortex of uncertainty and unreliability—and become always, as Joan remarks earlier—transient, “like a circle in the water.”

Although the ostensible locus of epistemological uncertainty is now destroyed (Joan is dead), the play does not end on a note of reassuring certainty. The spectre that

Joan represents—a diffuse and uncontrollable ontological and epistemological unreliability—has spread beyond the space of her character to other early modern cultural “cells” or quilting points. As I will discuss in the subsequent chapter on *Henry V*, the capitalist market affected—or infected—other areas of social relations in the early modern period, reconstituting key semiotic signifiers such as fealty and kingship. While a momentary antibiotic for the ensuing disorder, the attempts to control such epistemological uncertainty through anatomizing/codifying women’s nature were soon outstripped by the virus-like spread of speculativeness and commodification in almost all areas of social life and thought in the early modern period.

Chapter Two: “Thou Couldst’t Have Coin’d Me Into Gold: The Currencying of Filiation in *Henry V*”

Writing in “Odysseus’s Scar,” Erich Auerbach makes an important point about the representation of historical dialecticism in literary texts. Contrasting the foregrounding of history that occurs in Homer’s *Odyssey* with the mystical backgrounding of history that appears in the Old Testament, Auerbach observes, “To write history is so difficult that most historians are forced to make concessions to the technique of legend” (*Mimesis* 17). Legend is, in Auerbach’s mimetic world, a processed representation of the historical moment, one that ignores “the contradictions and crossing of motives both in individuals and general action” (18). It is a flattened-out history, similar in form and function to the historical anecdote so popular in some recent criticism of early modern drama:

Legend arranges its material in a simple and straightforward way; it *detaches it from its contemporary historical context*, so that the latter will not confuse it; it knows only clearly outlined men who act from few and simple motives and the continuity of whose feelings and actions remain uninterrupted (19, my italics).

Contemporary critics of *Henry V* discuss Shakespeare’s treatment of Henry V in terms similar to Auerbach’s description of legend. Leonard Tenenhouse, for example, assigns *Henry V* to the category of hagiography. In this reading, Harry is a figure of legend, of English sainthood because he alone, in the chronicle history plays, “can make the discontinuous political process appear as a coherent moment” (*Political Shakespeare* 120). Stephen Greenblatt similarly sees *Henry V* as “a collective panegyric to the

creation of a martial national state purged of its incorrigibles” (PS 42).

In their essay, “History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*,” Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield observe in *Henry V* a representation of dialectical history. They note that *Henry V* is a rich site for the “understanding of history and the human subject in terms of social and political process.” In Dollimore and Sinfield’s analysis, however, these processes are implicitly equated to the contradictions produced by the monarchical apparatus for its further ideological consolidation. In their reading, the historical dialecticism of the play is nothing more than the representation of its King’s struggle to contain ideological contradiction. The essay ends reasserting the monarchically-determined proxemics of nationalist ideology: “Henry V is an Elizabethan fantasy because it represents a single source of power in the state. Nothing is allowed to compete with the authority of the King” (PS 220).

In her book, *The Stage and Social Struggle*, Phyllis Rackin breaks with a reading of *Henry V* that sees the play as dramatizing the Chronicle’s hagiography of Henry V. In contrast, Rackin sees *Henry V* as a primary dramatic site for the exploration of the possibilities of historical representation. In her reading, the play strives to overcome the representational aporias that plague the dramatization of historical change and contradiction. She writes,

In *Henry V* the last play in the second tetralogy, the two views are deliberately clashed against each other. . . . Moreover instead of reconciling the two views at the end of the play or discarding one for the other, Shakespeare lets both of them stand, directing our attention to the abyss at the center of the historiographic project: the impossibility of

recovering the past or of getting behind the historiographic text . . . to discover the always postulated and never graspable fiction called historic truth” (Rackin 69)

Continuing, Rackin describes the plays of the second tetralogy as a “whirling dialectic” of historical manicheism:

Instead of reconciling the binary oppositions between past and present, providence and Machiavelli, theater and history, the second tetralogy . . . calls into question both the adequacy of its representation and the possibility of historical knowledge.

While I agree that *Henry V* reveals the unknowability that inevitably compromises any attempts (dramatic or not) of historiographical representation, I would like to posit another reason for the perceived unease in the Shakespearean project. I suggest that the sense of historiographical frustration in *Henry* is not wholly the result of a generalized historiographical skepticism, as Rackin suggests, but rather is the inevitable effect of the attempt dramatically to materialize the late middle-ages (1411) in an early modern context (1599).³²

As a result of this chronological dynamic, the play engages in a complex dialectic of historiographical representation. It is at once concerned with reanimating a sentimentalized feudal dynamic--it is within this context that Hal’s desirability has its full force--as well as confronting and interrogating the capitalist restructuring of paradigmatically feudal social relationships. I do not mean to suggest, however, that *Henry V* constructs a dramatic *square dance* wherein “feudalism” and “capitalism” meet

³² We are fortunate to be able to date *Henry V* so precisely because of the mention in the chorus of Act V of the Earl of Essex’s campaign in Ireland.

for one (uncomfortable) twirl and then go their separate ways. It is precisely the opposite. In *Henry V* examples of proto-capitalist structures of social relations are found *within* social affiliations characteristic of a feudal dynamic.³³ Thus, as I will discuss in the following pages, an incipient capitalist commodification of social relations reformulates certain key symbolics of the feudal *weltanschauung*.³⁴ kingship, “kinship”, soldiery and patrimony

The theoretical implications of the play’s mystification of the expected definitional demarcations between feudalism and capitalism are best clarified by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of “the transition” in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.³⁵ In their exploration of the progressive “decoding” of traditional feudal relations of production, Deleuze and Guattari complicate the frequent Marxist historical equation that posits a victorious capitalism bursting through the “fettters” of a recalcitrant feudalism.³⁶ Instead of adhering to the resultant simplified chronology--

³³ I do not mean to suggest, however, that this “coexistence” is comfortable. I believe, with Adorno, that any “totality” (for lack of a better word)—historical or not—is comprised of elements “whose connections are not a matter of unbroken transition, but a matter of sudden change and the process takes place not through the moments approaching one another, but through rupture” (Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 4).

³⁴ As Perry Anderson discusses in *Lineages of the Absolutist State* and in *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* the feudal dynamic was characterized by a system of parcellized sovereignties, which held within them the notion of a more centrifugal monarchical base, but which on a practical day to day basis functioned as “local monarchies.” As Anderson writes in *Passages*, “There was an inbuilt contradiction within feudalism, between its own rigorous tendency to a decomposition of sovereignty and the absolute exigencies of a final center of authority in which a practical recomposition could occur” (*Passages* 152). One can conceptualize this inherent tension as the effects of Deleuze and Guattari’s everpresent, yet always out of reach, *urstate*--the “abstract despotic State” that feudalism “not only presupposes . . . [but] divides into segments according to the regime of its private property and the rise of its commodity production” (AO 220).

³⁵ “Transition” is an unsatisfactory term for this historical confluence. However, it is a convenient shorthand. I would like to retain Perry Anderson’s sense of a “composite system” throughout this analysis, wherein what may be understood as residual elements of a feudal structure interface with (and interfere with) the economic and social innovations of capitalism. See, Perry Anderson, *From Antiquity to Feudalism*.

³⁶ I am here referring to Marx’s pithy description of capitalism’s ascendance from feudalism in *Capital, Vol. I*. He writes, “the economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former” (*Capital I*: 875). Marx, however, complicates this simple diachronism in *The Grundrisse*, where he elucidates a *vorgeschichte* (prehistory) of capitalism that is not equivalent to but rather prepares the way for the mature capitalism of his day. Marx also points to such a prehistory in the beginning of his discussion of primitive accumulation: “The whole movement

feudalism *then* capitalism--Deleuze and Guattari advance a “schizoid” version of the feudal/capitalist confluence:

[T]he example of feudalism: there . . . private property, commodity production, the monetary afflux, the extension of the market, the development of towns, and the appearance of manorial ground rent in money form, or of the contractual hiring of labor, do not by any means produce a capitalist economy, but rather *a reinforcing of feudal offices and relations* . . . Hence capitalism does not lead to the dissolution of feudalism, but rather the contrary . . . (AO 223, my italics)

In some sense, Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizoid” analyses are attempts at the (re)introduction of non-identity or a negative ontology into traditional histories of the transition. In his analysis of Hegel, Adorno makes the following points about the interventive capabilities of a negative dialectics --a dialectics that focuses and refuses erasure of the nonidentical in the conceptualizations of idealist philosophy:

Hegel shows that the fundamental ontological contents that traditional philosophy hoped to distill are not ideas discretely set off from one another; rather each of them requires its opposite and the relations of all of them to one another is one of process.

And, again in relation to the positing of an absolute subject:

Analysis of the absolute subject has to acknowledge the indissolubility of an empirical nonidentical moment in it, a moment that doctrines of the

[the structuring of the capitalist mode of production] . . . seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out of by assuming a primitive accumulation . . . which *precedes* capitalist accumulation: an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production, but its point of departure” (*Capital I*: 873).

absolute subject, idealist systems of identity [traditional historiography is certainly one such idealist system], are not permitted to acknowledge as indissoluble (Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 8.16).

The incipient capitalism that *Henry V* represents takes as its primary form the commodification, or the “currencying” of certain social relations of production, characteristic of feudalism. By concentrating on the social modulations wrought by the commodification of certain relations of production, we may grasp the schizoid confluence that Deleuze and Guattari describe above--how, in short, the play forwards a dialectic of intratransitional movement--not feudalism not capitalism, but a *feudalist capitalism*, a *capitalist feudalism*. In this way, the play may be seen to be an (unwitting) participant in a peculiarly modernist problematic--the way in which paradigms of history and society are predicated upon an erasure of what Adorno describes above as “non-identity”--those elements that resist enclosure within a totalizing ontology.

Before entering into an analysis of the play itself, we should consider the historical conditions of possibility that enable this dramatic intervention. In what ways, for example, did the socioeconomic/political realities of the English early modern period preview/anticipate the social relations resulting from commodification under capitalism? Also, how did the representation of Henry V--the great Christian warrior--within an early modern context involve Shakespeare in the working out of the historical contradictions arising out of the reformulations--profound or not--of the mode(s) of material and ideological production during this time?

In considering these questions, I would like to focus on a key aspect of the social and economic history of the early modern period, namely, the effect of emergent

capitalism on the English imaginary as this imaginary is reconstructed in the histories (in the case of this chapter, *Henry I*). By so doing, the dissertation takes part in a critical project begun by George Simmel in the late-nineteenth-century: the mapping out of a “philosophy of culture” through the articulating lens of “commodification.” With Simmel, this analysis sees the examination of commodification and its restructuring of key cultural “quilting points” as a way into the social imaginary of the early modern; how, in particular, emergent capitalism contributed to the redefinition of the “ultimate values and the importance of all that is human” (Simmel 2) during this time.³⁷

³⁷ At this point, an important qualification must be made. What is problematic about Georg Simmel’s work is the way in which he poses “money” as the *ur-horizon* existing behind and more importantly, determining the “nature”/mode of social and ideological reproduction in capitalist culture. Although his analysis is complex and suggests an inexhaustible “multitude of connections” which make up capitalist culture, these connections are grasped as so many parts of an overweening totality, a totality that has as its essence the ethos of the marketplace. In some sense, this is both the work’s strength and weakness. As Karl Joël, a contemporary of Simmel’s, notes “[*The Philosophy of Money* has] overheard the innermost tone of modern life from the babble of the vast market place, the tone which one does not hear . . . because it is always audible” (qtd in *POM*, introduction, 8).

* * *

The Currencying of Labor: The Destruction of the Guild

There was in each guild an endless succession of internal struggles in the attempt to maintain between the varying elements an equilibrium which was necessarily unstable.
--George Renard, *Guilds in the Middle Ages*

In order to give some sense of the actual material reconfigurations of social relations of production in the early modern period, I would like to look at the capitalist reformulations of the guild system in England at this time. An examination of the guild system and the modulations of its internal structures during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries provides a crucial focal point for understanding the wider shifts in the conception of social relations characteristic of the late 1590's. Contrary to popular conceptions, the guild system is unique in that it always occupied a middle ground between traditional feudal relations and the more monetarized filiations that are evident under capitalism. The external structure of the guild system was always, however, distinctly feudal, as Robert DuPlessis explains in *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe*, in a chapter appropriately entitled, "Medieval Legacies:"

[G]uilds were primarily hierarchic economic institutions that regulated producers and production for the benefit of the crafts and, more specifically, for the masters who dominated them. Only those men and (in a few trades) women who had successfully completed apprenticeship in the manner prescribed by guild rules and had amassed sufficient

capital to buy the requisite tools, open a shop, and purchase admission to the guild were permitted to make and sell the goods reserved to that corporation (35).

Within these structural confines, however, the content of the guild's organization of its labor power remind us of labor relations under capitalism. DuPlessis continues his analysis of the medieval guild system by commenting on the way in which guilds "fixed wage rates, regulated laborer's mobility and wherever possible crushed autonomous worker organizations" (35). Maurice Dobb also notes that, even in the fourteenth century, "when a man had finished his apprenticeship, cunning devices were found for casting him back among the rank and file of hired labour" (Dobb 117). Similarly, George Unwin has noted in *Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* that by the sixteenth century only a "favored few [apprentices] could hope to become masters, and the rest came to form a separate body of workmen" (11). Thus, while the guild system functioned on a restrictive basis--limiting the number of practitioners of a certain trade--it also engaged in what must be understood as protocapitalist coercive practices in order to ensure a plentiful supply of poorly paid wage laborers. In this way, guilds were not so far away from the kind of labor practices found under the 19th century factory systems.

The affect of early modern primitive accumulation upon the guilds was primarily to explode the exclusive character of the guild system by engaging previously marginalized workers--such as women--in the production of goods. Dobb, for example, records several complaints by such handicraft guilds as the Girdlers' company in the early 17th century:

In the case of the Girdler's company . . . in the early seventeenth century we find the craftsmen of the company lodging complaints with the Lord Mayor and Alderman of the City of London "that there was noe execution of the ordinances of this Company touching Girdling, whereby the poore artisans were undone," including the ordinances touching those who "set on worke such as had not served seven years at the art and also for setting foreigners and maids on worke" (129).

In her important study of the decline of the guilds in England, Stella Kramer notes that by the early 1500's there were continuous attempts by journeymen to limit the employment of non-guild regulated labor, such as foreigners and women. In 1507, for example, the freemen of the guild of clockmakers brought a suit to court against the guild's aldermen. Foremost in the list of particulars "appears the charge that the governing body [of the clockmakers] abetted strangers and foreigners 'whereas the charter was in especiall manner procured for ye restraint of all such'" (Kramer 189-190). Georges Renard in *Guilds in the Middle Ages* similarly addresses the proto-capitalist workings of guilds, even pointing to instances dating from the 1200s. Writing about thirteenth century French attempts at "union-busting" through the prohibition of any workingmen's associations except those permitted by the existing guild structure, Renard notes the profound discontent of guild apprentices.

The privileges accorded to the sons of masters tended to close the guilds and to keep the workmen in the position of wage earners; this gave rise to serious dissatisfaction . . . [M]ore acute was the dissatisfaction in towns where the rudiment of "great" industry existed (Renard 18).

Interestingly the worker's discontent can be traced to the intensification of certain feudal aspects of the guilds *as well as* the concomitant capitalizing of the guilds' intensified feudal relations. In other words, the guild "apprentice/wage laborer" was beset by the disequilibrium caused by the guilds' own attempts to retain its feudal character against the market/labor exigencies of an emerging market economy. While guilds were never intended to become hereditary in their privileges, in the face of competition from employment-hungry unskilled laborers on the one hand and large-scale enterprise on the other, they attempted to solidify their internal structures through the interpellation of feudal paradigms of filiation, such as heredity and economic class.³⁸ In so doing, the guild structure became the locus of capitalistic labor practices--one of the prime effects of its intensification of feudal relations of production was the production of capitalist relations of production--wage labor. Feudal exclusiveness meant protocapitalist inclusiveness in the large scale enterprises of the early modern period: "[T]he gild system held within itself elements of its dissolution, at the same time it was met with destructive forces from without" (Renard 73). Turned away from entrance to the guilds by their ever more restrictive character, unskilled laborers formed a "true industrial proletariat" working in the large scale industries--the great commercial guilds that would eventually destroy the traditional guild structure. Writing about the masters of the great commercial guilds, Renard describes nothing else than the capitalist factory *par excellence*:

Already they were capitalists, fulfilling all the functions of captains of

³⁸ As Anthony Black notes in *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, "Although *de facto* the craft guild became to a considerable extent hereditary, guilds in general differed from the caste . . . on account of the voluntary nature of the bond, which rested not on hereditary status but on the mutual oath, *on artificial rather than blood fraternity* (Black 3, my italics).

industry. What became then of the intimate and cordial relations between masters, journeymen and apprentices? At the summit were the masters, who were recruited entirely from the rich families and formed a solid alliances for their own interests . . . [T]hey tried to recoup themselves by employing cheap labor, and, remembering the maxim, “divide and rule,” they ranked the workmen they employed in different degrees of dependence and poverty (Renard 25)

Describing the great woolen industries, Renard continues:

On the lower tier, we find the washers, beaters and carders of wool who formed the lowest grade of the laboring classes—*a true industrial proletariat—wage earners living under the regime of modern manufacture*. They were crowded together in large workshops, subjected to a rigorous discipline, compelled to come and go at the sound of the bell, paid at the will of the masters, and always in silver in copper, or in small coin which was often debased . . . They were victims of an almost perfect system of slavery (Renard 26, my italics)

A popular song of the late sixteenth century entitled the “Clothier’s Delight” parodies the exploitative nature of the relations between master and workers within the guild system.

MASTER: Throughout the whole kingdom in country and town
There is not danger of our trade going down
So long as the comber can work with his comb
And also the weaver weave with his lomb,
The tucker and spinner that spins all the year

We will make them to earn their wages full dear.

In former ages we us'd to give

So that our work-folks like farmers did live
But that time is altered, we will
make them know

All we can for to bring them under our bow;

We will make to work hard for sixpence a day

Though a shilling they deserve if they had their just pay (Renard 86).

Unwin similarly traces contemporary sweatshop practices to incipient capitalist modes of production of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He notes that twentieth-century exploitative labor practices are “but the traces of what constituted the great industrial problem in Tudor and Stuart times” (Unwin 6). Protocapitalist inclusiveness was, of course, a crucial aspect of the revolutionization of production necessary for the maximum potentialization of the burgeoning international (and national) trade routes. These innovations in the mode of production are what rendered a previously exclusive and well-legislated guild system into little more than a ready-made pool of laborers for the ever-encroaching *verlagsystem* (or, putting out system). “In the putting-out system,” writes Fernand Braudel,

the master of a guild was often himself a wage earner too. He was dependent on the merchant who provided raw materials, often imported from abroad, and who would afterwards handle the sale and export of the cloth, fustians, or silks he had woven. In this way all the sectors of craft life were touched, and the guild system was gradually being destroyed, although outward appearances were maintained (*Wheels of Commerce*,

317).³⁹

The primary affect of innovations in the modes of production was the instantiation of a strict division of labor and the concomitant establishment of proto-factory systems of craft production. The new division of labor wherein a worker was assigned and restricted to a particular task of production was inherently contrary to the apprentice ethos of the guild system, wherein an apprentice-laborer would be trained in all aspects of craft production. The strict divisions of labor simply mirrored the transformed ethos of capitalist production—the sense of a productive purposefulness that outweighed all other considerations of apprentice training and craft education. Writing in *Guilds and Civil Society*, Anthony Black summarizes the ideal guild ethos through a quotation by Henry of Ghent. Applying the guild ethic to the ideal concept of a polity, Ghent characterizes civil society as simply the formal structure of a

disposition . . . bound together by the deepest friendship, by which each person is regarded by each other as another self . . . , and by deepest charity, in which each of them loves the other as himself, and by the highest benevolence, by which each wills for the other what he wills for himself (Black 78).

Renard notes that by the sixteenth century, towns such as Norwich in England were the sites for the institution of techniques of “scattered manufacture.” The rising “great industries” of cloth making and leather working

demanded the division—even the disintegration of labor. The product,

³⁹ The *verlagssystem* was at times supplanted by proto-industrial structures of labor production in the early modern period. Dobb records examples of “weaving” factories, whereby looms would be set up side by side in one site instead of dispersed in a variety of workers’ homes. (See, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, pp. 138-140.)

before it is finished, passed through the hands of various craft groups . . . [I]t must be stressed that this disintegration of the whole process leads straight to the mechanical system . . . It needed very little to complete the technical revolution already begun and to make hands of wood or metal accomplish what had been done by human hands (Renard 80).

The ingenuity of capitalist production was the further utilization and specialization of divisions of labor that existed in the feudal guild system. While in the early guilds, apprentices might work in all aspects of production, by the fifteenth-century this method of complete craft production had been broken down into distinct production steps. Given the undesirability of increasing competition from apprentices *qua* wage laborers, guild organizations restricted the kinds of work that its lowest members could do to tasks that approximated the divisions of labor instantiated in the proto-factories of this time

One is able to discern in all aspects of guild production what Marx might call the “cancer” of capitalism and capitalist relations of production. Rather than a plague of economic ills coming from without, capitalist social modalities were generated from within feudal paradigms of production. Their finished form--the protofactories of the 15th century--can be seen as the metastases of previously contained guild relations of production. In *Henry I*, the pathogenesis of capitalist reformulation of traditional feudal structures are consonant in form and function to the reformulation of guildic relationships in the early fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is in fact only through an understanding of the social and political effects of the guildic revolution that we can appreciate the way in which the play confronts the transformation (monetarization) of social relationships in the late 1500s.

* * *

“We Are But Warriors for the Working Day”

[T]hou cruel
Ingrateful, Savage and Inhuman Creature.
Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,
That know'st the very bottom of my soul
That almost might'st have coin'd me into gold (II.
ii. 95-98)

I would like now to look more closely at the commodification of traditional relations in the text of *Henry V*. Although occurring in the middle of the play, I will focus initially on the scene at Agincourt. What I am interested in noticing here is the way in which paradigmatically feudal social and political relations are transformed into commodified relationships—whatever form this commodification may take in the particular dramatic context. At Agincourt, the commodification of relations takes as its form what Pierre Bourdieu might call representational “kinship:” a group’s use of the concept of kinship to “orient [it] towards the satisfaction of material and symbolic interests . . . organized by reference to a determinate set of economic and social conditions” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 36.)

The political use of kinship in order to instantiate a common political/military goal was a common strategy in Elizabethan England. What marks it as different in the case of *Henry V* is the strategy of commodification—both specularly and actually—of traditional economic and social affiliations resembling traditional guild relationships. Critics have noted the way in which *Henry V* makes use of certain aspect of Elizabethan political rhetoric in its characterization of Henry’s relationship to his followers.

However, these analyses do not consider the role of commodification in Hal's political rhetoric. In her article "*Henry V* and the Paradox of the Body Politic," for example, Claire McEachern explains that a major concern of Shakespeare's reconstruction of Henry V was a dramatic exploration of the contradictions inherent in the rhetoric of the Elizabethan political state. As McEachern discusses, Elizabeth frequently used a rhetoric of commonality with her less noble subjects while at the same time ruthlessly protecting the feudal distinctions of nobility and heredity within her own Court. McEachern sees the character of Henry V as a personification of "a particular Elizabeth political affect--that of corporate identity, of what we might call 'the nation'" (*Materialist Shakespeare* 293). In his character, Henry V manifests, for McEachern, the precarious rhetoric of commonality and mutuality that Elizabeth utilized in her regulation of such social concerns as the theatre. This rhetoric of commonality--in which she unites her royal likes (what she would call prerogatives) with the needs of all her subjects--is most clearly a strategy of political control around issues like the theatre where the mechanisms of regulation are shared between "competing" authorities. In the case of the theatre, these opposed regulatory bodies were the city authorities and the Queen's representatives, such as the Master of Revels. The issue of the theatre spotlighted a particular political and rhetorical tension that I argue was aggravated (if not initiated in some sense) by the collapse of feudal distinctions of class by the emerging capitalist market. In McEachern's reading, Henry's body becomes the playing field for similar types of political contests--ones, that like the issue of the theatre, implicitly pit the new ethos of a common national identity (represented in the case of the theatre by the Queen's representatives) against the older feudal system of hierarchical ordering (the City fathers).

While I agree with McEachern's spotlighting of Henry as the corporeal playing-field for the new *realpolitik*, her analysis lacks a consideration of the role of commodification in this new ethos of commonality. Particularly, it is important to reflect upon the way in the new systems of valuation, freed from the fetters of feudal markers of hereditary "value," effected (if not determined) the rhetoric of commonality that McEachern sees operating in *Henry V* and in the Elizabethan political world in general.⁴⁰

Also, if the play of *Henry V* seems a fruitful site for the consideration of the rhetorical proxemics of early modern *realpolitik*, the character of Henry V seems less suited for such a consideration for reasons not fully considered in McEachern's article. For McEachern the choice of Henry V as the locus within which to confront Elizabethan corporate rhetoric is appropriate given Henry's symbolic germaneness to the political situation of 1599 (especially in his representational consonance with the Earl of Essex and his Irish Expedition). If examined differently, however, Henry V seems less appropriate if we consider his legendary standing as England's last (feudal) warrior king. For while Henry is no doubt the dramatic representative of the new early modern *realpolitik*, he is also considered "the last great Christian king" and is consequently invested both in the play and in the chronicles with an appropriate hagiography of Christian martiality and rectitude. It is worth pondering why Shakespeare chooses to use Holinshed's and Hall's celebration of the reign of Henry V to make sense of an early modern state that is socially and politically wending its way towards capitalism. Whatever the reasons for this choice (and some will be suggested later) it is perhaps

⁴⁰ In her book, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History* (1991) Barbara Hodgdon sees Henry's character as similarly inhabiting a no-man's land between two competing discourses of political authority: "*Henry V* opposes these discourses [between master and man, ruler and subject] flaunts their contradictions, and attempts to fuse them by positioning the king at the center of both an aristocratic and a 'base, common, popular' narrative" (186).

because of this particular historiographical confluence--the personification of a capitalist *weltanschauung* and *realpolitik* within a traditionally feudal character--that the play reveals more clearly than the other histories the problematic in which it participates--the representational aporias that result from the use of the past (in Henry V's case, 1411) to work through and resolve the concerns of the present (1599).

The scene at Agincourt most clearly manifests the historiographical dialectic with which we are concerned.⁴¹ In ways that are similar to what occurs within guildic relations, at Agincourt, Henry transforms a traditional feudal dynamic of kinship into a fraternity of martial commodification. Here, Henry creates a currency of filiation in order to interpolate each of the soldiers--noble and common--into an (all too transient) ideology of universal filiation, the political effect of which--as the play goes on to demonstrate--is Henry's successful conquest of France and the consolidation of his absolutist rule.⁴² Henry's nostalgic resurrection of the guild-like paradigm of brotherly filiation erases the geographical and cultural divisions between the soldiers themselves as each becomes symbolic investors in Henry's French campaign, an investment whose

⁴¹ Critics such as Barbara Hodgdon and Jean Christophe Agnew have pointed out the theatre's role in indexing and interrogating cultural changes wrought by new economic and social relationships. In his book, *The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought*, Agnew connects the concerns of the market to theatrical representation; he writes, "[T]he theater quickly became the terrain on which the struggle to redefine the grounds of exchange relations was most vividly and vigorously joined. Separated, like the market, from its original ritual and hierarchical aegis, the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater furnished a laboratory of representational possibilities for a society perplexed by the cultural consequences of its own liquidity" (*Worlds Apart*, 54). Hodgdon considers *Henry V* the "tabula rasa for early modern culture's current prerogatives (*The End Crowns All* 186)." In more general terms, Agnew connects the concerns of the market to theatrical representation; he writes, "[T]he theater quickly became the terrain on which the struggle to redefine the grounds of exchange relations was most vividly and vigorously joined. Separated, like the market, from its original ritual and hierarchical aegis, the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater furnished a laboratory of representational possibilities for a society perplexed by the cultural consequences of its own liquidity" (*Worlds Apart*, 54).

⁴² Given Bourdieu's challenge to see kin relationships as that which people or groups constitute (36), it is not difficult to apprehend the guild or any other hierarchical organizational structures as so many instances of "practical kinship"--relations formed on the basis of particular material and symbolic goals.

signatories are marked for inclusion by the corporeal wounds of war:⁴³

O do not wish one [man] more!

Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host

That he which hath no stomach to this fight,

Let him depart; his passport shall be made,

And crowns for convey put into his purse:

We would not die in that man's company

That fears his fellowship to die with us.

This day is called the feast of Crispian;

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home

Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,

And rouse him at the name of Crispian.

.....

Then he will strip his sleeve and show his scars,

And say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day",

.....

Then shall our names

Familiar in his mouth as household words

Harry the king, Bedford, and Exeter,

Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,

Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered;

.....

⁴³ Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield note this erasure of national difference in "History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry I*" in *Alternative Shakespeares*.

From this day to the ending of the world
 But we in it shall be remembered
 We few, we happy, few, we band of brothers
 For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile
 This day shall gentle his condition. (IV. iii. 33-64) ⁴⁴

Participation at Agincourt is thus rendered a symbolics of its own; rather than a currency of metal, the coinage is struck from a corporeal semiotics of martial service--scars. The body here is the subject of a metaphysics of valuation that at once divorces it and unites it with the community from which it gains symbolic meaning. While the fraternity of brothers that Harry constructs is predicated upon the uniqueness of each of its members--their status as those "few those happy few"--the future redeemability of their fraternal currency (Agincourt scars) depends upon an objectification of this *familiarizing of martial relations*. The rhetoric employed in Harry's speech--the "kinning" of the Agincourt soldiers--both enables and compromises the effectivity of this new currency. Its functioning, like all other forms of "money," is only guaranteed by its ability to be universalized--to be recognized and socially traded upon in a context *well outside* of the original (and necessarily circumscribed) site of its constitution. The movement of this capitalization of feudal relations is thus the explosion of its originary ontological exclusiveness; it is the movement of universalization--the abstracting of the particular into the realm of what Slavoj Žižek might call the "sublime," the ontological

⁴⁴ Certain participants in Agincourt did indeed find their conditions gentled: as Andrew Gurr writes in his *Introduction to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of Henry I*, "In 1418 Henry V issued a writ referring to the fact that heretofore 'divers men . . . assumed unto themselves Arms and Coats of Arms' and proclaiming that 'no one, of whatsoever rank, degree or condition he may be, shall assume such Arms or Coats of Arms,

dialectic upon which depends the continued “symbolic authority” of money:

Here we have touched a problem unsolved by Marx, that of the *material* character of money: not of the empirical material stuff money is made of, but of the *sublime* material, of that other “indestructible and immutable” body which persists beyond the corruption of the physical--this other body of money is like the corpse of the Sadeian victim which endures all torments and survives with its beauty immaculate. (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 4)

Given the precarious material existence of returned soldiers in England, this speech, rousing as it is, must be considered within the category of an elaborate bribe.⁴⁵ Rather than the hard cash promised to all departing soldiers, the currency here is a semiotics of blood and honor that will be everpresent and will be ever redeemable (one need simply pull off one’s shirt). Thus, a quintessentially feudal metaphysics of valuation--a powerful and vast kinship network coupled with personal honor is collapsed into a capitalist metaphysics of valuation--a mediated and impersonal system of currency-exchange and production. The resulting symbiosis is effective on two levels. The language of honor and fraternity appeals to the nostalgia for the outmoded system of feudal belonging and patriotic reward. On another level, the promise of an ever-redeemable commodity--the wounds of war--operates as a viable and desirable

unless he possess or ought to possess the same in right of his ancestors . . . those excepted who bore arms with us at the battle of Agincourt” (35n1).

⁴⁵As Fernand Braudel explains, “there were always demobilized soldiers” who “comprised a good portion of those who regularly begged for food and alms.” See, *The Wheels of Commerce*, esp pp. 505-511. Perhaps the

currency in a context where returned soldiers were rendered destitute, and where beggars were seen as “idle, good for nothing and dangerous” (Braudel 508).⁴⁶

This characterization is particularly apt in 1599 since, just three years prior in 1596, “the privy council emptied the London prisons . . . to furnish recruits for the Cadiz expedition” (Wilson 23). The last lines of the speech confirm the semiotic doubleness of this newly-minted coinage: “Gentleman in England . . . /Shall think themselves accursed they were not here/And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks/ That fought with us upon Saint Crispins day” (IV. iii. 64-68).^{47, 48}

While the scene at Agincourt is perhaps the most easily recognizable example of the reconfiguration of feudal paradigm of filiation that I consider, the play is replete with examples of the currencying of feudal social and political paradigms. In its first moments, *Henry V* presents itself as dramatically dependent upon a quintessentially

most haunting representation of beggared soldiers is the 1568 painting by Brueghel the Elder showing several “celebrating carnival.” The facial expressions remind one of a more primitive version of Munch’s *Scream*.

⁴⁶ Braudel contrasts this early modern perception with the popular view of beggars in “the old days”: “the beggar who knocked at the rich man’s door was regarded as a messenger from G-d, and might even be Christ in disguise” (508).

⁴⁷ If we consider the actual plight of some of the veterans of Agincourt, Henry’s promised “bribe” seems to have been rescinded upon the soldiers’ return to England. Consider the following letter sent from an Agincourt veteran to Henry VI in 1422:

To the Kyng our Soverain Lord: Besechith mekely youre poure liegeman and humble horatour Thomas Hostell, that in consideration of his service doon to your noble progenitours of ful blessid memory Kyng Henrj the iiijth, and Kyng Henri the fift, whoos soules G-d assoille; being at the siege at Harflewe, there smyten with a springholt [dart] through the hede, lesing his oon ye [eye], and his cheke boon broken: also at the Bataille of Agincourt, and after at the takyng of the Carrakes on the See, there with a gadde of yren his plates smyten in sondre, and sore hurt, maymed, and wounded: by meane whereof he being sore febeled and debrused, now falle to greet age and poverty; gretly endetted; and may not helpe himself; havyng not werewith to be susteyned ne releved but of menes gracious almesse; and being for his said service *never yit recompensed ne rewarded*, it plesse your high and excellent Grace, the premises tenderly considered of your benigne pitee and grace, to releve and refresh your said pouere Oratour, as it shal please you, with your most gracious Almesse at the reverence of G-d and in werk of charitee; and he shal devoutly pray for the soules of your said noble Progenitours, and for your moost noble and high estate. (II.V.H. Ellis, *Original Letters*. London, 1827.)

⁴⁸ (It is interesting to note that in *Henry IV*, ii, a comment by Falstaff foreshadows the somatic commodification described above. Trying to finance his own participation in the defense of the reign of Henry IV, Falstaff notes:

A pox of this gout! Or a gout of this pox! for the one or the other plays the rogue with my great toe! Tis no

capitalist metaphysics of valuation. The prologue opens with puns on “cipher,” “reckon” and “O” that make use of a metaphysics of valuation and equivalency that are *the symbolic bases* of capitalistic processes of social and economic reproduction. In a key passage from *Capital, I* Marx explains the dependence of money-economies on a metaphysics of valuation and equivalency:

In order, therefore, that a commodity may in practice operate effectively as exchange-value, it must divest itself of its natural physical body and become transformed from merely imaginary into real gold, although this act of transubstantiation may be more ‘troublesome’ for it than the transition from necessity to freedom in the Hegelian ‘concept,’ the casting of his shell for a lobster, or the putting-off of the old Adam for Saint Jerome (Marx, *Capital Vol I*, 197).

The opening chorus of *Henry V* asks the audience to engage in a similar kind of transubstantiation. We are asked to “reckon” in ciphers—to think of the play in a symbolics of money. The stage, like a coin, becomes a “wooden O” which we must imaginatively fill with the millions participating in the French invasion of Henry V.

... Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! Since a crooked figure may

matter if I do halt: I have the wars for my colour and my pension shall seem the more reasonable. A good wit will make use of anything: *I will turn diseases to commodity*” (my italics, I, iii, 246-250).

Attest in little place a million . . . (I. i. 10-16).

The narrator depends upon the phantasmatic capacity of “a crooked figure”—a reference to the symbol for poundage as well as the yet-unfinished Globe theatre—to signify or “attest in little place a million.”⁴⁹ The play’s successful recreation of its chronicle is, like coins or notes, predicated upon a mystical valuation conferred by the recipient, or, in the play’s case, the audience. The prologue continues by coaxing the audience into just this imaginative valuation and evaluation.

. . . [L]et us, ciphers to this great accompt

On your imaginary forces work. . . .

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;

Into a thousand parts divide one man,

and make imaginary puissance

For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings

Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times,

Turning th’accomplishment of many years

Into an hour-glass, for the which supply,

Admit me chorus to this history;

Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,

Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play. (Prologue, 15-18, 24-35)

This metaphysics of valuation resonates throughout the play, especially *vis a vis* the metaphorical status of Harry the King in relation to his followers. In the first scene

involving Harry we are witness to what seems like a contractual negotiation between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King. Harry is concerned that he is not participant in a "raw deal", that the investment of war, in which the King's assent is rendered into a form of financial and ethical collateral is, as the Archbishop promises, a worthy one. Instead of the wooden "O" of the theatre, the King's body is here rendered as a form of money, capable of being "impawned"--or, as the OED defines it, "pledged as security,"

Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,
 How you awake our sleeping sword of war
 We charge you, in the name of G-d, take heed.

For G-d doth know how many now in health
 Shall drop their blood in approbation

Of what your reverence shall incite us to (I. ii. 21-22, 19-20).

For the Archbishop to "fashion, wrest or bow [his] reading" would be to disgrace the human currency--blood, that, like the King's body, will have pledged itself--"dropped in approbation" of the invasion of France. The language of approbation again reminds us of the contractual nature of this discussion. To approbate, in the early modern period, was precisely to give one's assent to a contract usually financial in character. The soldiers' bodies are here metaphorized into legal signatories--the blood metonymizes into the ink used to sign and thus ratify the contract. In this way, perhaps the most powerful signifier of the ultimate unmediatedness and humanness of social relations ("If you prick us, do we not bleed?") is here collapsed within the ever-shifting semiotics of monetarily

⁴⁹ The *Riverside Shakespeare* glosses "crooked figure" and "accompt" as follows. It equates the former to "a cipher or zero, which, added to a digit, multiplies its value." Accompt is glossed as both "(1) the story of King

mediated social relations.

Allegiance to the king is similarly apprehended in terms of the symbolics of money. The treason of Cambridge, Scroop and Grey is rendered as monstrous and inhuman precisely because its motivation can not be reckoned in money terms. It becomes undefinable because it seems to issue from a non-monetary origin. It is thus explainable only in magical terms: "And whatsoever cunning fiend it was/That wrought upon thee so preposterously/Hath got the voice in Hell for excellence" (II. ii. 111-113).

Certainly Scroop, Grey and Cambridge were "bought," but the question remains, "with what?" As Harry declares to Scroop, the latter's intimacy with the King could easily have metaphorized into "gold":

thou cruel

Ingrateful, Savage and Inhuman Creature,

Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,

That know'st the very bottom of my soul

That almost might'st have coin'd me into gold (II. ii. 95-98).

After being condemned to death, Cambridge admits the ultimately non-material basis for his treason, "For me, the gold of France did not seduce / Although I did admit it as a motive/The sooner to effect what I had intended."

As we learn from Holinshed, the cause of this treason was the competing Yorkist claim to the throne. By including this scene, the play reasserts--in the midst of an early modern/capitalist *weltanschauung*--a residue of the feudal ideology that resists enclosure within the new model of social relations. In some sense, Scroop and his compatriots become paradoxically "loyal" to the palimpsest of unmediated and fraternal connection

Henry V's career and (2) reckoning."

that constitutes the feudal--in the sense of anticapitalist--paradigm. Although disloyal to their king, they are nevertheless committed to an ideology that is uncoinable; and it is precisely this essential self-exclusion from the new model of filiation that renders them monstrous in the eyes of Henry V, Chief Executive Officer.

A later scene also models the way in which the play transforms key manifestations of feudal ideology into relations objectified and mediated by monetary exchange. Confronted by Will, the soldier with whom a disguised Henry V had exchanged gages, the King prefers to “fight” the expected “duel” with coins instead of swords. Having transferred his gage to Fluellen, a move that, like the transfer of coins, mitigates the feudal ideology of honor that underlies the original exchange of martial markers, Harry remakes honor into something that may be bought off--honorably.

K. Hen. Here, Uncle Exeter, fill this glove with crowns,
And give it to this fellow. Keep it, fellow,
And wear it for an honor in thy cap
Till I do challenge it. Give him the crowns;
And, captain, you must needs be friends with him.

Flu. By this day and this light, the fellow has mettle
enough in his belly. Hold, there is twelvence for you,
and I pray you to serve G-d, and keep you out of prawls
and prabbles, and quarrels and dissensions, and I warrant
you it is the better for you.

Will. I will none of your money.

Flu. It is with a good will; I can tell you it will serve you to

mend your shoes. Come, wherefore should you be so
 pashful? Your shoes is not so good. 'Tis a good silling, I
 warrant you, or I will change it (IV. viii. 57-72).

Will's refusal—which, in this play on words, is a refusal to be “willed” out of the paradigm of dishonor and personal insult—underscores the different social paradigm in which Henry is now operating. Henry and his subordinate Fluellen convert this exchange of metonymic signifiers of personal honor into an opportunity for gross material gain—“It is with a good will; I can tell you it will serve you to mend your shoes.” In his rejection of the proffered coins, Will refuses the terms of this new “will/contract” Even though he has no real argument with the King—“Your Majesty came not like yourself. You appeared to me but as a common man . . .” (IV. viii. 50-52) Will nevertheless invests his glove—the symbol of his “will”—with a sense of honor and identity that is not susceptible to commodification or exchange. Coming as a “common man” and then transferring his gage to Fluellen reveals Harry's insurpassable distance from this “quilting point” of feudal ideology. In his substitution of himself for another—both in disguise and then with Fluellen—Harry vitiates the terms within which identity is preserved and preservable in the feudal paradigm. As identity for Harry becomes marketable--transferrable to another as well as commodifiable (the scars of Agincourt; “thou could'st have coined me into gold”)—it ceases to be fixable within recognizable feudal parameters. Perhaps more disturbingly, identity here takes on the qualities of a commodity whose value is subject to the spurious regard (and appreciation) of others.

This instability of identity within a new political and economic context is alluded to in Henry IV's famous reprimand of his son:

Had I so lavish of my presence been
 So Common-hackneyed in the eyes of men
 —
 So *stale and cheap* to vulgar company
 Opinion, that did help me to the crown
 Had still kept loyal to possession,
 And left me in reputeless banishment
 A fellow of no mark nor likelihood.
 Be being seldom seen, I could not stir
 But like a comet I was wonder'd at,
 That men would tell their children, "This is he!"

.....
 Thus did I keep my person fresh and new,
 My presence, like a robe pontifical,
 Ne'er seen but wonder'd at, and so my state.
 Seldom, but sumptuous, show'd like a feast,
 And wan by rareneess such solemnity (III. ii. 39-47; 55-60; my italics).

While frequently interpreted as an indication of the savvy *realpolitik* that dominated early modern politics, its logic also rests on the common-sense psychology of market economics--namely, the pervasive dialectic of scarcity and demand which, along with other factors, determines valuations.

* * *

[I]tem, two lips, indifferent
 red;
 Item, two grey eyes with lids
 to them;

Item, one neck, one chin, and
so forth (*Twelfth Night*, I. v
247-250).

If Henry's exchange with Williams reveals the uncertainty within which identity is constituted in a context of commodification, Katherine's linguistic dissection of herself in her language lesson is a humorous (if chilling) confirmation of the fracturing of identity that is an effect of this new capitalist imaginary. While set in the play as a humorous interlude between the serious representation of war, it nevertheless functions as a frightening foreshadowing of Katherine's own imminent enclosure within the English colonization of France. As critics such as Katherine Eggert, Jean Howard, Phyllis Rackin and Lance Wilcox have noted, Katherine's language-learning reflects, in its content and in its placement in the play (after the fall of Harfleur), the English conquest of France. As Eggert argues convincingly in her article "Refusing Female Rule in *Henry V*,"

[Katherine] will, by the end of the play, embody what Henry has come to France to achieve: not just a female France, but France in the person of a female. And as sweetly amusing as her "language lesson" scene may be, it contains extraordinarily dark hints of how Henry's conquest of her will come to replace a purely military rape of France. . . . All her bobbings of her language, then, are directed toward her upcoming part in Henry's project of conquest: as she learns English, her own speech absorbs the English military and sexual might that is being brought to bear on her country (*ELH* 61 (1994) 523-550; 532)

In their discussion of Henry V, Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin continue the association of Katherine's body with the conquered France:

In *Henry V*, in fact, the entire French kingdom is represented as a woman to be conquered by the masculine force of the English army, a conceit that is implied by the placement of Katherine's language lesson immediately after Henry's speech at Harfleur and literalized in the final scene when Henry claims the French princess for his bride (*Engendering a Nation* 213).

Hodgdon also notes that Katherine's language lesson involves her in the cataloguing of her soon-to-be Anglo-French body, "through which, much later, Henry will lay claim to France" (189). Not only is Katherine's body made the somatic representative of France's military conquest, but her cooption⁵⁰ by Henry V positions her as co-agent in France's conquest/ rape.

Kath. Is it possible dat I should love de ennemie of France?

K. Hen. No, it is not possible that you should love the enemy of France, Kate; but in loving me, you should love the friend of France; for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it; I will have it all mine. And, Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France and you are mine (V. ii. 169-176).

Soon after this exchange, Henry explicitly clarifies Katherine's part in the exploitation of France.

⁵⁰ I use the word cooption advisedly. To suggest as some critics have—as well as certain recent film renditions of Henry V—that Katherine is seduced by Henry is to read into her character an emotional valence that is not supported by the text's representation of her response to Henry's "wooing." One confirmation of Katherine's essential indifference to Henry can be found in his comment to Burgundy regarding the Princess' "learning" of English: "*Bur.* G-d save your Majesty! My royal cousin, teach you our princess English?/ *K. Hen.* I would have her learn, my fair cousin, how perfectly I love her, and that is good English./ *Bur.* Is she not apt?/ *K. Hen.* Our tongue is rough, coz, and my condition is not smooth; so that having neither the voice nor the heart of flattery about me, I cannot so conjure up the spirit of love in her, that he will appear in his true likeness" (V. ii. 281-290).

If ever thou beest mine, Kate, as I have a saving faith within me tells me
 thou shalt, I get thee with scrambling, and thou must therefore needs prove
 a good soldier-breeder. Shall not thou and I between Saint Denis and
 Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to
 Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard? (V. ii. 203-209).

Like the soldiers at Agincourt, Katherine will bear the marks of France's surrender on her body through the offspring that she will produce for Henry. The promised son--Henry VI--is nothing else but the human issue begat by the commodification of relations (such as Agincourt) required to effect the conquest of France. "In infant bands crowned king," Henry VI is, in effect, the ultimate signatory to the contract made between Henry V and his followers.

Rather than confirming the strength and durability of this new contract of transvaluative valuation and the corporate state, the play's ending reasserts a distinctly feudal vision of Henry as the great warrior-king. The last lines of the Epilogue, however, destroy the momentary feudal fantasy in much the same way that the commodification of relations destroyed the fraternal world of the guild. Henry's patrimony to Henry VI--and the imperial promise that this patrimony connotes--is undone by the Epilogue's truncated narration of Henry VI's disastrous reign. The "best garden" which Henry V achieves for his son is by the end of the epilogue nothing more than a mismanaged plot of land; the key semiotic of patrilineal inheritance is in one moment--the moment of rhetorical transition from the reign of Henry V to Henry VI--transformed into a picture of sorry tenancy so frequently found in the early modern English context:

This star of England, Fortune made his sword;

By which the world's best garden he achieved.

And of it left his son imperial lord.

Henry the Sixt, in infant bands crowned king,

Of France and England, did this king succeed,

Whose state so many had the managing,

That they lost France and made his England bleed (Epilogue, 6-12).

The Epilogue's shifting rhetoric reminds us of Adorno's earlier point about historical representation—that such representation is predicated upon a hostile dismissal of heterogeneous elements—of those historical valences that problematize the smooth narration of an event or time period. It is as if the Epilogue here rehearses what the play as a whole disallows; whereas in the play proper, Henry was never allowed to rise above the commodified context of social relationships that underwrote the play's internal dynamics, in the moment of closure, Henry is allowed to occupy a mythic space above and beyond the confusion of market-driven relationships. In its ending, the play reveals its “desire for Hal” in the sense of a persistent nostalgia for a pre-capitalist social context in which fealty and heroism were not for sale—however faulty this particular conception is of the actual social dynamics of the period of Henry V's actual reign. Certainly, the not so subtle allusions to Essex's campaign in Ireland provide a convenient and contemporary object of desire for the kind of heroism that is frustratingly and continually undone by the semiotics of commodification that characterize most of the interpersonal negotiations in the play-text. Of course, the Epilogue's closing reminder of the Henry VI's disastrous reign sheds an uncomfortable shadow on this myth-making—and recalls

how the play is exceptional in its ability to lay bare the representational aporias resulting from the representation of the feudal in a capitalist context.

Chapter Three: The Merchant, Formerly Known as Jew.

Por. Which is the Merchant here? And which the Jew?
– *Merchant of Venice* (IV. i. 170)

In 1271 Thomas Aquinas composed a letter to the Duchess of Brabant in response to her inquiry regarding the possible taxation of the Jews in her dominions. In this letter, known as *De Regimine Judaeorum*, Aquinas takes the Duchess' question as an opportunity to remind her of the rulings of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Through the work of the Fourth Council, the Church reiterated its condemnation of any participation in the practice of usury--by moneylender and client alike. Aquinas calls on the Duchess and others of her position to cease their involvement with Anglo-Jewish money-lending and suggests an alternative vocation for the Jews, saying, "If rulers think they harm their souls by taking money from usurers," Aquinas wrote, . . . "they should see that the Jews are compelled to labor."⁵¹ Several things make this suggestion interesting to us both as readers of the *Merchant of Venice* and as readers of the Jewish question in early modern England. Although on one level Aquinas' call-to-work seems a commonplace solution to the problem of usury, it is nonetheless remarkable for the way in which it, like many other Anglo discussions of this issue, misrecognizes the economic and social location of Jews in the English context. As this chapter will point out, the particular forms of misrecognition that dominated the Anglo imaginary during this time

⁵¹ Martin Luther had a similar suggestion in regards to Jewish labor in his text, *The Jews and Their Lies* (1543). Denouncing usury as "evilily acquired money," Luther suggests, "seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses as is enjoined by Adam's children. For it is not proper that they should want us cursed *Goyyim* to work in the sweat of our brow and that they, pious crew, idle away their days at the fireside in laziness, feasting and display. And in addition to this, they boast impiously that they have become masters of the Christians at our expense. We ought to drive the rascally lazy bones out of our system." (J. Marcus, Ed. *The Jew*

was constituted by the country's experience with the Jews in the medieval era. This historically overdetermined understanding of the Jews--although by Shakespeare's time a part of England's distant past--nevertheless colored the early modern perception of Jewish participation in the emerging capitalist market. This misrecognition was not, however, simply the result of historical and social naivete; rather it served an important ideological function--it allowed the early modern English audience psychically and epistemologically to distance themselves from aspects of capitalist social relationships that were problematic for a collective sense of ethics and identity during this time. More specifically, the perception of the Jew as economic parasite *par excellence* allowed the English to rationalize their capitalistic activities as ethically sound in the context of a moral culture that viewed money-lending, interest and transvaluation with suspicion and disapproval. As John Drakakis suggests in his article on the significance of speech prefixes in the *Merchant of Venice*,

For the writer 'Shakespeare' and indeed for Elizabethan culture generally, the figure of 'the Jew' had become a focus for a range of . . . fiscal practices which had become of central symbolic significance to the definition of certain material social practices (Drakakis 59).

In *The Merchant of Venice*, this figure of the Jew--the somatic site for the resolution of cultural questions around capitalism is centered, predictably, in the character of the Jew, otherwise known as Shylock.⁵² The Jew-Shylock is misrecognized

in the Medieval World, 187). It is significant, for our purposes, that the same concerns and the same suggestion of labor occurs over a span of almost 300 years.

⁵² Although it is somewhat awkward, I will insist on the double appellation of the Jew-Shylock because I do not want to slip into the characterological fallacies of much criticism in the *Merchant of Venice*. This criticism attempts to separate Shylock from his Jewishness which, given the epistemological logic of the play, is misguided and motivated by an attempt to recuperate Shakespeare from within an Anglo paradigm of anti-semitism. As I will show, such a recuperation is unsupportable by the play-text, much as we would like to

in the play through a dramatic process of historical anachronism and distortion; even though a seeming representative for the transcendental humanity of the “Jew”—(“does not a Jew bleed?”) the Jew-Shylock, must be understood as ontologically dependent upon and (thus) constructed out of the particular ideas about Jews that dominated the English imaginary before (and since) the expulsion of 1290. On the cusp of mercantilist and capitalist social order, the Jew-Shylock is caught in a time-warp; rather than an Antonio, the heroic trader of goods celebrated in the early modern period, he is the medieval stock character—fettered by bonds and contracts that make no sense to the new ethic of transvaluation, exchange and profit. As such, the Jew-Shylock rescues Antonio from the lurking Jewish shadow that accompanied conceptions of the merchant into the Elizabethan period. As medieval stock character (super-Jew) Shylock provides Antonio (and the Elizabethan audience in general) with a needed ontological and epistemological distance—one that finally fissures and destroys the usual association of merchant with Jew.

imagine Shakespeare as somehow rising above the cultural neuroses of his time. Shylock is never allowed to escape his “Jewing” in the *Merchant of Venice*; even his “humanity” speech devolves into the confirmation of a revenge ethos which Anglo Christians believed dominated the thoughts and minds of the Jews within their dominions and which, more seriously, the English pinpointed as the motivation behind presumed Jewish-Christian murders (the blood libels).

* * *

The Medieval Backdrop: Jewish Proto-Capitalism in the Medieval English Period

But if clipped money be found in the hand of Jew or Jewess the money shall be taken and perforated and placed in a certain safe box for our needs, and the body of the Jew or Jewess that has such money shall be taken and their goods take and retained without bail till we order otherwise. [1205]

Their *Traffick and Merchandise* was unquestionably, very great; from their Universal Correspondence with their Brethren, in foreign parts, as was before observ'd. But Persons experienced in those Matters, will readily answer, that the *largest* Gains of that Sort, cou'd never be a Fund proportionable to such *immoderate* Expences. Yet if we consider that *they were the only tolerated Usurers*, throughout the King's whole Dominions, the Wonder ceases; and we may very well account for their Prodigious Riches. (Toovey, *Anglia Judaica*, 121).

The medieval backdrop to this play provides the historical etiologies through which we may understand the constitution of the particular imaginary within which the “Jew” was conceptualized in the Anglo early modern *weltanschauung*. As other scholars have documented, the Anglo-Jewish community in the middle ages was implicated in diverse if equally horrifying social libels—the blood libel, national parasitism and, of course, Christian desecration. These conceptions must be understood to emanate from the radically circumscribed economic role that Jews were allowed to play in the medieval English landscape. Shut out from virtually all professions by a succession of earlier decrees by the Church which forbade Christians from engaging in trade with Jews and which forbade Jews (by necessity) of becoming members of guilds, many trades were

off-limits to Jews in England, except for the profession of money-lending (and those professions which could be carried out within the limits of their communities, i.e. medicine, butchery, religious service, domestic servants, etc.) As money-lenders, Jews operated outside of the Christian framework of legitimate economic exchange: in fact, their economic activities depended upon a crucial demarcation of Jew and Christian as strangers.⁵³ Not only did money lending place Jews within the position of outsider/other within a Christian theological standpoint, but socially Jews were distinguished from Christians by their close association with the Crown. As money-lenders Jews functioned as the entrepreneurial base of the medieval economy; it was through their financing that both the Church and the Government could undertake expensive internal improvements (build Cathedrals, roads) wage war and quietly and insidiously collect “taxes” (i.e. extort cash/goods) from their non-Jewish citizens through the hands of the Jews. Although agents of the crown for the collection of taxes from their Christian counterparts, Jews were the first subject of royal extortion. In 1194, for example, Richard I founded the Exchequer of the Jews. While originally the Exchequer was set up to inventory the wealth of the Jews (real estate, debts owed) for the future financial benefit of the Crown, the Exchequer under Richard’s successors became a quick and expedient mechanism of extortion of Jewish money and debt by the Crown. The Jews were thus always in the double position of being the mechanism of extortion (via usury) in order to be able financially to meet the Crown’s next tallage upon them. As Harold Pollins notes,

The Jews were a small, separately administered group, on whom special taxes (tallages) could be imposed by the Crown. The taxable income came from the interest they charged on loans, in turn obtained from

⁵³ See Deuteronomy 23:19-20.

Christian borrowers, the Jews being, in effect, indirect tax-collectors for the king (Harold Pollins, *The Economic History of the Jews in England*, 19).

As Cecil Roth pithily remarks, if Jews were usurers, the Crown was the arch-usurer of all.

The antipathy of English Christians for Jews was thus of a double-nature; while ostensibly religious, it was intimately bound up with the Jews role as moneylenders to the Crown and community. In describing two of the most severe English *pogroms*—the blood libel of William of Norwich in 1144 and the crusades-inspired attacks in York of 1190—Harold Pollins notes the difficulty in separating religious from economic motives:

As always, it is very difficult to decide whether the attack was a consequence of religious antagonism or because of the Jews' hated role as moneylenders. The events at York, it has been suggested, were 'led by indebted gentry and needy crusaders, who in a fine blend of religious prejudice and financial self-interest had finished by burning the bonds of the Jews in the middle of the Minster' (Pollins 22).

The epistemological interrelationship of religion and economics spawned a host of quintessentially English (mis)perceptions of Jews as intimately associated (because of their religion and economic role) with "all manner of obnoxious acts—usury, blasphemy, magic as well as cheating and sharp practice" (Pollins 21).

The actions of Edward I concretized the anxious association of the Jewish presence with religious and economic deterioration. As is well known, Edward I was the first English ruler to take up Aquinas' call to economic reformulation for the Jews in his kingdom. Responding to the Council of Lyons' (1274) prescriptions against usury,

Edward undertook measures to “compel the English Jews to labour” rather than engage in the occupation of money lending. This compulsion took statutory form in the *Statutum de Judeismo*, issued at Westminster in 1275. The *Statutum* forbade “Jews to lend money at interest, and in return, they were to be allowed to be merchants and artisans.”

Although a seemingly noble attempt at integration, the *Statutum* was impossible to enforce for several reasons, all of which had to do with the particular economic and social relationships that determined the role of Jews in the English economy. As Roth notes, economic emancipation was impossible without social emancipation (72). The English Jews engaged in money lending were constrained to this role by the social and religious restrictions that prevented them from entering into other professions. Trading and crafts were almost completely controlled through a guild system, which restricted their memberships to Christian-born Englishmen. The Jews were also limited by the function that they played in the economic life of the nation. As monetary agents of the crown, the role of the Jews within English economic life was confined to their economic usefulness to the crown. In proto-mercantilist fashion, the Crown saw the Jews as the financial reservoir for the security and betterment of the state. Thus, the Jews were the primary source for capital needed for warfare and internal improvements (Cathedrals, roads). As the proto-entrepreneurial base of medieval England, their worth to the crown was dependent upon their ability to raise needed capital for the crown’s various pursuits. As Roth and Israel both note, the Jews’ expulsion coincided with their inability to meet the Crown’s demands for ready capital.

Structurally then, the Jews should be understood as the proto-capitalists of the medieval English economy. As such, the *Statutum*’s proposed integration of the Jews

into the guild economy was an impossibility given their economic locus within the English economic structure. Ostensibly because of their unwillingness to abstain from usury, Edward I expelled the Jews from England in 1290-- the more accurate historical explanation is, of course, considerably less moralistic and much more complex. As a result of the ever-increasing tallages imposed on the Jewish community by Edward's forerunners Richard I and John, by 1290 the Jews were in financial straits and were unable to meet the Edward's increasing need for money; as Roth notes,

[By 1290] the Jews were no longer of primary importance to the Exchequer. A century before their average annual contribution to the royal income in ordinary taxation has been estimated at about L3,000 or approximately one-seventh of its total: now it was reduced to some L700, which represented little more than one-hundreth of the amount to which the revenue had by now increased (Roth 84).

In addition to the financial incentive for expulsion, the banishment of the Jews was a popular measure among the commons and also a way of lessening the power of the barony that depended upon Jewish money for their financial security. Thus, Edward's expulsion must be understood as borne of both financial, security, and religious motivations. On the religious front, for example, the expulsion rendered Edward's religious leadership unimpeachable, even to the increasingly conservative Roman authorities; financially, the benefits were even more apparent. The expulsion was greeted by almost universal applause in England and Parliament--financially--echoed the popular joy with its "prompt assent to the royal demand for a fifteenth of movables and a tenth of the spiritual revenue, in taxation " (Richardson 219).

* * *

The Jew and the “English Jew” in the Early Modern Period

It is perhaps the experience of the expulsion that is of the greatest importance in understanding the very particular English perceptions of the Jew in the early modern period and later. The creation of the first *Judenrein* state some 800 years before the experiment was attempted again by the Germans affected the English perception of the Jew well into the early eighteenth-century.⁵⁴ In the English imaginary of the pre-readmission period (ante 1656), the expelled Jew was a Jew frozen in time; no matter what the particular economic circumstances of Jewish life in Europe (or, for that matter the roles of those few Jews living in England prior to 1656) the Anglo perception of the Jews was overdetermined by the English experience with Jewish money-lending in the medieval period. Thomas Wilson concretizes this association in his *Discourse Upon Usury*, written in 1572, almost three hundred years after the expulsion. Vilifying usury, Wilson reminds his reader of its most hated practitioners, the Jews, which for this reason (alone) were banished the realm—a punishment he suggests for present-day practitioners.

What is the matter that Iewes were so universallie hated weresoever they come? For soothe, usurie is one of the chief causes, for they cobbe all men that deale with them, and undoe them in the end. And for thys causes they were hated in England, and so banished wortheleye, with whome I woulde wyshe all these Englishemen were sent that lende their money or their goods whatsoever for gayne, for I take them to be no better then

⁵⁴ The debate around readmission occasioned expression of anti-semitic fear and suspicion: As William Prynne notes in his *Short Demurrer*, “the Jews themselves in all ages having been principle firebrands of sedition both in their own land, and all places where they have dispersed (qtd in Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 61). For a detailed discussion of English perceptions of Jews from the middle-ages to their return in the 1650’s, see David Katz, *The Jews in the History of England: 1475-1650*.

Jewes (Wilson 232).

As Roth notes, not only was the term “merchant” synonymous with Jew in the middle ages and later, but the appellation of money-lender connoted Jewishness in all of its manifestations in the English vernacular during this period.

English fear of the Jews may also trace its etiology to the suspicion and anxiety around proto-capitalist activities like money lending with which Jews were intimately associated. Understanding usury as the “labor pains of capitalism” Jacques Le Goff describes the epistemological trauma that accompanied capitalist activities during the middle ages,

The sudden eruption and spread of the monetary economy threatened old Christian values. Capitalism, a new economic system, was ready to take shape. If it did not require new technology to get started, it at least made wholesale use of practices that had always been condemned by the church (Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life: Economic and Religion in the Middle Ages*, 10).

The fact that money-lending was perhaps the most visible symptom of this new economic relationship did nothing to help the perception of Jews either in the early modern period or in the middle ages. In addition, money lending depended upon a different epistemology of money--one that focused on transvaluation and (unnatural) generation. This also contributed to the Anglo framing of Jewish identity in terms of an almost magical otherness--the Jewish cabals as Fernard Braudel discusses in his study, *The Wheels of Commerce*.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Cotgrave’s 1611 definition of caball affirms the common connection between Jews and magic: *Cabale: [f.] The Jewes Caball; or, a hidden science of diuine mysteries, which the rabbies affirme, was*

Debates about the effects of the Jewish experience on the Anglo- imaginary have ranged from Stephen Greenblatt's dismissive remark that "there was no Jewish question in Marlowe's England; there were scarcely any Jews" to an assertion of Shakespeare's irreducible Jewishness by some less well-known and less respected critics.⁵⁶ Although this question has been studied in great detail by historians of the period, beginning perhaps from the Victorian Anglo-Jewish expedition on the subject (1880), little careful consideration has been undertaken in English departments until James Shapiro's work, *Shakespeare and the Jews*. Shapiro's work is important in its assertion of a Jewish question in Shakespeare's England. The author exhaustively surveys the literary and historical analyses of this question; his analyses ranges from affirming the existence of a Marrano Jewish community in early modern London to questioning the reasons behind the relative lack of material on this subject in early modern English studies. Although his critique of Anglo-Jewish historiography's exaggerations and omissions is important, what is most useful in Shapiro's book is the conclusion that he reaches at the end of a chapter on the Jewish presence in early modern England. Having detailed the evidence proving a minor Marrano/Jewish presence in early modern London, Shapiro abandons the counting game and concludes that what is interesting is

not the raw numbers of Jews . . . as much as the kind of cultural preoccupation they became, that is, the way that Jews came to complicate a great range of social, economic, legal, political and religious discourses, and turn other questions into Jewish questions as well (Shapiro 88).

revealed, and deliuered, together with the Law, vnto Moses, and from him deriued, by successiue relation, vnto posteritie; (yet is it, in truth, no better than a vaine rabble of their owne tradition.)

⁵⁶ For a thorough discussion of questionable contemporary analyses of Shakespeare, Jewishness and *The Merchant of Venice*, see Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews*, especially pages 80-88.

Shakespeare's representation of the "Jew/Shylock" is a telling index of the peculiarly anachronistic perception of Jews that dominated the English consciousness into the early modern period. Apart from the consistency with which the Jew is figured in the Anglo consciousness (as money-lender and/or economic parasite), what is distinctive about the Anglo preoccupation with the Jews is its surprising continuity given that there was no visible Jewish presence in England during this time. While the Jewish question for other countries was a "living" issue—in the sense of their being active Jewish communities in many areas of Eastern-Europe at this time-- Anglo-Jewish stereotyping stemmed from the English experience of the middle-ages. Thus, the English imaginary around the Jewish question was, in many ways, obscure and bogey-like; the persistent characterization of Jews as economic parasites in their anti-English/Christian activities results from a kind of historical immaturity—a vision that depends upon the oft-recited and half-heard tales about Jews that appear in the Chronicle sources. As John Russell Brown notes in his introduction to the *Merchant of Venice*, "In England at this time, the Jews were not a people to fear, but were rather a fabulous and monstrous bogey belonging to remote times and places." Thus, at a time when Jews were integrated into diverse professions in other countries, English writers persisted in their association of Jews with usury, "sharp dealing" and counterfeiting.

Historians have suggested that this considerably anachronistic Anglo conception of the Jewish experience has impacted studies of early modern Jewry. In his study, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, Jonathan Israel notes the predilection in historiography of the early modern period to "treat the early modern period in Jewish history as basically just an extension of the Jewish middle ages." Repudiating such a

continuation, Israel claims,

that there is much to commend the drawing of a firm dividing-line between the medieval and early modern epochs in the historical experience and consciousness of western Jewry.

Thus, the Jew-Shylock is a profoundly inaccurate representation of Jews' economic and social roles in communities outside of England and France at this time. The Jewish usurer, while still extant, in certain areas was becoming a rarity; supplanted, instead, by a new class of Jewish professionals—doctors, notaries, and merchants—which were drastically changing Jewish customs and life in these areas—especially, for example, in Germany and Poland.

The Merchant and the Jew

Shylock is a myth.
--Steven Berkoff

While the Jew in the Anglo imagination became a sort of bogey-man, a figure of cabalistic mystery and suspicion, Shylock, on the contrary, is a palliative figure—allowing the early modern audience to reassert the comfortable epistemological divide between merchant-Jew and the new breed of “commodity adventurers” that began to dominate the (Christian) mercantile landscape. The growth of early modern capitalism had made the easy equivalence between merchant and Jew an epistemological impossibility. In order to allay anxieties about the way in which merchants are necessarily jewed, Shylock must become the super-jew (the jew to surpass all jews— or, at least the other Jews that appear in the play-text).

The title of Shakespeare's play is perhaps the most truncated symptom of the

confusion of terms in this period. As Martin Yaffe points out in his study, *Shylock and the Jewish Question*,

Shakespeare's title . . . has the peculiarity of distributing the announced description of the play's one protagonist among more than one of its city dwellers, perhaps even among all of them to some extent, whether citizen (like Antonio) or mere resident (48).

Yaffe sees this peculiar vagueness as stemming from the commonalities that Shakespeare suggests exists between Shylock and Antonio in regards to profession. Yaffe observes that Shakespeare “homogenizes his characters to a remarkable extent, by indicating their common dependence on a given political setting” (48). In contrast to Yaffe, I would suggest that it is just this anxiety-provoking homogeneity (of economic roles) that the play attempts to alleviate by resurrecting the merchant-Jew of the Anglo-Jewish chronicles against which the early modern merchant-adventurer (Antonio and his ilk) might be successfully contrasted. The title then is less an indicator of an enlightened recognition of the homogeneity of Christian and Jew in the capitalist world-system, than an indicator of an anxiety-provoking equivalence that it is the play's task to remedy. Although for the medieval English audience the “Merchant of Venice” was necessarily “the Jew of Venice,” by the late 1500's such a comfortable and unproblematic association was no longer possible.

While Shylock is palliative figure for reasons discussed above, his character does not work to allay the anxieties wrought by another aspect of the new capitalist social relationships. Unlike Marlowe's Barabas, for example, who embodies the worst excesses of the speculative economy—forgery and counterfeiting, Shylock does not represent a

capitalist bogey as much as a medieval one. He does not work to undo the economic bases of Venetian society, but rather insists on the letter of the law and so betrays a dependence on medieval forms of valuation that seem almost antiquated within the context of the play. In this way, he plays a double function—he at once seems to undergird the literalism of contract-based relationships that seemed threatened by speculation (transvaluation) while at the same time reifying his position as economic parasite—extorting life-blood as currency. Thus, at once, we see Antonio defending Shylock's insistence on the letter of the law and the way in which such laws must form the basis for legitimate and reliable economic exchange while chained to his jailkeeper in an image of Christian economic prostrateness that was the nightmare of the Anglo-Jewish imaginary.⁵⁷ Antonio's defense reads as follows:

The duke cannot deny the course of law:
For the commodity that strangers have
With us in Venice, it if be denied
Will much impeach the justice of the state,
Since that the trade and profit of the city
Consisteth of all nations (III. iv. 26-31).

By functioning (in one sense) as the erstwhile representative of the letter of the law, of the sanctity of bonds, Shylock frames Antonio in terms of an uncomfortable

⁵⁷ In her article, "*The Merchant of Venice*: 'Modern' Anti-Semitism and the Veil of Allegory" Lisa Freinkel notes Shylock's particularist epistemology. Commenting upon the punning of gentle/Gentile that occurs throughout the play, Freinkel writes, "The pun on gentle/Gentile . . . reveals that ways in which Shylock stands for a resistant particularity—for the principle of difference itself" (Hugh Grady, Ed. *Shakespeare and Modernity*, 134). While I agree with Freinkel's characterization of Shylock as "standing for difference itself," I think it is important to consider the context of this difference-making. It is the task of this chapter to assert that the particularism of Shylock—his medieval bond-making—marks him as different from the newly emerging merchant-class—the Christian merchant-adventurers who must be "de-Jewed" in the English popular imagination. Thus, Shylock's difference is a particular difference, specifically relating to the philosophy of exchange and valuation. Shylock is monstrous to the play's audience because he refuses to convert—in more ways than one (both economically and

epistemology of economic relationships that threatens to transcend the legitimate boundaries of legal agreements. For Antonio, transvaluation is the new norm; what was once sacrosanct because untransformable (bonds/contracts) is, within his economic ethos, always a possible object of transformation—as he himself comments to Gratiano, “I hold the world but as the world Gratiano./ A stage, where every man must play a part . . .” (I. i. 76-78). The epistemological contrast between Antonio and Shylock is perhaps most evident in the latter’s comments on the kinds of speculative trading ventures in which Antonio is engaged. Considering the economic soundness of Antonio, Shylock remarks the following to Bassanio:

[M] y meaning in saying he is a good man, is to have you understand me that he is sufficient,—yet his means are in supposition: he hath an argosy bound for Triples, another to the Indies, I understand moreover upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath squandered abroad,—but ships are but boards, sailors but men, there be land-rats, water-rats, water-thieves, and land-thieves (I mean pirates), and then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks . . . (I. iii. 13-23)

What makes Shylock a figure of anachronism is his recalcitrance in adopting the new ethic of transvaluation that Antonio embraces. While the latter figures as the representative of the new-world order of credit and speculation (even though his attempts at the latter have been exceedingly unsuccessful), Shylock is stubbornly medieval in his insistence on the specific requirements of the bond between him and

religiously).

Antonio.⁵⁸ As a result, Shylock becomes monstrous to the audience of the play precisely because he refuses to engage in the new (and by association, Christian) ethic of transvaluation where bonds of flesh are, in the worst cases, effortlessly transformed into bonds of currency. Shylock himself recognizes the danger that he potentially poses to Antonio—both in his refusal to convert and in his status as Jew—hostile to Christians and their interests. Ironically and disingenuously, Shylock attempts to assuage the fears of Bassanio by acknowledging the inherent economic irrationality of the bond itself when understood in the context of transvaluation and speculation. However, his appeasement of Bassanio only confirms his unholy bloodlust to the play's audience, who were all-too-aware of the deceptive kindness of Jews from the many accounts of the blood-libels that they had read or heard in their communities.

O father Abram, what these Christians are,
 Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect
 The thoughts of others! Pray you tell me this,—
 If he should break this day what should I gain
 By the exaction of the forfeiture?
 A pound of man's flesh taken from a man,
 Is not so estimable, profitable neither

⁵⁸ The discourse of the marketplace and the way in which it threatened to sunder not only value from its material expression (gold, silver) but muddled the reliability of communication even in a non-economic context was remarked by such writers as Francis Bacon and x. In his *Organum*, Bacon focuses on the marketplace's creation of "idols" of discourse which obstruct the clear understanding of meaning and message. "There are also Idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call Idols of the Market-place, on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate; and words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar. And therefore the ill and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding . . ." Later in the same section of the *Organum*, Bacon continues, "[T]he idols of the market-place are the most troublesome of all: idols which have crept into the understanding through the alliances of words and names . . . Whence it comes to pass that the high and formal discussions of learned men end oftentimes in disputes about words and names: with which (according to the use and wisdom of mathematicians) it would be more prudent to begin, and so by means of definitions reduce them to order" (87).

As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats,—I say,

To buy his favor, I extend this friendship . . . (I. ii. 156–164).

In his 1562 tract against usury, Thomas Wilson warns his readers against the suspicious meekness that characterizes the usurer's initial attitude towards his potential "client." Likening a crusade against usurers to an earlier crusade in England against the wolves that in the reign of King Edgare, Wilson writes:

Now yf your lordeship, with others, could procure by your good meanes that in your tyme there mighte bee never an usurers heade in England, I doe thinke you shoulde doe a greater good deede to thys lande, than ever was doone by the kyllinge of wolfes. For these bee the greedie cormoraunte wolfes in deede that ravyn up both beaste and man, who whyles they walk in sheepeskynne, doe covertlye devourte the flocke of England under coloure of their wealth and counterfeit honesty (182).

Although in his exchange with Bassanio, Shylock plays lip service to an ethic of transvaluation that he does not intend to honor, his role as money-lender/ usurer ironically inserts him within the kind of a relationship of speculation that his literalist economic bent would seem to disallow. Here we notice an important contradiction that further serves to alienate Shylock the Jew from the early modern English who were his first audience. Although Shylock's epistemology of exchange seems here to rest on a medievalist tradition of exact equivalence—where pounds of flesh can not be rendered currency—his role as usurer places him within system of unequal exchange. Medieval, then, in his insistence on his bond, Shylock nevertheless subsists within an economic

Thus, Bacon ends up prescribing a return to strict ontological correspondence to clear away the obfuscations caused by the proliferation of ambiguous signs in the context of economic and human commerce.

order that even Antonio—the merchant adventurer—sees as based in a kind of unholy economic magic.⁵⁹ As Thomas Moisan notes in his article, “Subversion and Recuperation in the *Merchant of Venice*,”

That Shylock should “choose” to do wrong reminds us, though, of the simultaneously most damning and yet socially and ideologically most reassuring charge to be levelled at usurers in Shakespeare’s time, namely that usurers are heretics, willful choosers of the wrong course and, therefore, most deserving of unqualified approach (194)

Quoting from Henry Smith’s 1591 *Examination of Usury*, Moisan confirms the Anglo association of usury with heresy: “[O]ne saith well . . . that our usurers are Heretics, because after manie admonitions yet they maintaine their errors, & persist in it obstinately as Papists do in Poperie” (194). In distinguishing the “merchant of Venice” from the Jew of Venice the play proleptically interpolates Shylock as the Jewish magician of old, breeding money through the debts of Christians rather than the lambs of Jacob and Esau. As Lisa Jardine remarks in her essay, “Alien Intelligence” the “barrenness of money was a fundamental tenet of early modern Christianity—so the vividly literal idea of “making money” is fraught with difficulty” (107).⁶⁰ Although

⁵⁹ In regards to the suspicion of magical machinations that characterized Anglo anxiety about Jewish money-lending, it is important to note that the “discipline/tradition” of alchemy originated with a Hellenistic Jew, known as “Maria the Jew”. The writings of Maria were familiar to early modern readers, so much so that her theories were said to influence such minds as Newton and Goethe (Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, 5). And, although alchemy and magic were distinct “specialities” to their respective practitioners, alchemists were commonly perceived as magicians in the Western early modern imaginary. Also, alchemists frequently practiced as physicians, a profession which was clearly associated with Jewishness in Shakespeare’s time especially given the collective trauma around the alleged conspiracy against Elizabeth by a Jewish doctor, Roderigo Lopez. (For an interesting discussion on the epistemological interrelationship between alchemy and medicine in the middle-ages and renaissance, see Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, Princeton: 1994).

⁶⁰ The argument that usury defies natural law dates back to Aristotle:

“The most hated sort of money-making, and with greatest reason, is usury, which makes gain out of money itself, and not from the natural use of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term usury, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money from money because the offspring resembles the parent. Wherefore of all modes of making money this is the most

“making money” was commonplace in England at this time—so much so that even Elizabeth’s parliament attempted to regulate the rates of interest that could be charged—anti-usury tracts nevertheless insist on “*use*’s” essentially alien and diabolical nature. And as Jews were almost always historically “remembered” in these tracts by their usurious lineage, they are necessarily tainted by the sense of cabalistic mystery that attended the representation of usury in these writings.

Wilson’s *Discourse Upon Usury* is an interesting document to examine for the way in which it subtly and not so subtly “jews” the merchant-usurer in its representation of a debate between a preacher, a doctor, a lawyer, and a merchant named appropriately, Gromel Gayner. The Preacher, Ockerfoe, is usury’s most vigorous prosecutor in this discourse. His preeminent strategy against the merchant, usury’s most vigorous defender, is to insist that usury falls beyond the bonds of Christian behavior, thereby insinuating—and at times stating—that its practitioners are not Christians. The history of Jewish usury comes up enough times in this document to allow the reader a comfortable understanding of the spectre of Jewishness that haunts any accusation of unchristian behavior. Given the Preacher’s multiple mentions of Jewish usury (four to be exact, in a peroration of twenty pages) it is reasonable to assume that the Jew is posed as the existential “other” of the Christian—if, in other words, the Merchant is *not* a Christian, then he is made a Jew. He is placed within the familiar ontological armchair of Jewry in the preacher’s (and his readers) minds:

For you oughte to lende freely unto all men, riche and poore, lord and getlement, kyng and caysar so that G-d, being the lord of the ryche aswell as of the poore, hath utterly and precisely forbidden all usurie amongst all

unnatural” (qtd in *The Truth About Shylock*, 79).

men that are of the household of faith, except perhaps you will saye, that ryche men are no christians (253).

In an earlier passage, Ockenfoe also intimates the Merchant's unchristian behavior

Lawyer: . . . [W]ho I pray you woulde lende but to have some benefite of his money? And is that any harme when bothe do gayne?

Merchant: G-ds blessing of your hart for so saying, for I did never lende money in my lyfe but for gayne, and whether my neyghbour gayned, or noe, I knowe not. I wysshed well unto hum, but by Saynt Marye, I woulde bee sure first to doe well myselfe, whatsoever came of him.

Preacher: Herein you wanted charitie, and shewed yourselfe not to be a perfect Christian (202)

The Doctor, in a later passage, amplifies the "jewling" of the lending Merchant:

The chauses that have moved wyse and godly men to deteste usury besides the plaine prohibiton are diverse and substancial, and therefore woorthy to bee considered most diligently. The Iewe, that hath used thys horrible sinne most above all others, and might lawfullye use the same, before Christs comming, upon any straunger, as appeareth plaine in Exodus, hath so robbed the Christians wheresoever hee came, that his evill lyvinge seene, hee is banished out of the most places in christendome, and worthely, for surely that common weale and country cannot longe stande in prosperous estate and welfare, wher merchants and all others become usurers. And no better do I call them then Iewes, yea, worse than any infidel that wittling lyve by the onely gayne of their money (283).

Thus, in ways that are identical to the Jews of medieval England, the proxemics of the Merchant's economic survival mark him as other—he is not the heroic merchant-adventurer whose commodities sail openly on the winds of chance, but rather a character who represents the hidden parasitism that was always part and parcel of the market—both in the middle ages and in the renaissance.

The Jew-Shylock's house, is one such significant metonymic indicator of his position of economic exploitation within Venice. In the English imaginary, Jewish homes were associated quite literally with their economic functioning in the community. Not only were the homes of Jews physically different from those of their Christian counterparts (the homes of prominent Jews were built of stone rather than wood), but these residences were associated and frequently equated to the money-lending /economic role of the Jews in England.⁶¹ Thus, Jewish homes were frequently misperceived as the repositories of vast riches, a conception that led to the common tactic of burning down Jewish homes in the hope of recovering the presumed wealth inside. William of Newburgh, a 13th century monk, chronicles the York riots of March 16-17 1190 in his *History of English Affairs* (1201). What makes his description interesting is his focus upon the destruction of Jewish property that accompanied the rioting, and the clear intention of looting these homes that motivated the conspirators in York:

The zeal of the Christians against the Jews in England . . . broke out fiercely. It was not indeed sincere, that is, solely for the sake of the faith, but in rivalry for the luck of others or from envy of their good fortune. . . . [M]any of the province of York plotted against the Jews, not be able to

⁶¹ Interestingly, Jewish homes were frequently located near royal residences so that resident Jews might obtain protection in time from royal authorities (see, Harold Pollins, *Economic History of the Jews of England*, 21).

suffer their opulence, when they themselves were in need, and, without any scruple of Christian conscience, thirsting for the blood of infidels from greed or booty. . . . Some of these, having given up their estates to them [the Jews] for the money they had received, were now oppressed by great want; some, bound by their own sureties, were pressed by the exactions of the Treasury to satisfy the royal usurers⁶². One story night no small part of the city became on fire either by chance, or as is believed, by arson perpetrated by the conspirators, so that the citizens were occupied with their own houses in fear of the fire spreading . . . And while the fire gloomily increased in strength, the robbers seized their booty and left the burning house, and by help of darkness retired unobserved and heavy laden [having, of course, murdered all the occupants of the house first] (147).

Although William of Newburgh chastises the rioters in this Chronicle, the invasion of Jewish homes and the destruction of their occupants—property and persons—was nevertheless the predominant expression of English-Jewish rage during the middle-ages. These pogroms were cathartic for several reasons; they destroyed the most visible symbol of Jewish prosperity (the stone house) while at the same time invading—and thus in some sense, psychically cleansing a culturally overdetermined site of suspicion and fear. The question of what went on in Jewish homes was an overwhelming obsession to the English at this time and later—as is attested to by the various fairy tales and strictures against

⁶² The “state” is here implicated because of their role in assisting the Jews in collecting debts, of which the governing authority took a large percentage.

entering Jewish homes.⁶³ The invasion of Shylock's house—by his daughter no less is, in some way, the wished-for dream of the English who, although freed from a living Jewish presence, still struggled with what were framed as Jewish questions, as John Drakakis and James Shapiro have noted in their analyses of *The Merchant of Venice* and the *judenfrage* in England. Not only was the Jewish home a site of potential fear, but it was also conceptualized as strangely intermixing economic and familial practice. The role of the Jewish males as money-lenders could not be separated from their roles as *paterfamilias*; the persons of Jews—the wives and children—were thus conflated with the economic positioning of the money-lenders in the community. The particular form of Luther's attack on the Jewish usurers in his *The Jews and Their Lies*—where he focuses on the lazy-making fireside as the clearest manifestation of Jewish exploitation—is just such a symptom of this cultural conflation: “they, pious crew, idle away their days at the fireside in laziness, feasting and display.” Thus, Shylock's admonition to Jessica to “look to his house For I did dream of money-bags tonight” places him (even in his own psyche) within this particular ideological trope of the English imaginary by rhetorically collapsing the home with economic viability and survival. Shylock's cry “my daughter and my ducats, my ducats and my daughter” simply reifies this connection and works to confirm the Jew's home as the appropriate site of Christian economic

⁶³ The chronicle of William of Norwich, an infamous blood libel in Anglo-Jewish chronicles, stresses the dangers inherent in associating with Jews in their homes or communities: “So it came to pass that when the holy boy, ignorant of the treachery that had been planned, had frequent dealings with the Jews, he was taken to task by Godwin the priest . . . and he was prohibited from going in and out among them any more. . . . But the Jews, annoyed at the thwarting of their designs, tried with all their might to patch up a new scheme of wickedness . . . Accordingly, they found a man . . . who was a most treacherous fellow and just the fitting person for carrying out their execrable crime . . . they sent him out to find and bring back with him the victim, which, as I said before, had slipped out of their hands” (137). The chronicle continues by detailing the ways in which William was first feasted at the Jewish home during Passover and then subjected to the tortures of a mock circumcision. The site of terror and helplessness for the non-Jew in these chronicles is the Jewish home, once captured and taken into the home and community, there seems to be no escape—like the spider that entangles the fly in her web.

revenge. Jessica's self-gilding, in her somatic carrying-away of the home's riches, is an epistemic confirmation of the way in which the home, its inhabitants and economic positioning are all one to the English (and ostensibly to the Jew): "*Jes. I will make fast the doors and gild myself/With some more ducats, and be with you straight*" (II. vii. 49-50).

What is interesting—and considerably ironic—is the fact that Portia is also positioned—economically—in the same way *vis a vis* her home, Belmont. Like the Jew-Shylock, her value is literally encased within the halls or more specifically, the caskets arranged in Belmont. This metonymic conflation is indicated by Bassanio's first mention of Portia to Antonio: "In Belmont is a lady richly left . . ." (I. i. 161). This collapse is further confirmed by the casket game, where choosing the correct encasement (of Portia's image) functions performatively as marriage. The fact that Portia's image is within a leaden casket is an attempt to differentiate the Christian-Portia from the Jew-Shylock in terms of the logic undergirding this metonymical equivalency.

The rhetorical and metaphorical "bonding" of the Jew-Shylock and Portia nevertheless continues throughout the play-text, and causes us to question the quality of the distinction between the Shylock's bonding of Antonio and the Christians bonding of each other. For if the Jew-Shylock is the economic parasite *par excellence*--breeding money and insisting on blood,--how do we understand the relationships between the other characters in the play--the Christians whose bonds with each other are also constitutively economic in character? Because of this similarity of relational character, what distinguishes the Christian from the Jew in the play is not simply or even primarily religion, but the kinds of bonds that bind the characters together. In part, it is a

mercantile Christian ethos that determines these bonds—one perhaps based in faith (of friendship?) rather than the cold logic of economic calculation. Along with the other semiotics of economic and religious difference that I discuss above, the relational context of bond-making is also what distinguishes the merchant from the Jew in the play. While Shylock calculates his bond (or purposely miscalculates, so that Antonio will be in his debt) Antonio bonds Bassanio to himself with the simple interest of faith and good will. Bassanio's childhood fable is a fitting parable for this newly "Christened" economic order; speculation in this ethos of mercantilism consists of chasing an arrow of faithful if naïve servitude to one's brother. As will be apparent, Bassanio's parable of economic faith relies heavily on the framing of such relations in terms of child-like innocence and good will:

In my school-days when I had lost one shaft,
 I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
 The self-same way, with more advised watch
 To find the other forth, and by adventuring both,
 I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof
 Because what follows is pure innocence.
 I owe you much, and (like a willful youth)
 That which I owe is lost, but if you please
 To shoot another arrow that self way
 Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
 (As I will watch the aim) or to find both,
 Or bring your latter hazard back again.

And thankfully rest debtor for the first (I. i. 140-151)

Of course, Antonio's bond does not come without an interest payment of its own. In some sense, Bassanio's "flesh" (the arrow) is what Antonio claims at the end of the play, the exchange of which is signified by Bassanio's betrayal of his bond with Portia (the ring)

As the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio shows, the Christians of *The Merchant of Venice* have positioned themselves in a complex web of economic and personal interdependence. As many critics have noted, the play both problematizes and celebrates the "growing trafficking of the English nation in trade" (Moisan 191). Antonio's relationships with Bassanio and Portia's dealings with Lorenzo and Jessica attempt to interpellate this trafficking within a Christian ideology that promotes free-lending rather than lending at interest. Yet Shakespeare's idealization of these Christian economic relationships rests upon an almost stubborn misperception of the actual economic relationships of the time. In England, as in the rest of the European continent, usury was practiced not primarily among Jews, but among Christians.

Excluded by medieval bigotry . . . from the normal intercourse with Christians as well as from the right to earn a normal living by membership in the trades, the Jews had in numerous cases resorted to money-lending. In the popular mind, they were particularly identified with that detested pursuit. . . . Nevertheless, as respectable historians are well aware, the Jews . . . did not play a leading party in banking. The money-lending Templars of the Crusades; the French, Italian and Catalan lenders of money to the Saracens, the Scrovigni, Gianfigliuzzi, Ubriachi, and

Buiamonte whom Dante placed in Hell for their usury; Jacques Coeur; the Fuggers; the Lombard and Tuscan bankers . . . were all Christian. Facts, however, have shown themselves reluctant of acceptance, and to the man in the street “usurer” was synonymous with “Jew” (“The Usurer” 83).

No doubt cognizant of the antipathy aroused by discussions of English usury Shakespeare was at pains to dissociate his ostensible heroes—Antonio, Portia and Bassanio from any taint of lending for use—rather than out of a Christian generosity.⁶⁴ Yet, as we have seen, the play is also anxious to recuperate a capitalist/Christian ethic from the same spectre of (Jewish) usury. This rescue effort involves the idealization of speculation—the Merchant cannot “give away” his wealth—such a personification would be considered foolish and unrealistic—rather he may generously lend—with the hope of gain at some future point. (This kind of speculation has a quintessentially Christian cast to it—we have faith now to garner the promised treasure that is in heaven.) Apart from the potentially bawdy undertone of Bassanio’s emotional coercion of Antonio discussed above, there is also a distinctly religious character to the arrangement—in the sense of requiring a child-like faith that seems naïve in the context of the Jew-Shylock’s literalist and necessarily ruthless interpretation of contracts of exchange. Indeed, Bassanio’s promise to Antonio is never understood in terms of a debt until Shylock’s actions force Bassanio to see it in this way. Until Shylock’s bond is called in, Antonio and Bassanio are free to understand their economic arrangement as an expression of trust and friendship, rather than a loan that must be repaid—with interest. As if to exaggerate the way in which the Jew-Shylock consistently interrupts the idyllic relations of the Christians of the play, Shakespeare

⁶⁴ In anti-usury tracts, the English usurer was considered worse than the Jewish usurer, see my discussion of Wilson below.

inserts news of Antonio's (grave) economic circumstances into Bassanio's and Portia's discussion of their impending marriage:

Bass. O sweet Portia,
 Here are a few of the unpleasant'st words
 That ever blotted paper! Gentle lady
 When I did first impart my love to you,
 I freely told you all the wealth I had
 Ran in my veins, . . .
 I should then have told you
 That I was worse than nothing; for indeed
 I have engag'd myself to a dear friend
 To feed my means. Here is a letter lady,
 The paper as the body of my friend,
 And every word in it a gaping wound
 Issuing life blood (III. ii. 249-265).

Of course, the bond between Portia and Bassanio suffers from a taint of illegitimacy while the latter is bonded—economically and personally—with Antonio. Bassanio's willingness to part from Portia's ring at the trial scene only confirms the irreconcilability of the two bonds with which he is engaged. Until Bassanio frees himself from his own bond of flesh with Antonio by freeing the latter from the compulsion to be sacrificed for Bassanio's courting expenses, Portia and Bassanio cannot be truly joined. Their marriage is unconsummable until it is debt-free; until, in other words, it is not indebted to Antonio's sacrifice for its existence.

Thus, while the bond of flesh between Antonio and Bassanio is of a considerably different character than that between Antonio and the Jew-Shylock, it nevertheless, like the latter, disrupts the smooth emotional and physical consummation of the relationship between Portia and Bassanio.

It is in the trial scene where the different kinds of bonds—and the attendant different conceptions of economic and personal relationships reach their points of contention and eventual (if uncomfortable) resolution. As in the other parts of the play we have considered, the bonds under disputation in the trial scene are reconstructed from and framed by the anxious association of merchant-capitalism and (Jewish) usury with which the play grapples. The literalist rhetoric of the Jew-Shylock, for example, is an uncomfortable reminder of the rhetoric of English pro-usury pamphlets in the early modern period. In these pamphlets, the most noteworthy of which is perhaps Robert Filmer's defense of usury, entitled *Quaestio Quadlibetica or A Discourse whether it may be Lawful to take use for money* (London, 1653.) In this work, in ways that as we will see resemble Shylock's own parsing of the law of the bond, Filmer relies heavily on a literalist interpretation of the Biblical discussions of usury. Dissecting each Biblical mention of usury for its exact prescription and attendant loopholes, Filmer's defense reads almost as a parody of itself, and when considered alongside the play-text, resonates uncomfortably with Shylock's prosecutorial ethic. Introducing the subject to his readers, Fenton emphasizes his careful study of the Biblical sources that have been (mis)interpreted as forbidding usurers by readers less perceptive than himself:

As soon as I had understand in the affaires of this World, I became
sensible how greivous it was to lie under the heavy disease of paying

Interest, Consideration or Use (term it how you will) for money: And finding it generally condemned by those whose judgements and learning I most esteem, I began to question with myself whether the sinne were not of that nature that I my self in paying did concur in the same offence with the taker Upon which occasion I began to search farther, and as for Scripture I confess the prohibitions in it seemed to me to have much of the Laws terms for no other than the common-wealth of the Jewes . . . (2)

Ironically, Filmer's defense of Christian usury necessarily functions as a defense of post-Biblical Jewish usury, primarily because Filmer legitimates his arguments through a rigorously literalist reading of the Biblical proscriptions against usury. For Filmer, what the Bible does not explicitly disallow is allowed. Citing Nehemiah's rebuke of Jews who took interest from members of a community of heathens, Filmer glosses it as follows:

So then Nehemiah never naming usury, nor mentioning the law against it, but supposing the act of Nobles to be lawfull, but not expedient, doth encline my belief to think that this oppression was not properly called usury, although it had a covenant for gain. . . Any man would think that to rebuke and reclaim men from their sin the way had been to have named it in particular, or the Law by which it was prohibited: but *Nehemiah* does neither of these, he only tels them, it was not good what they did, and asks them if they ought not to walk in the fear of their G-d because of the reproach of the heathen their enemies, not because of a particular law against usury (12).

Since then Deuteronomic law only prevents Jews from lending to each other, Filmer

argues that it in no way prevents them—or anyone else for that matter—from lending with interest to a stranger. And since Christians are not Jews, Filmer claims that none of the Jewish laws against usury apply to the gentile communities:

To give some brief accompt to the reader of the substance of the scattered arguments in this Tracture, he must know; That my scope and intention is to shw that Usury is not where in Scripture forbiddent to Christians: but that it is as lawfull as any other contract or bargain, unless the Laws of the Land do prohibit or moderate it as point of state or policy (14).

In order to contend with the unambiguously Christian anti-usury writings of Fenton and Downam, Filmer strives to debunk their arguments by highlighting what he claims are the unreliable semantics of these diatribes. Considering Fenton's argument against usury, Filmer points out the many possible understandings of a lending arrangement:

I undertake to manifest, that the Definitions of Usury (wherein Dr Downam and Dr. Fenton mainly differ between themsel'es) are neither warrantable by the rules of art; nor justifiable by any proof or ground in Scripture, or by any testimony of antiquity either in Councils or Fathers (16)

Filmer continues his analysis of the semantic confusion around usury by offering this understanding of G-d's prohibition:

And the lawes given by G-d about Usury are such as by the Coherence of the Texts, and the Conference of other places, do shewth that those pse lawes did only intend a prohibition of taking Usury of such as borrowed in case of extreme necessity, and were so poor that they were in charity to be

relieved (16).

Where lending to the grievously impoverished might be seen as usury, lending to those who are financially competent is certainly not, but may be considered a legitimate application of the practice of interest. After all, argues Filmer, the lender must be guaranteed some surety, and be reimbursed for his temporary inability to “gain” from the stock of money that he has lent to his client.

While it would be unfair to say that Filmer would agree with Shylock’s reasoning in the trial scene, Filmer’s rhetoric of literalism is nevertheless echoed by Shylock in his insistence on the letter of the bond with Antonio, rather than its spirit. Like Filmer, Shylock willfully ignores the spirit of the bond; he refuses to commute Antonio’s debt into anything but the pound of flesh stipulated. Filmer, likewise, blinds himself (and tries to blind his reader) to the spirit of the Christian ethic which views usury /interest as immoral and unchristian in all cases. Like Shylock, Filmer points out the hypocritical ways in which the religious of his time have tried to disguise usury as charity. Discussing the “mountains of piety” that were raised to relieve the poor said to be ruined by the usury of the Jews, Filmer points out that even the managers of this charitable store charged interest:

A mountain of piety is a stock of Money raised by the charity of good people, who observing the poor ruined by the Usury of Jewes, did voluntarily contribute good store at treasure, whereby they *upon security* might have money at low rate to relieve their wants, which because the mass is great, and the thing is pious and charitable in itself, is called a mountain of piety. But in respect the officers and other charges incident

unto it cannot be had without some emolument, therefore the borrower pays somewhat by the month for the lone of that he receives (19).

Thus, while the Jew-Shylock is at once a resurrection of the medieval Jewish usurer of old in order to serve as a palliative contrast to the new merchant-class which Antonio represents, he is also a reminder of the still current debate about usurers that dominated the English landscape at this time. As we have seen, the English usurer, as represented in the works of Wilson and others, was constituted as monstrous in their own right; Wilson even goes so far to say that the English usurer is worse than the Jew:

I [Preacher in Wilson's *Discourse*] Shall say: they [English usurers] are worse than Jewes. For go wither you wil throughout Christendom and deale with them [Jews] you shall have under tenne in the hundredth, yea, sometimes for six in their handes, whereas English usurers excede all goddes mercye, and will take they care not how much, wythout respect had to the partye that borroweth what losse, daunger, hinderaunce soever the borrower susteyneth (232).

Set against the context of these early modern usury debates, the relevant audience of Portia's "mercy" speech reaches beyond the figure of the Jew-Shylock. And yet, the play is anxious to, in a sense, collapse these unsavory practices of English merchants and money-lenders within the figure of the Jew-Shylock. He is made to contain, however uncomfortably, the usurious and unpopular facets of early modern English merchantry, even if, at times, this resolution is subject to some leakage given the cultural context of continued English usury of which the play's audience was no doubt aware. Like the purging of Jews that occurred in the English middle-ages, the play attempts to purge the

You know the law, your exposition
 Hath been most sound: I charge you by the law,
 Whereof you are a well-deserving pillar,
 Proceed to judgment: by my soul I swear,
 There is no power in the tongue of man
 To alter me,—I stay here on my bond.

Ant. Most heartily I do beseech the court
 To give the judgment.

Por. Why then thus it is,—
 You must prepare your bosom for his knife.

Shy. O noble judge! O excellent young man!

Por. For the intent and purpose of the law
 Hath full relation to the penalty,
 Which here appeareth due upon the bond

Shy. 'Tis very true: O wise and upright judge,
 How much more elder art thou than thy looks.

Por. Therefore lay bare your bosom.

Shy. Ay, his breast,
 So says the bond, doth it not noble judge?

"Nearest his heart," those are the very words (my italics) (IV. i. 227-250)

Portia's subsequent descent into a similarly implacable literalism has been characterized by critics negatively, who see her as "sinking" to the level of Shylock's medieval madness. I would argue, however, that Portia's entrapment of Shylock is more of a

cathartic staging of purging and expulsion to which I alluded earlier. By catching the Jew-Shylock in the web of his own making, Portia resurrects the pleasing historical memory of the expulsion of the Jews from England under the direction of Edward I. Forbidden usury yet prevented from practicing any other profession, medieval English Jews were necessarily doomed by their own actions (of money-lending), much as Shylock is condemned by the bond that he himself creates with Antonio. In begging for mercy, Shylock acknowledges the way in which his livelihood and his life are interconnected—much as they were for Antonio and other “victims” of (Jewish) usury for which Shakespeare stages retribution:

Shy. Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that, —

You take my house, when you do take the prop

That doth sustain my house: you take my life

When you do take the means whereby I live (IV. i. 370-374).

The play achieves a further victory that eluded the medieval English in their relations with the Jews. The Jew-Shylock is made to convert—against his own will; through this forced conversion, the purging of collective historical rheum is complete—not only is Jewish usury defeated and the new merchant-class freed from its uncomfortable tainting, but the Jew-Shylock is ontologically eradicated and made to subsist within a quintessentially Christian economic order in which the Jew has no longer any place.

Chapter Four: The Royal Debt: Specters of Kingship in *Hamlet*

Ethan Hawke's *Hamlet*, a recent film version of the play, sets "Denmark" not as a country, but as a corporation. "Denmark" figures as an omnipresent corporate logo in the beginning of the film; from advertisements on a huge television screen that dominates Times Square to the ostentatious office tower that bears its name in twenty-foot letters. A Japanese film from 1960, *The Bad Sleep Well* similarly resets the story-line of *Hamlet* within the context of a ruthless corporate struggle for power. As the announcement of the film notes, "Roughly Enron meets *Hamlet*, Kurosawa's first independent production charts scandal and ruin moving inexorably up the corporate ladder . . ." (*Film Forum* 2). While this kind of modern resetting of Shakespeare plays is no longer remarkable, what is interesting and provocative is the question that inevitably issues from such a "rewriting" of the play: What in *Hamlet* allows for this kind of rethinking of monarchy? How is it possible to produce a play about regicide in a setting where the kingdom has been transformed into a corporation? How can the kingdom disappear in such a context? Similarly, we may ask, "where's the king?"

What is remarkable about such films is that this transformation does not strain the audience's credulity—in other words, the play sustains such a rewriting without losing any of the dramatic tension and power of the original setting. Yet it would be difficult to imagine setting one of the plays of either of the tetralogies without a kingdom as context. While these plays are profoundly concerned with the fragility of rule—three of the eight plays have depositions and regicide as their focus—they still preserve the centrality of the king in their representations. In these plays, kings may come and go—Richard II may

give way to Henry Bolingbroke, and Henry VI to Edward and Edward to Richard—but the throne and the question of who will occupy it is always front and center. Indeed, the first tetralogy ends on a triumphant note of monarchical security. As Richard Helgerson notes in his *Forms of Nationhood*,

In Shakespeare's English history plays . . . England seems often to be identified exclusively with its kings and nobles. The story of their conflicts and conquests is its story. No one else matters. But before this scene [the beginning of *Henry VI, ii*] another vision asserts itself, one that will not again emerge so clearly in Shakespeare's work for another quarter of a century (195).

One explanation for this strict and enduring identification of England with its “kings and nobles” in the tetralogies is, no doubt, the demands of their genres. Based in the chronicle-histories of Holinshed (and, to a lesser extent, the verse-account of the civil war by Samuel Daniel), the tetralogies were, by their structure and sources, compelled to spotlight England's kings and nobles in their dramatic retelling of the wars of the roses. As a tragedy, *Hamlet* is not similarly constricted by genre and structure, but may “play” more with its representation and consideration of kingship.

In her discussion of the play, Linda Charnes considers the “writing-out” of royal lineage that she discerns in *Hamlet*. Charnes makes the following observation about the play and its general reception in her article appropriately entitled, “The Hamlet Formerly Known as Prince”:

Mention Hamlet to the average middle-class American and certain things spring to mind: romance, high culture, adolescence, high school English,

failed exams, revenge, procrastination, and other vague themes related and unrelated. What does not seem apparent is an awareness that Hamlet is a Prince who should, by the time the play begins, be a King. How is it that this rather important fact seems to have gone missing in the popular imaginary (*Shakespeare and Modernity* 191).

One might say, then, that just as there is something rotten in the state of Denmark, there is also something rotten in the play of *Hamlet*: the divine ontology of the King. In *Hamlet*—and perhaps by Hamlet’s time--the king *qua* King, divine, absolute, unassailable, martial and heroic, has been “crossed-out”; like Bruno Latour’s crossed out G-d, it remained as a significant quilting-point for England’s idea about itself, but the form and function of its power is far different than the representation of that power.⁶⁴ It was, to a significant degree, an evacuated semiotic, always present and visible, frequently called upon to restore a sense of historical and identificatory order, but at the same time, constructed out of a fiction of *puissance*. One only has to think about the figure of Elizabeth, dressed in armor, before her soldiers at Tilbury to understand the profoundly irrelevant nature of the traditional ideology around kingship that operated during the end of her reign and the beginning of James’s rule. At this crucial moment of traditional

⁶⁴ Writing about the same period of time, Latour notes the similar degrading of the relevance and ideological power of G-d in the context of increasing scientific discovery and political republicanism:

No one is truly modern who does not agree to keep G-d from interfering with Natural Law as well as with the Laws of the Republic. G-d becomes the crossed-out G-d of metaphysics, as different from the premodern G-d of the Christians as the Nature constructed in the laboratory is from the ancient *physis* or the Society invented by sociologists from the old anthropological collective and its crowd of non-humans. . . . G-d’s transcendence distanced Him infinitely, so that He disturbed neither the free play of nature nor that of society, but the right was nevertheless reserved to appeal to the transcendence in case of conflict between the laws of Nature and those of Society (33).

The crossed-out G-d, like the crossed-out King, became an ideal, publicly revered, perhaps even privately worshipped, but increasingly anachronistic:

The moderns could now be both secular and pious at the same time. His absence did not prevent people from calling on Him at will in the privacy of their own hearts. His position became literally ideal, since He was bracketed twice over, once in metaphysics and again in spirituality. He would no longer interfere in any way with the development of the moderns, but He remained effective and helpful within the spirit of humans alone

warfare and battle. Elizabeth's self-referential assertions of her "power" only underscored the profound discrepancy between her actual "power" and the armed power called for at this moment of nation-threatening warfare. Parading before her troops, Elizabeth declared, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King and a King of England too." It is doubtful that the figure of Elizabeth at this particular moment—when rhetoric and dazzling wit could not possibly win the day—proved of much comfort to her army. And if James would seem an appropriate and heartening replacement to this *maedchen in uniform*, we need only remember his infamous bookishness and his committed pacifism to lay to rest any dubious assertions of James's martial pedigree.⁶⁶

Considered in this light, the question "where's the king" takes on a historical urgency as well as an ontological one. It is precisely this question that the play tries to answer. Although generally considered to predate James ascension to the throne (1600-1601), *Hamlet* nevertheless anticipates him and the new model of monarchy that he will attempt to institute as king—a model of divine kingship and absolutism shorn of its martial analogues.⁶⁷ Within this psychologically and culturally fraught context, the ghost in *Hamlet* must be understood to signify more than just one deposed king—it is, in a

(34).

⁶⁶ As J.P. Sommerville notes in regards to James's scholarly habits, "James was Britain's most scholarly king, and wrote five main works of political theory . . . James involved himself in continental intellectual debate, read the works of European scholars and invited a number of leading figures to England . . ." ("James I and the Divine Right of Kings" in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, Edited by Linda Levy Peck, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, 58, 62.)

⁶⁷ Disputing the common-place editorial understanding of the first quarto of *Hamlet* (Q1) as a "mosaic of words and phrases," distinctly inferior to the supposedly authoritative versions, Q2 and F1, David Ward argues that the three constitute a revision cycle of the play, and that Q2 may actually post-date rather than pre-date the reviled Q1: "It is perfectly possible that the despised Q1 represents Shakespeare's own early work much better than most editors suppose" ("The King and *Hamlet*," 281). He further contends that Q2 may have been rewritten in response to James I's patronage of Shakespeare's company: "After James became their patron in May of 1603, it is likely that 'his Highnesse seruants looked carefully at all their plays. And it is possible that, in the case of *Hamlet*, they felt the need to make certain changes" (282)—hence, Q2.

sense, the specter of kingship itself.⁶⁷ The question then becomes the following: How does Hamlet the character and the play register the gradual desecration of the ideal of majesty in the early modern context? In other words, how can the play sustain the transposition that Hawke's movie imposes whereby the kingdom becomes a corporation diffusely embodying the symbolic power of a now disembodied king? What I will contend in what follows is that the market and the burgeoning demands of the commons and merchant-class for control over market movements—exports and imports, for example—proved a crucial site for the contestation of absolutist rule that James, particularly, dreamed of instituting in England—particularly because he was unable to do so effectively in his late domain, Scotland. Yet, the association of market interests and the monarchy would haunt James even at his triumphal entrance into the City of London. In Michael Drayton's *Paeon Triumphall*, written for the Society of Goldsmiths of London, there is a consistent identification of James's majesty with the regality of the society's trade:

Native our love as needfull is our trade
 By which no kindome ever was decaide
 To bring sleight gauds and womanish devices
 Of little use and excessive prices
 Good home made things with trifles to supresse
 To feede luxurious riot and excesse
 Sound bullion is our subject, whose sure rate

⁶⁷ Several key critical works have discussed the historical associations operating in Hamlet and particularly the Jacobean analogues to the action in the play. See, for example, Eric S. Mallin, *Inscribing the Time*. Lillian Winstanley, *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*. Stuart Kurland, "Hamlet and the Scottish Succession", *Studies in English Literature*, Spring 1994 34(2): 279-30, and David Ward, "The King and Hamlet, SQ43 (1992): 280-302.

Seale'd by his selfworth, such the Goldsmiths state
 Which peace and happie government doth nourish
 and with a Kingdome doth both fade and flourish (1-10).

One can even read an implicit critique of James and the fashions of his court in this celebration of his coronation and entrance into London. Also, the Goldsmiths claim that gold and the surety of its value is almost as important as effective government to ensuring the health of the kingdom is a bald declaration of the immense importance of the market—and its various participants—in enabling the king's successful rule. The fact that James was particularly annoyed at the crowds at his entrance, declared when told that “they only wanted to look upon his face, he cried out in a tantrum, ‘G-d’s wounds! I will pull down my breeches and they shall also see my arse’” attests to his consciousness of the distressing necessity of ruling with the love and assent of the merchants and Londoners who greeted him on his entrance into their city (*The Stuarts* 42).

* * *

In his article, “Enjoy your Nation as Yourself” Slavoj Žižek presents a quintessentially Lacanian definition of a nation. In a psychoanalytically-inflected revision of Benedict Anderson’s key text, *Imagined Communities*, Žižek writes,

It would be ... erroneous simply to reduce the national Thing to the features composing a specific way of life. The Thing is not directly a collection of these features; there is “something more” in it, something that *is present* in these features, that *appears* through them. . . . The

national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself. . . . A nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices (202).

In the case of early modern England, the burgeoning middle class coupled with the incipient republicanism of the polity reified the problematic nature of kingship and contributed to the eventual “crossing-out” of a parliamentary and popular understanding of the King as divine and absolutist ruler.⁶⁹ Although rhetorically monarchs continued to claim an almost absolutist prerogative in their writings about the throne, as we shall see when we examine the writings of James I, the throne in England was always essentially constituted as a contract—between parliament and its representatives and its occupier. If successive English kings looked across the channel to French absolutist monarchy with envy, they were essentially powerless to rule without the consent of the ruled, and without, more importantly “doing” business with parliament in order to consolidate that rule. In a context of a burgeoning market economy, such business was no longer restricted to the nobility, but embraced the newly emerging merchant class. Although its mythos rejects such a comparison, England by the late-sixteenth-century (and before) was an *incorporated* monarchy—its queens and kings increasingly subject to the interests of market forces, and market forces similarly affected by the actions of England’s rulers.

Even in the case of English imperialism, both Elizabeth and James had to share

⁶⁹ In his book, *Authority and Conflict*, Derek Hirst notes the particular disdain that accompanied James’s free distribution of titles in the early years of his reign. Noting the observation of a contemporary of James’s court, Hirst writes, “The newly-rich, buying and estate and aping gentry ways, might very soon be thought gentlemen. As Sir Thomas Smith, an Elizabethan commentator concluded, ‘Gentlemen be made good cheap in England’” (14).

the “glory” of England’s empire with the merchants who were enabling the expansion of native trade and English “values” to all parts of the world. As Lesley B. Cormack explains in her article “Britannia Rules the Waves?: Images of Empire in Elizabethan England,”

[T]he images of empire developed by those most interested in promoting the creation of an English empire were ambiguous in relation to this meaning. Many saw Elizabeth and James as integral to an imperial adventure, but the underlying messages of these texts [propoganda for expansion of English interests across the globe] and images were much more haphazard and personal than monarchical. Merchants and trade seemed just as if not more important than conquest and glory. The creation of an English empire, while clearly arguing for England’s ability to achieve supremacy in the geopolitical struggle, would not place Britannia on the ship of power and control. Rather merchants and personal adventurers were to gain by this venture (*EMLS* 4(2) September 1998, 3).

Thus, the hero of such escapades were unclear—was it the Roman-identified ruler, James, expanding—like some Caesar—the British empire to far-flung and sometimes hostile geographies, or was it the merchant, gambling his wares and, less often, his life to expand English trade to the far corners of the globe? Of course, the answer is somewhere in the middle. English imperialism, as a royal imperative, was a direct result of Dutch, Spanish and Portugese incursions into crucial areas of trade, and into religious disputes (particularly, the Netherlands), but it was also a market imperative, competing, among

many areas, for supremacy in the wool trade, to protect England's fisheries from piracy and, perhaps most importantly, to dominate the Eastern trade. In his travel narratives, Richard Hakluyt calls out to merchant-adventurers to become the new heroes of economic conquest:

The rude Indian Canoa halleth those seas, the Portingals, the Saracenes, and Moores travaile continually up and downe that reach from Japan to China, from China to Malacca, from Malacca to the Moluccaes: and shall an Englishman, better appointed than any of them all (that I say no more of our navie) feare to saile in that Ocean. What seas at all doe want piracie: What navigation is there voyde of peril? (qtd in McCormack 9).

While such expansion was ostensibly for the "glory" of king and country, it was also profoundly bound up with market interests and market infiltration into existing centers of trade. As such, economic imperialism provides another site wherein the delicate ontology of the crown's regal pretensions is made evident. As McCormack remarks in her article, "There was no doubt that this would be an empire for the glory of Queen and country, but who would have dominion was rather less clear" (9). I would add that exactly who would reap the glory is similarly unclear as well. In some sense, English imperialism, with its firm reliance on merchant adventurers, also proved to question, and perhaps even undermine the Crown's attempts to be the sole recipient of the glories of England's imperial expansion.

Elizabeth's Golden Speech of 1601 is another important instance of the mutual indebtedness of the crown with the English merchant class, many of whom wielded considerable influence in the House of Commons. If we did not know the historical

context of the following passage, we might easily transpose its contents to any corporation's boardroom, with a few emendations here and there.

Of myself I must say this, I never was any greedy scraping grasper, nor a strict fast-holding Prince [CEO], nor yet a waster. My heart was never set upon any worldly goods but only for my subjects' [stockholders'] good. What you do bestow on Me, I will not hoard up, but receive it to bestow on you again; yea Mine owne Properties I account yours to be expended for your good, and your eyes shall see the bestowing of it for your welfare (30 November, 1601).

When we recall that this audience was a result of parliamentary lobbying for an end to prejudicial monopolies, the corporate nature of its sentiments becomes even more pronounced. The audience of this speech is significant—rather than the nobility, the addressed are here England's stockholders—representatives of the merchant-class, the newly emerging (if not titled) aristocracy of wealth that the Queen—and later James I—would not be able to ignore. As the Queen is at pains to assert, she is most thankful not for the riches of her office, but for the “love” of her subjects, a euphemism for their consent to her rule:

Wee perceive your comming is to present thanks unto Us (for ending prejudicial monopolies); know I accept them with no lesse joy then your loves can have desire to offer such a Present, and doe more esteeme it then any treasure of Riches, for those Wee know how to prize, but Loyaltie. Love and Thanks, I account them invaluable, and though G-d hath rayseed Mee high, yet this I account the glorie of my Crowne, that I have reigned

with your Loves.

The last sentiment is a fine specimen of equivocation and fantasy. Asserting her divine pedigree, Elizabeth, in the same breath, acknowledges her ontological (if not financial) indebtedness to her subjects—and not only the nobility. This allows her for a moment to inhabit the site of monarchical fantasy, without unduly ruffling the feathers of contractual monarchy. Again and again with the advent of an increasingly energetic merchant class involved in an ever-expanding global market, the kings and queens of England were forced to situate themselves in such a double world: robing themselves in the ermine of majesty for appearance's sake, while, at the same time, dressing themselves in the more restrictive undergarments of contractual monarchy.

Like Elizabeth, James struggled with parliament over monopolies and impositions. Unlike Elizabeth, however, James was loath to bow to the demands of parliament or the merchant class when either complained of the Crown's right to collect levies on imports or exports. As Hill writes in *The Century of Revolution*, concerning James I's intrusion into importation rates:

In 1608 James issued a new Book of Rates, cautiously revising the valuation of certain commodities, and embodying additional duties on new imports ('impositions'). . . . The crown's right to make such adjustment had not hitherto been disputed. But as in so many spheres, economic developments were changing men's attitudes towards legal rights. Foreign trade was increasing in importance, the economic structure of the country was becoming more complex; the men of property felt that they should have a say in the formation of economic policy; and the House of

Commons did not want the King to become financially independent of the taxes they voted (40).

By 1610, the King was engaged in almost a full-scale proclamation war with the English parliament concerning his prerogative in the burgeoning market economy. In one particularly telling exchange, James decries parliamentary protests against his proposed impositions. He writes, “You may not set such laws as make [kings] the shadow of kings. . . .” Reporting James’s strident refusal of parliamentary incursion into this area, John Chamberlain, a contemporary writes in a letter to Robert Dudley:

I heare yt bred generally much discomfort; to see our monarchical powre and regall prerogative strained so high and made so transcendent every way, that yf the practice should follow the positions we are not like to leave to our successors the freedome we received from our forefathers (Patterson 260).

It was precisely this issue—importation rates, and the more general rights of the king to impose export and import taxes without the approval of parliament—that would push James—and his parliament—to wrestle over the thorny and politically dangerous question of English jurisprudence. The market and its control was the site wherein the push and pull of England’s essentially contractual monarchy was most evident; the burgeoning economy of trade and speculation more than anything else revealed the specular nature of the king’s “divine” and unassailable power. In a passage from one of James’s political writings, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, written during his reign in Scotland, James provides his readers with a keen sense of his own vision of the King as lawmaker—both inside and outside parliament. Disputing the claim that the laws of

Scotland predate its monarchy, James writes:

So the trewth is directly contrarie in our state to the false affirmation of such seditious writers, as would preswade us, that the Lawes and state of our countrey were established before the admitting of a king: where by the countrarie ye see it plainly prooved, that a wise king comming in among barbares, first established the estate and forme of government, and thereafter made lawes by himselfe, and his successors according thereto.

And so, it followes of necessitie, that the kings were the authors and makers of the Lawes, and not the Lawes of the King (Paul Christainson, *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, 74).

In her article, “English Politics and Administration 1603-1625,” Menna Prestwich notes the increasing tension that accompanied James’s new book of rates for setting duties on imports and exports and the restructuring of feudal revenues:

[T]he political and financial consequences of the Great Contract were acrimoniously debated in Parliament and in the Court. Some in the Court criticized trading ‘the flowers of the Crown for cash’, considered the financial terms unrealistic and argued that elastic revenues were being exchanged for a fixed income when inflation was still feared. In the Commons the country gentlemen became nervous of a permanent land-tax and had no faith in a corrupt administration. There was too a hardening of views, the result of the king’s flaunting of his powers and the consequent friction with the common law judges, who set restrictive definition upon

the prerogative (150).⁷⁰

In England unlike the continent, the law was not the province of her kings but rather under the jurisdiction of custom, and its interpretation by judges and parliament. While Elizabeth was careful to avoid trespassing in areas of jurisprudence and precedent, James quickly intruded himself into the law-making of the nation, commenting to parliament in 1607 that it “should leave not the law to the pleasure of the judge . . . but let your laws be looked to” (Helgersen 77). This “looking to” involved a complex and bitter rivalry between Francis Bacon, a champion of James’s belief that “kings were the authors of laws, and not the laws of the king,” and Edward Coke, who, just as vigorously, believed the opposite. In this debate the profoundly contingent nature of royal authority was frequently revealed; so much was this the case that Coke felt confident enough to dispute to the King’s face both James’s legal authority and interpretative capability in a famous incident early in his reign⁷¹. Unlike Bacon, Coke’s perception of English jurisprudence descended from a popular conception of the law as framed by custom and interpreted by counselors with the approbation—at best—of the prince. Discussing modes of civic consciousness in the mid-sixteenth century, J.G.A. Pocock provides an apt description of the civic ideal under which Coke operated:

In the territorial and jurisdictional monarchy, the individual took on a

⁷⁰ The “Great Contract” was an innovation by Robert Cecil, designed to raise much-needed money for an increasingly over-spent Court. It proposed to add 200,000 pounds annually to the “royal revenue in return for a number of concessions to parliament, including the abolition of purveyance—the right of the Crown to buy supplies for the Court at less than market price,” as well as other financial changes (168). For a detailed discussion of Cecil’s financial dealings with parliament, see Allan G. R. Smith, “Constitutional Ideas and Parliamentary Developments in England 1603-1625” in Allan G.R. Smith, Ed. *The Reign of James VI and I*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973.

⁷¹ Coke describes this incident in his *Twelfth Reports*, “[T]he king said, that he thought the law was founded upon reason, and that he and others had reason as well as judged: to which it was answered by me that true it was, that G-d had endowed his Majesty with excellent science, and great endowments of nature; but his Majesty was not learned in the laws of his realm of England . . . which law is an art which requires long study and experience before that a man can attain to knowledge of it” (qtd in Pocock, 17).

positive being primarily as a possessor of rights—rights to land, and to justice affecting his tenure of land—and a structure of ascending authority existed mainly as a structure of customs, jurisdictions and liberties in which such rights were embodied and preserved and which rose to meet the descending structure of authority that existed to command its continuance and enforcement (335).

Within this epistemology, it was not for princes to appropriate the function of law-giver—only judges and lawmakers familiar with the customary law of the nation were equipped to undertake its interpretation and application:

The prince was in not position to criticize the application of law by his judges . . . he could only accept (and of course love) the customs of his kingdom on the presumption that, being ancient, they were good and, being the oldest in the world, they were also the best (17).

Although such sanctifying of English law was not new—dating from the *Magna Carta* and forcefully reasserted in Sir John Fortescue's *De Laudibus Legum Anglie* (1468-71), James was the first prince since John to attempt its substantial modification.

Given James's own history as King of Scotland, this is somewhat surprising. Compared to Scottish customs, England was much more kind to its monarchs. Scotland was considerably more conservative of its parliamentary rights than England; during James's rule there, he was subject to a national ideology that was heavily influenced by such thinkers as John Mair and Buchanan, both of whom vested supreme authority in the community rather than the king. Under Buchanan's influence, the first coinage of James VI's reign bore the emblem of a sword with this motto: *pro me si mereor in me* (for me,

against me if I deserve it). Buchanan's influence, however, was hardly long-lasting. By the age of eleven, James would battle for prerogative in Scotland; significantly, shorn of Buchanan's influence, the coins' motto changed to, "Nemo me impune lacessit" (No one may meddle with me with impunity). In some sense, this latter credo would govern James's dealings with both the Scottish and English parliaments for much of his reign.

In both kingdoms, then, James battled not only centuries of precedent and prerogative, but sought to disentangle himself from the fetters of contractual monarchy—a quest that would eventually lead to the English civil war in the mid-seventeenth century. The complex and growing market economy only made the questions of the crown's prerogative more pressing. If Elizabeth knew when to give up her pretensions to market control when it threatened her standing among her subjects, James refused to concede what he saw as his G-d-given rights as King.

In some sense, James can be seen as engaging in a crusade similar to Hamlet's, albeit for very different reasons. Both long for a particular kind of reembodiment—a redeification of the crown—and hence, a resurrection of the regal fantasy by which England as a nation vigorously defines itself, but which it also, and just as vigorously, refuses once the crown seeks the real power that such fantasy promises. It is precisely this anxiety around the death of majesty—an anxiety that plagued James I throughout his reign—and the almost fruitless quest to *remember* (reconstitute) majesty—that constitutes the tragic ethos of the play. Read against the backdrop of the Stuarts' quest for divine absolutism, *Hamlet* is an elegy to that which James sought during the entirety of his rule—a divinely embodied crown. In another fashion, James and Hamlet are struck of the same metal; while both long for majestic royalty unalloyed by the early modern

realpolitik, both seek this goal through thoroughly modern means: dissimulation and deception. Although James rode into London with the iconography of Rome and its warrior-class as his backdrop, his personal credo was not one of transparency and open struggle, but rather chillingly Machiavellian, and as such, quintessentially modern.

* * *

“Who’s there?”
(I. i. 1)

In her essay “We Were Never Early Modern,” Linda Charnes notes the dramatic pedigree of *Hamlet*’s spectral king. Discussing the *Henriad*, Charnes notes an important ontological shift that occurs in *Richard II* in regard to the figure of the king:

Bolingbroke’s usurpation has transformed the ‘sacredness’ of sovereignty (in Bataille’s terms, its heterogeneous nature, its position outside the laws of ‘normal’ production) into just another market relation, rapidly demystifying its operations, thus eliminating the necessary ideological mediation between forms of social commerce. By failing to instill another ‘vanishing mediator’ in the place of royal paternal metaphor, Bolingbroke throws the status of the crown into ontological crisis (Charnes 56).

The first act of the play displays both literally and figuratively the vanishing mediator—the absent king—that haunts the play’s imagination. Figuring a martial king as ghost, there and not there, the play instantiates the notion of the warrior-king’s essential insubstantiality in the early modern context. Rather than a reassertion of royal prerogative, the ghost’s martial dress mocks its own origins—declaiming a monarchical lineage deceased and disclaimed by country and son alike. The history of royal

campaign and combat that the ghost conjures is, in itself, shrouded in uncertainty; it is told by Horatio, an intimate of the ghost's son, but essentially one who is outside the royal lineage. Also, it is a story told in whispers in the dead of night—becoming, in its telling, as insubstantial as the bearer of the armor itself.

Hor. At least the whisper goes so: our last King,

Whose image even now but appear'd to us,

Was as you know by Fortinbras . . .

Similarly, the image of the king himself is shrouded in uncertainty. Although directly confronted with the ghost, the witnesses' language throughout this discussion is stubbornly couched in simile and in a kind of ontological equivocation which, as we have seen above, retreats eventually into historical narrative to stabilize the specter before them.

Mar. Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again

Bar. In the same figure like the King that's dead.

Mar. Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio.

Bar. Looks a not like the King? Mark it, Horatio.

Hor. Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

.

Hor. Stay, illusion:

If thou has any sound or use of voice,

Speak to me . . .

Stop it, Marcellus.

Bar. Tis here

Hor. Tis here

Mar. Tis gone.

We do it wrong, being so majestic,

To offer it show of violence (I. i. 130-132; 141-148).

Marcellus's last comment—"We do it wrong, being so majestic,/ To offer it show of violence" serves as a potent commentary on Horatio's own mode of address throughout this initial encounter with the Ghost of the dead King. Indeed, Horatio's linguistic assailing of the ghost recalls the equivocal and contradictory understanding of "majesty" in the early modern political context. While readers have reasonably assumed that the ghost refuses to speak to Horatio because the latter is not his son, the ghost's "offense" may indeed have another, much more subtle basis. In fact, the ghost is offended not only because Horatio is not Hamlet, but rather because Horatio fails—in his choice of pronoun ("thou" rather than "you") to address the ghost in terms appropriate to the ghost-king's divine royalty.

In his first encounter with the ghost, Horatio stubbornly assaults this specter of martial majesty with the "thou" form of the second-person pronoun. Horatio persists in this even though he has himself assented to Barnardo's remark that "looks a not like the King." Also, what is striking about Horatio's use of "thou" is that he is perhaps the most loyal subject within the play. Not originally from Denmark and thus not truly a subject to the Hamlet who once was king, he nevertheless alone shares in Hamlet's plots for revenge and seems to understand intimately the great offense wrought by Claudius and Gertrude. Yet with all this, in his sole encounter with the divine king for whom he allies with Hamlet to revenge, Horatio offends. Like all of the other characters of the

play aside from Hamlet, he too fails to do adequate homage to this representation of rightful rule, and so, albeit in a manner considerably subtler than the actions of Claudius and Gertrude, contributes to the desecration of majesty that the play so movingly mourns.

Mar. Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio.

Bar. Looks a not like the King? Mark it, Horatio.

Hor. Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

Bar. It would be spoke to.

Mar. Question it, Horatio.

Hor. What art *thou* that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? By Heaven, I charge *thee* speak.

Mar. It is offended.

Bar. See, it stalks away.

Hor. Stay, speak, speak, I charge *thee* speak. *Exit Ghost* (I. i. 45-54).

To be fair to Horatio, he regards the ghost not as ontologically equivalent to the dead king, but as a possibly hallucinatory—if not diabolic—spectral incarnation of the dead king. Yet, as we will see below, representations of kingship were the primary manner in which most beheld the king. Thus, in some sense, to offend representation was to offend the king or queen themselves, as royal figures functioned not as random ciphers to be bandied about, but as a vital system for the remembrance, and in some cases, allegorization of majesty in the daily lives of early modern subjects.

The control and more importantly, manipulation of representation was of particular concern to Elizabeth and James, both of whom were keenly aware of the pitfalls of “being seen”, especially in contexts that might challenge their playing of “majesty.” As is well known, Elizabeth I was obsessively careful of her own pictorial representations; indeed, she micromanaged her own figuration in theatre and in portraiture and became infuriated at depictions that did not strictly adhere to her carefully crafted image of the virgin queen, a mother to her subjects, loved and loving.⁷² In 1563, for example, she issued a draft of a Proclamation Prohibiting Portraits of the Queen. Although Elizabeth crafted her royal image carefully, she was also willing occasionally to modify the majesty of her position—especially if it would benefit her relationships with certain subjects. A telling example is her Latin speech to the heads of Oxford University in 1592, quite late in her reign:

But now the ice is broken: I have either to stick with it or get off of it.
 [She asks the audience to forgive her rusty Latin]. Your merits are not the exceptional and notable praises (unmerited by me) that you have given me. . . . but another thing which is much more precious and more excellent: namely a love that has never been heard nor written nor known in the memory of man. Of this parents lack any example; neither does it happen among familiar friends; no, nor among lovers, in whose fate faithfulness is not always included, as experience itself teaches. It is such that neither persuasions nor threats nor curses can destroy. . . . Such are

⁷² In a famous incident, Elizabeth interrupted the performance of a play at her court because its contents did not please her. Although we do not know exactly what these contents were, we may assume that they contained a discussion or representation that challenged Elizabeth’s management of her own image. In another instance, during a visit of the Spanish ambassador, she voiced her disapproval of a piece that featured a marriage debate between Juno and Diana, exclaiming “this is all against me” (Frye 38)

your merits, of such a kind that I would think them to be everlasting if I also were eternal. For which, if I had a thousand rather than one tongue, I would not be able to express due thanks, so much is the mind able to conceive that it knows not how to express (Marcus, *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 327).

With the advent of James I's rule, such declarations of love and gratefulness would not only end, but would be replaced with a much more fearsome regality, one that would brook no such rhetoric of intimacy with royal subjects. Like Elizabeth, James I was also careful about his public persona; his image-making, however, and thus his relationship with his subjects was radically different from Elizabeth's. As James Goldberg has adeptly demonstrated in *James I and the Politics of Literature*, James worked hard to frame his image as absolutist ruler—divine and unassailable. Quoting a 1611 letter from Lord Thomas Howard to Sir John Harrington, Goldberg delineates the different way in which Elizabeth and James framed their relationship to their subjects:

The contrast between Elizabeth and James is marked in the letter Lord Thomas Howard wrote to Sir John Harrington in 1611 . . . Here is how he sums up the difference between his king and Harrington's queen: "Your Queen did talk of her subjects love and good affections, and in good truth she aimed well; our King talketh of his subjects fear and subjection and herein I think he dothe well too, as long as it holdeth good" (28).

Although the contrast between Elizabeth and James was significant, James himself was not an unproblematic figure of divine solidity. Upon his coronation, James was at once a Roman warrior, entering London triumphantly and yet cowering before the spectre of the

plague that caused him and his followers to roam the country-side in search of somatic safety; a monarch committed to “fearsome rule” but a scholar that nevertheless brooked a quite intimate and deferential relationship with writers from Europe, a regal figure that challenged parliament vociferously in regards to taxation and legislation, but retreated before further irretrievably exasperating an increasingly exasperated parliament.⁷³ As we shall see, the play shifts uncomfortably between heroization and degradation: the king appears in martial dress in the first scene—a heroic figure, but he also appears as a figure in torment—helpless without his son’s intercession. Similarly, the last mention of kings and of kingship by Hamlet is grossly figured in the noisome detail of digestion and death: “We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean begger is but variable service—two dishes but to one table. That ‘s the end” (IV. iii. 22-25).

* * *

The Dead and Dying “King”

The body is with the king,
but the king is not with the
body. The king is a thing—
(Act IV. ii. 27-28)

If the vanishing mediator or absent center of Shakespeare’s text consists in the

⁷³ For a fascinating discussion of the effects of plague during James’s rule, see Eric Mallin, *Inscribing the Time*, especially chapter three where Mallin notes, “The play as a whole and Hamlet in particular skittishly engage a complicated desire that they can neither fully confront nor comfortably resolve: the desire, perhaps again translated from the Essex revolt, to contest and control monarchy, to master the space where authority resides—but not to occupy that space. Instead, contestation and control lead Hamlet to mimic the historical effects of that antimonarch, the bubonic plague: he will prevent the new king’s peace and pleasure” (122). In his book, *Authority and Control*, Derek Hirst notes the following about James’s ability to refrain from pushing parliament and the court too far in regards to reforms he himself favored: “[James’s] memories of the turbulent Edinburgh mob, and perhaps his consciousness of his own awkward appearance and speech made him shun Elizabeth’s dazzling example of courting popularity. Nevertheless his ability to balance the factions in court and church was fully as developed as hers, and he avoided the dangerous alienation of those out of favour that was to disfigure his son’s reign . . . His flexibility and skill at letting sleeping dogs lie served him well in dealing with parliaments and with protestant zealots” (97).

death of a particular fantasy of kingship—the heroic and embodied martial king. Claudius becomes its antonymic replacement. While the ghost functions as a reminder of what is no longer possible (and perhaps what never really was), he nevertheless persists as a potent accusation against the model of kingship that Claudius inhabits. If the medieval king, of which the ghost is a forlorn representation, fought with swords and won countries by wagers in battle, Claudius is a model of the early modern king who fights with his wits, who battles through proclamations. As royal rhetorician, Claudius may be understood as a dramatic—if subversive—embodiment of another king who battled with words rather than swords—James I. Writing during his tenure as King of Scotland, James remarked the following about the mechanics of early modern rule:

This I must say for Scotland and I may trewly vaunt it; Here I set and govern it with my Pen, I write and it is done, And by a clearke of the Councill I govern Scotland now, which others could not doe by the sword (56).

James's contemporaries, however, lamented this manner of rule. As Leah Marcus discusses in her book, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, even James's son dismissed his father's easy confluence of authoring with authority, as did his other subjects:

It had been better his Maiestie had never written any Bookes at all; and being written, better they had perished with the present like *Proclamations*, then have remayned to *Posterity*: For say these Men, Little it befits the Majesty of a *King* to turn Clerke, and to make a warre with the penne, that were fitter to be fought with the Pike; to spend the powers of his so exquisite an understanding upon papers, which had they been spent

on powder, could not have but prevailed ere this for the conquest of
Kingdome (qtd in Marcus 113).

In a similar vein, James's son, Henry, rejected his father's scolding for his inattention to scholarly matters, saying, "I know what becomes a Prince. It is not necessary for me to be a professor, but a soldier and a man of the world . . ." (qtd in Marcus 113).

Our first introduction to Claudius italicizes the rhetorical battle-strategy that characterizes his reign. Whereas old Hamlet's specter conjures the memory of his lost military glory, our introduction to Claudius similarly rehearses a confrontation with this old foe. Instead of martial acts, however, Claudius' response to Norway's threats consists in words—a battle of letters and diplomacy to be delivered not to the challenger, but to his aged uncle. With Claudius, and with this issue, the play signals that we have entered a different world, one closely resembling the machinations of the early modern court: strategic rather than confrontational, Machiavellian rather than Arthurian. Here, military engagement is replaced with rhetorical weapons of legal influence; "bonds of law" rather than the scars of battle. Indeed, in the rhetorically rich context of Claudius' court, like that of Elizabeth and James, the battlefield seems an anachronism, the result of a failure of rhetoric, and Fortinbras' nephew, chomping at the bit, simply a naïve dilettante in the affairs of states. As such, rhetoric rather than force enters the field, and, as we shall see, the battles for legitimacy and survival are fought with these new and thoroughly modern weapons of destruction.

The battlefield is not the only apparent anachronism within the context of Claudius' court. Indeed, the question of patrimony—the fundamental basis upon which royal inheritance rests—similarly seems to be alien to the *weltanschauung* of the Danish

court. The play directly acknowledges only twice the question of Hamlet's patrimony: the significant fact that instead of Claudius, Hamlet is the one who *should* be sitting on the throne.⁷⁴ Not only is this fact all but absent, the play allows almost no space for its discussion or consideration. Claudius's position as "king"—whatever this appellation means in a context of its increasing spectralness—is solidified before the play begins. If *Richard II*, according to Kantrowicz, dramatizes the "cascading from divine kingship to kingship's 'Name,' and from the name to the naked misery of man," in *Hamlet* this process is long done with—and the name of King can be understood as a specialized commodity albeit restricted to a few, but absolutely exchangeable within certain bounds and with more than general acceptance:

Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen
 Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state,

 Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barr'd
 Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
 With this affair along. For all our thanks (I. ii. 8-15).

For Hamlet, however, the crown is not a floating semiotic, wafting down to be worn by whoever is at the right place at the right time. It remains, for him, a fixed symbol of personal divinity—incorporate only in the particular body of a lawful king. While Claudius in his usurpation of the crown expands the notion of the essential corporateness of kingship to its limit, Hamlet's threat to Claudius rests in his refusal of this transmutability. As he notes in a later and different context, but one that resonates

⁷⁴ These mentions are Act III. ii. 331, Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "Sir, I lack advancement" and Act V. ii. 65, Hamlet to Horatio: "He that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother./Popp'd in between the

significantly in the current discussion: the “king is with the body, but the body is not with the king.” Hamlet also here refuses another form of “crowning;” he will not be “crowned” as Claudius’ heir: his son. In this way, Hamlet absents himself from his patrimony. In order to revenge Claudius’s usurpation and his father’s murder, Hamlet must, in some sense, unking himself. He is the prince who must not be a son (to Claudius) and who also must remain perpetually a son (to his dead father).

In the early modern social world, this kind of transmutability was the *sine qua non* of the crown’s effective functioning. The name of crown was, in fact, everywhere linked with the most immediate and universal symbol of transmutability or exchange: English coinage or what were commonly called “crowns” at the time. As Goldberg notes, “The king’s real face is the one stamped on his coins. Real and royal, the image of the king carries currency and value” (Goldberg 46). Not only does the image of the king carry “currency and value,” it itself can be currencied—commodified and revalued—according to its bearer. In her important work, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*, Susan Frye meticulously details the dependence of crown upon its supporting merchants. Discussing *The Queen Majestie’s Passage*, the text that described Elizabeth’s progress in London during her coronation, Frye reads the City’s money-gift to the queen as a moment of contractual obligation and exchange:

Enshrined in this display of civic opulence is the moment when “the right worshipfull maister Ranulph Cholmley, Recorder of the citie, presented to the Quenes’ majestie a purse of crimson satin richly wrought with gold, wherein the citie gave unto the Quenes majestie a thousand markes in gold.” The recorder’s appearance is significant, as he was the official

election and my hopes.”

liaison between city and Crown whose duties included “raising troops or loans for the Queen, offering civic offices to the friends of a crown officer, securing patents for city merchants . . . and especially maintaining the traditional liberties and privileges of the City.” His speech, which Mulcaster paraphrases, asks her directly “not to esteem the value of the gift, but the mynd of the gyvers.” Taking the gift with “bothe her handes” commits her to acknowledge the merchants’ “mynd” (purpose) in this staging of the city’s socio-economic power. At the same time, the recorder’s paraphrased remarks define this moment as one of exchange (41).

Unlike his real-life analogues, Hamlet refuses to be interpellated into the brand of market-monarchy that characterizes not only Claudius’ reign, but that of Elizabeth and James. While Claudius’ first remarks to Hamlet attempt to redefine his status in regard to the new king, from “cousin” to “son,” Hamlet’s reply rejects the terms of this transformation:

King. But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son—

Ham. A little more than kin and less than kind.

King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Ham. Not so, my lord I am too much in the sun (I. ii. 65-70).

To allow Claudius’ ontological redefinition would involve Hamlet in a similar kind of disembodiment: the spectralizing to which the conception of kingship has been subject in the early modern context. It is significant and profoundly ironic that Hamlet’s soliloquy following Claudius and Gertrude’s exit wishes for just such a disembodiment—a suicidal

evaporation of the possibility of existential redefinition, while simultaneously decrying the discursive corruption that makes possible the commodified exchange of *crowns*. Indeed, rather than participate in this new epistemological market-place, Hamlet desires literally to be disembodied, and thus to escape the hurly burly of discursive definition:

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O G-d! G-d!
 How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely (I. ii. 129-137).

In the dialogue with Gertrude that precedes this soliloquy, Hamlet is careful to crystallize the question of ontological corruption as an issue of counterfeit representation. Responding to his mother's importunities: "cast thy knighted colour off. . . /Do not forever with thy vailed lids/Seek for thy noble father in the dust," Hamlet refuses the implication that his mourning is simply a performance of sorrow:

Queen. Thou know'st 'tis common: all that lives must die,
 Passing through nature to eternity.
Ham. Ay, madam, it is common.
Queen. If it be,
 Why seems it so particular with thee?

Ham. Seems, madam? Nay it is. I know not 'seems'.

Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,

Nor customary suits of solemn black

Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,

Nor the dejected havior of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,

That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,

For they are actions that a man might play;

But I have within that which passes show,

These but the trappings and the suits of woe (I. ii. 76-86).

Not only does Hamlet here reject his mother's intimations of counterfeiting, but he refuses the very terms of modern subjectivity, defined increasingly as consisting in opaque and unknowable representation—the "protean man," which as Agnew notes, was "the plastic polymorphous, performative figure that is both the ideal and the nightmare of modernity" (14).

In fact, the early modern court was perhaps the most visible and potent practitioner of the ethic of dissimulation. As historians of James I noted, dissimulation was a crucial and necessary strategy of James's rule:

Anthony Welden claimed that the king's familiar motto, *Beati Pacifici*, Blessed are the peacemakers . . . was joined to another, *Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare*, He who does not know how to dissimulate, does not know how to rule (Goldberg 68).

While Hamlet has routinely been described as a quintessentially “modern” character in Shakespearean criticism—psychologically complex, multi-dimensional, even contradictory, his stubborn allegiance to the idea of divine kingship—fixed, not exchangeable, transparent and heroic— marks him, in this particularity, a profoundly anti-modern character in this most modern of Shakespeare’s plays.⁷⁵ The ghost’s parting exhortation to Hamlet—“Adieu, adieu, adieu, Remember me” is not only a demand of cognitive focus, but a call to recorporealization, in the sense of the return of the crown to its legitimate and divinely-ordained bearer—in this case, Hamlet—father and son. The logic of the King’s two bodies, so brilliantly analyzed by Ernest Kantorowicz in his book of that name, demands that the *corpus mysticum*—the christologically-based understanding of the divine soul—be housed in a legitimate and thus “divined” ruler:

[T]he fiction of the King’s Two Bodies produced interpretations and definitions which perforce would resemble those produced in view of the Two Natures of the G-d-man. Anyone familiar with the christological discussions of the early centuries of the Christian era will be struck by the similarity of speech and thought in the Inns of the Court, on the one hand, and in the early Church Councils on the other; also by the faithfulness with which the jurists applied, unconsciously rather than consciously, the current theological definitions to the defining of the nature of kingship (18-19).

Although Hamlet works hard to resurrect this divine inheritance through the

⁷⁵ Of course, it cannot escape our notice that the refusal of such dissimulations comes from one who is himself a dissimulation—an actor playing a part on the stage. Even though this must be kept in mind, I think it may be bracketed for a moment, especially in considering the importance of Hamlet’s refusal to a more nuanced characterological analysis of Shakespeare’s protagonist in the context of early modern culture.

revenge of his father's murder, the play consistently refuses Hamlet's father's injunction to "remember"—in the sense of re-embodiment. Hamlet himself fails to be the "heir" to his father's martial pedigree to which his father's ghost consistently refers in his apparitions. Rather than engage in open battle with Claudius—as Norway attempts to do—Hamlet instead dissimulates and deceives in order to reach his goal of revenge. By so doing, Hamlet is never able to transcend the political context of Claudius' court, but rather becomes a shockingly adept practitioner of Machiavellian *realpolitik*. In fact, Hamlet loses no time in adopting such a strategy. Faced with his martial ancestor and his injunction to revenge, Hamlet determines almost immediately to adopt a strategy of deception and indirection:

Ham. Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,

How strange or odd some'er I bear myself

As I perchance hereafter shall think meet

To put antic disposition on— (I. v. 177-180)

Much of Hamlet's behavior in the play is predicated upon such dissimulation; his confirmation of Claudius' guilt, for example, proceeds through indirection—he catches "sight" of his guilt at a recreation of the murder of his father. As we know, Hamlet most effectively "remembers" his dead father only through the literal performance of the old king's murder. Like Claudius (and James) Hamlet becomes the author—rather than the actor—of his revenge. In this way, Hamlet aligns himself closely with the strategies adopted by Claudius in his rule, and by implication, with that of Elizabeth, and later James. Authoring his authority—both to revenge his father's death and to revenge the usurpation of his crown—Hamlet marks himself as more Claudius' heir than his father's,

reversing his previous refusal of this identificatory transformation. He is, at this moment, a little more than kind and less than kin.

If Hamlet's behavior may be unproblematically understood to inhabit the early modern world of dissimulation and intrigue, his own conceptions of his mission in regard to his father also depart strikingly from the more traditional—if not medieval—ethos of revenge which would seem to at first animate him. The play shifts uncomfortably from its heroizing of the crown to a tacit endorsement of more market-oriented and as such, Machiavellian, understandings of court relations and identity. In this way, it participates in some of the most pressing ethical issues of its age: in particular, how to reconcile market-defined social relationships, characterized by dissimulation, artifice, and counterfeit, with a social ethic which based itself on honesty, honorable battle and knowability. As Agnew explains in *Worlds Apart*, the theatre itself became a site for playing out these competing ethics in the early modern context:

Seventeenth-century playwrights . . . did impart to their work a conservative and cautionary perspective they had inherited from long tradition of homiletic writing and teaching in England. Like their literary forbears . . . dramatists looked to an imagined past for models against which to judge the shortcomings of their own epoch. . . . They sought to expose the theatricality of ordinary life, from the deceits of cony catchers to the artificial tears of monarchs who framed their faces “to all occasions” (Agnew 123, 127).

These effects of the market ethos—its restructuring and redefinition of emotion, of behavior and of perception—is everywhere evident in Hamlet's own struggle to define

his revenge and to understand the charge which has been put upon him. In ways that are similar to how Claudius understands his position *vis à vis* the throne and its supporters, Hamlet conceives of his task of revenge as a form of debt to his murdered father. Rather than understanding Claudius to be an unlawful usurper of a crown that should be his, Hamlet experiences his revenge as a debt he owes to his father—rather than one that he owes to himself. Thus, just as Claudius' position is dependent upon the collective assent to his election to the throne, Hamlet's revenge is similarly owned by his father—regardless of the grievousness of the injury done to him by Claudius' murder and usurpation. Not only does Hamlet conceptualize his revenge as debt, his initial characterization of his actions conjures the image of an accountant carefully tabulating and retabulating his account-book:

Remember thee?

Ay, poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat

In this distracted globe. Remember thee?

Yea, from the table of my memory

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,

That youth and observation have copied there,

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain,

Unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!

O most pernicious woman?

O villain, villain, smiling damned villain.

My tables

(I. v. 95-105).

Hamlet's "tables" may be understood here in two senses: the chalk-board of memory, the trivialities of which he must now overwrite, and more crucially for us, his "account-book"—the table of debts and repayments: what is, in short, the ethical constitution of the early modern market context.⁷⁶ The play's persistent use of financial metaphors to underscore both the form and character of Hamlet's "due" to his father and his father's own "debt" to heaven firmly inscribe Hamlet's tables as the tables of commodified equivalence. After the performance, Hamlet describes the ghost as a kind of creditor: "I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (III. ii. 263-264). Similarly, standing before Claudius praying, Hamlet refrains from murder, unwilling to send Claudius to heaven while his father remains unavenged, his soul in as-of-yet uncredited, "And how his *audit* stands, who knows save heaven?/But in our circumstance and course of thought/'Tis heavy with him (III. iv. 82-84).

Defined as debt, Hamlet's revenge becomes as spectral, as insubstantial as the figure for which it is presumably waged. Just as old Hamlet, the rightful king, has in this play become at once an uneasy memory and a ghost of itself, Hamlet's debt both defines and obscures his revenge. The play-within-the-play is an interesting instance where Hamlet's memory of his father and his injunction to revenge is both obscured and confirmed. Performed in couplets and in a meter that make the player-king himself seem a quaint "rememberance" of a long-lost historical and dramatic context, Hamlet's play seems to remove further this ideal from the actual context of the Danish court. Rather

⁷⁶ Of course, Stephen Greenblatt's recent book, *Hamlet in Purgatory* alerts us to quite another type of debt with which the play is engaged, that is, the debt that the dead in purgatory claim upon the living. Although written in the context of a religious theocracy that rejected purgatory as theologically unsound, Greenblatt's reading of the play focuses on the semiotic remainders of the belief in purgatory that pepper the play-text (see especially chapter 5, "Remember Me").

than “remembering” Old Hamlet and his manner of rule, the play-within-the-play works to dismember this memory, making it seem a distant and no longer relevant recollection of another time. Where it should revivify the lost king, the player-king’s character and Hamlet’s play itself further spectralizes this now fading semiotic of heroic kingship.

It is, however, only through the play-within-the-play that both the guilt of Claudius and his own motivation for action are clarified for Hamlet; it is also where the debt that Hamlet owes to his father is most explicitly stated as such by the Player King:

P. Queen. The instances that second marriage move

Are base respects of thrift, but none of love

A second time I kill my husband dead

When second husband kisses him in bed.

P. King. I do believe you think what now you speak.

But what we do determine, oft we break.

Purpose is but a slave to memory,

Of violent birth but poor validity,

Which now, the fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,

But fall unshaken when they mellow be.

Most necessary ‘tis that we forget

To pay ourselves what to ourselves is *debt* (III. ii. 177-188, my italics).

For Hamlet, memory is at once a stern and uncertain taskmaster; it tasks him in two ways—as the reminder of the debt that he must revenge and in so doing, repay, and at the same time, as that which in itself is not creditable. To credit the ghost and thus to render his debt valid, Hamlet must credit his memory—lest the ghost be, as Gertrude

later implies, simply a fantasy--“the very coinage” of his brain. Plotting with Horatio, Hamlet stresses the importance of *seeing* Claudius’ guilt writ large on his face. It is this confirmation that serves as the guarantee of the ghost’s debt.

There is a play tonight before the King:
 One scene of it comes near the circumstance
 Which I have told thee of my father’s death.
 I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
 Even with the very comment of thy soul
 Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt
 Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
 It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
 And my imaginations are as foul
 As Vulcan’s stithy (III. ii. 75-83).

It is to this “ocular proof” that Hamlet also subjects his mother in the closet scene that follows the play-within-the-play. Stressing Old Hamlet’s monarchical authority—in the sense of being the semblance of majesty, and also the assurance of majesty’s divinity, Hamlet once again refers to the metaphors of a “bond” or debt in describing his father’s image:

See what a grace was seated on his brow
 Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself
 An eye like Mars threatening to command,
 A station like the herald Mercury
 New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,

A combination and a form indeed

Where every god did seem to set his seal

To give the world assurance of a man (III. iv. 55-62).

Unlike Claudius, Hamlet's father "set his seal/To give the world assurance of a man," and one might add, a king. Claudius in this context is both seen in counterfeit (in a pictorial representation) and as counterfeit—unable to provide a similar guarantee or credit of his royal and moral legitimacy. The comparison raised by this hyperbolic description, one that revels in the semiotics of royal fantasy, however, extends beyond Claudius here to include inevitably the dying and aged queen still on the throne. The rhetoric of royal authority that Hamlet espouses here resonates uncomfortably with the actuality of the court and its ruler during Elizabeth's declining years. Living daily with an increasingly obdurate and irrational monarch—old and vain, haunted and hunted by courtiers, threatened by insurrection—many must have wished for a quick resolution of not only the queen's life, but the significant question of the succession. And with this wish must have come an almost fantastic, unrealistic fantasy for a "royal" personage that would replace Elizabeth, perhaps along the lines of a Henry V, or a Richard I: "the front of Jove himself/ An eye like Mars threatening to command/ A station like the herald Mercury . . ." And yet, in this scene, the ghost appears not to embody the very description that Hamlet provides for his dead father. Rather than striding the battlements as in the first scene, he here seems a diminished figure, seen only by his son, and "stealing away" through an obscure portal:

Ham. Do you see nothing there?

Queen. Nothing at all, yet all that is I see

Hamlet. Nor do you nothing hear?

Queen. No, nothing but ourselves (III. iv. 122-24).

While Old Hamlet exists in a netherworld of heroization and the spectralizing of such heroizing (“Do you see nothing there?”) Claudius’ presentment more easily aligns itself with the existent monarch, and reminds the audience, no doubt uncomfortably, of the current “mildewed” (aged) queen sitting on the throne. Unlike his brother who receives a lengthy description, Claudius’s image is connoted through synecdoche; he is the mildew’d ear “blasting his wholesome brother.” With its connotations of withering and infecting, blasting suggests/conjures the image of unwholesome age and declining wisdom—the “mildewed ear” may not only blast, but may also be blasted—perhaps by the flattering unction(s) of unscrupulous courtiers and advisers.

Although Hamlet here sets forth a study in contrasts, his own place in this dualism is not so clear. While Claudius is clothed in the clear metaphors of vice and market chicanery—a king of “shreds and patches,” a cutpurse, and a slave—Hamlet is similarly not free of blame. During this long scolding of his mother, Hamlet too is scolded—by the very figure he heroizes and is committed to revenge:

Ham. Do you not come your tardy son to chide,

That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by

The important acting of your dread command?

O say.

Ghost. Do not forget. This visitation

Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose (III. iv. 105-110).

Hamlet’s self-condemnation at this moment closely echoes the Player King’s

admonitions to the Player Queen:

Purpose is but a slave to memory,
 Of violent birth but poor validity,
 Which now, the fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,
 But fall unshaken when they mellow be.
 Most necessary 'tis that we forget
 To pay ourselves what to ourselves is *debt*.

Another significant intratextual analogue interposes itself at this moment. Hamlet's inaction at this moment mirrors in opposition the actions of Pyrrhus recounted initially by Hamlet earlier in the play. In his welcome to the players, Hamlet recalls the defeat of Priam by Pyrrhus. As in the Player King's dialogue, this recounted tale conjures another spectral king—Priam, and a similarly spectral warrior, Pyrrhus. In this account, both are heroized at the same time as they are made to seem impossibly distant—in character and function—from the contemporary dealings of the Danish court. Like the image of a colossus that Hamlet will use in the closet-scene to describe his father, the descriptions of Pyrrhus and Priam are constituted of the familiar, yet curiously archaized semiotics of martial heroism and regal martyrdom:

The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
 Black as his purpose, did the night resemble,
 When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
 Hath now his dread and black complexion smeared
 With heraldry more dismal

Unequal match

Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;
 But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
 Th'unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
 Seeming to feel his blow, with flaming top
 Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
 Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear (II. ii. 442-446, 451-457).

Uncomfortably reminding the audience of the circumstances of old Hamlet's death (poisoned in the ear), this account recalls the lost world of heroic, if violent, action that the play itself mourns in the figures of old Hamlet and his son, Hamlet. Echoing this sentiment, Hamlet's soliloquy following the player's performance confirms his own implicitly feminized failing in this regard:

Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
 And can say nothing – no, not for a king,
 Upon whose property and most dear life
 A damned defeat was made (II. ii. 518-523).

Not struck of the same metal as his father, Hamlet, like Claudius, is also counterfeit: he thinks revenge, but does not revenge, just as Claudius thinks prayer, but does not pray. *Sans* fruition, Hamlet's revenge becomes nothing more than fantasy; like the body of the rightful king who has never appeared except as a specter before the play's audience, Hamlet's revenge is similarly a ghost of itself, nothing more than "the very coinage of his

brain.”

After this scene, the ghost no longer appears in the play. The next corporeal representation of his father’s court that confronts Hamlet is the fool Yorick’s skull. As he should do with his father, Hamlet is successful here in “remembering” Yorick, in conjuring his comic personage from this abject remainder:

Ham. Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times and now—how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? . . .

Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

Hor. What’s that, my lord?

Ham. Dost thou think Alexander looked o’ this fashion i’ th’ earth?

Hor. E’en so.

Ham. And smelt so? Pah!

Hor. E’en so, my lord.

Ham. To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why, may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till a find it stopping a bung-hole (V. i. 178-200)?

With the mention of Alexander in a context of worm-ravaged and dessicated skulls--good only to “[stop] a bung-hole”—the plays signifies the death of the regal fantasy that has heretofore sustained it. Hamlet here registers a new cynicism that disallows even the

fantasy of regality that has animated him, if ineffectually, up to this point. Indeed, through the abject remainder that Hamlet injects with the “specter” of the great warrior and king, Alexander, Hamlet reburies what has been revealed as an unrememberable national fantasy: the *Kingdom* is dead, long live its memory.

After this scene, however, Hamlet emerges as a more potent challenger of Claudius’ reign. Having buried the fantasy of kingship that his father represents, and in so doing, metonymically burying his father, Hamlet now resurrects himself—literally from the grave—as “the Dane”: the rightful king. Disputing Laertes’ right so vociferously to mourn Ophelia in the presence of her presumed lover, Hamlet here inserts himself as the legitimate bearer of royal authority:

Ham. What is he whose grief
Bears such emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wond’ring stars and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet the Dane.

At this moment, Hamlet traverses a significant identificatory landscape, moving from aggrieved son to revenging and rightful heir. As “the Dane” Hamlet even coopts the majesty of Laertes’s mourning for himself. In answer to his own question—“what is he whose grief...” he inserts himself as the only fit subject—because majestic—to mourn with such otherworldly and imperial passion.

His interruption of Laertes here semantically (linguistically) reenacts his prior interruption of Claudius’s England-bound embassy, the content and context of which he, in the next scene, recalls for Horatio. In this narration, Hamlet tells the story of his own

self-ordination as the authentic ruler—as “the Dane” —forestalled from power by Claudius. In his deceptive cooption of the Danish “seal”—and in his resealing of Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s commission with his own hand— Hamlet metonymically appropriates the office of king. By his hand, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are condemned to death, and with their deaths, Hamlet rehearses his later condemnation and execution of the usurper of his and his father’s crown: Claudius.

While the telos of the play at this point leads inexorably to Hamlet’s murder of Claudius, the final scene of the play resists this longed for consummation, staging Hamlet’s actual revenge almost as an aside. Claudius’s murder is hardly commented upon by the key figures in the play. While the spectators cry “Treason, treason” after Hamlet has stabbed Claudius, it is Laertes’s brief commentary that resonates to signify the relative insignificance of his death: “He is justly serv’d/It is a poison temper’d by himself (V. ii. 331-332). In fact, one might argue that Claudius’s ontological death occurs much earlier in the play, perhaps, at the instant of Hamlet’s self-styling as “the Dane” considered above.

With Claudius’ death, Hamlet is finally able to claim his rightful identification as King of Denmark. This identification, however, is achieved only at the moment of death; as such, Hamlet as King is a spectral figuration—much like his father’s ghost at the beginning of the play. The last scene of the play thus stages not just revenge, but identificatory insurrection: while Hamlet has successfully avenged his father’s death and usurpation, in the context of so doing, he himself has usurped his father’s place. Hamlet becomes now the ghost of “the Dane”; he will spectrally haunt the Danish court, supplanting his father as the woeful and wronged ruler:

O G-d, Horatio, what a wounded name.

Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me.

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart.

Absent thee from felicity awhile.

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

To tell my story (V. ii. 349-354).

Unlike his father, Hamlet is able to pass on his mantle to a rightful heir—in this case, Fortinbras. In some sense, Fortinbras becomes the Hamlet that Hamlet never was: a model of forthright and vigorous rule—ready to claim “vantage and right” without hesitation or indirection. Fortinbras, in fact, becomes the idealized son and ruler of the play’s imagination. Through him and through the death of Hamlet, the fantasy of regality that the play at once interrogates and mourns resolves into a stabilizing incarnation.⁷⁶

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⁷⁶ Of course, critics have also suggested that James is a historical analogue for Fortinbras. In his article, “Hamlet and the Scottish Succession,” Stuart Kurland puts forward a compelling argument suggesting that *Hamlet* registers the profound anxiety occasioned by the succession question at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Recounting historical sources from 1599-1601, Kurland suggests that the character of Fortinbras incarnates the nightmare vision of a Stuart coup of Elizabeth’s crown: “From Antwerp in the spring of 1599, John Petit reported news out of Scotland that ‘the King intends to gather grapes before they are ripe, and his brother of Denmark will assist him with 10,000 men.’ There were rumors that ‘for a kingdom’ James would ‘become a counterfeit Catholic, like the King of France.’ ‘The Scots here are in great hopes, but all they say need not be believed,’ Petit wrote, concluding that ‘Means should be taken to prevent that King cutting the grass under Her Majesty’s feet’ (32). A month later Petit wrote again, from Liege, that James ‘would attempt to gather fruit before it is ripe, but cannot find friends to assist him; the French King will not . . . and the Scottish nobility do not desire to see him King of England’ (33). Again, less than six weeks later, Petit wrote from Liege, ‘A Scot at the Spa said that his King had a promise from the Queen to succeed her; that if she perform it not, he has made many friends, both in England and abroad, especially in Denmark, and has no doubt of carrying it; and that he would undoubtedly be a Catholic, or give the liberty of religion which he has promised’ (34).

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