TIME AND CAUSALITY IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

PLOTTING REVENGE

Linc Kesler

Time and Causality in Early Modern Drama

The opening of the first commercial theatre in London in 1579 initiated a pattern of development that radically reshaped representation. The competition among theatres required the constant production of new works, creating an interplay between the innovations of producers and the rapidly changing perceptions of audiences. The result was a process of incremental change that redefined perceptions of time, action, and identity. Aristotle in the *Poetics* contrasted a similar set of formal developments to the earlier system of the epics, which, like many predecessors of early modern drama, had emerged from largely oral traditions. Located in the context of contemporary relations between the academy and Indigenous communities, *Time and Causality in Early Modern Drama: Plotting Revenge* traces these developments through changes in the revenge tragedy form and questions our abilities, habituated to literacy, to fully understand or appreciate the complexity and operations of oral systems.

Linc Kesler has a B.A. from Yale University and a Ph.D. from The University of Toronto, both in English literature. He is now an emeritus professor at the University of British Columbia. In his early career he taught early modern English literature and literary theory at Oregon State University, while also leading the establishment of the state's first Ethnic Studies department and other services for American Indian and other under-represented students and working on oral history and other projects with Oregon tribal organizations. In 2003 he became the first director of First Nations and Indigenous Studies at UBC, developing curriculum centred on research partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations and advanced uses of digital technologies. He subsequently became the director of the First Nations House of Learning and senior advisor to the president on Aboriginal Affairs, leading the development and implementation of the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan and the establishment of units such as the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, the Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Health, and the Indigenous Research Support Initiative. Since leaving teaching and administration, he has returned to research on early modern English drama. His Indigenous ancestry is Oglala Lakota from the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota.

Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture

To learn more about this series, please visit https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Renaissance-Literature-and-Culture/book-series/SE0537

Time and Causality in Early Modern Drama

Plotting Revenge

Linc Kesler

Contents

Acknowledgements

Many people, both inside and outside of the academy, have contributed to this book, often in ways they could not have anticipated: it has been a very long time coming. Most immediately, I'd like to thank Stephen Guy-Bray, Naomi Conn Liebler, and other readers at Routledge, and Darlene Zeleney for their reading and thoughtful comments at various stages of its production. I'd like to acknowledge my appreciation and debt to my daughters, Emma and Marika, for their counsel and perceptive observations at many points. Most especially, I'd like to acknowledge my profound appreciation to my wife and partner Paula Renaud for her unwavering support, her indefatigable intellectual curiosity and perspicacity, and her superb editing skills. Without her, this book would not be.

Introduction

This book is about hermeneutics—how we interpret experiences based on what we already know and work to understand that which is unfamiliar or different. It is also about blindness and insight—how the interpretive schema we already have allows us to identify and interpret the familiar with subtlety and precision, but also, at times, to fail to recognize or misinterpret the unfamiliar, and how interpretive schema may change over time, either through our conscious efforts to absorb and understand new experiences, or perhaps without our realizing it, in response to changing circumstances.

More specifically, it is about drama, and especially tragedy, and is an attempt to understand why the two great periods of tragedy, that of Attic Greece and Elizabethan and Tudor England, lasted for such a short time, had such similar trajectories, and changed and modified perception and the ways in which Shakespeare and other artists have been interpreted and used over time. Over centuries they have become icons of Western culture and, for many, icons of what it means to be fully literate. For some, they have also operated as symbols of misapprehension and oppression in their association with literacy and all that it represents.

For me, thinking about these matters has had a long and circuitous path. Attracted to literature and early modern drama as an undergraduate, I completed a Ph.D. and taught early modern literature and literary theory for 20 years. By the end of the 1980s, however, other concerns were claiming my attention. Increasingly disturbed by the often unconscious but entrenched racism that had long smouldered in my personal experience and professional life, and recognizing the increasingly difficult aspects of my responses, I found it necessary to find a way to direct that energy towards some more positive outcome. I began working with Oregon American Indian tribal groups on initiatives in higher education, and with them and colleagues, eventually established services for American Indian and other minority students and finally the state's first ethnic studies department. On the basis of that experience, I moved to the University of British Columbia to establish curriculum for a new First Nations studies program. As events

developed there, I eventually took on a more central role and worked for ten years as the lead in the establishment and implementation of the university's first Indigenous strategy. In response to the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada addressing the century of abuses in Canada's system of Indian residential schools, I worked to establish the university's Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre. That centre provides access to the TRC records, maintains links with survivors and communities, and works to assure that awareness of Indigenous history and concerns persists as core elements of Canadian education. At the end of that time, when I was finally able to return to early modern studies, I was thinking about interpretation in an entirely different way.

As the beneficiary of an education at both Yale and the University of Toronto and years of teaching literature and theory, I was well versed in the theory and practice of literacy, but like so many of us, unable to see many of its larger implications. In spite of an early graduate seminar with Marshall McLuhan, extensive study of Slavic semiotics and the works of Jakobson, Bogatyrëv, Tynjanov, Vološinov, Baxtin, and the Prague school, and research in the works of Jack Goody, Brian Street and other theorists of literacy and orality, I had the theories, but not the implications. My conversations with residential school survivors gave me a very different perspective on those theories and also helped me to better understand my experiences with my Oglala Lakota grandparents on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota and my mother's experiences at the Haskell Indian Boarding School in the early twentieth century—experiences that she refused to discuss until close to her death. Sometimes these realizations happened slowly or in stages and sometimes they coalesced in particular moments. In 2006, not long after arriving at UBC, for instance, I was added somewhat belatedly to a high-level search committee on the university's second campus. My service had some unanticipated ironies.

The circumstances for Indigenous people in Canada were then, as now, difficult, though some things now are rapidly changing. In 2006, as the TRC was forming, more comprehensive information on Indian residential schools was just beginning to come to light. Operating for more than a hundred years, the schools were an important part of the government's attempt to eradicate Indigenous cultures. Those schools, run in Canada by churches for the state, had brutalized many generations of Indigenous children, forcibly removing them from their families and communities, often for years, and subjecting them to physical, psychological, and, in many instances, sexual abuse. Many students died, with mortality rates in some schools at times exceeding 60%, and nearly all who survived were deeply affected by what happened to them. Among the explicit missions of the schools was to interrupt the transmission of Indigenous knowledge.

Students, forced to speak only English, were subjected to a harsh regime of work and a steady diet of shame and guilt. The curriculum included only the basic literacy needed for the absorption of Canadian and Christian values. The last school closed in 1996, and among my first students at UBC were some who were survivors.[1]

Other changes were also in process. From 1885 to 1951 it was illegal under the Indian Act for Indigenous people to hire lawyers or pursue legal actions against the Crown. In the later twentieth century, however, a series of court cases had begun to change the legal landscape. One of the most famous of these was *Delgamuuk'w v. British Columbia*. Through it, hereditary leaders from the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en communities in northern British Columbia sought to protect their lands by pursuing a land claim against the state. Proving such a claim in the colonial courts, however, required that communities demonstrate long and continuous occupation of the lands and continued adherence to traditional customs. The Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en, like many of the communities on the West Coast, did not have written records. They maintained their histories and alliances through highly developed systems maintained and preserved orally, most visibly through large gatherings held to commemorate important events, announce and confirm internal arrangements, recount histories, and negotiate agreements between communities. These events, generally known as potlatches, had been banned under the Indian Act from 1884 to 1951, though the traditions and work persisted, often clandestinely, and always under threat of punishment. The oral histories maintained this way were and are crucial in preserving records of lineages, relations, land use, and rights.

After much internal discussion within their communities, the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en decided to perform the traditional oral narratives, the *adaawk* and *kungax*, that traced habitation and authority over lands through generations, in court, even though these performances would necessarily be recorded and risked compromising the operations of the traditional system. After months of performance and testimony, Chief Justice Allan McEachern summarily dismissed their testimony as hearsay and inadmissible. Before the white man came, he concluded, they had had no history, and "there is no doubt, to quote Hobbs [sic], that aboriginal life in the territory was, at best, 'nasty, brutish, and short.'"[2] His judgement was overturned on appeal in the supreme courts of both British Columbia and Canada, and though his comments were sharply rebuked, they have not been forgotten in Indigenous communities. The difference between the two systems could not have been made clearer.

I arrived at UBC just after McEachern had become the Chancellor, to the consternation of many Indigenous students who refused to be tapped with the chancellor's hat at graduation, putting an end to a long tradition. McEachern was also on the search committee to which I had been

appointed. With the university president and a few other officials, we flew on some occasions in a small charter jet between the two campuses. As the other officials had other meetings, McEachern and I occasionally found ourselves having lunch together. To avoid pointless acrimony, we settled on a relatively neutral interest we had in common—Shakespeare. The irony of all this was not lost on me: clearly for MacEachern, Shakespeare and Indigenous oral traditions lived in very different worlds, barely able to see each other if at all. Shakespeare was clearly a zone of relative comfort for him; increasingly less so for me.

In such politicized circumstances, and especially in hindsight, the association of Shakespeare and literacy with cultural supremacy are easy to see, but in other ways, their more subtle operations might not be. The past 50 years have seen emergence of many Indigenous writers, academics, and media producers in both mainstream and experimental venues, and even in residential schools, Indigenous people used literacy as a means of resistance.[3] Even so, the anger of many Indigenous people, and especially residential school survivors, towards literacy, its imposition, and the erasure of culture it involved has remained very strong. After so many years of suppression, the operations of non-literate Indigenous cultures, or the non-literate traditions in cultures operating under conditions of mixed literacy, remain difficult to understand for outsiders and for many who, through the residential schools and other circumstances, have been alienated from them. Without other people at least attempting to understand the depth of those experiences, the ways they continue and resonate in the present, the ferocity of efforts to maintain and strengthen cultural continuity, and the anger and disappointment surrounding what is still effectively their erasure persist. Without some appreciation of the very different systems of knowledge and information that have structured Indigenous and Western societies and the ways that they have been differentially validated, there is very little basis for progress beyond the conflictual venues of courts, blockades, misunderstandings, and recriminations. Even in English, we are speaking different languages. And it certainly makes it harder for some of us to appreciate Shakespeare and other Western writers.

In many academic fields there is now a strong interest in addressing the injustices of the past and the role that Western education has played within them. In Shakespeare and early modern studies, that movement was first apparent in the challenges to orthodoxy made by feminist scholars in the 1980s. It was a truly exciting time in organizations such as the Shakespeare Association of America. Subsequent waves of gender and post-colonial theorists, and, more recently, writers from racialized groups and others attentive to these issues, have changed the landscape in these fields, especially as their approaches are adopted more widely by other scholars. In the past few years there have been significant additions to the

published literature by Ian Smith, Miles Grier, Brandi Adams, Dennis Britton, and others who have built on the ongoing work of Joyce MacDonald and earlier scholars to develop an expanding discourse. Recent anthologies such as *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* and *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies* are evidence of considerable growth in this field.[4] Writers such as Miles Grier have also looked at the role of Shakespeare in colonial/Indigenous encounters in North America. In other fields considerable work has also been done for years in documenting early traditions of Indigenous writings in North America and on Indigenous encounters with Europeans in England and other European venues.[5]

Smith's work in *Black Shakespeare* is particularly valuable in directing attention not just to the uses and representations of blackness in Shakespeare, but to the ways in which race has permeated assumptions of power and orthodoxy. Particularly powerful is his delineation, following James Baldwin, of the processes of erasure that operate pervasively in both daily life and the academy. These processes continue to affect the lives of Indigenous peoples as well.[6] The kind of erasure noted by Smith has generated both academic and political responses. Particularly following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* and the passage of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in 2007, there have been significant calls, especially in Canada, for the development of decolonizing and Indigenizing academic frameworks, though the structure of such efforts is still very much under discussion.[7] That activity has been especially robust in discussions of research ethics, in which Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 1999 *Decolonizing Methodology* set an early standard.[8] Anthologies such as *Indigenous Research Design: Transnational Perspectives in Practice* track some of the recent developments of this discourse. While much of this discourse is necessarily concerned with exposing the presumptions and incursions of Western researchers, another thread is now developing, represented by this statement by two emerging Lakota scholars:

> *Decolonization* will always be preoccupied with *colonization* and consequently decolonization's efforts at resisting and refusing colonization will always be constrained by its own logics and discourses. [9]

Such thinking has appeared in many other resistant discourses and often resulted in efforts to establish separatist practices. These scholars, however, join many others in suggesting an approach based on relationality. The premise is not that others should attempt to master (or perhaps "capture") Indigenous thought—a highly problematic aspiration—but rather should strive to develop more functional and equitable modes of exchange and reciprocity with those who already think that way. The

approach advocated here is in the hope that better understanding of the origins and thought that creates areas of blindness in our approaches may better prepare us for such exchanges.

Perhaps necessarily, much of the intervention of the thinking surrounding these issues in early modern drama and Shakespeare has been through the media of print and writing. These efforts broaden the discursive field and to some extent over-write what now appear to be the retrograde excesses of the past. The notion of over-writing, however, might in itself give us pause. The University of British Columbia is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people, and, unlike the circumstances at many universities, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm people are very much still here. They have persisted in this location since the last ice age, though they now occupy only on a small remnant of their former lands. Over the past century the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm and the other Indigenous communities of this area have seen the vast majority of their lands seized, paved over, and built upon. Now the city, their lands are all but unrecognizable. Recently, through protracted protest, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm were able to prevent the destruction of c̓əsnaʔəm, one of the oldest archeological sites in North America, being paved over by developers.

The relentlessness of progress, of development and the paving process, appears unstoppable. But so too are the processes of the academic world, in which every new development occasions new work. The imperatives for redress are also a form new territory and an opportunity for new writings. This book is one of them. But as written work and academic formulation, they also hold the potential for further appropriation, alienation, and replacement of that which is not written, and cannot or should not be. While those of us who write cannot capture the unwritten and oral social structures of the past and those through which some Indigenous peoples continue to live, we can develop more thoughtful approaches to what we are doing—to what we know and do not know, and what we really cannot hope to capture, reprocess, or replicate. Doing so may give us a better basis for communications and exchanges with people who are not like us and do not strive to be.

Perhaps it might also give us a different way to look at the past, even in England. Returning to early modern literature after many years of addressing these questions on a daily basis, I returned as well to a question I had begun thinking about even before that time. For us, as for Justice MacEachern and many Indigenous people, Shakespeare and his contemporaries are icons of literacy. But that notion of "literacy" is culturally produced, and Shakespeare and his contemporaries were part of its production. To what extent do we project backwards onto these artists and their era our own assumptions about what literacy means based upon our

habituation to what it has come to mean, in spite of our best efforts and a growing body of scholarship on early modern literacy? How does our habituation to literacy, even as it is now undergoing significant changes with the advent of electronic media and newer regimes of knowledge and organization, interfere with our ability to see this period, as perhaps not really as much like us as we might have thought?

We do know that the development of drama in London after 1580 was very rapid, and also that its most productive period was over fairly quickly—certainly by the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623, the point at which Shakespeare's work passed irrevocably into the realm of the literate. We know that the group of significant playwrights were, to varying degrees, literate, but might surmise that the variability among their audiences was much greater. We know that much of the Folio, unlike Jonson's ambitiously titled *Works* published some seven years earlier, was compiled, not from manuscripts and texts, but from the orally preserved memories of actors and other participants. How are we to think about the appearance of these texts, their development, and, eventually, their participation in the production of habits that, for us, have become both iconic and natural, but have also led to results such as the Indian residential schools?

In attempting to answer these questions, I will be proposing a set of five closely related propositions:

1 Drama operated in the long and complex transition between oral practices and an increasingly influential print culture. This is neither a new or controversial proposition, though the way in which drama operated within it has perhaps not been sufficiently considered. In considering it, I will advance some hermeneutic analysis by looking at two classic theories of tragedy, those of Aristotle and Nietzsche. Both advanced significant insights, but argued in nearly opposite ways, and both were constrained by their suppositions and commitments of their own positions in the transitions of culture. Considered together they offer ways of thinking about the blind spots incurred in each and speak to the location of drama, and especially tragedy, in this transition.

2 Drama, and especially tragedy, developed as a set of sequential structures—not just in that they had a traceable history, but in that their development had a source and a logic in which each development set the stage for the next. Commercial drama began with the opening of the theatres in 1576, just as the period of Attic Greek tragedy began with the development of competitive festival performances. Those changes of venue, so different from the more encompassing representational venues that had preceded them—the epics for the Greeks, the more repetitive and ritualized performances of medieval drama for

the English—produced a profound restructuring, dividing representation into smaller, formally complete and comparable representational units, but also setting in motion market dynamics that necessitated innovation. That change had a structure that was determinate, producing some of the changes observed by Aristotle and lamented by Nietzsche. Affecting many categories of time, action, and identity, it dismantled the more holistic world of oral modes of organization, replacing them with the narratives of isolated linear causality and identity theorized by Aristotle. In the process, perhaps not surprisingly, it also produced exactly those features in mainstream education Indigenous students have found most troubling.

3 Internal to these changes and absolutely critical to them was a second hermeneutic that I argue to have been active in audiences' interpretations and reactions to plays as they emerged in sequence. Audiences accustomed to existing organizations of representation based in repetition, or in other forms, such a bear-baiting, characterized by more immediate actions, were not accustomed to the slower and patient, but critically important explications of causal sequences that emerging plot structures of tragedy involved: those had to be learned. As more complex plots emerged and audiences became naturalized to them, the prediction of actions became more habitual, provoking a disjunction between the apparent knowledge of tragic figures, especially heroes, and the expectations of audiences. The ensuing crisis in tragic representation resulted in the encapsulation and parody of tragic plots in New Comedy—just as Nietzsche was later to lament.

4 In the development of this second hermeneutic, a second discrepancy of perspectives emerged, from that formed *within* a pattern and the ability to see the pattern as a whole. The suspense of a play such as *Othello* results from audiences seeing a pattern that a character internal to the play could not. On a larger scale, it is not hard to imagine that each playwright and company, addressing the immediate circumstances of mounting a new production and addressing the opportunities as they saw them, did not, or could not have seen the larger pattern in which they were located. That is significant in imagining their responses, but also in thinking about our own. We have for centuries recognized the genius of authors (even as both Foucault and Stephen Orgel have reminded us that they are in part our own invention) and explained the themes of their work as explorations (or inventions, as Harold Bloom has argued) of the human psyche.[10] Seen in the context of this larger pattern, however, their genius appears constrained by their necessary responses to structural imperatives over which they had little control. Those larger patterns were lived, but not necessarily seen or understood—just as our own perceptual precepts are.

5 As for that larger pattern, the sequence of development, from the first commercial dramas to the last of the great tragedies, may be seen to form a kind of arc of development that had a "beginning, a middle, and an end"—replicating in their development the pattern defined by Aristotle at the core of the individual tragedy. This unusual development, in which inner organization develops in a way congruent to the larger pattern including it, is something like the "recapitulation theory" occasionally, and often unconvincingly proposed in biology, that ontogeny replicates phylogeny. That drama and tragedy should internally "tell the story" of their own development, may simply be a quirk of chance, or, more likely, the manifestation of a kind of developmental logic operating on two levels. In any event, it may well have operated on both levels to reinforce habits of thought that assert the importance of sequence, prediction, and method that were relevant to the emerging world of written records, capitalism, and investment.

This last is also hermeneutic in that, for many of us, this pattern only becomes visible now as the era of print literacy it helped to define has itself become increasingly encapsulated and replaced by other processes and formulations, as, for instance, the hierarchic organizational patterns dominating Western information systems from the seventeenth through the mid-twentieth centuries give way to the associative linking and searching systems of electronic communications and the experiences they offer and structure. Difficult to see, or see outside of, during the period of its ascendancy, the pattern that emerged in drama and consolidated in the regime of print literacy has become visible from the outside, through the perspectives of other people who are not and have not been within it, such as those in traditional Indigenous communities, or through the perspectives of a mainstream culture now more generally moving in other directions.

Paths for Readers with Different Interests

For readers who find all of the propositions advanced above and their interactions intriguing, reading the entire volume, perhaps in sequence, might be the most satisfying. For those interested in literary theory, Chapter 1 might be especially interesting: it encapsulates, in theoretical form, the argument elaborated through the fuller discussions and interpretations that follow.

For readers primarily interested in thinking about the morphology and transitions between literary forms, the second part, including Chapters 2 and 3, may be of particular interest: these chapters deal with antecedents to competitive and commercial drama and the transition between forms and practices encompassing and mnemonic in function, and how they have

developed over time. Chapter 2 is concerned primarily with epics, as they have been understood to be organizational structures of oral cultures, and as they may be seen to be affected by their migration into written forms, as well as some parallel developments in some thinking about Indigenous cultures. Chapter 3 is concerned more specifically about medieval representation and especially medieval festival and religious dramas and their mnemonic functions as distinct from the commercial dramas that would follow them.

Readers interested primarily in the commercial dramas that emerged after 1576, especially in revenge tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy, will find the third part, Chapters 4–9 of particular interest. Please be aware, however, that these chapters are not intended to provide complete readings of these plays, but to explicate the pattern of development in and between them that define a sequence elaborated through developments in their internal structures.

Chapter 10 (Part IV) may be of interest to all readers whose endurance has taken them through their selection of earlier parts and returns to the themes of hermeneutics and cultural interaction with which this book has begun.

Notes

1 See the extensive reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
2 For McEachern's decision see: *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1991* CanLII 2372 (BC SC). https://canlii.ca/t/1g2kh. For an analysis shortly following the decision, see B. Douglas Cox, "The Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en as 'Primitive' Peoples Incapable of Holding Proprietary Interests: Chief Justice McEachern's Underlying Premise in Delgamuukw." *Dalhousie Journal of Legal Studies* 1 (1992): 141–60. For a more recent analysis, see John Borrows, "Sovereignty's Alchemy: An Analysis of Delgamuukw v. British Columbia." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 37, no. 3 (1999): 537–96. DOI: 10.60082/2817-5069.1522
3 See, for instance, Justin Gage, *We Do Not Want the Gates Closed Between Us*: Native Networks and the Spread of the Ghost Dance (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020).
4 Ian Smith, *Black Shakespeare: Reading and Misreading Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Ayana Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Cassander L. Smith, Nicholas R. Jones, and Miles P. Grier, eds., *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies* (New York: Palgrave, 2018); Miles P. Grier, "Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England's Early Imperial Imagination." In *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush, 193–220 (New York: Routledge, 2015); Miles P. Grier, "Staging the Cherokee *Othello*: An Imperial Economy of Indian Watching." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (January 2016): 73–106.
5 See, for instance, Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks*: Native Signatures of Assent (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

6 Ian Smith, 31–32.
7 United Nations General Assembly, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." October 2, 2007. UN Document A/RES/61/295. Available at https://documents.un.org.
8 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd ed. (London: ZED Books, 2021).
9 Kaylen J. James and Kellyn J. James, "Putting Research into the Heart: Relationality in Lakota-Based Research." In *Indigenous Research Design: Transnational Perspectives in Practice*, ed. Elizabeth Samida Huaman and Nathan D. Martin, 243–62, 246 (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2023).
10 Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 101–20 (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Stephen Orgel, *The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023); Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998).

Reference List

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

Borrows, John. "Sovereignty's Alchemy: An Analysis of Delgamuukw v. British Columbia." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 37, no. 3 (1999): 537–96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.1522.

Cox, B. Douglas. "The Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en as 'Primitive' Peoples Incapable of Holding Proprietary Interests: Chief Justice McEachern's Underlying Premise in Delgamuukw." *Dalhousie Journal of Legal Studies* 1 (1992): 141–60.

Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1991 CanLII 2372 (BC SC). https://canlii.ca/t/1g2kh.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 101–20. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

Gage, Justin. *We Do Not Want the Gates Closed Between Us: Native Networks and the Spread of the Ghost Dance*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020.

Grier, Miles P. "Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England's Early Imperial Imagination." In *Scripturalizing the Human: the Written as the Political*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush, 193–220. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Grier, Miles P. "Staging the Cherokee *Othello*: An Imperial Economy of Indian Watching." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (January 2016): 73–106.

James, Kaylen J., and Kellyn J. James. "Putting Research into the Heart: Relationality in Lakota-Based Research." In *Indigenous Research Design: Transnational Perspectives in Practice*, edited by Elizabeth Samida Huaman and Nathan D. Martin, 243–62. Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2023.

Lyons, Scott Richard. *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Orgel, Stephen. *The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Smith, Cassander L., Nicholas R. Jones, and Miles P. Grier, eds. *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 2018.

Smith, Ian. *Black Shakespeare: Reading and Misreading Race*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed. London: ZED Books, 2021.

Thompson, Ayanna, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Thrush, Coll. *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Collected Reports. https://nctr.ca/records/reports/#trc-reports

United Nations General Assembly. A/res//61/295, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2 October 2007. UN Document A/RES/61/295. Available at https://documents.un.org.

Part I
A Theory of Tragedy

1 Nietzsche, Aristotle, and a Theory of Tragedy

> The best turned out, most beautiful, most envied type of humanity to date, those most apt to seduce us to life, the Greeks—how now? They of all people should have needed tragedy?
>
> (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1886)[1]

Why indeed should the Greeks have needed tragedy? Or, having needed it, why should they no longer have needed it, or at least no longer produced it, after the age of Euripides? A similar question may be asked in another context: why in the early modern period should the English have produced such significant tragedy, but only for such a limited time? And, finally, if these occurrences of tragedy are seen to be historically restricted and remote, what accounts for their similarity? Aristotle's *Poetics* began a tradition in Western dramatic theory of not only subsuming all drama under the rubric of tragedy but defining tragedy as a set of isolated formal features that have appeared universal and removed from the very notion of historical juncture. Tragedy has emerged from such accounts as, if not universally producible, at least universally accessible—a representation of "human nature" ("men in action") that audiences at different times respond to in "the same way," affirming not only the play's greatness but the essential similarity binding its many audiences into a single community of perceiving subjects. Though the larger issues of the emergence and development of drama have not often progressed beyond these accounts, Lawrence Clopper posed this question yet again: "How could this phenomenon, the emergence of a dramatic tradition, have occurred a second time in Western history?"[2] His answer is detailed and specific, putting Elizabethan and Tudor drama in a long chain of developments, but does not address the explosive and profound development of these particular forms. It is worth returning to these earlier foundational accounts to see not only what they have to offer but how each may complement the limitations of the other and provide a more satisfying explanation.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) located the problem of universality in tragedy in a somewhat different context. Nietzsche's account was predicated not upon the assumption of the universality of tragedy but on its impossibility in the social conditions of his time. His project was rather the recovery of those conditions under which the universality of tragedy might again become possible. But even though it is for its images of a distant and romantic universal, the Apollinian,[3] the Dionysian, the heroically striving individual, that it is most often remembered, Nietzsche's theory offers what Aristotle's does not—an account of tragedy that is necessarily, if perplexedly, historic. In arguing that history itself is a cultural production of the rationalist framework he would eschew and calling for a return to tragedy and a conceptual system based on myth in which that notion of history would have no meaning, Nietzsche was arguing simultaneously for both the explanatory power of history and its limitation. Tragedy was, in Nietzsche's account, both the beginning and the end to history and not only a way of imagining change but a means of affecting change and ending what it imagines. This argument pointed to a social function for tragedy that was both more radical and more specific, bound to concepts of history and social structure and the explanatory system that constituted them, and intimately tied to larger issues of conceptualization and change.

In retrospect there is a curious though logical relation between these two perspectives, as if each, in viewing the same phenomenon from the opposite ends of the history that separates them, was able to see what the other could not. Considered together, they suggest a kind of conceptual closure and the definition of a period dominated by the very concepts of form and history over which they differed. Beyond that, in their differences, and the problems they leave unresolved, they point to the constitutive role of the underlying technological environment in which both tragedy and their own thought took place—the technology of written representation. I will argue here that these theories, in what they say and are unable to say, point to the underlying significance of literacy as the technological context for the development, operation, and interpretation of tragedy and that drama and particularly tragedy in both the Greek classical age and early modern England operated as a transitional technology, reformulating the conceptual categories of cultures in which oral transmissions and exchanges still played a significant role into categories appropriate to increasingly literate circumstances. Arguments for the extensive effects of the transition from orality to literacy in the classical age, the Middle Ages, and early modern England were persistently advanced more than half a century ago by theorists such as Eric Havelock, Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, Brian Stock, and Jesse Gellrich. Many developments in contemporary theory and art may be seen in turn as aspects of the displacement of both literacy and the conceptual system it supports from the cultural centrality it has held in the West for centuries.[4] The consideration of

drama as a technology of change, and of the theories that have attempted to explain it, points not only to the more general function of representation in change but to the larger hermeneutic questions involved in adequately forming such patterns of explanation from within a particular regime.

Tragedy and the Represented

> To justify the irrational, we appeal to what is commonly said to be.
> (*The Poetics* XXV.17, 107)[5]

Although Aristotle's theory generally encouraged the consideration of tragedy in the terms of a hypostatized and universal formal model, there were undercurrents within it that suggest not only a possible but perhaps a necessary role for drama as an agent of change. Aristotle's theory of tragedy has often been thought of as a kind of uneasy truce between two modes of description: one purely formal, based upon categories of "beginning, middle, and end," "rising and falling actions," "reversal," "recognition," "pathos," etc., and the other affective or functional, centring around the definition of katharsis (καθάρσις) and the effect of drama on its audience and society. Both asserted apparently timeless universals in different ways, as categories of knowledge perceptible to all observers or as less cognitive universals of experience and emotion. But on neither of these levels did history play much of a part. The historical account of tragedy in *The Poetics* remained largely anecdotal and teleological, replicating larger biological patterns of growth to completion in Aristotle and serving only to produce tragedy as a complete and natural form:

> Tragedy advanced by slow degrees; each new element that showed itself was in turn developed. Having passed through many changes, it found its natural form, and there it stopped.
>
> (IV.12, 19)

That form, once produced, seemed largely disengaged from further historical intervention, and the idea of a natural form, congruent with the corresponding notion of a represented "human nature" ("men in action"), left to offer a kind of atemporal conceptual stability, a relation between form and function that appeared unmediated and transparent.

The relationship between these levels was, however, perplexed by the intercession of a third—the more problematical level of "imitation" or *mimesis* (μίμησις). Aristotle defined tragedy specifically as the "imitation of men in action," and thus, it is tempting to assume that the form of tragedy follows in some way from that of "reality." Yet even within Aristotle's theory, this strictly derivative concept of "imitation" was at best only partially

adequate. Tragedy was not presented as "men in action" in any immediate sense (or rather, it was "men in action" only in the secondary sense that its actors were "men" involved in the "action" of producing the play). It was instead seen only a representation of them. This notion of difference, while the basis for Socrates's attack on poetry as stated in multiple locations and in the problem of the two Cratyluses,[6] was rehabilitated in Aristotle's system as the basis for conceptual generalities (in themselves displaced or derived "forms") that overcome the enigma of the purely factual: poetry differed from both "reality" and "history," he argued precisely because it *did* introduce difference, and with it, the potential for interpretation—the ability to deduce "the general" from the varied instances of "the particular."

> Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.
>
> (IX.3, 35)

The argument of a generalizing poetic difference was also central to the formal arguments of *The Poetics*: if the form of poetry allowed for or created these enabling differences, then an account of that form would be necessary to explain how such differences were produced not at random but in a rational and predictable manner:

> The same distinction marks off Tragedy from Comedy; for Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life.
>
> (II.4, 13)

Such genre distinctions affirm that poetry, while misrepresenting "life," misrepresented it in a characteristic, predictable, and therefore useful way.

The admission of such differences, however, was ultimately subversive to the very idea of *mimesis* itself since it suggested that it was the structure of the representational apparatus (the structure, for instance, of tragedy as Aristotle himself had been defining it) rather than any particular fidelity to some pre-extant "reality" that governed not only the process of representation but the image of "the world" that resulted from it. It is at these points, however submerged in the apparently "simple" text of *The Poetics*, that Aristotle's work pointed towards a far more sophisticated theory for the analysis of media and language. Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* argued that the theory of tragedy proposed by Aristotle was essentially constructive—that it viewed tragedy as constructing, in accordance with the requirements of its own form, those very objects and events that it purported to represent. The action that tragedy supposedly imitated was then, in Ricoeur's terms, "the 'construct' of that construction that the mimetic activity consists of." And yet Ricoeur advised the caution that this very

notion of construction, in which tragedy creates its own object, "tends to make the poetic text close in on itself" and should not be "pushed too far."[7]

But what is too far? At other points in *The Poetics*, Aristotle seems to have invited exactly this possibility. "It is Homer who has chiefly taught other poets the art of telling lies skillfully," he argued,

> The secret of it lies in a fallacy. For, assuming that if one thing is or becomes, a second is or becomes, men imagine that, if the second is, the first likewise is or becomes. But this is a false inference.
>
> (XXIV.9, 95)

Given the idea of a "reality" ("things"), therefore, that "poetry" ("words") appeared to follow from or "imitate," people, seeing "poetry," would have presumed some pre-extant "reality" from which it derived and to which it must refer. But if this was a "false inference," then the possibility was opened to the operation of representation itself as a kind of self-contained discursive system in which "reality" appeared at all only as a kind of effect or illusion, a system in which terms could be established and re-combined according to the rules of their own structure, allowing not only for the illusion of "reality" but for the creation, as Sir Philip Sidney was to remark, "forms such as never were in nature"—the fantastic, the absurd, and things as "better" or "worse" than they are or are normally perceived to be: in the well-known structuralist reduction, "reality" becomes the rules and structure of the system itself.[8]

The problem, however, is hardly so simple. At this point, the notion of *mimesis* became problematic in a second and much less recognized sense: if the concept of "reality" itself were just a product of the properties of this fictionalizing system, then what was it that it "imitated" at all? If, as noted above, Aristotle also argued that "to justify the irrational, we appeal to what is commonly said to be," then what appears to stabilize these representations was not their accuracy in relation to some pre-extant (and available) "reality" but rather their conformity to some set of conventions already stabilized within this system, either "rationality" itself as a set of accepted conventions (the "rules of logic") or that which, though not strictly "logical," was already widely believed. This system, while no longer exactly "closing in on itself," then presented mimesis in a different sense altogether, as an intensely social and rhetorical structure that extended into an entire system of ill-defined and potentially "illogical" relations. In a yet more famous argument, Aristotle also argued that

> With respect to the requirements of art, a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable and yet possible.
>
> (XXV.17, 195)

In a point expanded further in the *Rhetoric*, the "probable," that which was already established and credible within this system of beliefs (*doxa, δόξα*, opinion), was thus argued to be accessible in a way in which the "possible" (imaginable but unaccepted) was not. What was "imitated" as "life" then became only the aggregate beliefs of the audience. And in the most negative interpretation of this possibility lay another basis for the Socratic attack.[9]

Poetry, it would seem, then functioned, perhaps by "generality," but not particularly by "truth" in any absolute sense since it functioned primarily by replicating the existing order of accepted representations. Or rather, it would if it did not have its own structure: the critical point in Aristotle's entire analysis was that the particular form of tragedy (its material or institutional form) *did* make a difference since no representation functioned by pure identity. If, as Aristotle had already persistently argued, each type of representation characteristically alters perception in accordance with its own structure, then "what is commonly said to be" is in every instance modified by its representation in each specific form, and particularly in the emergence of a *new* form. Even mythological stories, reworked from epic into drama (and thus "imitated" in yet another more Horatian sense), were modified in the process (V, XXIII–XXIV, and XXVI).[10] And finally, since tragedy was indeed, according to Aristotle, a relatively new form in the period in which he was writing, at least in the competitive and de-ritualized form he was considering, and since it changed in structure throughout the period of the great writers as various technical innovations were introduced (which he outlined but without significant comment), then tragedy, both by its appearance and its development, must necessarily have changed, substantially and repeatedly, the very material structure of "what is commonly said to be."

Tragedy, seen in this way, operated in a kind of dialectic between its own form, which was constantly changing, and the expectations of its audience ("what is commonly said to be"). To the extent to which they were accepted and influential, the changes produced by tragedy necessarily changed "what is commonly said to be" while simultaneously appealing to its authority. The appearance of a new form such as tragedy necessarily changed the perceptual economy of its participants, restructuring representation by presenting a physical circumstance—its own form—that did not exist before. Tragedy, as a unique historical event (something that "happened," however "universal" it was later judged to be), can hardly be incidental to either "history" or the development of the conceptual structure that might then interpret it: the development of tragedy must necessarily be seen as part of a developing pattern of conceptual change, leading, eventually, both to Aristotle's work and its own description.

Near the end of *The Poetics*, in the passage on "the wonderful," Aristotle remarked, in passing, that

> the wonderful is pleasing: as may be inferred from the fact that every one tells a story with some addition of his own, knowing that his hearers like it.
>
> <div align="right">(XXIV.8, 95)</div>

Though Aristotle's theory in its less regarded moments opened the possibility of a sophisticated theory of the influence of representational technology on "the represented," and by implication points to the introduction of tragedy and its subsequent development as forms of "the wonderful" that altered narration in a far more significant sense, a theory of social change that would have explicitly described the operation of tragedy as a "historical" process seems to have been far beyond what Aristotle's theory of a "universal" tragic structure was in any position to allow.

The Fate of Myth

> For it is the fate of every myth to creep by degrees into the narrow limits of some alleged historical reality, and to be treated by some later generation as a unique fact with historical claims.
>
> <div align="right">(Nietzsche, sec. 10, 75)</div>

The assessment of tragedy as a more properly "historic" form—one that has not only a significant pattern of development but a role within larger concurrent historical changes—was a much more explicit aspect of Nietzsche's account, though it was one that Nietzsche himself seemed largely at pains to resist. On one hand, Nietzsche purported to offer a theory of tragedy as "myth" that denied the very legitimacy of history as a concept: "history," in this account, became something more like a local construct produced by an excessively rationalist mode of perception. Paradoxically, the very contextualization of the concept of history in this fashion became conceivable only as a part of a historical account—a linking together of a sequence of stages in which tragedy, philosophy, and Nietzsche's own writing formed other terms. In producing itself as a history that simultaneously criticized the very status of history as a concept, Nietzsche's account attempted to imagine the very circumstances of its own disappearance. Yet it was precisely because it could not imagine tragedy and myth by means other than history that Nietzsche's account pointed to a second and perhaps more significant (if repressed) function of tragedy, not as a return to myth but as a complicit agent of social change.

In its most "mythic" terms, Nietzsche's theory imagined tragedy as the mediation between two contradictory impulses in Greek culture that he terms the Apollinian[11] and the Dionysian. The Apollinian was conceived of the impulse to objectification, order, and "mere appearance," productive of the ideal and symmetrical world of Greek architecture, sculpture, and art that covered "reality" in idealized explanations just as it covered the individual in the illusion of personal identity. Since the explanations provided by the Apollinian could never be more than illusions, however, they could never be fully effective, and those moments in which they gave way resulted in the experience of the Dionysian. The Dionysian, initially experienced as terror at the collapse of the illusion of order, was envisioned as similar in some respects to the more restricted *katharsis* argument in Aristotle: it was that place in which the irrational or unaccountable disrupted the security of the system of explanations on which the categories of the individual depended. But while Aristotle's system was arguably homeostatic in proposing *katharsis* as a means of containing and regulating these disruptive moments by confining them to the projected fate of a single, distanced individual, the hero on stage, rationalized within the victory of the highly ordered and describable form of the play, Nietzsche's system was not: tragedy did not evoke the Dionysian in order to contain it, especially in its earlier forms, but to celebrate and amplify it. The collapse of order was to be experienced not as a disaster but as a relief:

> Schopenhauer has depicted for us the tremendous terror which seizes man when he is suddenly dumfounded [sic] by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principle of sufficient reason, in some one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depth of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian, which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication.
>
> (sec. 1, 36)

Though his account moved beyond the idea of a dialectic, Nietzsche imagined a kind of interplay of coherence and collapse that extended the "constructive" aspects of Aristotle's theories of representation and belief into something similar to the "disjunctive" theory of knowledge later argued by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[12]

The role of tragedy in this system was to mediate between these impulses by partaking in both, projecting the experiences of paralytic Dionysian revelation into Apollinian illusion. Though its "form" was argued to be Apollinian, its "content" remained Dionysian, centred around images of mistake (ἁμαρτία, *hamartia*, "missing of the mark"), reversal (περιπέτεια,

peripeteia), collapse and recognition (πάθος, ἀναγνώρισις, *pathos, anagnorisis*), and release (κάθαρσις, *katharsis*). The central image of tragedy was the image of dismemberment, which symbolized not only the collapse of Apollinian order but the joyful end to "individuation" in a return to a more primal and unmediated unity:

> Thus it is intimated that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian suffering, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire, that we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the origin and primal cause of all suffering, as something objectionable in itself…. This view of things already provides us with all the elements of a profound and pessimistic view of the world, together with the mystery doctrine of tragedy: the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness.
>
> (sec. 10, 73–74)

Ironically, however, Nietzsche's account seems concerned not so much to define this "original" function for tragedy as to account for its disappearance: "individual identity," if it were to be overcome through the agency of tragedy, must have already existed. Nietzsche, in accepting Aristotle's account of the ritual origins of tragedy but also the placement of its formal period after that of the Homeric epics, confirmed tragedy in this essentially recuperative role: the epics for Nietzsche constructed those Apollinian conceptual functions that tragedy was later to deny. Finally, tragedy, by projecting Dionysian realizations into an already Apollinian structural setting, was already in some respects alienated from the Dionysian "origins"—not being the Dionysian but only its representation, or perhaps recreation, in the "mere appearance" of theatrical illusion. Particularly as it became institutionalized in the period of the great writers, tragedy, for Nietzsche as for Aristotle, reached a kind of apotheosis in the works of the great tragedians in which both impulses have something like an equal claim. In other respects, however, for Nietzsche it could only be considered a nostalgic re-enactment of a far more pervasive earlier condition within the contained and limited institutional space of the theatre. Tragedy therefore already stood in respect to the Dionysian in very much the same position that Nietzsche's theory itself stood in respect to tragedy—the position of attempting to reconstruct the retrospective image of a past condition or ideal: it was the image of an image that was always receding. It could never be more adequately hypothesized within the limits of this theory.

Within Nietzsche's theory, it would have been possible to rationalize this problem as more apparent than real since this slippage could have

been (and certainly has been) credited to the structure of signification itself, though for Nietzsche this "slippage" would have been a problem local to a rationalist age: viewed in this way, the "remoteness" or inaccessibility of the Dionysian became not a quality of the Dionysian itself but merely of constraints surrounding his necessarily "historical" mode of coming to think of it. But, in the very detail in which this argument was pursued, the implication of tragedy within "history" might not have been so easily dismissed, pointing, against Nietzsche's better wishes, not backwards "out" of history but more properly to the very point at which "history" itself arose, not only in opposition to tragedy but through its very operation. It is to the details of this account, and its beginning in the image of a single Dionysian reveler, that we now return:

> so we may perhaps picture him sinking down in his Dionysian intoxication and mystical self-abnegation, alone and apart from the singing revelers, and we may imagine how, through Apollinian dream-inspiration, his own state, i.e., his oneness with the inmost ground of the world, is revealed to him in a symbolical dream image.
>
> (sec. 2, 38)

This moment, born initially not of "oneness" but in the "individuation" of the solitary figure "alone and apart from the singing revelers," already separated from the truly Dionysian, and therefore already implicated in the beginnings of "history," that tragedy began and entered its more formal history. The subsequent development of tragedy as an institution then quickly followed:

> Later the attempt was made to show the god as real and to represent the visionary figure together with its transfiguring frame as something visible for every eye—and thus "drama" in the narrower sense began.
>
> (sec. 8, 66)

The "theatrical" period of tragedy was characterized by the development of plot and action, the formalized separation of actors and audience by the intervening wall of the chorus, and the eventual innovations of the great writers.

The growing structural definition of tragedy was, however, ambiguous in Nietzsche's account, producing on one hand masterpieces of Aeschylus and Sophocles but on the other hand the projection of Nietzsche's basic collapse of order into an increasingly ordered formal structure that Nietzsche, in following Aristotle, was able to detail, if not explain: if tragedy were "eternal," why did it change? Aristotle had argued that tragedy passed through a series of distinct formal stages distinguished by the addition of

speaking actors to the stage and the reduction of the importance of the chorus: Aeschylus added the first actor and diminished the role of the chorus, and Sophocles added the second (IV.13, 19). Aristotle, however, contained these developments within a teleological sequence that produced the fullness of the tragic form and then simply stopped. For Nietzsche, who desired yet more strongly that tragedy have the timelessness of myth but wrote after the period of its disintegration, the tragedy of tragedy was that these changes did *not* stop. They continued and eventually produced the "decadent" tragedy of Euripides and its final antithesis in New Comedy.

And what then was the logic of these developments?

> Greek tragedy met an end different from that of her older sister-arts: she died by suicide, in consequence of an irreconcilable conflict; she died tragically, while all the others passed away calmly and beautifully at a ripe old age.
>
> (sec. 11, 76)

But suicide in what sense? Even in Nietzsche's account, the development of tragedy under Euripides did little more than extend the pattern begun by its predecessors: Euripides continued the proliferation of characters on stage, further compromising the claims of the hero on the attentions of the audience, and further reduced the role of the chorus, eroding the separation of actor from audience. The result was the destruction of the "mythic" basis for tragedy:

> Through him the everyday man forced his way from the spectators' seats onto the stage; the mirror in which formerly only grand and bold traits were represented now showed the painful fidelity that conscientiously reproduces even the botched outlines of nature.
>
> (sec. 11, 77)

Was not this very extension then "progressive"? One of the greatest strengths of Nietzsche's account, paradoxically, lay in its formalism, its assessment of Euripides's pivotal role in these developments, and its association of the death of tragedy with the gradual appearance of a specific set of formal features. But its weakness was to bury their explanation beneath the cult of personalities that at other points he seemed to have argued so strongly against: it was *Euripides* who destroyed tragedy and *Socrates* who revelled in that destruction.

Underlying Nietzsche's account was another and more powerful argument already partially made—the argument of "history," "progression," and "logic" themselves; their production of "the tragic"; and its constructive role in change. To begin with, it was not simply poets and philosophers who

emerged as "individuals" from Nietzsche's account: it was the heroes of the tragedies themselves, who in their tragic isolation became veritable icons of individual identity, as many generations of viewers, readers, and critics have perceived them to be. It may not, in fact, have been the epic that produced the image of the "individual" in this sense at all but tragedy, which not only imagined the "individual" but defined such "individuals" precisely in their isolation and independence, not only from other people but from "nature" as well:

> How else could one compel nature to surrender her secrets if not by triumphantly resisting her, that is, by means of something unnatural?
>
> (sec. 9, 69)

While tragedy did, as Nietzsche argued, create such individuals in order to destroy them, there is a curious and unsettling sense in which it was just this internal pattern of assembly and disintegration that was recapitulated in the very historical process that Nietzsche himself outlined: it was, after all, his claim that as drama progressed and as more characters were added to the stage and the separation between actors and audience reduced, the hero lost definition and that hero, once defined as separate from the audience in mythic isolation, came to be defined, first, by the pattern of action (plot) and then by his commonality with the audience, his immersion in their plurality and circumstances, finally to be dissolved into "the life of every day." But was this not also a form of "dismemberment," of "transformation into air, water, earth, and fire," and the relative anonymity of social life? And didn't tragedy, in the larger sense of its own history, then fulfil its own myth by moving inexorably towards its own dissolution, towards New Comedy and the embracing of the emergent ordinary? And was this not the very logic of "plot" itself in all its "mythic" inevitability? Was not "suicide" and the production of a new conceptual order the very point of tragedy? Seen in this way, the logic of tragedy is perverse, but only if the "real" function of tragedy were viewed, as Nietzsche sought to view it, in nostalgic, synchronic, and essentially recuperative terms. Once this particular "timeless" and "universal" idea is abandoned, the logic of tragedy, and tragedy's involvement in both logic and time, is only too clear: tragedy itself, like its hero, existed to die, and, in dying, to bring not recuperation but change.

Plot and Represented Action

> Indeed, the myth seems to wish to whisper to us that wisdom, and particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination; that he who by means of his knowledge plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person.
>
> (sec. 9, 69)

The irony of Nietzsche's conception of tragedy—that in its development tragedy should fulfil its own mythology in its own dissolution—remains submerged within *The Birth of Tragedy* at least partially because Nietzsche was so unwilling to view even the internal actions of tragedy as explicitly rational or logical, though he did grant them inevitability. His repression of such logical explanations was all the more striking in that they were the very foundation of Aristotle's account in *The Poetics*, an account that Nietzsche the philologist must have known very well. That account, though pointedly ahistorical, had equated the structure of the individual tragedy with time, rationality, and causal sequence through its central category of plot. It had also demonstrated tragedy's susceptibility to, if not active participation in, the growth of logical analysis. Viewed through the interpretive framework of Aristotle's analysis, "plot" and tragedy became a model for the division of perception into the standardized and repeatable units of categorical thought: they become a "method" for the consistent interpretation of events as limited sequences of causal change.

> For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy: and the end is the chief thing of all.
>
> (*The Poetics* VI.9–10, 27)

Aristotle's insistence on plot as a representation of action, and thus, a few lines later, as the "first principle" and "soul" of tragedy, formed the basis of this model and was evidence of the re-orientation of perceptual categories already underway in drama:

> Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero.
>
> (VII.1, 33)

The domination of character by plot not only established action as the primary category of tragedy but suggested that "character" and the hero were dissolved not into the "air, water, earth, and fire" of some elemental state but into the concept of action itself as an interpretive priority. In Aristotle's account, it was action, and eventually action as determined by the laws of causality and plot, that had become the interpretive standard within which character and personality were being re-evaluated and restructured.

Aristotle's definition of a conceptual structure based on plot and action, however, was not nearly as simple as it first appears. And, as Ricoeur has noted, it was a definition in which the formal categories of "wholeness" and "causality" play crucial parts:

> Now, according to our definition, Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude…. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.
>
> (VII.2–3, 31)

This highly formalized and relational definition imposed two crucial restrictions on the "whole action." The first was that it be perceived in isolation from its "natural" context, and the second that it be seen to have an integrated internal structure based on causal relation. Its internal relatedness is thus in sharp contrast to its relative independence from its surrounding context and provides the formal argument for its representational isolation, the extraction of "represented" events from their "real" settings, and their relocation in the institutional setting of the structured play. In performance, tragedy, having presented such events as if they were isolated, advanced a *de facto* argument for its own self-sufficiency as an explanation since it explicitly presented only itself as the immediate context within which an interpretation could be made. In fact, tragedy, by presenting itself as a "serious" mode of interpretation, argued that these events could be *better* understood by their isolation since it is by this isolation that the extraneous events of "everyday" are stripped away:

> For infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life which cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action.
>
> (VII.1, 31)

While it is obvious, then, that even for Aristotle "real life" events often occurred at least partially "at haphazard" and that momentous events were often punctuated by unimportant details, it was precisely these "realistic" occurrences that were categorically excluded from considerations of "plot," since they obscured its unique explanatory claims. Tragedy was

seen as selective, arguing for the extraction of only significant patterns from the apparently random order of actual events, and it was through their selection and assembly (or perhaps reduction) in a single integrated pattern that poetry became, for Aristotle, a "more philosophical and a higher thing than history":

> Of all plots and actions, the epeisodic [sic] are the worst. I call a plot "epeisodic" in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence.
>
> (IX.10, 37–39)

The inclusion of "causal necessity" into these definitions then bore the weight of distinguishing the integrated events of the play from some more "episodic" series. But what was causal necessity? It was at this point in the discussion of both plot and unity that Aristotle introduced the arguments of the probable and possible that we have already examined in part, arguments in which appearance and credibility weigh far more heavily than fact. The issues of significance and selection return us, in fact, to the question of the "constructivist" orientation of Aristotle's entire theory.[13] In the first place, tragedy would seem to have depended not upon the actual logic of events but on the audience's perception of them as logical and willingness to think of them in relative isolation. But what was the source of this agreement? Aristotle seemed to have argued at first that these events followed from "the natural": in his argument, the "unity" and "completion" of drama appeared to follow from the "imitation" of a "unified" and "complete" action. But everything in the further definition of action points to these definitions as a set of formal relations. Might it not then have been the case that the institutional structure of drama *imposed* these formal restrictions, thereby promoting the perception and identification of "significant" actions as "separate" and "causally" linked (or for that matter, identifiable as "actions" at all)? That through its role as ceremony and entertainment it operated as a mode of perceptual training that at least partially created the very categories it then appeared to "imitate"? Was this not, then, the logical extension of the "lying well" learned from Homer?

Drama in the period of the great writers had become a defined genre in which dramatists and plays competed for prizes. There can be little doubt that drama in these formal stages operated by the division of representation into the series of distinct and formally standardized and comparable individual units. In fact, it is this very division into units and the similarities among them that provided the basis for Aristotle's inductive theory based on the derivation of principles from observed instances. Rather than "imitating" some "natural" pattern in which events might well be

expected to be related to others in a variety of ways, this series of distinct and standardized units presented a method for dividing and categorizing a perceptual field so that only certain types of relations remained apparent or significant at all—specifically those based on a repeating pattern of the linear extension of "causal necessity." Furthermore, it is clear that, for Aristotle, this interpretive strategy extended far beyond drama and *The Poetics*. Just as they were later to do for Ramus in the sixteenth century, the standardization and classification of knowledge and the repeatability of general principles derived from the observation of instances formed the basis for Aristotle's own codification of a categorical philosophy.[14]

Such changes could hardly have occurred in isolation. But if they were part of a larger and more pervasive pattern of change, such that society began operating according to their categories and utilizing the "natural" world according to their precepts, then drama and the conceptual pedagogy it presented would have become efficient as descriptions, as it were, "before the fact"—descriptions of a new social and functional "reality" they were simultaneously helping to both prescribe and create. Such a pattern of events would constitute a "causality" of quite a different kind.

Seen in this light, the processes of formal drama take on an additional significance. Because tragedy presented itself repetitively as a series of applications of the same basic pattern to a wide range of individual concerns (different "stories" with different characters, settings, etc. but similar plot structures) and reprocessed in many instances older and more extended materials, drama operated as a *de facto* argument for the primacy of "method" over "materials"—an argument in effect that the same analytical procedure could be meaningfully applied to a range of circumstances—different stories—but resolve them into the same interpretive pattern. Drama thus argued implicitly on the perceptual level what Aristotle himself, and later Descartes, was to argue explicitly as philosophy—that large problems (such as "knowledge" or "nature") could be usefully approached by their division into smaller units and by the subsequent application of the same standardized analytical procedures to the divided pieces. This process of segmentation and analysis was profoundly significant if for no other reason than that it transformed the categorical relationship between "representation" and "the represented" by reversing their relationships of categorical inclusion. If "nature" were the primary category within which "representation" took place as only one of many possible activities, then representation could do little more than "imitate" that nature which encloses it (possibly degrading it in the process—the Platonic argument in which the Forms stood as the supercategory). But if "representation" were to operate through the division of "nature" into the standardized analytical units, then asserted the integrity of the resulting units, it asserted the dominance of representation over nature. "Method"

became the primary category through which "nature" was visible at all, and it was only through the unity of "method" that "nature" appeared as other than a collection of disparate pieces.

The choice of "causality" as a central metaphor for drama then also became significant in another sense. It is a cornerstone of Aristotle's theory of tragedy that the "irrational," such as the destruction of a "good" man, be in some sense contained or rationalized by *katharsis*,

> through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.
>
> (VI.2, 23)

While Aristotle's discourse on the parts and formal structure defined tragedy, it was the argument of *katharsis* that justified its immediate social function and answered the Socratic objection that poetry invited social unrest by "feeding and watering the passions." *Katharsis* relieved these emotions, perhaps symbolic of far greater ones, produced by the particular catastrophe of tragedy, the change in fortune from good to bad that virtually defines the tragic hero, and required his definition by *hamartia*, the "tragic flaw" causing the fatal turn of action:

> There remains, then, the character between these two extremes,— that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty.
>
> (XIII.3, 45)[15]

Change was resolved within this pattern by its very repetition and predictability: to learn the conventions of plot was to learn the rules of change (at least as far as they applied to "plot"). And the formalization of tragedy as a model of causal change that was not only circumscribed and limited but recurring, suggested that, though the *fact* of change must be acknowledged as central, the *principles* of change themselves might be generalized and predictable.

In Aristotle's theory the stability of this process depended on the limitation of the description of change to the first order: the theory of change had to have been presumed to itself remain constant and contained (and therefore ahistorical). Within the representations of tragedy, as Aristotle conceived of them, change, though produced by plot and action, was seen to be confined to the personal fate of an increasingly anachronistic "hero" and was not seen to apply to the institution of tragedy itself. For Nietzsche, who perceived the changes that befell tragedy after the "great writers,"

the necessity to acknowledge change of a second order, change in the more extended historical circumstances of tragedy itself, was absolute. In spite of this necessity, in his most nostalgic and idealized moments, Nietzsche went beyond Aristotle in imagining a tragedy so fundamentally repetitive and cyclical that it was forever returning its origins, or perhaps one that would exist beyond beginnings and endings and simply "was." But in doing so, he began by pointing back to a ritual origin that it was precisely the role of tragedy to abolish, if not forever, at least for a very long time.

Fragmentation and Method

> Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject—in the form of historical consciousness—will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought.
>
> (Michel Foucault, 1969)[16]

In a 1929 article entitled "Folklore as a Special form of Creativity," Pëtr Bogatyrëv and Roman Jakobson compared the function of verbal art under "literary" and "folkloric" (i.e. oral) conditions. In a society that is primarily oral, they argued, verbal art such as epics and folktales operate as repositories of communal knowledge perpetuated through their constant repetition in performance. The persistent retelling of such stories ensures cultural continuity and the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. Eric Havelock later argued that, in Greek epics, this record-keeping function often resulted in the central story line functioning largely as a frame within which other stories and other forms of knowledge could be included and mnemonically linked in a variety of apparently tangential or digressive connections. Such stories often appeared episodic and non-linear, since such "secondary" themes did not directly contribute to the development of any central pattern of "causal necessity." In performance, the stories themselves might be broken up and told in parts and out of sequence, each part being located within the audience's knowledge of "the whole," but without any particular re-enforcement of a linear succession to events. In this respect, they functioned as something like *la parole* in Saussurean linguistics—the individual instance that depended upon and

evoked the entire system (*la langue*), which, itself, was never fully rendered at any one time. Stories were also routinely expanded, abridged, or otherwise modified to fit the circumstances of performance, but such local modifications were not considered significant, since the individual performances only appeared as momentary manifestations of the story and not as the story itself. And although more permanent modifications might have occurred when circumstances favoured their general acceptance, the changes they introduced were quickly absorbed into the perceived continuity of "the story," since they displaced older versions that quickly vanished from memory. The role of individuals and innovations remained invisible, and the discontinuity of fragments not destructive of the pervasive and enveloping context of the narratives.[17]

"Literary" conditions, these theorists argued, present a significantly different set of relations. Specialized forms of written records displace poetry and narrative from their role of ensuring a continuity of factual information, shifting them towards the more specialized categories of entertainment and art. And since the physical stability of written works is easily assured, emphasis shifts from performance to production: works have documented origins, artists become "creators," and "ownership" of works becomes possible. Drama, in performance, becomes repertory. In fully "literate" conditions, the production of "new" works becomes a necessity, since the duplication of works already extant as written records, if not merely pointless (the job of a scribe and not an author), becomes a form of theft (plagiarism and the violation of copyright). Thus, whereas communal "folkloric" conditions absorb change through repetition imperceptibly into the flexible permanence of their master narratives, "literary" conditions foreground innovation by demanding differentiation of the "new" work from the growing body of documented past originals. "Literary" conditions thus introduce two of the primary economies of mass production—the proliferation of essentially standardized products that compete for a market and the subsequent necessity of product differentiation as that market becomes increasingly saturated.[18]

The circumstances of "literary" production, finally, introduce changes within the conceptual structure of the individual story. Under "folkloric" or oral conditions, while the physical performance of a story "begins" and "ends," the story itself does not, since its performance is merely the momentary and metonymic manifestation of a much larger (though not particularly linear) continuity that may be resumed at any time. With "literary" production, which assigns to the story the status and dimensionality of a physical object, the physical characteristics of writing—extension, linearity, and even repetitive formal analysis (the analysis of the continuity of speech into the standardized and repeatable symbols of phonetic representation)—like "beginning" and "end," become physical

attributes of the story itself. Havelock argued that one of the most significant effects of the introduction of literacy in Greek culture was the separation of "the knower" from "the known": knowledge became an externalized and identifiable system of relations that could be tested for consistency and logical integrity and demanded an equal consistency from the perceiving subjects it defined.[19] Such a process of objectification might be traced in the development of Greek philosophy from Socrates to Aristotle. It might be seen even in Nietzsche's description of tragedy, in which the "wall" of the chorus was argued to separate the audience from the actors and actions, distancing them from the kind of immediate empathetic involvement Havelock associated with epic recitation. In the early modern period as well, Walter Ong has argued that such an objectification of both knowledge and fictionality was equally characteristic of a shift from a condition of mixed orality towards the greater "literary" commitment of typographic representation.[20] Abstract and disorienting to the cultures in which it occurred, this process created a special role for drama as a form that could preserve the familiarity of spoken language and gesture while incorporating the fundamental and abstract conceptual properties of the new representational system.

The objectification of knowledge and representation, and particularly its corollary enforcement of the conceptual closure of the representational object ("beginning" and "end," and the unities of time and action), were particularly relevant to the development of tragedy since it was precisely the closure of the play as a representational unit that distinguished competitive and commercial dramas of classical Athens and early modern England from their predecessors. Nietzsche thought of tragedy as a kind of ritualized return to a primordial oneness in which the fragmentation of representational distinctions would not be significant. And in oral circumstances, in which the repetition of a single kind of performance consistently refers to larger and effectively eternal patterns of shared beliefs, or in those mixed uses of drama, such as the medieval English miracle and morality plays, in which texts functioned ritualistically within a primarily oral and repetitive environment such as that of the church year, something like this function might have been preserved. But in the more fully "literate" circumstances of the competitive or commercial dramas of Greece or Elizabethan London, even in circumstances in which texts themselves were not literally present, such a function had become virtually impossible.

Nietzsche argued that tragedy began with the objectification of the single speaker, developed in the multiple character dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and disintegrated on the crowded stages of Euripides and New Comedy. It was just this progression towards plenitude and fragmentation that the more literary development of tragedy itself virtually assured since the literary or repertory recording of even one tragedy split drama into two

versions (the performed and recorded), and the subsequent production of other tragedies did not eradicate their predecessors but joined them in a growing body of preserved records. Such a proliferation of instances fragmented not only tragedy but the very concept of the truth itself into a growing collection of individual versions, each with its own unique claims to authority. The stage itself, rather than a unitary site of ritual function, became a crowded site of competing ideals, just as the drama it supported (ultimately New Comedy) became the crowded competition of many voices, just as the Reformation produced a proliferation of competing alternatives to a previously integral authority. In Greece, the proliferation of characters on the stage—the addition of actors, first by Aeschylus, then by Sophocles and Euripides—differentiated newer plays from older as it mirrored the proliferation of the plays themselves on the expanding stage of dramatic production, just as it did in Elizabethan England. Nor was this parallel development entirely fortuitous or accidental: the expansion of acting personae, which Aristotle thought natural and Nietzsche thought destructive, was a logical consequence of a productive environment in which the competition between a growing number of individual plays for the attentions of the audience enforced economies of mass production and product differentiation. Under these conditions, logical and systemic innovations became requisite to survival. The role of the audience was also transformed: rather than expecting repetition of content, audience members, in their more objectivized role as consumers, were now trained not only to expect the new but to quickly absorb it into their basic perceptual assumptions and expect more. The assumption of new knowledge and perceptual habits, and of a pattern of their acquisition by the audience, thus initiated a cycle of developments in which change itself became a constant, continually altering the conditions of knowledge faced by each set of new productions.

"Plot" was itself both the consequence of these developments and a description of this pattern of change as it produced them. In the most immediate dramatic terms, "plot" was the logical consequence of the proliferation of characters on stage that necessarily shifted attention from the actions and speech of the single character to the pattern of character interactions that visibly changed and unfolded through time. The single speaker, appearing alone on stage, appeared initially as the drama's sole source and authority. But as characters multiplied, that position of authority was quickly eroded, first by the shift towards dialogue and stichomythia, even with the chorus, and second by the management of an entire set of relations that developed among characters over time. Characters became defined not solely by what they said but by the situations in which they said it, situations that came increasingly to be defined by actions of others. The set of relationships that then became visible as "plot" enveloped and redefined the supposedly independent actions of single speakers

and eventually absorbed them: as the stage becomes crowded, the very possibility for the individual hero to appear self-defining disappeared forever. The victory of "plot" over "character" became complete.

The development of tragedy and plot also affected the representation of time. In oral or ritual circumstances, time is primarily synchronic—simultaneously both eternal and immanent, with progression, if visible at all, viewed primarily as an enemy. Furthermore, though events are viewed in succession, and even as a causal succession, their causality operates primarily as an unchangeable frame of background relations: the rape of Helen initiated the Trojan war, which was a series of revenges, but these revenges, which were in some sense causal, operated as an essentially eternal pattern of successions that was ended, within Greek culture, only by the intercession of the gods—through supplication in tragedy, through *deus ex machina* at the end of *The Odyssey*. By contrast, in literate Roman culture, its extension, in *The Aeneid*, lead logically to the teleology of the founding of the imperial state. In pre-literate epics, the earlier framing of this pattern, while extensive and infusive, operated primarily to envelop a much larger number of individual stories upon which attention was more immediately focused.

Written records, in contrast, provided a way for documenting sequence and progression and interrogating them as objects for the construction of explanatory patterns. And tragedy, by limiting the depiction of events to a single sequence (or set of sequences in the more complex double plots of early modern drama), foregrounded the production of causes and converted something like revenge into a more explicit pattern of logic. Even in the early modern period, which had the benefit of classical models, the development of causality in drama was clear: where early plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy* presented characters groping towards a concept of causality and plot, later plays such as *Hamlet* presented sophisticated reflection on the very conventionality of such ideas. These examples will be further considered in later chapters. For the culture that produces such plays, training in the conventions of plot became training in the more generally predictive capabilities of causal thought in which "the end" came not as a surprise but as a predictable consequence of "the beginning." Time was no longer "being" but "becoming" and progression.

Tragedy itself was the inevitable victim of this process: if the hero could eventually be presumed to have knowledge equivalent to that of the audience and therefore understand the predictive capacity of plot, why should that hero have acted at all? Nietzsche observed that

> the Dionysian man has similarities to Hamlet. Both have had a real glimpse into the essence of things. They have understood, and it now disgusts them to act, for their actions can change nothing in the

eternal nature of things. They perceive as ridiculous or humiliating the fact that it is expected of them that they should set right a world turned upside down. The knowledge kills action, for action requires a state of being in which we are covered with the veil of illusion.

<div align="right">(sec. 7, 60)</div>

To persist in tragic action in the face of such general knowledge required a very special form of ignorance (*Othello*), compulsion (*The Bacchae*), or infirmity (*Lear*), all of which compromised the ability of such heroes to hold centre stage. Their eventual fate was not "death" but insignificance, a transition into repertory performance, and their displacement by the more "causally" oriented characters of the New Comic plot, a transition documented thoroughly in later tragedies, but most especially in New Comedy itself and most especially in the plays of early modern critic and master, Ben Jonson. In his plays, the tragic hero, most typically associated with an old monied or feudal nobility, was shown to be eclipsed by new heroes—the scheming servants and emerging bourgeois technocrats who represented not only "plot" and the institutions of the theatre but the emergent conceptual and economic structures of causality, planning, and investment. In New Comedy and the world of history, consequence, calculation, and exchange, the tragic hero had no place. In creating such a world, it was the fate of tragedy not only to "die" but to make the very circumstances that might have allowed for its resurrection virtually impossible.

Reification and Dissolution

Hence the image of the *dying Socrates*, as the human being whom knowledge and reasons have liberated from the fear of death, is the emblem that, above the entrance gate of science, reminds all of its mission—namely, to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified; and if reasons do not suffice, myth has to come to their aid in the end—myth which I have just called the necessary consequence, indeed the purpose, of science.

<div align="right">(Nietzsche sec. 15, 96)</div>

The coincidence between the internal structure of tragedy ("a beginning, a middle, and an end") and the pattern of its development ("origin," "fulfilment," and "decline") is surprising only if it is considered to be a form of either natural or serendipitous correspondence. In simple terms, tragedy may be thought of as having acted or mapped out, on the thematic level, the principles of its own form. But a more accurate assessment would be that both levels were interrelated developments of the same social condition—the transition from the conceptual economies of oral

exchange to literacy and the re-organization of conceptual and functional categories that such a shift entails, and tragedy that not only contributed to such a change but provided the means of its accommodation. The historical development of tragedy and its internal structure were two sides of the same coin.

Havelock argued that Socrates, in developing the abstract but partially objectified concept of the ideal forms, sought to re-create the stability of an oral community in which such concepts would not even be stated but merely assumed.[21] Socrates's very identification of "the forms," however, as well as the professionalization of knowledge that followed from that identification, as well as all the vesting of interests that such professionalization entails, was evidence of their displacement. The irony that Socratic philosophy, so fluid, dynamic, and interactive in its processes, should have produced such a fixed and eternal ideal as its object was matched only by that of Aristotle's development of the concepts of teleology and progression within the fixed form of a systematic philosophy so eminently suited to written representation. Both methods take as their content the formal categories that their methods do not, in their more explicit implementations, allow. The same has been true of tragedy as it has extended through time: in stressing both the independence and isolation of the hero, tragedy, particularly after the early modern period, provided a retrospective icon, not of the collapse of individual identity but of its reification. Even though the identity structures that immediately resulted from tragedy were hardly heroic (the successful types of New Comedy), tragedy has seemed to represent, within the imagination of subsequent generations committed to the basic tenets of the literary regime, that rare iconic moment within which the individual was produced by isolation from the obligatory contexts of the past while not yet fully absorbed by the emerging syntax of the future—the more explicit social "plot" of investment and science. Appearing briefly in relief before this new definition, the tragic hero has presented bourgeois and literate society with the image of itself, perhaps as "better than it really is," but certainly as more "individualistic" and "heroic" than it often gets to be.

Ironically, the golden moment of the hero was also, at least within tragedy, the most meaningful moment of that very causality that was its destruction. For both Nietzsche and Aristotle, tragedy, like the hero, depended on the illusion of choice: the hero must appear coextensive with his or her fate and to that extent its master. But as tragedy developed into its later phases, and the rules of plot became so established as to be axiomatic, what choice could there have been? Plot, so regularized, seemed to function without characters or rather to define characters merely as markers within its own automatic system of unfolding definitions. The later classical tragedies, those of Euripides and especially Seneca, and later early modern tragedies such as those by Webster, Chapman, Ford, and especially

Tourneur, all drove the causality of plot towards the conditions of automation and arbitrariness that not only defined New Comedy but ultimately de-ritualized even plot's explanatory power: as "plot" defined "the subject," so also "the subject" gave meaning to the "plot," and both are subject to the same dissolution. In Jonson's *The Alchemist*, the idea of tragic plot was reduced to a parody of subplot orchestration while the main plot only served to perpetuate a more informed version of established social power. And in Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, plot in a general sense became only an arbitrary machine for the "logical" production of both death and the play, the two at this point having become synonymous. Plot became coextensive, in other words, not with the fate of the hero but with the productive machinery of the theatre itself, an institutional form of self-perpetuation that no longer served, or was required to serve, in any direct sense, as an explanation for anything else.

The growing arbitrariness of such plays was, in some respects, merely the effect of the dialectics of knowledge and production: audiences conditioned to novelty and having assimilated the pattern of "causal" tragedy, simply assumed both its motivations and progressions (its "beginnings" and "middles"), and finding them of little interest, were directed instead to its "ends" and its "decadent" effects. Human motivations, no longer necessary to explain a plot that has become axiomatic, became more narrowly symptomatic, indexes of effects that were then seen to be inevitable even before they happened. Indeed, *Othello* struggled for almost its entire length to artificially produce a "motive" worthy of the consequences, the deaths of Othello and Desdemona, that were, in its very first scene, an announced as inevitable, while its real motive, represented by Iago, the hero of a New Comic counter-plot, was simply institutional self-perpetuation, the necessity to produce another tragedy from a set of conventions that had become increasingly restrictive.

Such tragedies seem to have remained popular only to the extent that their structural logic has remained studiously opaque to audiences who have been able to concentrate on their deliverance of "human" values in such adversity—as if these values too were not also produced. But these later dramas also disclosed the inherent limitation of causal logic and its alienation from these very "human" concerns. Because causality has been the basis for the development of later Western society, it has also been, in some respects, an adequate method of its description: like tragedy, it has been successful at least in part because it has been to a large extent describing itself. It is also a pattern that, due to *its* teleology and its effective extension in time, has resulted in the production of those circumstances in which its own functionality has eventually been called into question.

Drama "died" or was at least displaced into the institutional marginalization of an entertainment form in both its classical and early modern

settings, as the regimes of literacy consolidated the functionality of the text, in philosophical and religious texts and debates, imperial bureaucracies, literary epics and narratives, and in science. Such developments themselves have not been without their ironies. Nietzsche and earlier generations of Romantics had begun responding to the consolidation of the literate paradigm of knowledge, not by adding to its linear and teleological structure and completing its syntax but by reacting to that syntax as if it were already complete and therefore open to a more random form of access—the very "associationism" that not only presumed a stable "literary" code but subverted it. The saturation of literate technology thus produced the appearance, and in some respects the fact, of its negation. The separation of "subject" and "object" theorized by Havelock as beginning in Greek epic reached its furthest extension in the alternation of experience and reflection, of "living" and the comprehension of "living" through its representation and objectification in writing, that is the ostensible basis of Romantic technique. And yet it was this very alternation and "dialectic" that modernism, stream-of-consciousness narration, and Althusserian "ideology" collapsed into a single, ongoing moment of simultaneous occurrence, the "field" in which action and representation, base and superstructure, operated on the same functional level. It is at this point that the dialectics of literacy began to be eclipsed, literacy representing, in the almost pathological accumulation of its own documents (as, for instance, in Eliot and Pound), something other than itself and for which it appeared as a mythology, a museum, and a grave. That culture had passed beyond it, if for no other reason than that literacy itself and the linear and rationalist science and technology it has supported had produced new technologies of representation, both visual and electronic, that no longer supported its assumptions. It is no wonder that intellectuals, whose stake in literate production is perhaps more total than many others, have either begun to feel increasingly anxious or to embrace these forms wholeheartedly. Whether those among the latter can now perceive just what the regime and assumptions of classical literacy were, let alone the mixed conditions of orality that preceded it, or whether those become just another antiquarian pursuit remains yet to be seen.

The approach presented here to tragedy and its significance in the transition of Western culture to the literacy of phonetic representation and eventually, to print, is contradictory in that it presents its arguments in an essentially literary and causal form. Perhaps, like drama itself, this form of explanation is appropriate only in imitating the condition of its object. What, beyond that, is an explanation at all, and for whom? Why should *we* need to think about tragedy? Another explanation of these events will no doubt be constructed at some point outside of this "literary" framework, and indeed, this book in part imagines that. But when that is really

possible, literacy itself, at least in the perceptual terms we have been considering it, will perhaps have become as removed and inscrutable (sunken perhaps in the "myth" of a rhetoricized history) as the "mythical" Dionysian festival that Nietzsche once described—perhaps even more so.

> Here we knock, deeply moved, at the gates of present and future: will this "turning" lead to ever-new configurations of genius and especially of the Socrates who practices music? Will the net of art, even if it is called religion or science, that is spread over existence be woven even more tightly and delicately, or is it destined to be torn to shreds in the restless, barbarous, chaotic whirl that now calls itself "the present"?
>   Concerned but not disconsolate, we stand aside a little while, contemplative men to whom it has been granted to be witnesses of these tremendous struggles and transitions. Alas, it is the magic of these struggles that those who behold them must also take part and fight.
>
> <div align="right">(sec. 15, 98)</div>

More Recent Theories of Tragedy

Naomi Liebler and John Drakakis begin their very useful anthology of more recent tragic criticism with this quotation from Stephen Booth: "The search for a definition of tragedy … has been the most persistent and widespread of all nonreligious quests for definition."[22] The criticism of tragedy is indeed vast and has covered a range from very general thematic interpretations to very specific attempts at historicization, such as Blair Hoxby's treatment of early modern concepts of tragedy in *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon.*[23] They have included humanistic interpretations based in presumed universals of human nature to diverse interpretations based in contemporary literary theory. All of these theories and the interactions among them have much to offer. For the purposes of this book, two strands of enquiry, however, have particular relevance: the location of tragedy in processes of change and the relationship of tragedy to ritual.

Many critics have asserted the importance of context and historicization. Raymond Williams, for instance, argued that "it is not a case of interpreting this series by reference to a permanent and unchanging human nature. Rather, the varieties of tragic experience are to be interpreted by reference to the changing conventions and institutions." Terry Eagleton has similarly observed that "tragedy captures the reality of the human condition, but artistic and historical conditions are no longer hospitable to its representation on stage," also citing Walter Benjamin's argument that Attic tragedy was the only true tragedy.[24] Nietzsche's predecessor, Hegel,

and others have noted substantive changes in the tragedy of later periods, such as locating the tragic in the interiority of characters.[25] Echoing Nietzsche's lament, George Steiner argued that later tragedy shifted towards the depictions of everyday and the rise of the novel.[26] Naomi Liebler, in arguing for her notion of festive tragedy, has balanced ideas of function with the specificity of historical processes that might arise at various points. Thematically, she argues, "tragedy manifests the decentering of authority; it is the image of authority in crisis," while "festive" tragedy "is the drama of communities in crisis and of the redress available to them."[27]

Others, such as Lawrence Clopper, have argued, as I have here, for the specificity of at least a particular kind of tragedy in Attic Greece and in early modern England.[28] René Girard observed that "historians seem to agree that Greek tragedy belonged to a period of transition between the dominance of an archaic theocracy and the emergence of a new, 'modern' order based on statism and laws. Before its decline the archaic order must have enjoyed a certain stability; and this stability must have reposed on its religious element—that is, on the sacrificial rites."[29] George Thomson cited E. K. Chambers's idea associating the antecedents of early modern drama with a transfer of social power: "with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the so-called liturgical plays which had grown out of the ritual of the mediæval Church, were transferred from the clergy the bourgeois guilds, from the cathedral to the marketplace." With these changes, he argued that "the art of tragedy was descended, remotely but directly, and with each stage in its evolution conditioned by the evolution of society itself, from the mimetic rite of the primitive totemic clan."[30] Girard and Williams have both suggested that these may be linked to larger social changes in which formerly sacrosanct and immersive categories of social life were objectified and opened to question. "Rank in tragedy became the name-dropping, the play with titles and sonorities, of costume drama," Williams argued. "What had formerly been a significant relationship, of the king embodying his people and embodying also the common meanings of life and the world, became an empty ceremonial: a play of bourgeois man calling himself King or Duke …."[31] The objectification of kingship, and the many deaths of kings on stage in Elizabethan and Tudor times, may indeed have quite literally set the stage for the execution of Charles I.[32]

Other theorists, such as Jan Kott, have associated tragedy more closely with rituals of purgation and renewal.[33] Theorists have linked the idea of catharsis to ritual functions expelling discord and the relieving anxiety surrounding it. In this connection, considerable debate has arisen as to whether tragedy has had destabilizing and possibly revolutionary effect or a homeostatic and ultimately conservative one.[34] Many of these notions have resonance with Nietzsche's ideas, locating the origins of tragedy in ritual, or as emerging (for better or worse) from it.

Considerations of ritual functions have had another dimension reso-nant with some of the arguments already presented here. In Nietzsche's, and to some extent in Aristotle's account, tragedy appears to function, not so much by enacting ritual, as by representing it, offering it as a contained and retrospective image, as for instance, might be seen in Euripides's *The Bacchae*. The functions of rituals in some cultures may be quite trans-formed by the processes of their transition to more dramatic public per-formances. Wole Soyinka has noted a process through which some African ritual practices were enacted as dramas for European consumption, the distance between such ritual and commercial performance being signifi-cant. Thomson made a similar observation that in American Indian public performances, rituals take on a different function for observers, with their ritual meanings fully understood only by some.[35] While Thomson may have conflated North American Indigenous cultures and presumed a kind of evolutionary teleology, his observation may resonate with some circum-stances, such as those of Pueblo communities in the American southwest, and Kwakw<u>a</u>ka'wakw and other communities in the Pacific Northwest, in which performances are linked to more private levels of knowledge. Girard observed that in some situations, that kind of shift has resulted in a more total replacement. His description of such a transition in Kaingang culture, in which mythological functions were replaced by historical nar-ratives, might recall Nietzsche's comments on Euripides.[36]

One of the most telling observations in Girard's account has to do with "tragic flaw" or *hamartia*, which Liebler and other critics have persua-sively argued, in keeping with Aristotle's theory, to be a function not of character but of action (or, perhaps, ritual function).[37] Girard argued that

> We always view the "tragic flaw" from the perspective of the new, emergent order; never from that of the old order in the final stages of decay. The reason for this approach is clear: modern thought has never been able to attribute any real function to the practice of sac-rifice, and because the nature of the practice eludes us, we naturally find it difficult to determine when and if this practice is in the process of disintegration.[38]

A central argument of this book is that, as many of these theorists have argued, drama, and particularly the great tragedies of Attic Greece and early modern London, occurred at moments of transition and were themselves agents of change. More than that, in producing such change tragedy in par-ticular effaced the grounds for understanding the very conditions that had produced it: rituals or similar practices that had been lived and understood were reduced to their residual images as form and theme. Just as the embod-iments of order attached to monarchs and the active practices of sacrifice

decayed, so also did the understanding of the social orders that their functions had stabilized. They became as opaque to us as the functions and practices of African and Indigenous cultures with whom we are still interacting.

Such deflections and representations, of course, even in Nietzsche's account, are not without their purposes. For one thing, though a poor substitute for the experience of ritual, they do generate meaning: as Derrida observed in his long reflection on imitation, "a perfect imitation is no longer an imitation."[39] Just as in the Platonic conundrum of the two Cratyluses, the difference is most often a necessary constituent of meaning—an imperfect one, in Platonic terms, but the opportunity for generation, in Aristotle's reply. What did tragedy generate, and how did it generate it? In the theories considered above, much attention has been directed to tragedy in points of transition, and though the discussions of the transition from ritual to tragedy in these critics may imply a corresponding transition into literate representation, they do not address it very directly. Though such themes may be more evident in Aristotle and Nietzsche, very little attention in these later discussions has been directed to the transitions that take place within tragedy itself as it develops and their role in generating larger patterns of change. We will return to those questions in the third part of this book, after a consideration in the next section of some antecedents of tragedy, their sources in less literate environments, and the challenges involved in their interpretation.

Notes

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Attempt at Self Criticism" prefaced to the 1866 edition of "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage-Random, 1967), 18.
2 Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.
3 Kaufmann's spelling follows its German source in the spelling of "Apollinian" in contrast to the more common English spelling "Apollonian" used by Shelley and others. For continuity with quotations from Kaufmann, I have followed his example in this.
4 Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Belknap-Havard, 1963) and *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Further discussion follows at the end of Chapter 3.

5 Aristotle, "The Poetics," in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, ed. and trans. Samuel Henry Butcher, 1911, Reprint (New York: Dover, 1951), 5–111. Since readers may consult other translations, references to this work are given parenthetically by both section and page number.

6 Plato, "Cratylus," in *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns and trans. Benjamin Jowett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 432a–d, 466.

7 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.

8 Phillip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie* [Defence of Poetry] (London: Ponsonby, 1595). https://www.proquest.com/books/defence-poesie-sir-phillip-sidney-knight/docview/2248500521/se-2

9 Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), esp. ch 2.

10 Horace counselled imitation of earlier writers: Horace, "Ars Poetica." In *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). ll. 268–69, 472.

11 See note 3 above.

12 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

13 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 38–41.

14 See Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, considered in more detail in the next chapter.

15 This aspect of *The Poetics* has been endlessly controversial, both in terms of what constitutes *hamartia* and the potential of *katharsis* to be homeostatic and a means of social control, as noted in the following section.

16 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. Alan Mark Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 12.

17 For examples, see Chapter 3.

18 There are, of course, gradations, as described, for instance, by Brian Stock in *The Implications of Literacy*. It is not necessary for an entire culture to become "factually" literate for these changes to take place, as Stock explains.

19 Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 197–214.

20 For a more complete discussion, see Chapter 2.

21 Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 254–75.

22 Naomi Liebler, and John Drakakis, "Introduction," in *Tragedy*, ed. John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

23 Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

24 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), 45–46; Terry Eagleton, *Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 25. Benjamin also distinguished between *tragödie*, tragedy based in myth, and *Trauerspiel*, sorrowful story, based in history: Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 57–158.

25 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Tragedy as a Dramatic Art," trans. Francis Plumptre Beresford Osmaston, in *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 79–80.

26 "It is the triumph of rationalism and secular metaphysics which marks the point of no return." George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 193.

27 Naomi Liebler, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 35.
28 Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game.*
29 Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 42–44.
30 George Thomson, *Æschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), 181.
31 Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 49–50.
32 See, for instance, Nancy Klein Maguire, "The Theatrical Mask/Masque of Politics: The Case of Charles I," *Journal of British Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 1989): 1–22.
33 Jan Kott, *The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Cherwinski (New York: Random House, 1970), 186ff.
34 Raymond Williams, for instance, argued more on the side of revolution: *Modern Tragedy*, 61ff; Augusto Boal, more for functions, especially in Aristotle's account, that are ultimately conservative: Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).
35 Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 5–7; Thomson, 173.
36 Girard, 52–53.
37 Liebler, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, 21–22.
38 Girard, 43–44.
39 Jacques Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closing of Representation," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

Reference List

Aristotle. *Art of Rhetoric*. Translated by John Henry Freese. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Aristotle. "The Poetics." In *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, edited and translated by Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111. 1911. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1951.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. London: NLB, 1977.

Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closing of Representation." In *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 232–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Drakakis, John, and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds. *Tragedy*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Eagleton, Terry. *Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by Alan Mark Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Gellrich, Jesse M. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Girard, Rene. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge: Belknap-Havard, 1963.

Havelock, Eric A. *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. "Tragedy as a Dramatic Art." Translated by Francis Plumptre Beresford Osmaston. In *Hegel on Tragedy*, edited by Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci, 1–96. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Horace. *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*. Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Hoxby, Blair. *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Kott, Jan. *The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy*. Translated by Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Cherwinski. New York: Random House, 1970.

Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Liebler, Naomi Conn. *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Maguire, Nancy Klein. "The Theatrical Mask/Masque of Politics: The Case of Charles I." *Journal of British Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 1989): 1–22.

McLuhan, Herbert Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage-Random, 1967.

Ong, Walter. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Plato. "Cratylus." In *Collected Dialogues*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns and translated by Benjamin Jowett, 421–74. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol. I. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Sidney, Philip, Sir. *The Defence of Poesie [Defence of Poetry]*. London: Ponsonby, 1595. https://www.proquest.com/books/defence-poesie-sir-phillip-sidney-knight/docview/2248500521/se-2.

Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Thomson, George. *Æschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968.

Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1966.

Part II

Precursors to Tragedy

2 Epics and Narratives of Inclusion

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages),
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
(Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387–1400))[1]

The opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales* were, despite their ease and grace, highly structured. The entire 18 lines were divided roughly in half in a single cause-and-effect grammatical sequence ("Whanne … Thanne"). Within that, the first 11 lines were further divided into three groups with relatively parallel internal structures that were also thematically ordered. The first invoked a double perspective. While explicitly evoking an idea of change (the passage from winter to spring), it also implicitly evoked the framework of a recurrent yearly cycle, in which the specific changes were located. Internally to these lines, there is a progression, with the arrival of April rain falling from the sky, producing further movements. In a further

DOI: 10.4324/9781032724355-5

downward movement, the rain sank into the ground where, by bathing the roots, it produced a counter-movement upward through the veins and the subsequent emergence of flowers. Like the recurrent pattern of the seasons, the linear causality of this natural sequence was recouped in the circularity of this movement. In the next four lines, a second recurring process is described: the transit of the zodiac into the springtime sign of the Ram and return of the west wind produced a second set of processes, less detailed, but more pervasive, resulting in the emergence of spring crops. The three lines that followed then transition from the cosmological and vegetal frames to a more animate one, with the changes already in process stimulating the activities of yet another order of creation and producing the songs of birds, who are both seen and heard. Finally, in the remaining seven lines, the results of these changes on the human level were produced, coincident with these antecedents ("Thanne …"). The catalogue of effects and movements in the first 11 lines was replicated in these lines with a catalogue of effects within the human order, the different orders of humans, palmers, and pilgrims, like the birds, set in parallel motion on pilgrimages. In the final line, all of these movements culminated in the single linear path towards Canterbury.

These lines did indeed set in motion the entire structure of *The Canterbury Tales*, in that the setting they invoked and the movement they produced became the pattern of the poem, with the pilgrims meeting at the Tabard Inn and agreeing to tell a cycle of stories, two each on the way to Canterbury and two on the return journey. As envisioned, this structure, like those with which the poem began, recaptured the ideas of linearity and progression within a cyclical frame, a completion that, ultimately, prepared for their recurrent reproduction in the following years. The structure of these lines, however, had an additional effect and possible meaning, depending on the sensibilities of its readers and auditors. The parallelism, and the effective stacking of descriptions and ascending orders of creation, may have suggested the orderly concert of a natural order, a creation, that was infused with congruent analogical meanings on every level, and within which progression and change were always recouped into larger, eternal structures. On the level of discourse, it may also have evoked notions of signification, familiar to scholars of biblical interpretation and outlined, attributed to Dante, in the "Epistle to Can Grande della Scala" appended to the *Paradiso* (the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical). The process of reading the natural world in this way, and its potential interpretive parallel to sacred texts, was not, of course, a thought alien to this period, in which the natural world, in all its plenitude, might be thought of as the Book of Nature, and equally present as the writing of God.[2]

Chaucer's invocation of this framework, however, was, functionally both nostalgic and ironic. In the instance of the church liturgy, which functioned

similarly as it progressed through the seasons and recurred every year, the idea of ongoing recurrence was assured by the persistent institutions of the church and clergy. In other circumstances that we shall consider, it may similarly have been assured by the impersonality of orally based social memory structures that preserve it, and through which it functioned atmospherically, for generations. This, however, was not the fate of *The Canterbury Tales*, which, though the roots of many of its stories may similarly lie in stories passed anonymously through generations, was, as a signature literary work of early English literature, tied inextricably to the idea of a single author, Geoffrey Chaucer, who is widely believed to have died, on October 25, 1400, before completing the stories that would have effected the return of the pilgrims to the Tabard. It was that incomplete and unclosed circle that, in its canonical literacy, was frozen in time and locked in history. The cycle, like the emblem of the broken compass that would later serve as the aegis of another English poet, Ben Jonson, was broken, plunging the story and its aspirations to recurrence, and us with it, into a very different weighting of effectively linear time and an unrecoverable past.[3]

This book is ultimately about drama and, in particular, tragedy in the age of Shakespeare, elucidating in application the ideas presented in theory in the first chapter. Before proceeding to consider commercial drama after 1576, however, it is necessary to establish a base, as both Nietzsche and Aristotle did, in what drama was not, in the many forms, and particularly the extended forms such as the epic, that predated the notably compact form that distinguished drama during both that great and significant period and its classical predecessors. To begin that investigation, we return to the epics briefly mentioned in Chapter 1 and to the theories first presented by Eric Havelock and others.

The Epic: Its Structure and Functions

In his provocative and boldly speculative *Preface to Plato*, published in 1963, and subsequent works through the 1970s, Eric Havelock considered the relationship between the epics, which he argued retained many features of their oral origins at least through Plato's time, and the emergent framework of literacy, represented by both Plato and Aristotle, and coincident with the emergence of Greek tragedy. Havelock argued that poetry and the epics operated as a comprehensive method of encoding cultural information in pre-Socratic Greece and as the pedagogic system that Socratic philosophy most sought to displace.[4] Havelock's work, not unlike Nietzsche's in *The Birth of Tragedy*, was perceived as quite radical by his contemporaries and attacked on many grounds. In the intervening years, and by the time of the publication of Kevin Robb's *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* in 1994, it had gained much wider acceptance.[5]

Havelock's work asked two questions that continue to be provocative: what characterized the system for managing and transmitting information before the introduction of writing in Greece, and how did that system shape the information, cognitive practices, and society that produced it? These questions remain as central today as they were in 1963, especially as we develop greater awareness of our own processes of technological and cultural change and our own *paideia* and struggle to truly grasp the implications of cultural difference.

One of Havelock's most significant accomplishments was to argue persuasively for difference: that a society organized in a different regime of communications might actually think differently than ours in ways not be easily resolvable in our expectations of universal understanding. Though acknowledging cultural difference no longer seems as radical it perhaps did in 1963, it still poses significant challenges for many in conceptualizing non-literate social organizations in the present, let alone those, located in a more distant past, unlikely to protest, and commonly understood through literate paradigms in which so many have invested so much.[6] Some of those biases were evident, for instance, in the 1980s when, in the wake of French (but less so Slavic) structuralism and post-colonialism, many books and programs were developed to promote "multicultural literacy," advocating that we learn to "read" other cultures and interpret them as "social texts." Though well-intentioned, such practices imported in their methods the very prejudices they sought to remediate, especially when applied to cultures or periods in which literacy and textuality played a minor role, no role at all, or an aggressive and hostile one, as it did in Canada's Indian residential school system. At that same time, equally problematic presumptions were being made about the divisions between oral and literate society in the later works of Walter Ong and others. Havelock's approach and Ong's early work on Ramus, however, if contentious and speculative, had the significant virtues of grounding their arguments in specificity and detail.[7]

Havelock argued that the Greek epics comprised an extensive encyclopaedia of knowledge and custom that was designed to transmit information in a dense, multiplexed, and memorable oral form. The sound patterns and oral-formulaic structure of the epics had the dual functions of aiding memory for recitation and encouraging audience receptivity by immersive involvement on somatic and psychological levels. The organization of stories in dramatic instances encouraged audience identification with characters and actions that similarly aided in the transfer and imprinting of information. As Karen Armstrong has remarked, "Myth must lead to imitation or participation, not passive contemplation."[8]

The Socratic attack on the epics was largely in response to this kind of involvement. A *paideia* or a system of education based on identifications,

and particularly emotionally charged identifications with characters, undermined the development of critical and consistent thought.[9]

> He opens by characterising the effect of poetry as 'a crippling of the mind'. It is a kind of disease, for which one has to acquire an antidote. The antidote must consist of a knowledge 'of what things really are'. In short, poetry is a species of mental poison, and is the enemy of truth.[10]

Havelock's delineation of poetic function went considerably beyond such identifications in analysing the epic as a structure of information. He described a system in which information, rather than being presented in an abstracted, organized, and categorical system or interrogated for its validity, was constantly being embedded and enmeshed in the multiple connections of narrative descriptions. These connections aided in memory by placing information in dramatic contexts and by asserting the significance of individual items by asserting their multiple relationships to others. The connections that located each instance in a web of connections also allowed several different types of information to be embedded simultaneously. This kind of layering or "multiplexing" of information was dense and efficient. Cultural mores of correct behaviour, for instance, could be presented, along with counter-examples and situational information, in the description of an unfolding situation in which auditors had become affectively involved. Repetition of information, and particularly representation of items or themes in multiple contexts, increased the plurality of their connections and the range of their applicability, aiding in their retention. For a system based in oral memory, such a system was both sophisticated and efficient, since in every repetition it was capable of reinforcing multiple kinds of information and their supporting connections simultaneously and implicitly, while audiences absorbed them through their active involvement in stories, characters, and actions.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider further the efficiency of information transferred orally through such a system of multiple connections and embedded knowledge in another context, one that may further illuminate how difficult it is to see in retrospect. In his first book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, Walter Ong included a graphic from a 1525 work by Spanish philosopher and mathematician Juan de Celaya (Figure 2.1), an attempt to render some of the relationships between *topoi*, or common reference points, in medieval logic, in graphic form.[11]

The results, rendered in two dimensions, must have appeared as highly confusing then as they do now, as each item was connected to others in multiple ways that seem to obscure, rather than clarify, their many relationships. In reality, in the oral system in which they operated, such references

Figure 2.1 Johannes de Celaya, 1525. Bibliothèque nationale de France
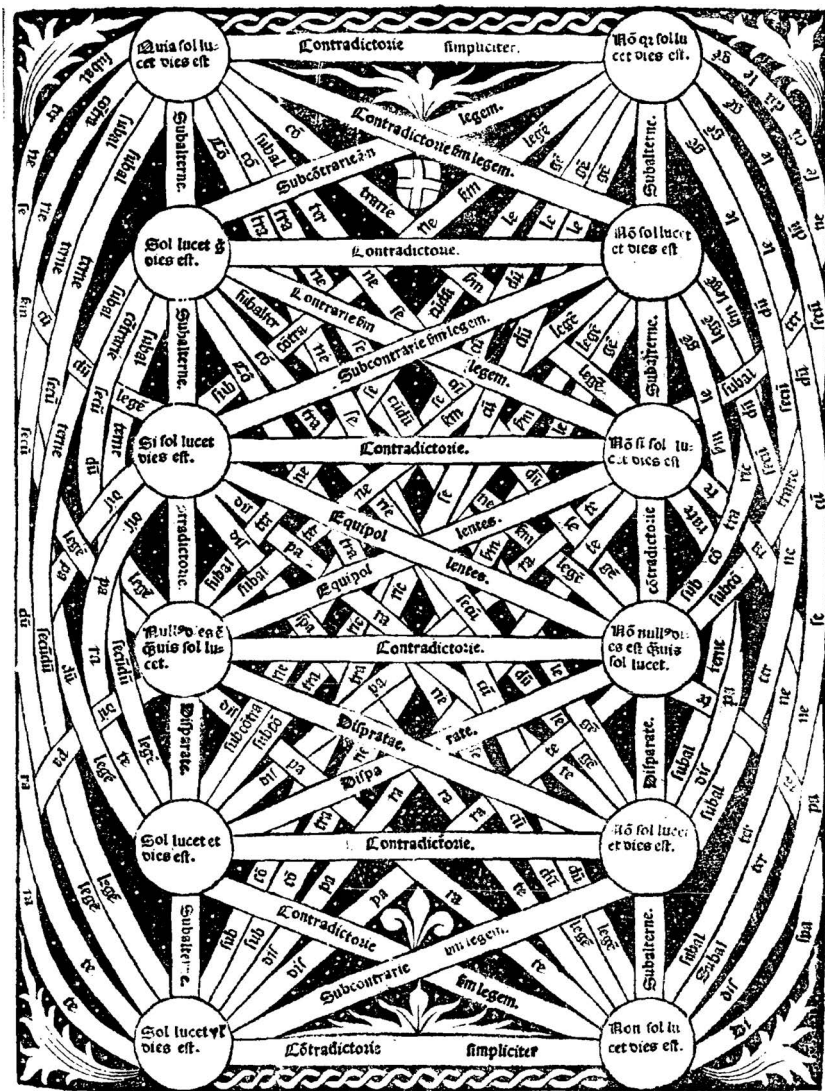
would never be used in this way. Only specific selected connections would have been activated and deployed in any particular use in oral disputation at any given time, though the sense that each reference was multiply connected to others in a vast network of meaning would have added to the power and authenticity of each in people's understanding. The individual
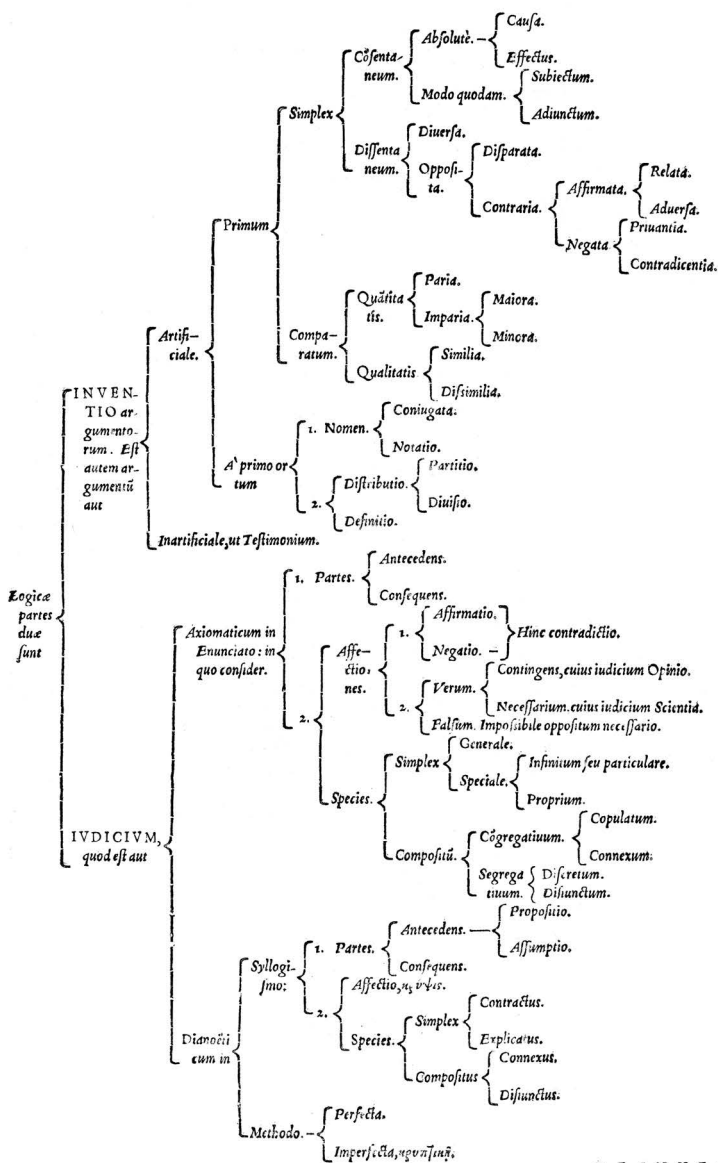
deployment, like the speech act or *parole* in Saussurean linguistic theory, would have both evoked and depended on the larger system of understandings (*la langue*) in people's individual and collective knowledge. It was only in the attempt to render all of these possible connections explicitly and completely at once in two-dimensional representation in this example from the early days of printing that this system appeared so confusing—and so vulnerable to critique and dismissal.

Ong also included one of many diagrams later used in the late sixteenth century to explicate the Ramist and Cartesian logical systems that were ascendant (see Figure 2.2). In these diagrams, no items overlap, and items connect to others in strictly determined hierarchical relationships, each connected only to membership in a larger category and to two or more subordinate subcategories. This representation of knowledge resulted in a pattern of analysis and organization with which literate people have been familiar for centuries. It is the pattern of a table of contents of a book or the cataloguing system of a library before computers allowed for extended searchable metadata (tagging and cross-categorical linkages). Rendered in two dimensions, it must have appeared efficient, categorical, and complete.

Unlike de Celaya's diagram, which required the one-time and expensive special skills of a woodcutter or engraver, it was easily reproducible in the new technology of movable type (a close examination reveals that even the apparently solid vertical brackets are composed of such pieces). As efficient as it was in what it did, this system of representation and organization was, however, limited in other respects: it was completely incapable of rendering the kind of multiplicity of connections represented in de Celaya's diagram, whether they were valid or not, and it certainly encouraged a kind of conceptualization that is directed more to abstracting principles from instances and rendering them in categorical integrity and isolation than to presenting knowledge as contingent, situational, contextual, and interactive.[12] And while the new system exploited the formidable power of visual organization on the printed page, it is very difficult to imagine that it would have allowed for the same level of memorization, retention, and transmission of information that the oral system provided. The two systems operated by different principles structured to their circumstances and involved different basic presuppositions about information and its valuation and use. Seen from the perspective of the emerging paradigm of literacy and without its supporting practice, this representation of the oral system rendered it arcane, contorted, and incapable. It is not then surprising that readers, trained in literate representation, would see something very different in the epics than what their predecessors heard.

Havelock further argued that the epics as auditory or acoustic systems also replicated the system of presences and absences typical in Saussurean descriptions of language in the circumstances of their repetition and

6;

P. RAMI DIALECTICA.
TABVLA GENERALIS.

Logicæ partes duæ sunt

INVENTIO argumentorum. Est autem argumentū aut

- Artificiale.
  - Primum
    - Simplex
      - Cōsentaneum.
        - Absolutè. —
          - Causa.
          - Effectus.
        - Modo quodam.
          - Subiectum.
          - Adiunctum.
      - Dissentaneum.
        - Diuersa.
        - Opposita.
          - Disparata.
          - Contraria.
            - Affirmata.
              - Relata.
              - Aduersa.
            - Negata.
              - Priuantia.
              - Contradicentia.
    - Comparatum.
      - Quātitatis.
        - Paria.
        - Imparia.
          - Maiora.
          - Minora.
      - Qualitatis.
        - Similia.
        - Dissimilia.
  - A' primo ortum
    - 1. Nomen.
      - Coniugata.
      - Notatio.
    - 2.
      - Distributio.
        - Partitio.
        - Diuisio.
      - Definitio.
- Inartificiale, ut Testimonium.

IVDICIVM, quod est aut

- Axiomaticum in Enunciato : in quo consider.
  - 1. Partes.
    - Antecedens.
    - Consequens.
  - 2.
    - Affectiones.
      - 1.
        - Affirmatio.
        - Negatio. — Hine contradictio.
      - 2.
        - Verum. Contingens, cuius iudicium Opinio.
        - Necessarium. cuius iudicium Scientia.
        - Falsum. Impossibile oppositum necessario.
    - Species.
      - Simplex
        - Generale.
        - Speciale.
          - Infinitum seu particulare.
          - Proprium.
      - Compositū.
        - Cōgregatiuum.
          - Copulatum.
          - Connexum.
        - Segregatiuum.
          - Discretum.
          - Disiunctum.
- Dianoëti cum in
  - Syllogismo:
    - 1. Partes.
      - Antecedens. —
        - Propositio.
        - Assumptio.
      - Consequens.
    - 2.
      - Affectio, uς ψις.
      - Species.
        - Simplex
          - Contractus.
          - Explicatus.
        - Compositus
          - Connexus.
          - Disiunctus.
  - Methodo. —
    - Perfecta.
    - Imperfecta, ugvātinī.

DE INVEN-

Figure 2.2 Petrus Ramus, 1576. Houghton Library, Harvard

production. Unlike printed texts that remained stable in their totality once generated, oral systems only survived through repetition. Because they were extensive and typically experienced in smaller parts, and because the circumstances of performance, like speech acts (*parole*), were always individual, situational, and contingent, individual acts of repetition were themselves varied and partial. Because they were auditory, even in the relation of a single incident they focused on that which was being spoken, rather than on its totality or trajectory. Even so, such individual enactments, like speech acts, relied upon and reinforced the ideas and conventions of the entire system, if primarily by implication: the epics as a whole, like *la langue*, existed more in the minds and shared understanding of their auditors as an encompassing context than as unified or reified objects. The system of epics, like *la langue*, was never fully produced but always atmospherically present. Conceptually and experientially, it had no boundaries. As he traced these features of the epics and other poems in detail, Havelock made this observation about Hesiod:

> The content of the Muses' song is encyclopedic and magisterial, embracing the order which emanates from Zeus himself…. This is why it is natural that Hesiod's hymn as it celebrates the Muses can turn also into a celebration of Zeus himself. Their song is coextensive with the mind of Zeus; it comprehends the social and political order. Poetic record pervades and controls every sphere of the human condition.[13]

Poetry and the epics were coextensive with the culture itself: like *la langue* or Althusser's notion of ideology, they had no outside.

These characteristics were further embedded in other aspects of poetic performance. Those of us introduced to epics in our early education may well remember the classroom maxim that epics began *in medias res*, "in the middle of things." In this respect, the epic appears in stark contrast to the tragedy that Aristotle describes as the "imitation of an action" that is "whole and complete" and has "a beginning, a middle, and an end." But what did it mean to "begin in the middle"? If the experience of the epic was common and atmospheric, and if it was commonly experienced through the recirculation of episodes in varying settings and in no particular order, and if participants come into consciousness hearing these randomized episodes from their earliest moments, the epic as a system truly did not have a beginning and end: the epics were always there and always in play. Rather than beginning "in the middle," *people* were always "in the middle" of the epics. As with Althusserian ideology, people were born into them and interpellated within them as subjects: the epics were "always-already," and their order, beyond their constant presence, inconsequential to their function.[14]

This characteristic of oral performance coincided with a very different way of thinking about actions and the linkages between them. Havelock argued that instances in the epics were presented in actions and that actions proceeded in a series in which events and characters came and went. Rather than forming causal sequences, actions and incidents arose and dissipated. They were "born" and "died":

> The content of the poetic record can thus be viewed on the one hand as an endless series of actions, on the other as an equally endless series of births and deaths which when applied metaphorically to phenomena become "things happening" or "events" … it can fairly be generalised that the saga considered from the standpoint of a later and more sophisticated critique is essentially the record of an event-series, of things-happening, never of a system of relations or of causes or of categories and topics.[15]

In defining the ideal tragedy, Aristotle observed that the worst plots were episodic, but in these terms, epics were *always* episodic. All of these characteristics of epic descriptions of actions were congruent with episodic retelling, in which the focus of narration was constantly shifting, but they also pointed to fundamental differences in understanding. Principles or embedded knowledge were not separable from actions, but were presented and perhaps perceived, as qualities of the situations in which they were described:

> First of all, the data or the items without exception have to be stated as events in time. They are all time-conditioned. None of them can be cast into a syntax which shall be simply true for all situations and so timeless; each and all have to be worded in the language of the specific doing or the specific happening. Second they are remembered and frozen into the record as separate disjunct episodes each complete and satisfying in itself, in a series which is joined together paratactically. Action succeeds action in a kind of endless chain…. Thus the memorised record consists of a vast plurality of acts and events, not integrated into chained groups of cause and effect, but rather linked associatively in endless series.[16]

At an earlier point, Havelock gave the example of a query ("how should one confront death") that is answered by reference to a specific incident from the vast encyclopaedia that is *The Iliad*. One reviewer questioned whether stories were ever really used this way, with related instance set in association with experienced incident. A compelling answer has been

given by anthropologist Julie Cruikshank in her work with contemporary Indigenous communities in the Yukon, in which cultural stories are not only used this way but considered by residents to be essential referents to understanding of events as they happen.[17]

It is worth considering further Havelock's observations on causality. Most of us are habituated to thinking in causal sequences and might, in fact, be likely to retroactively supply them in our understanding of epic events. This is not, Havelock argued, to understand the pattern that is actually there:

> The causative type of thinking presupposes that the effect is more important than the cause and in thought is therefore to be selected first before you seek its explanation. This reverses what we may call the temporal dynamic order, or the natural order, in which the doings are linked in that series in which they occur in sensual experience, and are each in turn appreciated or savoured before the next one occurs.[18]

The role of the poet, seen from this perspective, was not to explain causal patterns in action but to relate events in an order of births and deaths and to allow them to be experienced and understood. In any event, auditors often experienced them out of any particular sequence. The purpose was not to define causalities but to recover and restore the entire system of knowledge:

> Let us think of him therefore as a man living in a large house crowded with furniture, both necessary and elaborate. His task is to thread his way through the house, touching and feeling the furniture as he goes and reporting its shape and texture. He chooses a winding and leisurely route which shall in the course of a day's recital allow him to touch and handle most of what is in the house. The route that he picks will have its own design. This becomes his story, and represents the nearest that he can approach to sheer invention. This house, these rooms, and the furniture he did not himself fashion: he must continually and affectionately recall them to us…. Such is the art of the encyclopedic minstrel, who as he reports also maintains the social and moral apparatus of an oral culture.[19]

Having thought about these characteristics of narration and action, it is perhaps worth revisiting some observations about plot and the epic's role in memory. If, for instance, a purpose of *The Iliad* was to recall, along with many other aspects of cultural knowledge, the cultural genealogy of Greek society since the Trojan War, the recitation of the circumstances

surrounding the war—the location, the journeys and navigation, the ancestors involved—was important, but the plot, the "wrath of Achilleus," was perhaps less so. It provided drama and interest but was ancillary to this information. The plot, rather than the decisive element, was rather the vehicle through which much more extensive information was remembered and retained. This was a relationship that tragedy was to invert.

While the embedding of information in epics in dramatic episodes and the encoding of examples of behaviour and custom in situations clearly had value in preserving and transmitting cultural memory and providing reference points for resolving situations as they arose, there were many things that they did not do:

> There are a million things you cannot say at all in metrical speech and it will follow that you will not think them either.[20]

In this respect, Havelock noted, the Platonic rejection of the epics, though perhaps unfairly dismissive of the sophistication and efficiency of their mnemonic structures and functions, was not without a point: thinking outside this system required the development of alternative modalities and an alternative vantage point, and one such modality came with writing.

With that in mind, it is, perhaps, also possible to consider just how significant the change was that drama and tragedy, as theorized by Nietzsche and Aristotle (Chapter 1), represented in Greek society. The epics, by their functioning in an acoustic environment in which they were omnipresent but never fully visualized, provided an immersive and atmospheric representational system "without an outside" (coextensive with the mind of Zeus). Tragedies did just the opposite. Even in Nietzsche's nostalgic account, with its perception of tragedy as a call to "restored oneness," tragedy began with objectification—with the single speaker who stood apart from the throng and was viewed by them in his singularity. By Aristotle's time, tragedies, each with "a beginning, a middle, and an end," competed for prizes at festivals, each presented as self-contained and complete. Even when an individual tragedy was part of a larger structure (a trilogy or longer sequence) and part of a known, perhaps, epic story, the circumstances of production and presentation emphasized its enclosure, containment, and visibility as an embodied performance. Even in Nietzsche's account, tragedy, *at its most characteristic and effective*, emphasized the separation of the audience from the actors by "the living wall" of the chorus. The separation and objectification, so definitive of tragedy, was, in this way, the Apollinian separation that in Nietzsche's own account tragedy struggled most to overcome.[21]

By Aristotle's time, the production of tragedy had resulted in both enough examples and a social infrastructure comparing and judging them

that it was possible to extrapolate from them a theory of their operation and function. They provided, in other words, the occasion and material for an inductive process of typing a human activity—the process that Aristotle was more generally applying to the understanding of natural phenomena, as well as a means of breaking identification and objectifying and regulating emotions through katharsis. Though not identified by Aristotle, the emotions of tragedy were also regulated by the simple condition of tragedy's boundedness—the simple reality that the audience, unlike the hero, survived the performance because, unlike the omnipresent epic, tragedy always ended in closure: the hero died and the performance ended, but the audience walked away.

It may also be possible to see in this inversion of modalities, as Havelock argued, how Socratic-Platonic philosophy may have operated as a middle term. Socrates attacked the identifications and the situationism of the epics and the kind of variability of epic personae. Epic characters often appeared as mercurial and reactive, and, as he objected, even the gods were often portrayed this way. Rather than appearing as stabilizing ideals, the gods provided motivations to characters for actions that were otherwise inexplicable.[22] In attempting to provide stability and separation from the contingency of embedded actions, Socrates proposed the Forms, never fully knowable, but conceivable through contemplation and through the asymptotic processes of dialogue. Famously, however, Socrates eschewed the newer technology of writing, at least in part because it would erode memory, the very capability the epics enforced, and also because Socratic dialogues themselves functioned in an oral-aural modality that avoided hypostatizing the "truth" as an object. In aspiring to the fixity of the Forms, which were not "present" in the material world but, like the idea of the epics or *la langue*, existed only imperfectly through their realization in performance or speech, the processes of dialogue were acoustically ephemeral, requiring constant recreation and renewal of processes of approximation. And, as in the epics, they were never free from their representation in a personality.

Socrates was, of course, betrayed by his student Plato, who reduced the *activity* and auditory and ephemeral quality of the dialogue and its constant re-enactment and rediscovery, to a written account and the fixed and non-dialogical medium of writing. In doing so, he transposed it, perhaps not as radically as Ramus would later transpose logic, into a medium in which the dialogues were not themselves the process of discovery but the record of one available for later study. In doing so, he pointed the way forward to the more radical philosophy of Aristotle, which would offer fixity, systematization, and descriptions of change based on metaphors of predictable biological growth ("tragedy advanced by slow degrees"), teleology, and the method of induction based on the formation of concepts

from example. Considering that, in the record of his dialogues, Socrates emerged as a liminal character between two orders and there is both a dramatic and ideological inevitability to his death. While Nietzsche would envision a "Socrates who practices music," the West got instead, for several centuries, an Aristotle who observed, recorded, and defined causality, always to a practical and systematic end, and a Socrates who was defined, like the tragic heroes he eschewed, by his death and absence.

Before progressing beyond this topic, it is worth noting the difference, not just in "characterization" presented here but, implicitly, in personality structure. Socrates saw in the mercurial quality of epic character descriptions, including those of the gods, a kind of inconsistency or capriciousness that implied incapacity and was dismissible as unreflective or even childish. In these depictions, though the images of the gods were a preliminary way to externalize motives and forces, they remained similar to the humans. Another way to interpret those same characteristics, however, is to see them as highly functional in their capacity to reshape themselves fully in different circumstances—that in the sudden and often violent world of the epics, to remain "consistent" was to be unresponsive to events and vulnerable, but to listen to the situational advice of "the gods" was to survive. The projection of the unchanging ideals of the Forms, however, suggested another personality structure that achieved consistency in its relation to these projected ideals. That personality structure may at times be "tragic" or even dysfunctional in its vulnerability to a "tragic flaw" ("hamartia," ἁμάρτια, the "missing of the mark" in not shifting adequately with circumstances) or, for that matter, the inflexibility that resulted in the death of Socrates, but it was ultimately more in keeping with written records in which one's previous actions and statements at different times might be readily compared. The Socratic movement towards examination and objectification was a way station on the road to a context in which those actions could even begin to appear as inconsistent. The externalization was to redefine everything, and the written record itself was to become a new context for interpretation and definition.

Some Further Thoughts on Epic

Havelock's treatment of the epics was based in part on the oral-formulaic theories proposed by Milman Perry and Alfred Lord, though not out of keeping with an interesting earlier statement in the work of Russian Formalists and Prague Structuralists Pëtr Bogatyrëv and Roman Jakobson in "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity" first published in 1929.[23] In Perry and Lord's accounts, repetitive prefabricated metrical phrases assisted memory and oral composition on the fly as they completed

metrical lines and allowed for poets to plan out the trajectory of their recitation and fabricate the next lines. In addition, that formulaic technique also facilitated the adaptation of stories and recitations to specific occasions by allowing more or less elaboration of incidents and other modifications to fit time and interest of audiences. As Bogatyrëv and Jakobson noted, oral narratives also allowed for the integration of new material into narrative memory and for the elision of information no longer considered essential. *Beowulf* includes the description of such a process:

Hwīlum heaþorōfe hlēapan lēton,	At times the heroes let gallop
on geflit faran fealwe mēaras,	contesting their horses
ðǣr him foldwegas fægere þūhton,	where the path seemed good
cystum cūðe. Hwīlum cyninges þegn,	the best way known. Then the king's man
guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,	who knew vaunts songs remembered
sē ðe ealfela ealdgesegena	he who many old sagas
worn gemunde —word ōþer fand	in number retained tried different words
soðe gebunden— secg eft ongan	bound them truly he again took up
sīð Bēowulfes. snyttrum styrian,	the exploits of Beowulf. Wisely set forth
ond on spēd wrecan spel gerāde,	and with skill wrought the fitting history
wordum wrixlan.	with words combined.[24]

With this composition, somewhat literally on the fly, Beowulf's exploits were depicted as becoming part of the oral history, and perhaps becoming the poem in which older stories were then included. While containing this image, *Beowulf* as a poem includes other complexities. Describing events in a distant past before the Germanic invasions of England and certainly before the arrival of Christian missionaries in 597, it nevertheless integrated Christian elements, most likely the emendations of later Christian scribes, an aspect of the transformational practices of transcription.

While it is clear that such later emendations may have altered narratives, it is worth considering the other, less obvious ways in which literary transcription may have affected the epics as we have them, a topic to which Havelock turned in more detail in later works.[25] The contrast noted above between the epic, as Havelock described it or oral poetry as Bogatyrëv and Jakobson theorized it, and tragedy, as theorized by Socrates and Aristotle, has in part to do with boundedness and closure—the sense in which a story can be considered complete or over. In terms of epic recitation, the oral epic theorists have argued, narrative is effectively never closed and never "over," as the retelling of incidents is part of a larger pattern that

continually manifests itself in instances that constantly recirculate, a process that never reaches an end, or within which the narration of "the end" is just another episode in circulation. Tragedy, in contrast, performed in its entirety and having "a beginning, a middle, and an end," emerged as a more closed form, and its plots reflected closure in the causality and teleology of both construction and purpose, the production of both "an end" and a specific effect.

Not all epics, however, may be equal in this way. The difference between *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* with respect to an ending was substantial. *The Iliad*, even in its literary form, really did begin *in medias res* with the Trojan war well underway and it "concluded" only, in effect, with an incident, the death of Hector that was one among many such deaths as the war as a larger frame continued. *The Iliad* did have what may seem like images of containment in, for instance, the description of the shield of Achilleus (Book 18, 478–608), which contained panoramic images of aspects of life bounded by a river that circles its perimeter, but this image is perhaps more accurately seen as an image of inclusion, the plenitude of representation, and the encompassing quality of epic reference, rather than formal closure.

The Odyssey differed from *The Iliad*, at least as we have it in its familiar form, in several critical respects. First, while framed as a sequel to *The Iliad* in relating later aspects of the Trojan war, it was essentially a story, like the tragedies would be, organized around a single character (or, for tragedy, as Aristotle argued, the unity of action surrounding that character). If anything, in comparison to *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, however, was even more episodic, relaying sets of adventures that could reasonably be told in almost any order, as, in their oral form, they likely were, and united, like beads on a string, only by the path of the hero and his journey. The incidents, as Havelock argued, were dramatically compelling and memorable and contained considerable cultural information, with the hero and his journey functioning primarily as a mnemonic frame. But unlike the characters of *The Iliad*, Odysseus emerged as a different kind of character, more in the Socratic vein. He was a thinker, consistent in his actions, and when he was not, it was clear that his deviations were dissimulations and conscious adaptations to circumstances. He was portrayed as having something like an interiority, not entirely expressed in his actions. His adventures, furthermore, were reconciled into a larger and essentially teleological pattern. While his path had taken him to the Trojan war, *The Odyssey* was really the story of his return to Ithaca and the completion of a pattern that began on his departure. His journey, in other words, like that contemplated by Chaucer, was cyclical, and his return a completion.

The story of the Trojan war was a story of revenge for slights, in which each act of revenge provoked another of retaliation. This cycle

was potentially endless and appeared to be perpetuated at the end of *The Odyssey* when Odysseus instituted yet another cycle of revenge by executing the suitors. In the final section of the poem, which may be a later emendation, the relatives of the suitors appeared on the road, intending to avenge their deaths. That revenge, if effected, would contribute to the endlessness and timeless extension of this pattern in a world, like that depicted on the shield of Achilleus, that was timeless and filled with recurrent actions. The version of *The Odyssey* passed to us, however, closed with a divine intervention that halted the conflict, allowing for the successful completion of Odysseus's return and reunification with Penelope and for closure in the entire action of the poem.

> Then the gray-eyed goddess Athene said to Odysseus:
> "Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
> hold hard, stop this quarrel in closing combat, for fear
> Zeus of the wide brows, son of Kronos, may be angry with you."
> So spoke Athene, and with happy heart he obeyed her.
> And pledges for the days to come, sworn to by both sides,
> were settled by Pallas Athene, daughter of Zeus of the aegis,
> who had likened herself in appearance and voice to Mentor.
>   (XXIV, 5-41–48)[26]

This most classic example of *deus ex machina* internal to the description of the poem may also be seen, only slightly recast on the level of metanarrative, as a tracing of authorial intervention and a response to the perceived *need* for closure that was not present in the oral-formulaic epic, but that may be evidence, in the canonical and literary version, of the growing intrusion of literate habits into the structuring of the narrative and plot.

This divine intervention was categorically different from others within both epics, in which the gods represented either forces of nature or internal motivation driving character actions (a theory proposed in quite absolute terms by Julian Jaynes[27]). In the trajectory of this story and its circular theme of exile-and-return, the intervention completed the logic of the plot as a more "bounded" narrative form. In that regard, the artificiality of this intrusion, perhaps, represented the hand not of a god but an "author." And, in this context, what is "an author"? Bogatyrëv and Jakobson argued persuasively that "folklore," or oral narratives, in both their plasticity and mnemonic function, neither have nor require authors but are more broadly maintained as social constructions by many hands over generations. They are common property of a society or group that exerts a more collective ownership and collective practice of recitation. But here, perhaps, was the emergence of another kind of necessity.

Aristotle, in his thinking about fictionality and representation more generally in *The Poetics*, commented that

> It is Homer who has chiefly taught other poets the art of telling lies skilfully. The secret of it lies in a fallacy. For, assuming that if one thing is or becomes, a second is or becomes, men imagine that, if the second is, the first likewise is or becomes. But this is a false inference. Hence, where the first thing is untrue, it is quite unnecessary, provided the second be true, to add that the first is or has become. For the mind, knowing the second to be true, falsely infers the truth of the first.
>
> (*Poetics* XXIV, 1460a.9, 95)

If, in conditions of literacy, manuscripts had authors, just as the manuscripts of Plato or Aristotle did, then with the emergence of a transcribed *Odyssey*, the necessity may have been for the invention of one, an apocryphal "Homer." When provided with a manuscript (or transcription) of the epics, people presumed an author when, at least in some earlier phase of their existence, there had been none. Such thinking is in line with more recent considerations of authorship, such as Foucault's "author function" and others, but here the distinction may be even more significant.[28] The debate over Homer and the notion of authorship in the epics have had a long and complex history, but it may be sufficient to say that the closure noted in *The Odyssey* as we have it, even if an emendation, did require at least the consciousness of producers who were considering, as they did in tragedy, the trajectory of an action "that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude" and, therefore, requires both an end and, perhaps, ultimately "an outside," a vantage point from which it may be viewed as complete. It seems clear that by Socrates's time, the epics had acquired canonical form, so that the rhapsodes with whom he sparred (in *Ion*) and about whom he commented were performing something more like recitations in the modern sense, a practice in which the epics had lost their plasticity and already acquired both object status and an author, "Homer," reflecting their status, for some generations, as canonical and ultimately written records.

To argue this is simply to argue, once again, that oral and written narratives operate in different social contexts and perform different functions in ways that presume different forms of internal logic and method and have different requirements. It is also to acknowledge that they may change as the context of their operations change. These differences may perhaps be even more clearly seen in a consideration of two other examples. The first was the emergence in sixteenth-century China of one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature, *Xī Yóu Jì* (西遊記), *Journey to the West*,

generally ascribed to Wú Chéng'ēn (吳承恩), a minor scholar and official.[29] This novel in some respects extended the kind of structure noted in *The Odyssey*, and perhaps even in *The Canterbury Tales*. Largely consisting of the episodic assembly of a large number of folktales and legends, encompassing monsters, dragons, magicians, mythical figures, and many other characters, it foregrounds the antics of the hugely popular folk character, the Monkey King, Sūn wù kōng (孫悟空), about whom stories are still performed in street and puppet theatres and operas across Asia. A second aspect of this novel, however, is the narration of the journey that gives it its name, based, somewhat loosely, on the records of the pilgrimage of a Buddhist monk, Xuán zàng (玄奘) to India to study and bring back Buddhist scriptures. This plot shapes the episodic structure of its other contents into the pattern of a journey and return that gives it purpose—and a linear plot recaptured, as in *The Canterbury Tales* or *The Odyssey*, in a circle. In a third level, this plot also encompasses a narrative of cultural development through Chinese tradition and religions, from animism to the final emergence of Buddhism and the ethic of compassion.

It is possible to see in these progressive themes, a more "literary" realignment of the two levels of narrative, in which the framing story was not primarily a container for other cultural information, but in which, in an inversion of Havelock's order, the folk tales become vehicles through which the path towards compassion and enlightenment was conveyed and made more engaging. In this sense, the structure of this "epic" was very much in keeping with the "delight and instruct" alignments of Western literary theories since Horace, including Philip Sidney and many others, and the Ramist realignment of the relationship between logic and rhetoric, in which rhetoric, formerly the supercategory within which logic was only one method, served as an embellishment to explicate logic, which was repositioned to be the dominant category.[30]

Another example of this kind of literate reframing of widespread non-literate cultural traditions is far removed from this one and considerably more contemporary, and perhaps for some purposes, more immediately relevant. At the close of the nineteenth century, two doctors, trained in the literate practices of Western medicine, arrived on the newly formed Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota where the Oglala Lakota and other groups had settled in the aftermath of the Battle of the Greasy Grass (Custer's Last Stand), and around the time of the Wounded Knee massacre that closed this period (coincidentally, at the time and place of the births of my grandparents). One of these doctors, James R. Walker, though not Indigenous, became deeply immersed in Lakota culture and healing practices and underwent rigorous training that prepared him to receive traditional stories and the permission to record them. Walker transcribed these stories as accurately as he could, though he noted that even in his most accurate

accounts, he excised much repetition and detail. These accounts included variants of some stories as well as stories associated with only one teller. As a collection, these stories appeared only as fragments of a larger body of narrative and cosmology.

> When I was pronounced a holy man and worthy, then the holy men instructed me relative to their lore. This they did by telling me their legends. They could not tell these in a consecutive manner, neither did any legend give all the attributes of any of their mythologic characters. One legend would give to one or more of their deities certain attributes and another legend give other attributes to these deities so that the different legends must be considered in order to understand the lore sufficiently to account for the motives that actuated the Oglalas in their peculiar traditional traits. The legends as I give them are not translations of those as they were told in their language by my informants for such would be tedious repetitions of ideas and allusions.[31]

Walker's account, in other words, while preserving the fragmentary nature of these records, had already begun the process of editing them for the literate audiences that would receive them (including later Lakota) according to Ramist notions of economy and precision. His account, however, did give a way to think about the possible formation and functions of oral narratives that was more immediate and, in that sense, less speculative than Havelock's, though reiterative of some of its most salient features. Perhaps the most compelling were the ideas that these stories depended upon their immersive experience, including their many variations and (to a literate mind) excessive repetition, and that they did not depend upon sequential order, or, in any given instance, on their boundedness or "completion." This apparent fragmentation perhaps also reflected the circumstances of the Lakota, before entering the reservation system, as nomadic people who travelled in small bands (*tiyospaye*) and only gathered in larger groups on certain occasions or for specific purposes. While these stories all seemed to describe aspects of a common system, Walker surmised that no individual seemed to have known them all, and no one seemed to be bothered by multiple versions or the apparent partiality of their knowledge. A partial analogue may be found in the narrative traditions of the more settled Indigenous communities on the northwest Pacific coast, in which individual extended families or clans have proprietary rights over particular narratives, but the retelling of narratives at larger ceremonial gatherings (potlaches), functions to preserve and enact a larger, networked system of knowledge and custom. In some traditions preserving and transmitting knowledge through the retention of specific kinds of knowledge by

individuals and through forms of apprenticeship transmission also works, not by consolidation but by the networked distribution of orally transmitted knowledge. The cultural system of retaining and transmitting these stories has seemed to have worked well in their use and preservation in a kind of network of groups and memories and, for some groups, continues to do so. A further account of such practices in the contemporary Syilx community of interior British Columbia has been given by Jeanette Armstrong, herself widely recognized as a community knowledge keeper.[32]

Walker, however, did not stop there. Well acquainted with the Greek epics and the Bible, he could not help but wonder what Lakota stories might look like if they were consolidated into a single, consistent, and sequential narrative. While preserving his original transcriptions, he undertook, for himself and for other Euro-Americans, the formation of another version, which would, in its coherency, order, and consistency, more closely match the interpretive habits of those audiences and, he thought, garner their respect. The result was, of course, very different in its structure and potential operations than its source material. Perhaps surprisingly, it really does look more like its European and Middle Eastern antecedents in its form, narrative trajectory, and apparent implications. This example, like that of the *Xī Yóu Jì*, provides a way to think about the transition of oral narratives to written form and about what might be gained by such a transition into literacy, but also what might be lost, and how difficult the losses might be, in retrospect, to see once the literate versions have become established, and especially if the literate versions are established as definitive and canonical, and especially, as in the Lakota example, that occurs under conditions in which the original versions and practices are actively suppressed—a circumstance that Walker's Lakota teachers anticipated in allowing for his transcriptions.

These concerns are particularly relevant to contemporary situations, such as the landmark Canadian Delgamuuk'w court case noted in the Introduction, in which traditional Indigenous oral narratives were recorded and transcribed in court. In such instances, any inconsistencies among versions, as completely accepted in the Lakota example, have often been argued to undermine the credibility of oral accounts.[33] The very act of recording, and therefore *constructing*, through an exogenous colonial interaction, a "canonical" version, potentially undermines the viability of the oral system and its functions they seek to make visible and, in some cases, "preserve" ("We murder to dissect"—William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," 1798). With these more contemporary and at times contentious examples in mind, the advisability of understanding the emergence and functionality of drama and tragedy and the systems they represent in contrast to their predecessors, in light of the significance and social functions those predecessors might well have had that are obscured for us by our

own interpretive frameworks, in which we are likely to consider them as "literary" antecedents or artefacts, may be more compelling. Considering, as Havelock has done, what those predecessors might actually represent may be worth the effort, if a more accurate understanding, rather than "literary history" is our aim.

A Final Example

Aristotle contrasted the episodic structure of the epics, which he regarded as inferior, to the highly purposeful and sequential plots of tragedies, ordered by "beginning," "middle," and "end" and linked by "causal necessity," and he based his theory on a teleological outcome, the affective production of *katharsis*. With this in mind it is worth considering what happens to epic as it was reinterpreted in the classical world *post*-tragedy and within a fully ensconced regime of literacy. The third Greco-Roman epic, *The Aeneid*, in contrast to its Greek predecessors, was clearly a written composition and explicitly the work of Virgil as its single author, who, among other things, sought to consolidate his personal position as a poet in relation to the emperor and state through its composition. *The Aeneid*, like its predecessors, included cultural information and episodic stories, and it extended the cycle of revenge that permeated the earlier epics and follows from the Trojan war. While beginning with the fall of Troy, however, it ended with one final and decisive moment—the founding of the Roman state that ultimately subjugated the Greeks and avenged the defeat at Troy. While in that sense completing a kind of circle, its teleological and ideological purposes were clear in its genealogy of the Roman state and homage to Augustus. It was a celebration both of Roman rule and its own participation in a culture of high literary production.

As in the earlier epics, the cycle of revenge permeated many aspects of *The Aeneid*, though it is positioned somewhat differently as a plot device. Revenge motivated specific actions in *The Aeneid* as it did in *The Iliad*. It motivated the closing act of the epic in Bk XII in a scene recalling Achilleus's killing of Hector in revenge for the death of Patroklos in *The Iliad*. In a larger frame, the sacking of Troy, retold by Aeneas to Dido in Book II, was reprised as the occasion for Aeneas's journey and the eventual founding of Rome. This international cycle of revenge, spilling out of the earlier epics and encompassing an extensive cultural history, concluded in the poem's projected future with the reign of Augustus. Internal to this time frame was a second parallel cycle. At the end of Book IV, Dido proclaims perpetual Carthaginian enmity to Rome and calls forth an unnamed avenger ("aliquis … ultor," l. 625) for her suicide following her abandonment by Aeneas.[34] To a contemporary of Virgil, that avenger might well have been Hannibal, who had successfully campaigned against

Rome a century earlier, before Carthage too succumbed to Roman rule. In the Greek epics, revenge as a motive and plot device provoked potentially limitless alternations in a kind of steady-state oscillation. In *The Aeneid*, in contrast, all of these cycles were subsumed within the teleology that produced the *Pax Augustana* that imposed peace. This pattern in its linearity ultimately controlled both the poem and its representation of time.

Havelock argued that the time consciousness of the Greek epics was both immediate and "timeless," a kind of eternal present in which actions happened (were "born" and "died") in a succession of incidents in which audiences were immersed, but which were often told in a randomized order, or like the Lakota sacred stories, told by and to different people at different times, to be made more "complete" only in the combined understanding of their audiences. *The Aeneid*, though like the antecedent *Odyssey*, somewhat episodically structured in its first half, located all of its actions with the ordered sequence of the teleology noted above. In this respect, it cited its sources in the Greek epic but moved beyond them and subsumed them within its own more literate concept of time and plot. As Daniel Mendelsohn has noted, the opening lines encompassed the entire plot in one long sentence:

> Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
> Italiam fato profugus Lavinaque venit
> litora—multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
> vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram,
> multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem
> inferretque deos Latio; genus unde Latinum
> Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.

> Arms and the man I sing, who first from the coasts of Troy,
> exiled by fate, came to Italy and Lavine shores;
> much buffeted on sea and land by violence from above,
> through cruel Juno's unforgiving wrath,
> and much enduring in war also, till he should build a city
> and bring his gods to Latium; whence came the Latin race,
> the lords of Alba, and the lofty walls of Rome.[35]

That teleology controlled every aspect of this story, including its conception of character. As Havelock and Julian Jaynes more stridently have argued, characters in *The Iliad* were reactive or responsive to internally experienced commands of the gods, and Odysseus alone in *The Odyssey* showed clear evidence of interiority and long-range planning. Aeneas, in contrast, was defined by duty and was often pulled out of other episodic circumstances by the necessities of his mission.

Perhaps the clearest example lay in the betrayal and abandonment of Dido, which he argued was divinely mandated (IV, 356ff.). In fact, it was the repetitive restraint of impulsiveness in the name of duty that makes the final lines of the poem (which Virgil may have been most anxious to revise before his death) so striking, as Aeneas, in an action more congruent with the impulsive motivations of *The Iliad*, killed the suppliant Turnus. In larger terms, the inescapability of this view of time, duty, and fate produces a narrative bifurcation in *The Aeneid* between two timescales: the experiential timeframe in which Aeneas must "choose" to follow duty at personal expense and at the expense of those around him, and the narrative timeframe in which the inevitability of the end was explicit from the opening lines: no surprise then that Virgil was an inspiration to Milton, for whom a similar representation of time was a dilemma.

There are many other markers of this shift in the structuring of time and identity. In Bk I, for instance, the opening statement and invocation was followed with a debate among the gods that laid forth the inevitability, despite Juno's opposition, of Aeneas's victory and the eventual founding of Rome. A similar episode of divine foreshadowing appeared again in Bk VI when Aeneas travelled to the underworld in which the conquest of Greece was foretold and significant attention given to the lineage and triumph of Caesar Augustus. The contrast between the origins of the Greek epics in oral practices and *The Aeneid* in the literary may be found in *The Aeneid*'s reprisal of the image of the hero's shield. *The Iliad* (Book 18, 478–608) contained perhaps the first recorded Western instance of *ekphrasis*, the narrative description of a work of visual art, in which Achilleus's shield was described in detail. Its iconography was both encompassing and timeless, a panorama that included aspects from the cosmological through the aggregate range of human endeavour, bounded by the image of the river Oceanus circling the shield's edge, further enforcing the perception that its representation was both complete and unchanging.

The depictions on shield of Aeneas were encyclopaedic and complete, but in a very different construction of narrative and time:

> There the story of Italy and the triumphs of Rome had the Lord of Fire fashioned, not unversed in prophecy or unknowing of the age to come; there, every generation of the stock to spring from Ascanius, and the wars they fought in their sequence.
>
> (VIII, 625–20)[36]

Though similarly arrayed as elements of the shield, the represented items in this depiction were ordered and described in time as a sequence of events from their origins through to the reign of Augustus. There were, of

course, two perspectives on this narration: the perspective internal to the narration of time at the point of the shield's creation, in which these events are imaginatively foretold, and the perspective of the time of the poem's creation and reception, in which they were imaginatively rehearsed as a historical past (and a third, of course, in which both are hypostatized in a text). This construction of both a future and a past was, in some respects, like Havelock's description of the events of *The Iliad* as being born and passing away in a succession of events and descriptions, but here, in their sequence, they formed a larger pattern of meaning, something like a genealogy that tied the heroic actions of the poem, through the succession of events, to the triumphs of the poem's creation and the legitimation of the reign of Augustus. Their narrations, in both poems, work to different ends. In *The Iliad* they represent, emblematically, an age of Greek culture, related to the time of narration as an origin, but perhaps more significantly, as an analogue—a world more heroic than, but not entirely removed from the one in which the story is told. In *The Aeneid*, they describe something that is clearly past, that, through a succession of events, had produced the future, and emblematic of a civilization in triumph that has created the circumstances in which its narrative could also be produced and could more clearly present its antecedents "as a past" in this most literary description.

Poet and scholar Mark Van Doren's observation that "Homer is a world; Virgil, a style" has captured aspects of this difference, as does later critic David Mendelsohn's observation that "In place of the raw archaic potency of Homer's epics, which seems to dissolve the millennia between his heroes and us, Virgil's densely allusive poem offers an elaborately self-conscious 'literary' suavity."[37] That literary notion of "style" had its analogue in the poem in the depiction of character, and in Aeneas's constant return to "duty" as noted above. That "duty" was to history and the production of Rome, and to the genealogy and legitimation of the present—a theme that was later to populate Shakespeare's histories. Part of the "style" of *The Aeneid* may have consisted in a kind of self-conscious dedication to closure. The Greek epics began with a war (*The Iliad*) and ended with a journey (*The Odyssey*). *The Aeneid* began with a journey and ended with a war. The Greek epics began with an abduction (Helen taken from Agamemnon by Paris) that resulted in reprisals; in *The Aeneid*, the betrothal of Lavinia, previously promised to Turnus, to Aeneas, occasioned a war but effects closure. The ongoing action proceeding from the narrative was, as noted above, a future history that was, for Virgil and his audiences, the present.

These complex organizations of time are part of the literary epic and are at a considerable distance from the Greek epics or the tragedies that followed them. They point forward, in the history of the epic, towards the end of the seventeenth century and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. For the Greek

tragedies, it is the Greek epics that were the antecedents. For the English tragedies of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it was the set of iconic, but far more local, traditions, located, in various ways, among all of these antecedents. They are the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1 Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Canterbury Tales," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 23.
2 The attribution to Dante has long been controversial. See Robert Hollander, *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). For a brief summary of the issues, see William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1957), Chapter 8, section 4, 147–48.
3 For Jonson's use of this emblem was described by Drummond: "His Impressa was a compass with one foot in center, the other broken, the word, *Deest quod duceret orbem.*" Richard Ferrar Patterson, ed., *Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* (London: Blackie and Son, 1923), 47.
4 Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard-Belknap, 1963).
5 Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (New York: Oxford, 1994).
6 Havelock's field was perhaps somewhat distant from the linguistic wars, in which, for instance, Chomskian universalism rejected the Sapir-Whorf thinking about the structuring of cognition within language systems.
7 Ong's later work in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) drew from Havelock's work but was not as detailed and carefully argued as his exhaustive early work on Ramus: Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). That work, initially encouraged by Marshall McLuhan, also contributed to McLuhan's own *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962).
8 Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 118–19.
9 The extent of the system of "imitations" and emulations, as well as the complexities of Plato's use of the term "mimesis," is detailed in Havelock, *Preface*, chapter 2.
10 Havelock, *Preface*, 4.
11 Ong, *Ramus*, 81; Reproduced here from Juan de Celaya, Expositio magistri Joannis de Celaya, Valentini, in primum tractatum Summularum magistri Petri Hispane, nuperrime impressa et quam diligentissime ab eo dem sue integritati restituta (Paris: Pierre Gaudoul, 1525), n.p. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and viewable on Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k109374h/f140.item, accessed November. 2019.
12 Ong, *Ramus*, 202. Reproduced here from Petrus Ramus, *Septem Artes Liberales* (Basel: Freige, 1576), 95. Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
13 Havelock, *Preface*, 102–3.
14 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 85–126.

15 Havelock, *Preface*, 173.
16 Havelock, *Preface*, 180, 183.
17 Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived as a Story* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).
18 Havelock, *Preface*, 185.
19 Havelock, *Preface*, 188–89.
20 Havelock, *Preface*, 149.
21 Please note that the spelling here of "Apollinian" in place of the more common "Apollonian" follows Kaufmann's translation: Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage-Random, 1967), 15–144.
22 For a more radical and controversial, but provocative exploration of this idea, see Julian Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).
23 Alfred B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); Peter Bogatyrëv and Roman Jakobson, "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity," in *The Prague School: Selected Writings 1929–1946*, ed. Peter Steiner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 32–45.
24 *Beowulf* XIII, ll. 864–74, Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950), 33; the translation is my own.
25 Eric A. Havelock, "The Preliteracy of the Greeks," *New Literary History* 8, no. 3 (1977): 369–91, also *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).
26 Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper Collins, 1965), 359.
27 Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness*.
28 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–38.
29 Wu Cheng'en, *The Journey to the West*, trans. Anthony Yu, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); for an influential abridged English version see Wu Cheng'en, *Monkey*, trans. and abr. Arthur Waley (New York: Grove Press, 1970). Both translators Yu and Waley consider the attribution of authorship and associated issues in their respective introductions.
30 A theme in Ong, *Ramus*; more extensively treated in Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).
31 James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 49–50.
32 Jeanette Armstrong, "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmixwcentrism," PhD diss., Universität Greifswald, 2010.
33 Bruce Granville Miller, *Oral History on Trial: Recognizing Aboriginal Narratives in the Courts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), esp. 1–21.
34 Virgil, "The Aeneid," in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid*, ed. and trans. Rushton Fairclough, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), IV, 625; vol. I, 462–65.
35 Virgil, I, 1–7; vol. 1, 262–63.
36 Virgil, VIII, 625–20; vol. 2, 104–5.
37 Mendelsohn quotes Van Doren: Daniel Mendelsohn, "Is the *Aeneid* a Celebration of Empire—Or a Critique?"

Reference List

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, 85–126. New York: NYU Press, 2001.

Aristotle. "The Poetics." In Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, edited and translated by Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111. 1911. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1951.

Armstrong, Jeannette. "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmixwcentrism." PhD diss., Universität Greifswald, 2010.

Armstrong, Karen. *A Short History of Myth*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

Bogatyrëv, Peter, and Roman Jakobson. "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity." In *The Prague School: Selected Writings 1929–1946*, edited by Peter Steiner, 32–45. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Canterbury Tales." In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3–328. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Cruikshank, Julie. *Life Lived as a Story*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" In *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, 113–38. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Gellrich, Jesse. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge: Harvard-Belknap, 1963.

Havelock, Eric A. "The Preliteracy of the Greeks." *New Literary History* 8, no. 3 (1977): 369–91.

Havelock, Eric A. *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Hollander, Robert. *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Homer. *The Odyssey of Homer*. Translated by Richard Lattimore. New York: Harper Collins, 1965.

Howell, Wilbur Samuel. *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961.

Jaynes, Julian. *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Edited by Richard Ferrar Patterson. London: Blackie and Son, 1923.

Klaeber, Frederick., ed. *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd ed. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950.

Lord, Alfred B. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Mendelsohn, Daniel. "Is the *Aeneid* a Celebration of Empire—Or a Critique?" *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/15/is-the-aeneid-a-celebration-of-empire-or-a-critique.

Miller, Bruce Granville. *Oral History on Trial: Recognizing Aboriginal Narratives in the Courts*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, 15–144. New York: Vintage-Random, 1967.

Ong, Walter J. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Robb, Kevin. *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece*. New York: Oxford, 1994.

Virgil. "The Aeneid." In *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid*, edited and translated by Rushton Fairclough, 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916.

Walker, James R. *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.

Wimsatt, William K., Jr., and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. New York: Vintage-Random, 1957.

Wu, Cheng'en. *Monkey*. Translated and abridged by Arthur Waley. New York: Grove Press, 1970.

Wu, Cheng'en. *The Journey to the West*. Translated by Anthony Yu, 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

3   "The Syllables of Time"

Drama and Time in
the Middle Ages

> For it is the fate of every myth to creep by degrees into the narrow limits of
> some alleged historical reality, and to be treated by some later generation as
> a unique fact with historical claims.
>
> <div align="right">(Friedrich Nietzsche)[1]</div>

In *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, Jesse Gellrich argued that
Augustine's distinction between the eternal present of the angels and the
experiences of humans striving for understanding through the "syllables
of time" of scripture formed an emblem for understanding complex me-
dieval attitudes towards textuality. While the scriptures were identified in
Augustine's formulation with the temporal world of human experience,
in medieval interpretive theory these same scriptures and related writings
functioned as a kind of analogue to the experience of the angels, forming
a timeless array against which other forms of human writing, and espe-
cially fiction, assumed a more overtly temporal form. In contradistinction
to "writing" in the post-structuralist sense of *écriture*, the Bible and the
books of nature and culture with which it was closely allied operated,
Gellrich argued, in a way that has more in common with the "idea of the
book" imagined by Derrida:

> The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the
> signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a
> totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscrip-
> tions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality.[2]

In Saussure's formulation of the sign, signified and signifier do not ex-
ist independently, and in Derrida's analysis, such a relationship is not re-
ally possible, but in Gellrich's analysis, the belief in just such an ideality,
and in the participation of all aspects of nature as signifiers in unfold-
ing signification of God, stabilized the idea and operation of a system in

which all signification could be absorbed within a single and complete, though at times extremely complex, "mythical" plenitude. Within that system, writers did not think of themselves as forming new ideas or even new interpretations so much as discovering or revealing connections and correspondences that were already there—the kinds of correspondences mapped in systems of extended allegory and in the levels of signification and interpretation described by Aquinas. This system was profoundly conservative, and conceptually atemporal. "As long as the idea of the Book prevailed against écriture, mythology knew no threat in medieval culture. A challenge to it could not come, so to speak, from the 'inside.'"[3]

The challenge did come, Gellrich argued, from those kinds of writing that, while often presenting themselves in advocacy of those "mythical" understandings, located themselves by necessity outside of that system of privileged plenitude. The last chapter, in fact, began with such an example—*The Canterbury Tales*, the opening lines of which mapped both a kind of reprising of allegory and the levels of coincident operation in repetitive yearly cycle in the natural world *and* the emergence, from them, of a broken or interrupted cycle and descent into secular history associated with the individual origin of an "author" who marked its transition towards linearity, incompletion, and leakage into history marked by his death. Gellrich also argued that works by Dante, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and others did not compete with the "idea of the book" by laying claim to a status predicated on "truth," but sought refuge instead behind their overt claims to fictionality, just as Aristotle's theory of tragedy had done centuries earlier. In doing so, they acknowledged the possibilities of difference and partiality and of playing "with those orders that the Book of culture presents as absolute."[4] And they participated in the initiation of an important conceptual change in which the idea of history itself began to acquire a new relevance:

> The mythology of the Book of culture, concerned as it is with resisting change by perpetuating past models, stabilizes the conception of history as a text of organically whole "periods." Augustine's temporal language disappears into the timeless writing of an angelic intelligence. But fiction asserts its difference by inviting our challenge, by presenting us with a demand for criticism and for theories about our criticism that test and question the ways we signify meaning—even as my own are doubtless being tested now. That demand offers an approach to cultural understanding that does not indict historical inquiry, but rather promises a new and enlightened historicism.[5]

In this view, the tumultuous fall from myth into history was a consequence, not of some common human response to a universal temporality

but of what may itself be defined (if somewhat disingenuously) as a historical event or cultural moment—those circumstances through which the explanatory power of one system fell open to the challenge of another.

In the Middle Ages, however, that fall may have been, in many respects, remarkably slow or perhaps localized and intermittent. The last chapter traced some themes in classical and other epics and noted the ways in which the apparent structuring of time changed as the basis of narration shifted from repetition and oral transmission to literacy and the marking of a moment of origin in writing and history, and, indeed, Gellrich's "idea of the book" coincides in many respects more with those characteristics of oral culture than with the literate frameworks of Roman epic, which, like medieval fictions, mapped the descent into style and change. Those changes in the Middle Ages were complicated not just by literacy but by a mixed environment, as in the Platonic era, in which oral and literate practices co-existed in variously constructed relationships. In medieval Europe, those relationships were complex as they extended over centuries and spanned differentials of institutional structure and social stratification. Brian Stock, for instance, has argued persuasively for effects of literacy as early as the eleventh century that extend far beyond the practices of people who were actually literate, and Chaucer and, as we have seen, the other continental writers, Gellrich noted, clearly evinced a level of literate behaviour and production on a par with Virgil and the literate elites of Rome. And, of course, the church, after 597 in England, was clearly built, as was the Roman empire from which it descended, on a literate core.[6] In the sixteenth century in England, there is little doubt that these traditions and practices of literacy informed many aspects of life and the productions of forms such as the university plays, interludes, and entertainments that were precursors of commercial drama. But what of the other popular dramatic and narrative traditions? What habits of thought did they evince and what were they built upon? In thinking about this issue, some further considerations about medieval thought may be helpful.

Time and Change

Thinking about time and history, it is, perhaps, always tempting to think in terms of a set of human universals that are only partially, and perhaps not significantly, conditioned by social circumstance. Within anthropology, where the more radical claims for the cultural relativity of time have been most vocally articulated by Lévi-Strauss, E. R. Leach, Dennis Tedlock, and others, counterattacks are made with equal persistence.[7] Yet even if the presumption is made that perceptions of time are to a large extent biologically determined, it seems clear that different social formations privilege certain orders of explanation over others or construct their

articulated concepts along certain well-defined lines that have obvious implications for the status of "historical" explanations. In thinking about medieval time, Georges Poulet argued that "being," as a major temporal category, did not depend upon the notion of either a present, or a past and future that a present defined but rather on a concept of endurance that was set off against both the timelessness of eternity and the impermanence of the material—between, in these respects, the "syllables of the angels" and secular life as Gellrich proposed. Change, he argued, was understood not as a process but as a succession of states. "To change was to pass from potentiality to actuality. But this transition had nothing about it necessarily temporal." Duration was a result, not of the inherent nature of change but of defects in the nature of matter that did not allow for immediate actualization. Human time was similarly teleological in its orientation, the duration of change defined by the atemporality of its end:

> in proportion as this act was brought close to its point of perfection, in proportion as it approached its own completion in time, it tended to release itself from time. At the very moment it attained its fullness, all its temporality disappeared. It was brought to perfection in an instant which transcended time and which, as long as it lasted, lasted within a duration that was permanent.[8]

Recalling the arguments advanced in the first two chapters here, this thinking about change and temporality reflects even Aristotle's biological metaphors of change and his notion of change in drama:

> Tragedy advanced by slow degrees; each new element that showed itself was in turn developed. Having passed through many changes, it found its natural form, and there it stopped.[9]

The more perfect state is, in these accounts, beyond time and progression, just as Nietzsche hoped it to be in the tragic return to "a restored oneness."

The significance of this general understanding of time in the Middle Ages can perhaps be appreciated more fully in its corollaries in physical sciences. In *Physics and Metaphysics: Theories of Space and Time*, Jennifer Trusted notes that medieval notions of time and motion were based upon exactly these Aristotelian teleological principles. In this system, objects might have "natural" motion (primarily vertical and dependent on density) as they strove to actualize the potential inherent in their natures and achieve their proper positions.[10] The end result of such "natural" motion was its cessation. "To fulfil potentiality was to achieve perfection; then there would be no further change for the object would have accomplished

its purpose." While it is common for us to think of time in terms of Newton's laws and a later model of linear progression in which the present moves at a steady pace forward from the past into the future, the notion of temporality encouraged by this system of understanding motion was close to the opposite:

> Animate and inanimate nature strove to realize potentiality in actuality, and objects as well as living creatures were regarded as having a 'nature' so that their current state both implied and contained their future state. Hence they were not passive entities and any natural (i.e. not imposed) change in them was seen as part of their own striving to achieve their potential: 'the present state exists unmoved and continually draws into itself the future.'[11]

The implications of this way of thinking about all physical events, let alone the human and volitional, were to suggest the importance of two conceptual zones—a present, in which the movement towards actuality was either realized or persistently unfolding, and an eternity, in which that actuality could be permanently fulfilled. Apparently of far less consequence was the extension and location of actions in some defined and meaningful sequence that both orders and explains time as a regulated continuity.

In the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the works of Galileo and Descartes, the more familiar linear and mathematical concept of time began to be formulated as part of a more general project of mathematical description, though even in the work of these thinkers, time remained problematically implicated in sense perception. Only later, in the works of Newton, was time postulated as absolute and independent of objects.[12] The foregrounding in Galileo's work of the concept of motion, and of space and time as contexts within which motion could be mathematically described, pointed then to a new importance for time as a conceptual category: "for Galileo space (a Euclidean three-dimensional space) and time were ultimate realities and all physical change had to be describable in terms of changes in space and time."[13] Time, in that sense, became part of a dimensional arena defined by extension within which both physical motion and human actions had continuity. In this transition, Poulet argued, time became a field of action:

> Temporality then no longer appeared solely as the indelible mark of mortality; it appeared also as the theater and the field of action where despite his mortality man could reveal his authentic divinity and gain a personal immortality.[14]

   In a far more extended sense, it also became, at least among the proto-scientific elites, a field within which a different kind of history, and ultimately, a different concept of drama, was possible.

Historiography

Commentators on medieval and early modern dramas and early modern historiographers have generally agreed that two major themes underlay early modern historical accounts, including those originally structured as chronicles. One placed human events on a kind of compressed linear scale defined by the eternities of creation and redemption; the other considered historical events as an aggregate of exempla available as analogues for understanding the present. In "An Anatomy of Historical Revolution in Renaissance France," Zachary Schiffman gave one detailed account of sixteenth-century attempts to reformulate historical thinking along what might be termed more modern lines. Schiffman noted in particular the late sixteenth-century historian La Popeliniäre, who, opposing the idea of history as a simple chronicle of events, argued that "although the historian need not concern himself with ultimate truths … he needed to know the causes and motives of underlying events, 'for that which moves someone to say or do something, be it the cause of something else, is nevertheless always a fact and a separate event, certain and already having occurred, and for that reason is a part of history and should be expressed in it.'" The type of causality that La Popeliniäre developed, however, was quite complex, based largely on a reworking of the familiar medieval formulations of the four Aristotelian causes: material, efficient, formal, and final. In his reworking, the final cause, pre-eminent in the teleology of the physical explanations given above, was bound more closely with the material and formal, "embodying an entity's ability to realize a certain potential," while the efficient cause, which Schiffman considered to be the only one that "even remotely resembles the modern historian's notion of causation," was largely reduced to the status of "historical accident." The result was a reliance on origins and institutions and a history "characterized by the sequential overlay of discrete historical strata, each defined by its own particular institutional composition." And, since La Popeliniäre considered a mass of historical detail essential to the understanding of the originating and institutional milieu of any event, his history eventually defaulted into long lists of information, organized for the page by Ramist principles of subdivision: "given the need for 'perfection,' La Popeliniäre's list represented history not as a continuum but as a form of classification."[15]

   La Popeliniäre's example demonstrates the difficulty experienced, even at the end of the sixteenth century, and even among the most radical of historical thinkers, in producing a history that operated in a cogently

"causal" manner, at least in the sense of defining direct and limited causes for sequences of events. Arthur Ferguson, in *Clio Unbound*, recounted the complicated history of similar attempts in England, which, though obsessed with the search for "causes," defaulted largely to the descriptions of the actions of great men.[16] And though, by the turn of the century in England, other writers, Bacon among them, had broadened the definition of what counted as history; the philosophical notions advanced by Descartes, Hobbes, and others had begun, by that time, to call causality itself, as a self-evident form of explanation, into question. In general, Stephen Collins argued,

> Order was coming to be understood not as natural, but as artificial, created by man, and manifestly political and social. Whereas traditionally order was founded upon the belief that rest was natural, now order theory derived from more empirical political and self-consciousness which allowed that flux and motion were natural; order must be designed to restrain what appeared ubiquitous.[17]

For Hobbes, J. G. A. Pocock argued, the resulting scepticism surrounding history was overwhelming. If the course of actual events was too contingent to be predictable, reason from premise to consequence must structure any solution to be advanced in "scientific" terms: "we can escape from the flux, and enter a world of scientific certainties, if we abandon our insistence on thinking diachronically and, instead of seeking to argue from moment to moment, occurrence to recurrence, reason from premise to consequence."[18]

More specifically, for Descartes, Charles Taylor has argued, the philosophical issue became epistemic. Knowledge of the external world, rather than being the uncovering of correspondences already there, became a process of internal construction, or what, in Ong's account of Ramus's reformation, of "method." "As the notion of 'idea' migrates from its ontic sense to apply henceforth to intra-psychic contents, to things 'in the mind', so the order of ideas ceases to be something we find and becomes something we build."[19] Descartes wrote that

> the following rule tells us to conduct our thoughts in order, building from the simpler to the complex, "et supposant mesme de l'ordre entre ceux qui ne se precedent point naturellement les un les autres" ("assuming an order, even if a fictitious one, among those which do not follow a natural sequence relatively to one another").[20]

The search for a more complete form of causal explanation that could explicate the emerging dimensional extension of time called not for the

recognition of "universal categories of human experience," because, at least as they were commonly articulated, there were none, but for the imposition of an order of thought as an interpretive category remarkably akin to "fiction." Given that, what would be its form, and what would be the role of drama within it?

Early Antecedents of Commercial Drama

Descartes's call for a conceptually imposed order, and for an order only "fictionally" coherent if necessary, recalls Aristotle's preference for poetry as a "more philosophical and higher thing than history"—a sentiment often quoted in early modern writings—as well as his more technical preference for "probable impossibility" over "a thing improbable and yet possible."[21] As many critics, and perhaps most notably Paul Ricoeur, have noted, Aristotle's analysis of tragedy is a model for both the structuring and understanding of time and action.[22] And while several recent writers such as David Kastan have commented on aspects of early modern drama's conceptual structuring of time, it is perhaps worth turning to that drama's antecedents before considering commercial drama in more detail.

Many years ago, David Bevington began his examination of late medieval drama with this general comment on organization:

> As Madeleine Doran has shown, a primary concept of medieval design was copiousness of detail; and the relationship of parts was a "multiple unity" wherein each member was to some extent self-sustaining and co-equal with the other members. Subordination of one part to another was far less active a principle of perception than coordination. In drama as well as in graphic and plastic arts, the simultaneous presentation of separate scenes led to a panoramic, narrative, and sequential view of art rather than a dramatically concise and heightened climax of sudden revelation. The multiple staging of late medieval drama could find a direct corollary in paintings that united the beginning, progress, and end of man's spiritual history in a single panoramic continuum.[23]

Many subsequent critics have commented on the aspects of drama identified in this description. One notable aspect was the tendency of medieval art to be inclusive, particularly with respect to time—to represent all time as a panorama, comprehensible as an array present in every moment, rather than locating specific times as distinct points experienced sequentially. It was not only a characteristic way to represent time but, for that time, a normative one. Indeed, evidence of the linear timelines with which we are now all so familiar dates from a considerably later period.[24]

V. A. Kolve, writing specifically on the Corpus Christi cycle noted similarly that the cycle operated as "a sequence of plays relating the history of the world in seven ages, offering to its audience, within that framework, an image of all human time."[25]

A second, related aspect was the multiplicity of thematic foci and agglomeration of detail, common in earlier plays but more problematic in later times. Bevington cited *Mankind* as an iconic example that encompasses many of these elements, and he argued that aspects of this thematic multiplicity found in *Mankind* presented substantial challenges for late medieval and Tudor dramas, compromising the formal integrity of plays with distracting diversions, repetitions, and mixtures of serious and comic scenes.[26] Yet in these earlier plays, the combination of such thematic diversity with the panoramic structuring of time as a vast array was common enough to hardly have been an accident. What accounts for their coincidence, and what habits of organizing information did they point to?

Over the past half-century, considerable work has been done, through large-scale efforts such as the REED project and the work of many individual scholars, to expand our appreciation of the complexity of the centuries of English drama before Shakespeare and the diversity of forms, venues, and practices that constituted it. Richardson and Johnston, for instance, have noted evidence of liturgical dramas in the twelfth century and earlier, as well as evidence of ranges of performative activities that can be associated with drama even before that point. Writing in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan's *A New History of Early English Drama*, Susan Westfall noted the use of noble households as venues for performance dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period. Lawrence M. Clopper in *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* theorized the relationship of drama, more narrowly defined, to other practices throughout this period.[27] In *The New History*, John M. Wasson noted the use of churches as venues for early drama, and Alan H. Nelson and John R. Elliot, Jr., described the universities as venues for performances. All of these have different, if associated, traditions and inflections. Westfall argued that including all these kinds of performance results in an expanded and more complete understanding of drama in all its forms and contexts.

In thinking about both time and multiplicity in medieval drama, this expanded and more detailed understanding of context and occasion may provide other important clues. In a particularly interesting contribution to *The New History*, Anne Higgins expanded on aspects of the civic performances also considered by Richardson and Johnston and by Clopper. Higgins's description of the civic drama is particularly interesting in delineating two correlated aspects of some public performances. One is the embedding of such performances in the civic and political life of their locations. While the mystery plays and cycles had clear religious themes, these

and other performances quite likely had a multiplicity of other functions. Many cities, she noted, were complex webs of jurisdictions and territories controlled by specific interests. The procession of staging carts through such jurisdictions, as, for instance, in a mayor's procession, was a way of acknowledging each, confirming relations, and reaffirming boundaries.[28] Clopper argued that such events were most likely to happen in locations in which civic governance and the strength of guilds were able to challenge the dominance of the church, and many writers have noted the engagement of guilds and other organizations in staging different parts of a cycle, often in productions that were quite competitive.[29] The diversity of themes and modes may thus have reflected the diversity of districts, social groups, functions, and interests, even when overlaid on a religious thematic core.

All of these instances suggest major functions of such plays and processions that, though contextual and contingent, depended upon their yearly repetition. In addition to whatever liturgical functions they carried, they participated in the coincident renewal and affirmation of whole sets of civic and social relations. These developments in scholarship and documentation add context to the earlier accounts of writers such as Bevington and Kolve, complicate the understanding of religious and other cycles as embedded in their contexts, and perhaps explain further the significance of some aspects of their forms. They also point back to the features regarding time and multiplicity that these earlier writers noted, and to the mnemonic and social functions all of these dramas performed, whether liturgical or secular, as dependable and ritualized repetitions and re-enactments of familiar narratives.

Time and Repetition

Even given all this diversity, Bevington and Doran's remarks on the treatment of time, especially in the mystery play cycles, however sponsored and produced, remain provocative in many respects. Cycles, such as the York, Towneley-Wakefield, Chester, and N-Town cycles, performed over the course of a day or longer and extending throughout the geography of a city, presented a panorama of biblical time, arrayed across hours and locations. Like the liturgical year or stations of the cross, the recitation of their narratives in a repeated and ritualized order operated as a cyclical form of renewal. And, while they presented time as an array, it was also an array shot through with analogies and correspondences and other non-sequential relations that united incidents in a field of connections and typological inference:

> Typology was a means of comprehending the unity and purpose of Christian history and of showing that all events formed a part of God's plan for the universe. Though many of the events of the Old

Testament could be seen to have a cause and logic in their own historical circumstances, nonetheless they also contained a relevance to the Life of Christ and the establishment of the Christian religion which only becomes apparent long after the events themselves.[30]

The narrative significance in repeating these and other familiar patterns and noting their multiple underlying connections and correspondences, like the recitation that begins the *Canterbury Tales* noted at the beginning of Chapter 2, was to suggest a way of thinking and remembering, located in the present of experience but structured in analogy, eternity, and recurrence.

the Mystery Cycle plays focus on the present, showing the past of the biblical events to be integrally connected both to the present of the audience and actors and also to their future in terms of salvation or damnation. The cycle plays work within 'God's time' which is universal and contemporaneous, fixing the individual within the flow of Christian History.[31]

The present stood as an expanded moment, a place of choice, but repetitively located against the eternal presence and immanence of the greater story, the "single panoramic continuum" noted above. In this respect, the timeframe of the mystery plays was closer to Gellrich's "Idea of the book," or Augustine's "angelic intelligence," than it was to Augustine's "syllables of time." And even civic dramas, repeated once a year, like Havelock's epics considered in Chapter 2, were constituted not in novelty and suspense, since their stories are well known, but in repetition and remembering:

The plots of the plays were well known to the audience and there was no suspense involved as to the final outcome.[32]

Plenitude and Fragmentation

While it is possible that the concatenation of diverse thematic elements may have reflected all of the complexity of the contexts in which plays operated, it remains a signature and, to many, perplexing element. As Doran argued, these plays and cycles were characterized by "the integration of obverse and alternating textures into a single and yet multiform art."[33] Bevington noted, in more detail, that these elements, punctuating more serious narrative concerns, often included obscenity and burlesque farcical elements, and he noted that these common aspects of medieval drama extended well into the sixteenth century, even into elite dramas, though

eventually they became more formally integrated into more explicit thematic functions.

Many theories have been proposed to explain the inclusion of such wildly disparate elements. Richardson and Johnston noted that early productions by travelling players "known as *mimi, ludatores. Ioculatores* or *histriones*" included other activities such as juggling that were not part of their more explicitly narrative content.[34] Clopper also argued for the development of drama, and even mystery plays, that included many such features, from traditions explicitly not under church control. If these are the sources, it is, of course, possible that they provided the base upon which thematic elements developed and persisted as residual elements as more thematic foci emerged. Richardson and Johnston also speculate that the accretion of disparate elements may derive from the circumstances of their origins, not in the integrated work of a single author but in the accretion of effort by many hands over time reflecting many forms of influence and function. Their circumstances, in other words, may have been close to those noted earlier in epics and other spoken systems that transitioned towards records formed in literate transcription.

> There is no doubt, however, that the cycles were the work of many hands and that they developed, were altered and adapted throughout the years of their performance. The texts we have today represent only the form in which the cycle was at the moment in which it was written down in the manuscript which by chance has survived. It is possible that the cycles in the versions we have today were never actually performed in that precise form. Improvisation and adaptation caused by changes in cast or local events were probably very common and while the basic plot remained the same the dialogue would have varied considerably.[35]

The emergence, even at earlier periods, of what appears to be an authorial hand, as in the work of the Wakefield Master, would seem to be the exception to this rule, but that too may reflect the operation of a larger system of generation, just as the codification of folk legends in the *Journey to the West*, noted in Chapter 2, was an uncharacteristic recombination, in explicitly literary terms, of their more composite oral origins.

> it seems most likely that the Secunda Pastorum appearance of the theme is a conscious dramatization of a tale known by the playwright, audience and actors. The Wakefield Master's originality, if such it is, lies in having transformed the narrative material of the folk tale into dramatic form and grafted secular material onto the religious dramatic form of the Corpus Christi plays…. Certainly these

qualities of the tale are not discernible in the folk tale versions of the story and by his use of it within the Shepherds Play the Wakefield Master has added a new layer of understanding and effect to both the host play and the folk tale so that each underlines the themes and adds to the effect of the other.[36]

In more general terms, as Richardson and Johnston argued that the more typical composite structure resulted not from the intent of a single author but from multiple hands and the combination of three threads over time: scriptural didacticism, the need to entertain, and the impulse towards civic display. And, of course, it is very likely that many more did not survive the transition to literate transcription and preservation. In any event, they represent, as Doran argued, the attempt to include a wider range of human experience and expression within the larger organizing structure of a more specific well-known and framing story. That possibility may recall Havelock's observation that, in epic recitation, the explicit narrative was, perhaps, not so much the destination as a container.

Many other aspects of the operation of mystery cycles may also recall other aspects of Havelock's account. Havelock theorized that epics may often have been performed as fragments, but fragments that synecdochically evoked the larger system of which they were parts. Richardson and Johnston note that the cycles too may have on occasion been only partially or intermittently performed, due to the contingent circumstances of their production:

> Not necessarily all the plays of the cycle would have been performed every year. Not all the guilds were wealthy enough to bear the considerable expenses of producing their play every year and in times of economic difficulty the guild may have preferred to pay the fine to the City Council for not 'bringing forth' their play rather than incur the much higher cost of production.[37]

They considered such possibilities in more detail in the example of the N-Town cycle. They noted speculation, based on textual implications of multiple staging locations, that at least parts of the cycle might have been collections of materials that only appeared more coherent after they had been collected. This is the kind of possibility represented in Chapter 2 in the examples of James Walker's assembly of traditional Lakota stories or the construction of the *Journey to the West*. They then concluded

> While this hypothesis is not impossible, it is obviously less satisfying than the hypothesis of the whole cycle being performed in the same fashion and this in turn has suggested to some critics the idea that

the entire cycle was never performed as a whole but that sections of it were performed separately in different performances modes, perhaps on different days or in different years.[38]

Bevington noted that even much later and more singular elite humanist dramas involving classical debates interspersed with humorous skits appear to have been malleable, at least in the sense of being scalable to time and occasion.[39]

Scholars have also speculated about the competitive nature of some of the cycles' productions, in which guilds or associations strove to outdo each other or a previous year's performance. Such speculations seem to point towards originality and development. While such practices may indeed have introduced variation in embellishment and presentation, they may have worked to emphasize not their novelty or introduction of new materials but their competence or exceptional skill in performing the more conservative function of repetition, in which individual performance was always just a part. All of these features point to a system of representation that was constituted in and maintained by continual activity, repetition, and recitation but in the service of memory, preservation, and stability.

That conservative mnemonic function of preserving and transmitting not only important thematic information but entire sets of contextual relations, through yearly performances, points to a very different location of such works in their social context, especially in contrast to later, more explicitly "literary" works. Pëtr Bogatyrëv and Roman Jakobson in the wake of the Russian revolution theorized about Russian non-literate traditions persistent outside the intelligentsia. They observed that

> Like *langue*, the work of folklore is extra-personal and has only a potential existence. It is only a complex of certain norms and impulses, a canvas of living tradition, which the performers animate with the embellishments of individual creativity, just as the creators of *parole* do in relationship to *langue*. To the extent that these individual innovations in language (or in folklore) correspond to the demands of the community and anticipate the rule-governed evolution of *language* (or folklore), they are socialized and form the facts of *langue* (or the elements in the work of folklore).[40]

One of the implications of this line of thinking is that the appearance of disparate elements, whatever its source, was something that the communities preserving and transmitting these works considered parts of their structures and forms worthy of retention, or they would not have survived so long.

The functions of such repetitions in non-literate environments, or environments in which literacy performs more limited and specialized functions, were conservative, transmitted through repetition and community investment and acceptance that operate effectively *before* such forms were recorded, if they were recorded at all, as texts. Neologisms, deviations, and innovations occurred, but unless they were accepted and repeated, they were not preserved, and if they were accepted and repeated, they were absorbed within the tradition that was then repeated and socially maintained, effectively supplanting earlier instances (as in Chapter 2's example of *Beowulf*). In either instance, they were no longer either "individual" or innovative, but that which was, or was not, remembered.

In thinking about the mixture of high and low elements so characteristic of the dramas we have been considering, Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston consider the explication of disparate elements through the idea of the carnivalesque as theorized by M. M. Bakhtin and others, seeing in its apparent excesses the violation of what later ages might see as more Cartesian boundaries. While such carnivalesque aspects may reflect the ritual inclusion of disorder in medieval performances and festivals, they may also represent deeper and more sustained patterns in thinking about order. The combination of such disparate elements may seem jarring to modern audiences accustomed to more integrated plot lines. Richardson and Johnston argued that "according to present-day expectations, the plays are not realistic and are full of anachronism, solemn yet raucous, a disturbing mixture of styles."[41] It is also possible, however, that contemporary reactions are the result of a more fundamental hermeneutic problem and that these carnivalesque qualities may seem "transgressive" only in hindsight, or perhaps in a kind of partial misapprehension. At what point might such structural multiplicity have come to be viewed not as a familiar organizing principle but as an anomaly and a problem requiring discipline and containment?[42] The observation may simply point to a very different set of assumptions about plenitude, context, and structure, and about time and functionality, than those to which we are more accustomed.

From Cycles to Plays

Though other and later forms characterized as miracle plays and interludes, such as *Everyman* noted above, operated more as single performances, their internal characteristics often replicated many aspects of the larger cycles, if in a differently configured frame. Organized again around the instantiation and retelling of familiar stories, their operations were likely to have been similarly conservative and repetitive, serving to assure that these stories remained embedded in social memory. Particularly in earlier instances, they too seem to have included very disparate materials,

though, over time, more "carnivalesque" materials gravitated towards a thematic pole and function, identifying sinful (if amusing and enjoyable) behaviour thematically contrasted with the more virtuous conduct that was the didactic focus. In these plays, while the carnival may have been the occasion to participation and enjoyment, the display of virtue was likely to have been the authorizing thematic and moral justification.

Though participating in a larger system of religious and moral discourse, plays performed individually were less clearly defined as parts of series, and their formal integrity was correspondingly more reliant on internal structure. They were still, however, far from the Aristotelian ideal of the tragic model of plot. Just as extended cycles presented a kind of linear history, from creation through the present towards the day of judgement, but subordinated that linearity to the array of all time known at once, so these plays often ordered time as a progression in an individual life that was also encapsulated in a larger contextualizing array. Plays based on psychomachia, or the struggle between good and evil for the soul of a protagonist, for instance, were teleological in pressing towards an ending in the eventual triumph of virtue and redemption, but they rehearsed this familiar story *in toto* as a trope. Given that the general outlines of that path were well known, though they presented events as a sequence, they operated thematically as an array in which the ending was a foregone conclusion co-present from the beginning, even as audiences enjoyed its peregrinations. Perhaps most significantly, the intervening incidents comprising most of the action within this envelope were variable and often highly episodic, not having a "progressive" arrangement so much as presenting a path through an agglomeration of detail—just what Aristotle deprecated in his tighter definition of the teleological plot.

Bevington argued that the array of incidents, however chaotic they might have appeared in sequential terms, operated by a different constructive principle that was sustained even as late as the 1560s:

> The unity of *All for Money*, as in so many popular "episodic" plays, is the singleness of theme (man's greed) manifested in the variety of episodes. This theme becomes more important than the fate of individuals.

It is, in other words, the mass of incidents repeating a central theme rather than the order of their progression that constructs the method and unity of the play. "The success of the play," he argued further, "lies in varied illustration, in 'multiple unity' and gathering of impact, not in the crisis of the individual moment."[43] There was, in this sense, no rising and falling action, no real turning point—just the accumulation of instances. In this movement, the typology of earlier extended structures such as the

mystery cycles, in which levels of signification operated in concert over an expanse of material, began to be transposed, within the smaller frame of the individual play, into patterns of repetition, in which a consistent theme was seen to operate everywhere, asserting a kind of ubiquity and pervasiveness to a theme or realization that was both static and reflective of a kind of plenitude.

Noting that critics have often criticized *Cambises* for its episodic structure, Bevington further remarked that

> Unity in *Cambises* derives from theme, elaborated through a variety of incidents, all showing the corruption of civil power in the hands of a temperamental and worldly king.[44]

By this account, operating in these plays was not so much a defect of structure, though later critics and tastes may have deemed it so, but a different operational principle, based on the pedagogical and mnemonic principles that repetition and the exposition of the same point through multiple avenues were a route to retention, memory, and normalization.

This is a pattern that Bevington traced further into the commercial dramas of the London stage in plays such as *Tamburlaine* and (with a twist) *Dr Faustus*. Bevington's analysis linked *Tamburlaine* to its antecedents and similarly defended its structural principles:

> Whether or not we are dealing with the main plot bereft of its comic diversion, we nevertheless find in both parts of *Tamburlaine* a sequence of episodes strikingly reminiscent of the moral play and the mid-century hybrid chronicle. It is hardly necessary to point out that *Tamburlaine* has an episodic linear structure, for the fact has long been known and almost universally deplored…. A study of *Tamburlaine*'s structure in relation to that of its homiletic predecessors, however, reveals the inner logic and consistency of its "primitive" form.[45]

Bevington noted that *Tamburlaine*, like later morality and chronicle plays, began to place more emphasis on the development of a central character, especially in contrast to the flat and disposable depictions of surrounding secondary characters, more episodically defined:

> The secondary figures exist only to illustrate a phase of the protagonist's career, and are dismissed when they have fulfilled this function. The lack of three-dimensional characterization, so often noted of all the figures in the play except Tamburlaine himself, is entirely characteristic of Psychomachia drama. Depth and subtlety of character were never the intent of the homiletic playwright.

Finally he reiterates the functional premises of the episodic structure:

> As in *Cambises* the repetition of events, with its variety of inci-
> dents and character, builds in crescendo, and establishes its message
> through the very fact of repetition. the relation of parts to whole
> lies in the cumulative effect. The form of *Tamburlaine* has a grand
> simplicity about it, but this simplicity is not a lack of structural so-
> phistication on the part of its creator.[46]

These plays, though beginning to look more "modern," were still oper-
ating by older principles. They were not deficient, just different.

As the sixteenth century progressed, changes in the operation of indi-
vidual plays began to change with changes in the context of their opera-
tion, and as they began to less clearly reflect a location in a larger and
universally coherent framework of understanding, and, especially in the
examples of the more scholastic plays, the migration towards a more lit-
erate environment. Bevington argued that the episodic plot in the hands
of later writers such as Preston and Marlowe became more difficult to
justify as its ties to clear moral messaging were loosened. The resulting
ambiguity in *Tamburlaine*, he argued, was as the evidence of a structural
and thematic conflict "imperfectly resolved" in Marlowe's thinking.[47] An
alternative to Bevington's view might be that that very ambiguity *was* the
point, as Marlowe explored concepts of character and agency restructured
in both Machiavellian thought and this emerging context. That theme was
further explored in the more causally plotted and morally ambiguous *The
Jew of Malta*, and as patterns of thinking about time and causality began
to emerge from sequences more focused on change. They will be explored
in the next chapter.

In Bevington's account, and those of other critics who consider indi-
vidual writers and sub-genres in greater detail, the progression from the
mystery plays through to Marlowe and later writers involved not only
variety but perhaps as well a kind of formal transposition. Earlier plays
tended to paint in broad strokes, in which characters typically represented
qualities and types. As psychomachia evolved as a form, that kind of char-
acterization continued in secondary characters presented in various epi-
sodes. The depiction of the central character that those characters sought
to influence, however, necessarily became more detailed. Good and bad
influences deflected what appeared as a more malleable personality that
was eventually stabilized in the movement towards the concluding narra-
tive of redemption—or, in Tamburlaine's case, the inevitability of defeat
and death. Romance plays, Bevington noted, for example, were particu-
larly interesting not only in focusing on more developed central characters
but in extracting more contained plot lines from much larger narratives.[48]

The gravitation of plays towards historical, romance, and homiletic themes all allowed for the reconfiguration of ideas of order in more compartmentalized plots with more developed characterization. They narrowed the scope and frame to a more partial and contained story that constructed meaning in other terms. Yet even as they did so, their internal structure remained largely episodic.

The Transition towards Commercial Theatre

It is possible to see the reliance on typology and analogy so characteristic of the mystery plays as reconstituted not in systems of correspondence that extend over the broad panorama of time but in the more contained frame of single plays, as thematic repetitions. The stacking of layers of signification and interpretation over ordered arrays in the larger cycles was transposed, in the confines of a single play, to the stacking of episodic incidents that replicated and repeated variations on a single theme. The panorama of the mystery plays suggested a kind of static view of time in which all incidents of passing time could be located and associated within an eternal frame. Though the episodic incidents of the miracle plays and interludes unfolded in the time of performance, in their thematic repetition they represented a kind of static view of time in which change was largely subordinated. The drift away from positioning within such a larger, cohesive conceptual frame towards a more causal structuring of progression in more historically based dramas, such as *Edward II*, or even in the notoriously episodic (and ambiguously authored), but dramatically "causal" *Dr Faustus* began to shift the balance from typology, analogy, and repetition, towards singularity, sequence, change, and result—the kind of drama, defined by causal action, described and preferred by Aristotle.

   In 1963, in his celebrated "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," Roman Jakobson defined poetry as the projection from the axis of similarity to the axis of contiguity in language.[49] This pithy and somewhat totalizing characterization referred back to an earlier exposition on language in "The Linguistic Problems of Aphasia," coauthored with Morris Halle in 1956. In that work, Jakobson and Halle built upon aspects of the theory of language published in 1911 in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* to contrast two very different basic operations. One "selection," they argued, is constituted, for example, in the selection of a lexical element from a set of similar choices. The figure of speech most characteristic of it is metaphor, in which the similarity of terms is rendered explicit, at least in one foregrounded respect. The other is "combination" in which terms are linked in a sequence and related by contiguity. This is the realm of syntax, grammar, and subordination, in which items that are functionally distinct are joined in, and defined by, meaningful contextual

relationships. The figure of speech most characteristic of it is metonymy, in which one term is linked to another by membership in a larger structure.[50]

The explanatory power of this model of contrasting operations is powerful but, in non-aphasic circumstances, complex. To a greater or lesser degree in all uses of language, both operations are present, and a particular analysis requires focus on a level in which one or the other appears dominant. Here, in considering the transition from the analogic and metaphorical structures of earlier plays, in which broad contexts and systems are assumed but subordinated to a focus on analogues that reify and express the eternal, to the emergence in later plays of increasing specificity that is less typological and more defined by explicit characterization and the syntax of an increasingly progressive plot structure, a kind of larger cultural shift may be seen at play, from metaphor to metonymy, in which ideas about causality, time, and character are all in play. In Saussure's theory, that is a transposition from similarity and the synchronic, in which all substitutions are, at least *in potential* present, towards contiguity and the diachronic, the unfolding of utterances in time. While metaphor emphasizes similarity and a kind of stability, metonymy, by depending on predication, pushes towards the world of sequence and consequence, and with it, the reality of change. It is something like a fall out of the eternal and general into particularity and history. The consequences of this change, and its acceleration after 1590, are the subjects of the next chapter.

Further Thoughts on Literacy and Orality

The preceding chapters in this section have addressed the complex relations between alphabetic literacy and orality, certainly in the Middle Ages in Europe, but also in thinking about ancient Greek and Indigenous cultures. Many of the ideas considered here arose in the mid-twentieth century in the work of writers such as McLuhan, Ong, and Havelock, all of whom were influenced, directly or indirectly, by the work of Harold Innis at the University of Toronto. Innis's *Empire and Communications* (1950) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951) opened the door to considerable thinking about the relationship of regimes of communications and culture.[51] Much of what followed was, for varying reasons, controversial. McLuhan could be infuriating, and his disdain for detail, and sometimes for accuracy, was unapologetically a part of his provocative method. Ong, in his later work, along with the early work of anthropologist Jack Goody, promoted a theory of a "great divide" between oral and literate societies that was later contested by Brian Street and others who argued for greater specificity.[52] Though Eric Havelock has certainly been criticized for aspects of his account that are imaginative but difficult to substantiate, his work seems to have been standing the test of time. In spite of these challenges, there is, however, a

value to thinking in such larger terms, even in advance, or perhaps some-
times in defiance, of more detailed work. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*,
which he himself described in the "Attempt at Self-Criticism" prefaced
to the 1867 edition as "image mad and image-confused," effectively de-
stroyed his academic career when it was attacked by Ulrich Wilamowitz, a
philologist who went on to an extremely distinguished career. Nietzsche's
work as a philosopher, however, has likely had more influence.[53] They
were, perhaps, just doing very different things. In a somewhat similar vein,
the very detailed work of Elizabeth Eisenstein on the effects of printing be-
gan with some similarly harsh criticism of McLuhan's lack of rigour in *The
Gutenberg Galaxy* but then went on to substantiate many of his claims.[54]
As difficult as he could be, who in our present era can doubt the impor-
tance of the attention he drew to the influence of media or deny that we do
indeed live, for better or worse, in "a global village"?[55]

  Since that time, considerable scholarship has emerged looking in great
detail at the relationship among oral, manuscript, and, eventually, print
practices in early modern England.[56] In thinking about the relationship be-
tween the advent of commercial drama and its predecessors, it is certainly
worthy of consideration. It is also worth recalling that in Greece, by the
time of the great tragedians, writing had been present for several centuries,
and yet, as Plato's philosophy and Havelock's work on *paideia* suggest,
the epics and oral organization of thought were still very influential and,
at least in some important respects, culturally dominant. Given that, the
passage of the oral and performance-based works of the tragedians into
the texts we still read and study was a signature event marking an impor-
tant point in a major cultural transition. The same may be argued for the
commercial dramas of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in
England. Playwrights, after all, were literate, and some, such as Ben Jon-
son, intensely so. They exploited a huge range of source materials, many
with very long textual histories, and yet the dramas that emerged were
highly oral in performance and addressed audiences that were certainly
influenced by literacy and print but may still have been operating at least
partially in the conceptual habits of oral transmission and organization.
Adam Fox has concluded that "one of the fascinating and defining charac-
teristics of English society in the early modern period is the way in which
oral, scribal, and printed media fed in and out of each other as part of a
dynamic process of reciprocal interaction and mutual infusion."[57] Fox's
extensive documentation has demonstrated the long embedding of literacy
in many aspects of English society and the rapidity of transitions affecting
many institutions throughout the sixteenth century. He also has noted, as
many have, the complexity of determining literacy rates and has observed
that, even with the rapidity of technological change, "oral exchange re-
mained the primary mode of receiving and transmitting cultural capital for

most people,"[58] a sentiment echoing an earlier one by David Cressy that "people who were not unduly troubled about salvation, who were content within their horizons of knowledge and experience, and whose daily or seasonal routine required no mastery of print or script, had no pressing need of literacy and could hardly be persuaded to seek it."[59] Some of the London cognoscenti who attended the theatres were no doubt literate, but the frameworks associated with oral habits were far from extinct.

Thinking about the relationships between oral practices and alphabetic literacy in contemporary Indigenous cultures is also very complex. Many Indigenous people are, of course, highly literate, traditions of alphabetic literacy in some communities have existed for centuries, and the contact zone, of course, has been saturated in laws and records.[60] Yet in the lives of many communities and in many areas of contestation, such as court cases, the importance of oral systems and all they imply remains strong. Keith Carlson's works on Sto:lo history in British Columbia are particularly valuable in addressing the complexity of these interactions. Other writers, such as Julie Cruikshank, Keith Basso, and Jeannette Armstrong, have detailed many aspects of Indigenous oral systems and the interdependence among oral narratives, social practices, and place.[61] In his very detailed account of the influence of literacy in sixteenth-century England, Fox noted the importance of "custom" and local historical traditions and the "visual evidence of the immediate environment." Both suggest the mnemonic functions of social embedding and multiple connections to place that are similar.[62] While Brian Stock argued that as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, literate processes had affected oral culture, the detailed work of these historians demonstrates the ways in which, in the complex culture of the sixteenth century, oral practices continued to exert considerable influence, even, perhaps, on the emerging world of print, and was very much part of the context for the kinds of dramatic developments that took place on the commercial stage.[63]

Notes

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage-Random, 1967), 15–144, sec. 10; 75.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 18; quoted in Jesse Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 34.

3 Gellrich, 44.

4 Gellrich, 48–49.

5 Gellrich, 50.

6 See Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

7   See Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology of Time* (Oxford: Berg, 1992).
8   Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time,* trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 3–4, 6.
9   Aristotle, "The Poetics," in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, trans. Samuel Henry Butcher, 1911, Reprint (New York: Dover, 1951), 5–111, IV.12; 19.
10 Jennifer Trusted, *Physics and Metaphysics: Theories of Space and Time* (London: Routledge, 1991), 48.
11 Trusted, 62; the internal quotation is from Edwin A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (New York: Routledge, 1949), 83.
12 Trusted, 100.
13 Trusted, 61.
14 Poulet, 10.
15 Zachary Sayre Schiffman, "An Anatomy of Historical Revolution in Renaissance France," *Renaissance Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 507–33, 518–19.
16 Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), 21.
17 Stephen L. Collins, *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State: An Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Order in Renaissance England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 28.
18 John Greville Agard Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 156.
19 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 144; Ong, *Ramus.*
20 Taylor, 145.
21 Aristotle, *The Poetics*, IX.3; 35 and XXV.17; 107.
22 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 31–51.
23 David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 3.
24 See Daniel Rosenberg, "Joseph Priestley and the Graphic Invention of Modern Time," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 36, no. 1 (2007): 55–103.
25 Verdel A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 101.
26 Bevington, 13–18, 33, 43–44.
27 John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, eds., *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Suzanne Westfall, "'A Commonty a Christmas Gambold or a Tumbling Trick': Household Theater," in Cox and Kastan, *A New History*, 55–58; Lawrence. M. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston, *Medieval Drama* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
28 Anne Higgins, "Streets and Markets," in Cox and Kastan, *A New History*, 77–92.
29 Clopper, 141–42.
30 Bevington, 34.
31 Richardson and Johnston, 64–65.
32 Richardson and Johnston, 13.
33 Bevington, 4; Richardson and Johnston, 24.

34 Richardson and Johnston, 3.
35 Richardson and Johnston, 24.
36 Richardson and Johnston, 55.
37 Richardson and Johnston, 17–18.
38 Richardson and Johnston, 31–32.
39 Bevington, 45.
40 Peter Bogatyrëv and Roman Jakobson, "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity," in *The Prague School: Selected Writings 1929–1946*, ed. Peter Steiner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 32–45, 38.
41 Richardson and Johnston, 25.
42 A question raised for many by the 1968 publication in English of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968).
43 Bevington, 166–67.
44 Bevington, 186.
45 Bevington, 202.
46 Bevington, 208.
47 Bevington, 213–17.
48 Bevington, 195–95.
49 Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (New York: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley & Sons, 1960), 350–77, 358.
50 Roman Jakobson, "*Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances*," in *Fundamentals of Language*, ed. Roman Jakobson and Moris Halle,. 2nd ed. (New York: Mouton, 1971), 69–96.
51 Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950) and *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).
52 Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). See a later appraisal, see Laura Sterponi, "*Literacy Socialization*," in *The Handbook of Language Socialization*, ed. Alessandro Duranti, Elinor Ochs, and Bambi B. Schieffelin (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 227–46.
53 Nietzsche, 19.
54 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). See also Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin, *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).
55 In this respect, it is worth noting McLuhan's observation on William Burroughs: "It is amusing to read reviews of Burroughs that try to classify his books as nonbooks or as failed science fiction. It is a little like trying to criticize the sartorial and verbal manifestations of a man who is knocking on the door to explain that flames are leaping from the roof of our home. Burroughs is not asking merit marks as a writer; he is trying to point to the shut-on button of an active and lethal environmental process." Marshall McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs," *The Nation*, December 28, 1964, 517–519.
56 See, for instance, David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

1980); Robert A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500–1800*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002); Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol, *Print, Manuscript and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller, *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

57 Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 410. See also Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

58 Fox, *Oral and Literate*, 12. On the difficulty of measurement, see chapter 3, 42ff.

59 Cressy, 2.

60 For one fascinating account, see Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

61 Keith Thor Carlson, "Orality About Literacy: The 'Black and White' of Salish History," in *Orality and Literacy: Reflections across Disciplines*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Fagan, and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, 43–69 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived as a Story* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Jeanette Armstrong, "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmixwcentrism," PhD diss., Universität Greifswald, 2010.

62 Fox, *Oral and Literate*, 262, 216.

63 Fox, while noting the pervasive influence of literacy, has also noted the ways in which expectation that books and manuscripts would be shared by reading affected prose style: "In the sixteenth century, particularly, prose style had a very 'oral' quality, a high degree of colloquialism and formularity, which facilitated its spoken delivery." Fox, *Oral and Literate*, 37.

Reference List

Aristotle. "The Poetics." In *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, trans. Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111. 1911. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1951.

Armstrong, Jeannette. "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmixwcentrism." PhD diss., Universität Greifswald, 2010.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikailovich. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968.

Baron, Sabrina Alcorn, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin. *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

Basso, Keith. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

Bevington, David. *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Bogatyrëv, Peter, and Roman Jakobson. "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity." In *The Prague School: Selected Writings 1929–1946*, edited by Peter Steiner, 32–45. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.

Carlson, Keith Thor. "Orality About Literacy: The 'Black and White' of Salish History." In *Orality and Literacy: Reflections across Disciplines*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Fagan, and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, 43–69. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Collins, Stephen L. *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State: An Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Order in Renaissance England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Cox, John D., and David Scott Kastan, eds. *A New History of Early English Drama*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Cressy, David. *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Cruikshank, Julie. *Life Lived as a Story*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Ferguson, Arthur B. *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1979.

Fox, Adam. *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Fox, Adam, and Daniel Woolf. *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Gell, Alfred. *The Anthropology of Time*. Oxford: Berg, 1992.

Gellrich, Jesse. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Higgins, Anne. "Streets and Markets." In *A New History of Early English Drama*. Edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 77–92.

Houston, Robert A. *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500–1800*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Innis, Harold. *Empire and Communications*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950.

Innis, Harold. *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951.

Jakobson, Roman. "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics." In *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, 350–77. New York: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley & Sons, 1960.

Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." In *Fundamentals of Language*, edited by Roman Jakobson and Moris Halle, 69–96. 2nd ed. New York: Mouton, 1971.

Kolve, Verdel. A. *The Play Called Corpus Christi*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966.

Loewenstein, David, and Janel Mueller. *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Marotti, Arthur F., and Michael D. Bristol. *Print, Manuscript and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000.

McLuhan, Herbert Marshall. "Notes on Burroughs." *The Nation*, December 28, 1964, 517–519.

McLuhan, Herbert Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, 15–144. New York: Vintage-Random, 1967.

Pocock, John Greville Agard. *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History*. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

Poulet, Georges. *Studies in Human Time*. Translated by Elliott Coleman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956.

Rama, Angel, *The Lettered City*. Translated by John Charles Chasteen. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Richardson, Christine, and Jackie Johnston. *Medieval Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol. I. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Rosenberg, Daniel. "Joseph Priestley and the Graphic Invention of Modern Time." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 36, no. 1 (2007): 55–103.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Translated by Wade Baskin. London: P. Owen, 1960.

Schiffman, Zachary Sayre. "An Anatomy of Historical Revolution in Renaissance France." *Renaissance Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 507–33.

Sterponi, Laura. "Literacy Socialization." In *The Handbook of Language Socialization*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, Elinor Ochs, and Bambi B. Schieffelin, 227–46. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Street, Brian. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Trusted, Jennifer. *Physics and Metaphysics: Theories of Space and Time*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Westfall, Suzanne. "'A Commonty a Christmas Gambold or a Tumbling Trick': Household Theater." In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan. 39–58. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Part III

Tragedy, Time, and Revenge

4 Marlowe's "Tragic Glass" and the Decline of Analogy

> From jigging veins of rhyming mother wits,
> And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
> We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
> Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
> Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms
> And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
> View but his picture in this tragic glass,
> And then applaud his fortunes as you please.
>
> (*Tamburlaine the Great: Part One*,
> Prologue, 1–8)[1]

In this opening to *Tamburlaine the Great*, Christopher Marlowe announced the arrival of a cluster of significant changes. The first and most obvious was his declaration of the use on the English stage of a more classically inspired verse and diction, the "mighty line" of iambic pentameter that was to become the standard of which he remained a foremost practitioner. That form and its diction, as he used them, had their roots in the education of the schools and universities and the increasing availability of classical texts in the rapidly developing environment of printing. The second was a dedication to a more explicit and encompassing valorization of imagination, the possibilities of which had been expanded by that recovered learning and other accounts, many in writing, flooding into England from many faraway places. This was a more explicit and self-aware engagement with the fictionality and central illusion of the stage and, more broadly, of all narrative and perhaps all language: the ability to imagine, through language and simulated action, that which, as represented, was only there in concept—the world as presented in the "tragic glass." That regard for fictionality and the fictional basis of language dated back in European critical discourse at least as far as Aristotle, but Marlowe's statement of it was coloured by the emerging optimism of the early modern period, as represented in Sidney's *Apology* and other texts, and was novel

on stage in the clarity of its foregrounding.[2] It promised not only the transport of fiction but on a scale that extended far beyond the familiar sources of biblical and local chronicle. It promised to stretch the imagination of its audiences to include "the world" in all its imagined and exotic majesty. It also proposed a different level of agency for the poet, not tied to the simple repetition of the past. Just as Tamburlaine would threaten the world with "high astounding terms," so Marlowe would transport his audiences through the poetry that was decisively his own.

By the end of his short career, Marlowe would announce both the aspirations of unfettered early modern imagination and the first recognition of its limitation. By the end of the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*, Tamburlaine was represented as having imagined, declaimed, and then realized huge conquests, and yet, like Chaucer, as having seen his narrative truncated by death. In the later *Dr Faustus*, the complete freedom to realize what can be imagined and spoken was set yet more starkly against the apparent poverty of the imagination to generate power beyond the replication of old images (a point later reprised in Jonson's brilliant Sir Epicure Mammon), and its narrative then recouped within an older dramatic formulation, the psychomachia, if with a decisively more pessimistic ending. In the annunciation, Marlowe's work resonated with the expressionism of Sidney's *Apology*, but in its scepticism, it anticipated the satires of Jonson and the pessimism of John Donne's *Anniversary* poems.

Though innovative, as Bevington aptly argued, both *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus* operated largely by recapitulating and extending their predecessors.[3] Both emerged from the earlier developments of psychomachia and chronicle that Bevington outlined in detail, and both reprised the structure of those in plots that were largely episodic. Perhaps in a way different from their antecedents, however, both *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus* were plays defined by a different kind of emphasis on their endpoints. *Tamburlaine*, like its Prologue, began with a declaration of intention and ended, if after two plays, with the closure of Tamburlaine's death. *Faustus* began with Faustus's fascination with magic, and, if by implicit analogy, with poetry and the imagination, but similarly ended with the death of its central character. Between its opening and closing moments, *Tamburlaine* proceeded through a string of incidents that were in part sequential, as Tamburlaine built his forces and gained more territory, but were, in their individual features, largely interchangeable, as typified, for instance, in the trope of the three flags. Like the incidents of the earlier plays that Bevington noted, these central but interchangeable incidents functioned largely through the repetition of a single message told through multiple instances.[4] In *Tamburlaine*'s case in particular, that array was quite literally panoramic, encompassing much of what it imagines as the exotic world of the fourteenth-century middle east. *Faustus* is even more episodic. As the history

of multiple versions and possible emendations by multiple hands suggests, the incidents that fill the space between its opening and closing actions progress in an even more random array, "postmodern" in its imaginary collapse of times and places, sourced in the literary profusion of texts, but presented in the auditory and visual framework of the theatre. That array was not without its logic, as Bevington argued, since its alternations of comic and more serious episodes were central to its traditional structure and replicated "the established pattern of alternation between edification and amusement, serious message and satiric inversion of normality," but that logic did not require a specific or fixed order.[5] The emphasis on end-points and the definition of a space in between would have profound re-percussions in later drama, as subsequent chapters will consider.

Faustus has always been regarded as a tragedy, and the title pages of both the 1604 and 1616 editions term it a "tragicall history." Though *Tamburlaine* proceeded, especially through its first half, more like a tri-umph, it too, on the title page of its 1590 edition, was proclaimed a trag-edy. "Divided into two Tragicall Discourses," the Prologue presented its structure of imagination and representation in a "tragic glass." Though both plays ended in death, and in that sense were sad tales, it is not oth-erwise entirely clear what their designation as tragedies actually meant, or how this kind of finality operated as a representational strategy. One possibility they presented was the scale of action, as defined by Aristotle:

> Now, according to our definition, Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and, of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude.[6]

The stature of the central characters might have assured "a certain mag-nitude," but what constituted "an action that is complete, and whole"? Perhaps the death of the protagonist assured a kind of completion, though Aristotle also cautioned that "Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero," and that kind of completion would do little to determine the intervening actions.[7] Aristotle eschewed the "ep-eisotic" [sic] plot for tragedy, and the episodic was certainly a characteris-tic of these plays. A different kind of definition of tragedy, more congruent with Aristotle's theory, was yet to come.[8]

The ideas of death and closure were, however, part of what marked these plays as different from their predecessors. Through these thematic markers, these plays were bounded, thematically and functionally, in ways that earlier plays were not. As argued in the preceding chapter, cycle plays, and even miracle plays and interludes, were likely performed, not so much as novelties but as reliable and repeated aids to memory and social cohesion: their repeti-tion *was* their point, and, within them, while repetition and accumulation

was requisite, novelty and sequence did *not* greatly matter. And, as previously argued, plays performed intermittently, or only as part of a cycle, still synecdochally evoked the cycle or religious frame as a whole while metaphorically linking them to all the analogous layers of reference that constituted that extensive and inclusive system. As reflecting parts, they projected a system, coextensive with Gellrich's Book of Nature and the idea of a divinely infused creation that, like Havelock's "mind of Zeus," was enveloping, had no real end, and had no "outside." In contrast, these plays, coextensive with both a time of performance and the represented life of a less generically typed and more individuated character, were, by both definition and operation, bounded, contained, and constrained. They may have pointed to larger aspirations and the formation of larger institutions, but they announced a new framework rather than repeating an old one, and, as bounded and novel creations, they *assumed* an outside, clearly marked in their finality. Context, in this respect, was everything: if, in the earlier framework, the point of individual performances was their recapitulation and re-enactment of part of a constellation of familiar stories, their boundedness as individual performances, though casually experienced, was not conceptually foregrounded. If, however, the performance of a play such as *Tamburlaine* was proclaiming a framework that was new and unique, its boundedness and containment *was* its defining characteristic. This change was the key to many others.

In *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*, Lawrence Clopper responds to this "more fundamental question: How could this phenomenon, the emergence of a dramatic tradition, have occurred a second time in Western history?"[9] Clopper's answer was to trace a long tradition through the periods between the classical and early modern of practices he sought to make more visible through their reclassification: as the work of Bevington, the other scholars noted above, and many others have attested, the antecedents are clearly there. And yet, the drama, and particularly the tragedy that develops after 1580 in England, did have an affinity and structural similarity to Greek tragedy that is not so clearly explained by this genealogy or by the expedient explanation of recovered classical texts. This particular formulation of drama not only appeared as suddenly as its classical predecessor but waned in its production and influence in a similarly short time. What accounts for *these* similarities? The first chapter of this book proposed an answer framed in more abstract and theoretical terms. The next chapters will argue the explanatory power of such a theory in more practical and applied terms, beginning with this observation made by Margreta de Grazia in *A New History*:

> If there is any event in the history of the early English stage comparable to the epochal ones listed above, it would have to be the building of the first public theater in London in 1576. The event is invariably

singled out in the annals of English stagecraft as the beginnings of commercial theater. The name of that edifice, the Theatre, recalled the theaters of ancient Greece (*theatron*, a place for viewing), but in sixteenth-century London a fixed building for dramatic performance was a decided novelty. That novelty rapidly became an institution as the number of the theaters in London multiplied.

The Theatre emerged from new dispensations of both time and space. Performance in 1576 was no longer bound to a religious and official calendar: by royal patent, it was permitted on work days as well as calendar holidays. So, too, it no longer depended on securing church and civic quarters, and since it did not have to move from one site to another, it could now take place in a fixed structure of its own.[10]

Greek tragedy was defined by the institutions of its theatres and the competitive contests they developed: new plays competed each year *because* they were both defined and different. In the wake of this development in later sixteenth-century London, the boundedness of individual plays was not only possible but necessary for very similar reasons. The contexts of festival, liturgy, and moral instruction were superseded by another—the immediate and emerging institutional and commercial context of the theatres. If theatres, theatre companies, and playwrights were now to compete for audiences and struggle to define themselves from their peers in an increasingly saturated market, what adjustments to the platforms and traditions they had inherited would be required? How would their structures and internal arrangements have to reflect these circumstances? And how would the expectations of their audiences have begun to change? The necessity for novelty as a distinctive and incremental feature and the dialectic between the new and the changing expectations of audiences formed a powerful and dynamic engine for change that not only called forth the form of tragedy, but eventually lead, just as it had in the competitive festivals of ancient Greece, to its eventual undoing. The following chapters will trace some of these developments.

The Role of Machiavelli

Before progressing to these later developments, it is worth pausing to note another kind of change circulating in the culture that Marlowe introduced in the drama—the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, though there is considerable scholarly debate about the route through which his work became so influential.[11] Machiavelli's thinking coincides with other changes that began to loosen the hold of orthodoxies of many kinds, the Reformation certainly not being the least of them. But where the Reformation loosened the strictures

of the authority in Christian thought, Machiavelli's thought had the effect, if not the intention, of stepping outside of the constraints of Christian thought altogether. In its resolute exposition of political pragmatism, Machiavelli's thinking implicitly valorized a more direct and unfettered expression of will. That kind of thinking emerged in the exuberant wilfulness of *Tamburlaine*:

> I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,
> And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about,
> And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere
> Then Tamburlaine be slain or overcome.
>   (1.2.174–177)

In later plays, however, a more tempered, less certain, and more contingent expressions recast this theme. In both *The Massacre at Paris* and *Edward II*, Machiavellian and opportunistic characters, the Guise in the former and Mortimer Jr. in the latter, were presented as opportunistic and ruthless, but not as ultimately successful. Mortimer Jr., at his most successful moment, was presented as advising a retainer:

> As thou intendest to rise by Mortimer,
> Who now makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please,
> Seek all the means thou canst …
>   (2.2.52–54)

Yet a short time later, he was seen to be outmanoeuvred by the young and emergent Edward III and exclaimed

> Base Fortune, now I see that in thy wheel
> There is a point, to which when men aspire,
> They tumble headlong down. That point I touched,
> And seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
> Why should I grieve at my declining fall?
>   (5.6.59–63)

That kind of fatalism seemed to recoup expressions of will and agency within an older, more traditional, and essentially cyclical framework in which such opportunism was constrained within a more sober normalizing conformity.

Machiavelli's thought was not quite so fatalistic. The effective leader, he argued, must understand and adjust to changes in fortune:

Therefore it is necessary for him to have a mind ready to turn itself accordingly as the winds and variations of fortune force it, yet, as I have said above, not to diverge from the good if he can avoid

doing so, but, if compelled then to know how to set about it…. I believe also that he will be successful who directs his actions according to the spirit of the times, and that he whose actions do not accord with the times will not be successful.[12]

That would require both flexibility and a plan. Earlier in *Edward II*, Mortimer Jr. spoke to his confederates, suggesting that they opportunistically assassinate the troublesome Gaveston. When asked by his confederate, Lancaster, "Ay, but how chance this was not done before?" he replied, "Because, my lords, it was not thought upon" (I.4.272–273). In such moments, opportunism was clearly distinguishable from planning, and planning was clearly presented as the ascendant mode. The emergence in this play of a linkage between more extended planning, plotting, and deception was another way in which fictionality and its performative power were foregrounded and had begun to delineate a different way of thinking.

The Jew of Malta and the Emergence of "Policy"

An exposition of Machiavellianism that extended the ethic of more explicit planning appeared in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. That play began with a Prologue spoken by the choral character Machiavel, who commented on the persistence of his influence and corruption of papal authority, and announced a rather ambiguous opening to the ethic of the nascent Enlightenment:

> Admired I am of those that hate me most.
> Though some speak openly against my books,
> Yet will they read me and thereby attain
> To Peter's chair; and, when they cast me off,
> Are poisoned by my climbing flowers.
> I count religion but a childish toy
> And hold there is no sin but ignorance.
> (Prologue, 9–16)

Though this play has often been disparaged both for its anti-Semitism and collapse into caricature in its later acts, it was significant for the depth of its irony, profundity of its scepticism, and anticipation of many later dramatic developments, not the least being its demonstration of the efficacy of planning.

The Jew of Malta had a well-developed structure of interlocking plots and subplots, centring around opportunism, deception, and betrayal. Echoing aspects of morality play convention, the subplots were parodic

and burlesque. A major subplot was that around the interactions of Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borza. Ithamore, from his introduction in Act 2, functioned in the main plot as servant, confederate, and double of the main character, Barabas. The two, upon meeting, competed in their accounts of crimes and cruelty, especially as directed towards Christians. By Act 4, however, Ithamore had developed a second trajectory and fallen prey in turn to the opportunism of the lowest social order as represented by Bellamira and Pilia-Borza. Infatuated with Bellamira, he imagined their future together:

> *Bellamira.* I have no husband, sweet; I'll marry thee.
> *Ithamore.* Content, but we will leave this paltry land
> And sail from hence to Greece, to lovely Greece.
> I'll by thy Jason, thou my golden fleece.
> Where painted carpets o'er the meads are hurled,
> And Bacchus' vineyards overspread the world,
> Where woods and forests go in goodly green,
> I'll be Adonis' thou shalt be Love's queen.
> The meads, the orchards, and the primrose lanes,
> Instead of sedge and reed, bear sugar canes.
> Thou in those groves, by Dis above,
> Shalt live with me, and be my love.
>
> (2.4 84–94)

The classical references that populated this speech demonstrated once again a theme of *Tamburlaine*, the explosion of imaginative possibilities that accompanied the recovery and printing of classical texts. Their deployment in this context, however, was highly ironic, all the more so given the resonance, especially in the last line, of Marlowe's famous romantic and pastoral poem, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." The critique of early modern aspirations captured in this parody also anticipated similar parodic moments that emerge in the work of later writers, as, for instance, in some of the speeches of Sir Epicure Mammon in Jonson's *The Alchemist*. In broader terms, Ithamore also anticipated Jonson's deployment of the "scheming servant" trope of Roman New Comedy that would become such a mainstay of his greatest plays.

As these aspects suggest, though titled a "tragedy" and having a rather dire ending (its title character falling into a boiling cauldron), *The Jew of Malta* had, perhaps, a kind of bridging function, with more in common structurally with some types of comedy. And like later comedies, it made much of the implicit metadrama of deception and appearance in the service of achieving one's ends. While not explicitly metadramatic in the way that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Volpone* was to be, it was characterized

by the arranged staging of events and, in one noteworthy scene, Barabas's effective feigning of his own death (again anticipating *Volpone*). In nearly every instance, the play extended these notions of performance, duplicity, and deceit through its characters and their performance of duplicitous acts while feigning virtues. In the field of politics, these were quintessentially Machiavellian:

> Therefore it is unnecessary for a prince to have all the good qualities I have enumerated, but it is very necessary to appear to have them.
>
> (Ch XVIII)

Barabas's declaration of his use of deception was explicit:

> We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please,
> And when we grin, we bite: yet are our looks
> As innocent and harmless as a lamb's.
>
> (2.3.20–22)

This characterization of duplicity as an expressly non-Christian Jewish behaviour was, of course, undermined by the actions of other characters throughout the play. Ferneze, at the end of the play, defeated Barabas by deception and deceit, and Ferneze's betrayal of Calyphas, while a Machiavellian master stroke, was not substantially different. The return to something like "orthodoxy" in Ferneze's consolidation of power at the end of the play was especially ironic, not because it was out of step with the logic of the play but because it was justified in the play's closing lines as divine intervention:

> As sooner shall they drink the ocean dry
> Than conquer Malta or endanger us.
> So, march away, and let due praise be given
> Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven.
>
> (2.5.121–124)

This, of course, was Machiavellian too if the appropriation of legitimizing ideology were viewed simply as a route to power.

At the beginning of the play, Barabas's use of language associated him fairly closely with the kind of exceptional ambition that characterized Tamburlaine, just as it anticipated a later speech by Jonson's Volpone:

> No, Barabas is born to better chance
> And framed of finer mold than common men
> That measure nought but by the present time.

> A reaching thought will search his deepest wits
> And cast with cunning for the time to come,
> For evils are apt to happen every day.
>
> (1.2.220–225)

While this speech began in sentiments that were similar to Tamburlaine's casting off of order and restriction, it ended in something more like Machiavelli's more complex recognition of circumstance and adaptability. In the early moments of the play, this self-positioning was not yet separated from notions of morality and justice: Barabas was initially portrayed as expressing outrage at the callous opportunism of Ferneze and the Maltese government. Deception too, though by Act 2's exchanges between Barabas and Ithamore apparently having its own pleasures, was presented early in the play as a more pragmatic strategy, normal to the context in which it appeared. As one of the Jews commented on the impeding meeting of the Maltese council to address the arrival of the Turks, "Tush, tell not me; 'twas done of policy" (1.1.138). "Policy" in politics was one aspect of an emerging ethic of strategic planning, but the entirety of Barabas's commercial empire was the other. In contrast to agriculture, craft, wealth based upon lands and rents, or perhaps even statecraft, Barabas's sizable wealth was seen to be based upon investment, venture, trade, and return—the many ships that are deployed and bringing goods to Malta and elsewhere, or even the gold that Barabas had hidden in anticipation of future need. That wealth represents a new kind of power, based on a different way of thinking about time, agency, and futurity: the commitment and investment of wealth now in expectation of *future* gain, and the planning for and understanding of the chain of actions and circumstances that would connect present investment to its eventual reward were at its core. And, while not the orthodoxy of the past, they were certainly the emerging practices of the future.

The presentation of plot and planning in more extended terms announced a new pattern of understanding and modelling action, no longer primarily episodic, but defined by the representation of a more structured sequence of action. While all of that is presented in the elaborate actions and expressions of *The Jew of Malta*, it was, as an ethic, presented still to be viewed with suspicion, and as the play progressed, the greater terms of that way of thinking were buried in displays of dramatic action that located anticipatory thinking in a smaller frame that increasingly presented these actions as degraded and foreign. In this combination of exposure and sublimation, the racial politics of the play, as well as the decline into caricature, played a crucial role. Though the play exposed Christian orthodoxy as just another Machiavellian device, it also invoked its eventual victory to reduce the primary threat to established order of this new way of thinking and the kinds of social restructuring it would bring. Relocating the apparent

centre of that thinking in the culturally alienated characters of Barabas and Ithamore, *The Jew of Malta* began a long early modern tradition of announcing the new, unfamiliar, and potentially disruptive ideas through their association with categories of identity that were pushed to the margins, depreciated, and contained. This theme would echo through tropes of anti-Semitism, through the emergence of blackness as a category of difference, to the representation of the conquest of the New World in characters such as Caliban.[13] Though slowed and sanitized by such devices and prevarications, however, lay the emergence of new ways of thinking about action, time, and identity that drama was then bringing into greater visibility.

Notes

1 References to Marlowe's plays are cited parenthetically by act and scene from Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963).
2 "onely the Poet, difdayning to be tied to any fuch fubjection, lifted vp with the vigor of his owne inuention, dooth growe in effect, another nature, in making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe formes such as neuer were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, & fuch like; fo as hee goeth hand in hand with Nautre, not inclofed within the narrow warrant of her guifts, but freely ranging onely within the Zodiack of his owne wit." Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesie.
3 David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 202–3.
4 Bevington, 208.
5 Bevington, 252.
6 Aristotle, "The Poetics," in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, ed. and trans. Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111, 1911, Reprint (New York: Dover, 1951), VII.2; 31.
7 Aristotle, *The Poetics*, VII.1; 33.
8 For an extensive discussion of period definitions of tragedy, see Bair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
9 Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.
10 Margreta de Grazia, "World Pictures, Modern Periods, and the Early Stage," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 7–21, 13.
11 *The Prince* was not published in English until much later, but continental printing in other languages in the first half of the sixteenth century was prolific. For an account, including the role of manuscript translations, see Alessandra Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
12 Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. William. K. Marriott. Project Gutenberg ebook 1232. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1232, chapters XVIII, XXV.

13 For a detailed study of the tropes and uses of anti-Semitism in Shakespeare and elsewhere, see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Other uses of ethnic displacement are discussed in detail in following chapters.

Reference List

Aristotle. "The Poetics." In *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, edited and translated by Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111. 1911. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1951.

Bevington, David. *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

de Grazia, Margreta. "World Pictures, Modern Periods, and the Early Stage." In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 7–21. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Hoxby, Blair. *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Machiavelli, Nicolo. *The Prince*. Translated by William. K. Marriott. Project Gutenberg ebook, 2006. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1232.

Petrina, Alessandra. *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of* The Prince. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Sidney, Philip, Sir. *The Defence of Poesie [Defence of Poetry]*. London: Ponsonby, 1595. https://www.proquest.com/books/defence-poesie-sir-phillip-sidney-knight/docview/2248500521/se-2.

5 The Spanish Tragedy and Revenge

Ideas about action, time, and identity were indeed central to drama and the many cultural changes in which it participated and at times led. Nowhere was this more evident than in the evolution of the revenge tragedies that form such an integral part of commercial drama from its earliest days. That tradition began with *The Spanish Tragedy*, generally attributed to Marlowe's contemporary and sometimes confederate Thomas Kyd and written sometime before 1590. *The Spanish Tragedy* was not only one of the most performed early commercial dramas but one of the most persistent and influential, its resonances reverberating through to *Hamlet* and far beyond. Given the consistency of theme among this and the many plays that followed, the structural changes that developed among them provide a kind of index to broader changes as dramas in general continued to grow and proliferate.

It is not too hard to imagine why revenge plays appeared as early as they did or why they were so consistently popular. They were full of drama and violence, exotic foreign locations, and both flattering and critical representations of class and power.[1] They would have competed well among the other rougher entertainments that vied for audience attention, and their classical resonances, language, and references might also have appealed to the cognoscenti. And then there is revenge. In his introduction to *The Spanish Tragedy*, J.R. Mulryne comments on the pervasiveness of personal revenge in Elizabethan society:

> Fredson Bowers has shown beyond quibble the continuing sympathy for private revenge in Elizabethan England. In the recent lawless past the only means to achieving justice (or retaliation rather) for a crime against the person had been through private revenge; and even though the law now quite specifically forbade such vengeance (as it had not always done), and though moralists and preachers drew attention to the seemingly unambiguous Biblical prohibition ('Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord'), a strong emotional prejudice in favour of the private revenger still persisted in Elizabethan sentiment.[2]

It may have been particularly exciting for audiences to imagine acts of revenge that were not, in fact, entirely "private" due to the public status of those involved and the differentials in power among their social positions. In any event, though it has varied with changes in social ethos, the congruence of violence, cruelty, and celebrity seems to have an attraction that has spanned many times and places. In addition to these many attractions, however, revenge tragedies in the 1590s were significant in the ways in which they began to shape thinking about time and causality, the linkages between actions, and the ways in which, in the Aristotelian inversion, actions began to define character. Those characteristics would deepen and have profound repercussions over time.

Though revenge clearly had resonance in local social practice, revenge tragedies also had antecedents in classical literature. As Marlowe had demonstrated, the recovery of classical texts had expanded models and imaginative possibilities, provided material for scholars and authors, and presented audiences with more opportunities to venture into the realm of the exotic and imaginary. Though the immediate source for plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy* would seem to have been Seneca, Seneca himself stands at the end of the long tradition already described in Chapter 2, in which the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* all participated in long cycles of revenge and in which Greek tragedies presented major explorations. In the long cycle of the epics and their recapitulation in tragic sequences, revenge functioned, as it appears to have functioned in Elizabethan society, atmospherically, as an open-ended set of repeated or recurring events and a kind of condition of life. In Seneca's work, it also functioned more as a way of producing effects than defining causal relations.

In his 1927 essay "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," T.S. Eliot argued that Seneca's plays were unlikely to be performed as dramas. It is more likely that, like Greek epics in Socrates's time, they were recited as narratives or read as elite closet dramas. Eliot noted that the many features that Seneca contributed to Elizabethan drama (ghosts, cannibalism, more generally the theatre of blood) were designed to produce effects, and Seneca's language, while influential, was more suited to set speeches than interaction. Characters declaimed rather than spoke and had no apparent development or interiority. And while there was a surfeit of action, often reported, there was no plot *per se*:

> But in the type of plot there is nothing classical or pseudo-classical at all. 'Plot' in the sense in which we find plot in *The Spanish Tragedy* does not exist for Seneca. He took a story perfectly well known to everybody, and interested his auditors entirely by his embellishments of description and narrative and by smartness and pungency of dialogue; suspense and surprise attached solely to verbal effects.

In contrast, Eliot noted that "the structure of *The Spanish Tragedy* is more dramatic" and likely would have been more satisfying than Seneca to "an unlettered audience." Finally, he made this very crucial observation:

> The plots of Elizabethan tragedy were, so far as the audience are concerned, novelties.[3]

Especially in light of some of the other changes already noted, this is an observation worth further exploration: the impact of the development of the commercial theatres noted by de Grazia and the transition from earlier drama to the bounded forms that suited those venues were profound changes. The development of the "novelty" of Elizabethan plots was yet another, and it developed in a most interesting way in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Like *The Jew of Malta*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, in spite of its lasting influence, has often been regarded as a somewhat lesser work. In terms of what is often most valued in Shakespeare's tragedies—the development of characters with interiority, the exploration (and perhaps invention) of the great "human" themes—that lesser reputation may be well-deserved. Its significance, however, may derive from other things. In its own terms, it is actually a very complex play, and perhaps unexpectedly so for a play known primarily for its violence. Perhaps also not obvious for modern readers is that its most important functions may be more in the category of "instruct" rather than "delight." Its pedagogical functions were, however, foregrounded from its opening scene in the use of choral characters who framed and commented on the play's actions, providing a template for audience responses. Like the *chori* of Greek drama, they interceded between audiences and the events of the stage, mediating and suggesting modalities for the interpretation and understanding of actions as they were presented. Most interesting, in hindsight, is that such interventions should have been necessary.[4]

In the opening scene, the ghost of Don Andrea set the context for the actions to unfold by reprising the battle just concluded between the Spanish and Portuguese. He recounts the circumstances of his own death at the hand of the Portuguese prince Balthazar, the resulting separation from his love Belimperia, and his journey to the underworld. That journey located the play discursively within the realm of classical reference and explained as well in Andrea's presence on stage as a spectator to the actions of the play. In this opening scene and throughout the play he was joined on the stage by personified character, Revenge, resonant of medieval allegory. Revenge, in this brief rejoinder, introduced the play's frame for thinking about both time and action:

> Then know, Andrea, that thou art arrived
> Where thou shalt see the author of thy death,
> Don Balthazar, the prince of Portingale,

> Deprived of life by Bel-imperia.
> Here sit we down to see the mystery,
> And serve for Chorus in this tragedy.
>
> (1.1.86–91)[5]

The framework revealed here is, in one respect, very Senecan, in that any sense of suspense attached to the notion of outcome was foreclosed: the purpose of the play, the production of the death of Balthazar at the hands of Bel-imperia, was virtually guaranteed, not to be discovered but to be demonstrated. That the production of Balthazar's death would not only be produced, but enacted before Don Andrea, was also significant. It created, in effect, two audiences: Don Andrea as a choral audience at the side of the stage, and the theatre audience watching both the action and that internal audience before it. The creation of this metadramatic and voyeuristic frame for the actions of the play not only placed theatre audience at a remove from the action but brought their explicit attention to the processes of the play as they unfolded. That distancing also located their pleasure in their consumption of, rather than participation in, those actions and provided a means through which their reception and interpretation could be guided by Revenge as a commentator. That metadramatic and voyeuristic distancing was replicated by other devices in the play, as in 2.2 in which Balthazar and Lorenzo watched from the wings an exchange between Horatio and Bel-imperia crucial to a major action of the plot and in other choral punctuations. That metadramatic framing, the foretelling of the end of the action, and its description as a "mystery," all reset the epistemological frame of the play, redirecting the question of knowledge from *what* would happen, to *how* it would happen—the process through which the "mystery" would be revealed.

That revelation did indeed become the action of the play, but its punctuation at several key points with further choral commentary also defined two very different ways of thinking about action and the experience of time through which it proceeded. In 1.5 Andrea complained again at the apparent inaction and the play's apparent inability to produce his revenge. Revenge replied by reassuring him of the certainty of the outcome. Their appearance was repeated again in 2.6. At this point, Horatio, who had been Andrea's closest friend and had replaced him as Bel-imperia's chosen partner, had also been slain. Andrea asked

> Brought'st thou me hither to increase my pain
> I looked that Balthazar should have been slain;
> But 'tis my friend Horatio that is slain,
> And they abuse fair Bel-imperia,

> On whom I doted more than all the world
> Because she loved me more than all the world.
>   (2.6.1–6)

To which Revenge replies

> Though talk'st of harvest when the corn is green:
> The end is crown of every work well done;
> The sickle comes not till the corn be ripe.
> Be still, and ere I lead thee from this place,
> I'll show thee Balthazar in heavy case.
>   (2.6.7–11)

Conceptually, of course, Andrea was presented as literally in limbo, in a kind of stasis that would only be ended, apparently, by the performance of the act of the revenge in the main plot that would allow his return to the underworld. His stasis was an indication of the way in which the experience of time was bifurcated by the revenge motif and its double perspectives. Andrea's view of time was presented as structured by duration in which there were only two steady states in which time could be experienced. The first was the duration defined by both the "wrongness" of his unavenged state and the expectation that revenge would end it. The second would be the duration of a "corrected" state in which the act of revenge had effected a resolution. The first, the state of wrongness or disequilibrium, was expressed as anxiety and impatience. The second was projected as a release from that and a return to order and equilibrium. It too would be a state or duration, but one in which a kind of harmony and balance had been achieved, characterized by the stasis of normalcy and proper order. The fulcrum that defined the passage between these two states, the act of revenge, would be, in itself precipitous and momentary, without significant duration at all, meaningful primarily as a point of inflection. It would not be a process, but a point of transition producing a change of state—a movement from one experience of a kind of timeless present to another. In this and other passages, Don Andrea was depicted as being, in his state of unrest, only desirous of that change.

The understanding of time presented by Revenge, however, was very different. The metaphor of growth, maturity, and harvesting was, in contrast, less about states and duration than about process, not about being but becoming. It was not just about a change of state but about the demonstration of the process through which that change would be effected. Like Aristotelian tragedy, it would be teleological, leading to an end and defined as a process in which individual actions all play a part. How those actions operate, how they would be linked together in forming meaningful

sequences, and how those sequences would be demonstrated—those constituted the very "mystery" that the play was revealing, both to audiences and to their metadramatic surrogate in Don Andrea.

At the point at which this exchange took place, the road to revenge and the fulfilment of the necessary pattern of action must have seemed mysterious indeed. Horatio, who had recovered Andrea's body and might well have been assumed to accept the obligation to revenge, was not represented as really contemplating such actions. As a lower ranked retainer in the feudal order, his position appeared fixed and constrained, and he appeared to have accepted his place in the political arrangements being negotiated for the resolution of the war, arrangements in which Balthazar would play a central role. Horatio's position appeared to be necessarily static as he awaited further instructions. Bel-imperia, who did speak of her desire for revenge, appeared to be ill-positioned to effect it. Constrained by her gender position, her primary action appeared to be to accept Horatio as a replacement for Andrea in an attempt to forestall her pairing with Balthazar as part of the truce. Once Balthazar learned of Bel-imperia's interest in Horatio, he, however, was presented as seeking "revenge" against Horatio for usurping his rightful place. The Spaniard Lorenzo, who was of higher status and had contested the honour of Horatio's capture of Balthazar, was presented as joining Balthazar in devising the first major plotted action of the main plot, the murder of Horatio, effected a short time later.

The play's movements in this contrast between stasis and action were mirrored in its language. While the language given to Horatio, both as a retainer and a lover, was courtly and largely static, that accorded to Balthazar was not. It was more formal and highly patterned, but more than simply courtly. In two highly developed speeches in Act 2.1, it was presented as deliberative and adversative, presenting arguments and counter-arguments in a set of balances. In the first, he reflected on his attraction to Bel-imperia:

> It is my fault, not she, that merits blame.
> My feature is not to content her sight,
> My words are rude and work her no delight.
> The lines I send her are but harsh and ill,
> Such as do drop from Pan and Marsyas' quill.
> My presents are not of sufficient cost,
> And being worthless all my labour's lost.
> Yet might she love me for my valiancy;
> Ay, but that's slandered by captivity.
> Yet might she love me to content her sire;
> Ay, but her reason masters his desire.
> Yet might she love me as her brother's friend;
> Ay, but her hopes aim at some other end.

> Yet might she love me to uprear her state;
> Ay, but perhaps she hopes some nobler mate.
> Yet might she love me as her beauty's thrall;
> Ay, but I fear she cannot love at all.
>
>   (2.1.12–28)

A few lines later, he began by repeating this adversative construction:

> Both well, and ill: it makes me glad and sad:
> Glad, that I know the hinderer of my love,
> Sad, that I fear she hates me whom I love.
> Glad, that I know on whom to be revenged,
> Sad, that she'll fly me if I take revenge.
> Yet must I take revenge or die myself,
> For love resisted grows impatient.
>
>   (2.1.111–117)

In the continuation of this speech, however, the pattern shifted dramatically:

> I think Horatio be my destined plague:
> First, in his hand he brandished a sword,
> And with that sword he fiercely waged war,
> And in that war he gave me dangerous wounds,
> And by those wounds he forced me to yield,
> And by my yielding I became his slave.
> Now in his mouth he carries pleasing words,
> Which pleasing words do harbour sweet conceits,
> Which sweet conceits are limed with sly deceits,
> Which sly deceits smooth Bel-imperia's ears,
> And through her ears dive down into her heart,
> And in her heart set him where I should stand.
> Thus hath he ta'en my body by his force,
> And now by sleight would captivate my soul:
> But in his fall I'll tempt the destines,
> And either lose my life, or win my love.
>
>   (2.1.118–133)

These later lines were all discursively linked, with the final term of one line becoming the initial term of the next, and each linkage moving the argument forward towards a resolution and conclusion in which the final commitment to action came as a traceable consequence of the initial term. In this way, the language moved from stasis to sequence and action,

demonstrating a rationale for the construction of plans and actions that would lead towards the desired result of the death of Horatio a few scenes later. The language is both an explication and a demonstration of a sequence logically linking a beginning to an end—something very similar to Aristotle's definition of a tragic plot.

The death of Horatio was also significant in that it demarcated the earlier sections of the play from those that followed and led more precipitously to the final result. It also effected a transition in movement and control from one set of characters to their opposites—from Lorenzo and Balthazar as initiators of action to Hieronimo and Bel-imperia as controllers and completers of the actions of the later parts of the play. In ways that paralleled the movement of Balthazar's speech, the actions that would result in their domination in the later acts of the play emerged through a set of linkages that at times seemed indirect, and, in that sense, "mysterious." The murder of Horatio resulted in the emergence of Hieronimo as an avenger, a role that required his abandonment of his former position as a feudal retainer in order to function as a more autonomous individual, defined by *his* planning and execution of a sequence of orchestrated actions ultimately disruptive of the order that previously defined him. That transfer and progression, in other words, led to the emergence of a hero defined by acquired autonomy and action.[6]

> Dear was the life of my beloved son,
> And of his death behoves me be revenged:
> Then hazard not thine own, Hieronimo,
> But live t'effect thy resolution.
>   (2.2.44–47)

The path to this functionality was not, at least conceptually, entirely direct. Throughout the play, a set of subplots also began to define a pattern of such linkages, complicating and advancing this result as lower ranking characters were presented as planning and executing, or failing to execute actions that depended upon scheming and dissimulation. In an early but somewhat incidental subplot set in Portugal, the minor character Villuppo was presented as planning the demise of his rival Alexandro through false reports of Balthazar's death on the battlefield (I.3). Though nearly successful, the discovery of his treachery resulted in his own death (3.i). In an overlapping and somewhat parallel subplot linked to the main plot, Pedringano, whom Bel-imperia had assumed to be a loyal retainer, betrayed her to Lorenzo as Lorenzo, Balthazar, Pedringano, and Serberine joined in Horatio's murder. Pedringano too, however, suffered a reversal of fortune: after Lorenzo had Pedringano kill Serberine, whom he suspected of revealing his involvement in the murder, Pedringano was arrested and sentenced

by Hieronimo. Thinking Lorenzo would arrange his reprieve, Pedringano bantered with the hangman but was executed when the box he believed to contain a reprieve proved to be empty. This subplot was grimly ironic in presenting Pedringano as believing himself to be an effective plotter when he was only a pawn in the more effective plot orchestrated by Lorenzo. This complication, while perhaps intensely satisfying to audiences, also began to develop more complexity and subtlety in the thematic linkages of planned action, dissimulation, and subterfuge and their potential for the kind of audience awareness that would allow for irony. Pedringano's false confidence and the banter with the hangman provided an ironic commentary in the metadramatic telescoping of the play in general. Lorenzo's similar defeat, later initiated by a letter from Pedringano delivered posthumously to Hieronimo, confirmed this theme.

The transfer of agency and planning to Hieronimo and Bel-imperia emerged thematically in 3.2. In that scene, Hieronimo, distraught with the death of Horatio, found an earlier letter from Bel-imperia, delivered anonymously, that accused Lorenzo and Balthazar in Horatio's death. Appearing unsure of its origin or validity, Hieronimo did not commit to action until a second letter from Pedringano (3.7) confirmed her account. Hieronimo was then shown to seek redress within the feudal order by appeal to the king, but in the interim, in anticipation of *Hamlet*, to create further delay by either dissimulating or experiencing madness, perhaps as a consequence of his conflicting feudal obligations. During this period, Bel-imperia, like Don Andrea, had emerged as a choral figure, first lamenting delay, and then, like Revenge, counselling her own patience:

> Hieronimo, why writ I of thy wrongs,
> Or why art thou so slack in thy revenge?
> Andrea, O Andrea, that thou sawest
> Me for thy friend Horatio handled thus,
> And him for me thus causeless murdered.
> Well, force perforce, I must constrain myself
> To patience, and apply me to the time,
> Till heaven, as I have hoped, shall set me free.
>
> (3.9.7–14)

After his interactions with authority have not proved successful, Hieronimo, in a long and philosophical soliloquy, delineated his options and, in a most Machiavellian recognition, decided to both dissemble and await his time:

> And to conclude, I will revenge his death!
> But how? not as the vulgar wits of men,
> With open, but inevitable ills,

> As by a secret, yet a certain mean,
> Which under kindship will be cloaked best.
> Wise men will take their opportunity,
> Closely and safely fitting things to time.
>
> (3.13.20–26)

In a further set of delays that also anticipated those that would later emerge in *Hamlet*, Hieronimo, as Marshall, was beset by petitioners. While in his apparently distraught state and growing questioning of the feudal order, he appeared generally dismissive of them, but appeared to be moved, ultimately, by the grief of one who had also lost a son, anticipating Hamlet's "Hecuba" speech. In a final metadramatic interlude in which Don Andrea accuses Revenge of sleeping, Revenge replies

> Content thyself, Andrea: though I sleep,
> Yet is my mood soliciting their souls;
> Sufficeth thee that poor Hieronimo
> Cannot forget his son Horatio.
> Nor dies Revenge although he sleep awhile,
> For in unquiet, quietness is feigned,
> And slumbering is a common worldly wile.
>
> (3.15.19–25)

Revenge then produced a dumb show anticipating the internal drama and demonstrating the revenge that will be more explicitly enacted in Hieronimo's play.

In its final scenes, Hieronimo was commissioned to produce a play for the court and solicited Lorenzo and Balthazar to act in it. After chastising Hieronimo for his inaction, Bel-imperia was shown to join with Hieronimo to use the elaborate staging of the play to kill them. By the conclusion of both this internal play and the main play, Bel-imperia and Hieronimo were also dead. In the final scene of the play (4.5), Don Andrea concluded his commentary by recounting the events of the play and his satisfaction with them, as well as imagining the delights and horrors to be meted out in the underworld, to which he would be able to return, now that the vengeance had been accomplished. The choral framing, and the play as a *demonstration* of process to both levels of audience, was complete.

This play had several notable accomplishments. First, it explicitly fulfilled the metadramatic premise of the play's opening by demonstrating that the methodical development of a carefully managed plot could indeed not only be entertaining but produce effective results. By concluding the play-within-the-play, the larger teleology of its enveloping framework of action was also concluded. In all these respects, it was very much a demonstration

of the "mystery" that plotted sequential actions, taking time but proceeding methodically, could lead to a resolution to the problems presented in the other time frame of the play, the state or duration of disequilibrium constituted by the unfulfilled obligation to revenge. To audiences accustomed to rapid action, it was also a proof of the pleasure and entertainment value of such a more patient demonstration of linked actions. In addition, it also effected a redefinition of the idea of a central character. Within the play, beginning as a secondary character defined as a feudal retainer in a static and constricted role, Hieronimo was seen to emerge, by initiating and completing a set of plotted and linked central actions, as a powerful "individual," defined by his choices. Furthermore, those singular and independent actions, undertaken by Machiavellian characters in Marlowe's plays, but consistently neutralized and depreciated in their most explicit representations as morally bankrupt or racially marginalized, were valorized here as the sympathetic actions of characters wronged by the social order in which their allegiance had been abused. The social order was shown as both challenged by the singularity of these actions and realigned as a form of justice was seen to be restored. In spite of this restoration, there was certainly seen to have been change, and the state of things at the end of the play was most decisively *not* as it was at its beginning. The play was, in all of these ways, the production and modelling of change.

If Eliot was right, that, for the initial audiences of *The Spanish Tragedy*, plots, as we understand them, were indeed a novelty, then the point of all of this framing and demonstration was perhaps clear. Audiences who were not accustomed to such plots but more accustomed to the familiar repetitions of older stories or the pleasures of more immediate and visceral entertainments, might, as Don Andrea was, be impatient with the processes of such a play: revenge called for action and the immediate and satisfying experience of release and pleasure. The play, however, did not deliver that kind of immediate satisfaction. It demonstrated instead a different route to pleasure through the experience of deferred gratification through postponement and extension in time, all of which were argued to be purposeful, and it was for that purpose *and its demonstration* that Revenge had consistently argued. The "mystery" and the pedagogy of the play were the explication of the very idea of the sequential plot, the novelty and innovation noted by Eliot. It was a brilliant exposition.

The Spanish Tragedy was an very influential and widely produced play, seen many times by generations of audiences. What was novelty for its first audiences would not, however, have been novelty for later ones. It would have become, for them, a habit—part of the furniture of their understanding, and neither a novelty nor a mystery once that change in their perception and expectations had become normalized. While its pleasures might have been experienced as ritual, its "mysteries" would have become cliché.

Once the play was published (1592), its "mysteries" were documented, more widely available, and fixed in history. It mirrored, in its change of state, the many references and functions of literacy that appear in the play. As that passage into history, printing, and cliché, or simple familiarity occurred, in a marketplace driven by novelty, another change accompanied it: unlike the audiences of Havelock's epics or ritually produced miracle and morality plays that recreated and renewed an environment of eternal stories in which audiences always participated, the position of audiences was confirmed in a new location. Unlike the represented characters of the tragedy with whom they might indeed for a time identify, audience members, following a performance, did not die but returned to their lives outside the theatre at the conclusion of the performance. Every aspect of the play's framing and staging and the commentary by Andrea and Revenge reminded them of their positions as spectators and defined them as something new. They had become members, in 1590, of the emerging category of consumers.

Notes

1 John Kerrigan's extensive treatment of the broad scope of revenge tragedy began with a consideration of its wide appeal followed by his later applications. John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3–5.
2 J. R. Mulryne, Introduction to *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kyd, ed. J. R. Mulryne (New York: Norton, 1970), xii–xxxiv, xviii.
3 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), 65–105, 65.
4 Gregory Semenza's otherwise thorough consideration of metadrama in *The Spanish Tragedy* does not consider this particular framing of the play in much detail: Gregory M. Colón Semenza, "*The Spanish Tragedy* and Metatheatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 153–62.
5 References to this play are noted parenthetically by act, scene, and line from Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. J. R. Mulrayne (New York: Norton, 1970).
6 John Kerrigan noted that this kind of "displaced agency" was endemic to revenge tragedy and closely related to irony, a relationship explored later here in considerations of *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*. It is tied as well to his observations on the role of memory in creating the motive for revenge in this play and in *Hamlet*. Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 7–8, 170–81.

Reference List

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation." In *Selected Essays*, 65–105. London: Faber and Faber, 1932.

Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Edited by J. R. Mulrayne. New York: Norton, 1970.

Mulryne, J. R. Introduction to *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kyd, xii–xxxiv. Edited by J. R. Mulryne. New York: Norton, 1970.

Semenza, Gregory M. Colón. "*The Spanish Tragedy* and Metatheatre." In *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, edited by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., 153–62. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

6 *Titus Andronicus*

O, why should nature build so foul a den,
Unless the gods delight in tragedies?
                              (4.1.59–60)

A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;
A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
                              (5.3.42–44)[1]

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* would seem to have originated in the same general time period as *The Spanish Tragedy*, though its precise dates of composition and performance have been the subject of considerable scholarly conjecture and debate. While some scholars posit a date of composition as early as the 1580s, perhaps before Shakespeare's transition to London, others support a later date between 1592 and 1594. While the first known record of a performance, by the Earl of Sussex's Men, appeared in Henslowe's diary on January 24, 1594, some speculate that it was performed before that by at least two other companies. Its first extant publication, by John Danter, dates from later that year. Whether it is the first or a revised text, it is considered a good quarto and is the text through which the play is known to us. However the play may have been composed or changed, this version certainly followed the publication of the first surviving edition of *The Spanish Tragedy* in 1592 and its performance considerably before that. Given the success and popularity of that earlier play, at least by the time of its publication in 1594, it is hard to imagine the composition of at least this version of *Titus Andronicus* not taking *The Spanish Tragedy* into account.[2] Harold Bloom, for instance, has argued that *Titus Andronicus* is an extended parody of *The Spanish Tragedy*.[3] This likely sequencing in production is significant, not just in accounting for the similarities between the two plays but in considering some possible implications of their differences.

The argument of the previous chapter was that a most characteristic feature of *The Spanish Tragedy* was the way in which, in the face of an expectation for immediate action, the play made the case for the unfolding of a more patient and elaborated sequence of linked actions, all of which took time, but as they unfolded created the play itself. The persistence through which the play made the case for this structure would seem to have presumed an audience for whom such an explication was necessary—for whom, as Eliot argued, that kind of sequentially linked plot was indeed "a novelty" for which they had no interpretive frame and for whom the play, in the form of the choral commentators, had to supply one. *The Spanish Tragedy* was, of course, a major commercial success, performed many times: it was, Jonathan Bate has argued, the "biggest hit of the 90s."[4] The familiarity of audiences with the pattern of action it presented would likely have been a very early result. It is not uncommon for plays that are performed repeatedly to become institutions in which the very repetition and rehearsal of their familiar actions becomes part of their appeal, and when that happens it is clear evidence that audiences have internalized their patterns of presentation and interpretation. Clearly by the time of Ben Jonson's 1616 Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* had become clichés (or perhaps, as Marshall McLuhan would have argued, they had already progressed to archetypes):

> Hee that will sweare, *Ieronimo*, or *Andronicus* are the best playes yet, shall passe vnexcepted at here, as a man whose judgment shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these fiue and twentie, or thirtie yeares. Though it be an *ignorance*, it is a vertuous and stay'd ignorance; and next to *truth*, a confirm'd errour does well.[5]

That suggests that audiences who had become familiar with *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* and had internalized knowledge of their structures were, then, not the same audiences that had first witnessed the plays, even if they were the same people: their knowledge, expectations, and basis for interpretation had been changed by their prior experience.[6] How did this change in audience awareness and expectation alter the situation for later plays, especially in a competitive market that demanded novelty?

If *Titus Andronicus* were simply to have replicated *The Spanish Tragedy* and one already owned a copy of that precedent play, there would have been very little reason to purchase *Titus Andronicus* since it would have been, in effect, a duplicate copy. The value of a printed copy of *Titus Andronicus* was thus predicated on its *difference* from *The Spanish Tragedy*, and that would similarly have been the value of its staging. If a repertory production of *Titus Andronicus* was being performed in one theatre, what would attract patrons to another, if not the novelty of a new production? Bernard Beckerman has

observed that "the constant demand for fresh material beset all companies," and he noted as well the effects of that demand on practices.[7] The requirement, in print for novelty, was quite high, even before the emergence of a system of copyrights made that requirement absolute.[8] In fact, in the absence of copyright, as other printers or producers copied the product of one printer or company, the need for that printer or company to attract or retain patrons by introducing new works was an additional accelerant of change.

If, then, *Titus Andronicus* could not have been *The Spanish Tragedy* and survived, how would it have constituted its *difference*, while still building upon the recognition of its predecessor's successful form? In the extensive literature on *Titus Andronicus*, surprisingly little attention has been given to this question. Early commentary on the play, extending well into the twentieth century, has focused on a distaste for violence that has led critics to question its authorship, to see it as adulterated by a lesser hand, or to see it as unformed early work.[9] In the twentieth century, the play has undergone some rehabilitation, but commentary has tended to focus primarily on thematic concerns and character development, and, in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, on thematic reinterpretation through changing cultural imperatives. Throughout this tradition, scholars have sought to define sources for the play, primarily in Seneca and Ovid, but only occasionally in *The Spanish Tragedy*.[10] Structural interpretations have generally seen *Titus Andronicus* as a precursor of *Hamlet*, and even those who have argued for the play's sophistication and value have seen the relationship as primarily that of source and refinement. David Bevington, however, has spoken more directly to the immediate context of authorship, arguing that "Shakespeare's dramatic structuring and his stagecraft in *Titus Andronicus* can be illuminated by the London theater of the 1580s and early 90s."[11]

> Jonathan Bate has persuasively argued similarly that the best way of thinking about the origins of *Titus Andronicus* is not so much in terms of "sources", but rather in the terms suggested by Titus as his justification for killing Lavinia: he describes the action of Virginius in killing his daughter because of her rape as "A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant/For me, most wretched, to perform the like" (5.3.43-4). I believe that the play was composed out of a series of *precedents* in the dramatic repertoire of the period and a series of *patterns* in Shakespeare's reading of the classics.[12]

Finally, Howard Baker, writing in 1939, sought to locate the play in a developmental sequence between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*:

> The tragedy in terms of what it really is, a transitional piece, namely, that stands between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*, is to be understood as (and only as, I think) a purely Elizabethan transformation of the Philomena story.[13]

Though Baker's further consideration concentrates, as others also do, on Shakespeare's reworking of Ovid, the idea of a "transition" he proposed is intriguing. What are the most active patterns that Bate notes? What does "transition" mean here, and how does the form of this play, as well as its use of characterization, develop in relation to *The Spanish Tragedy* as its predecessor, especially given the imperative for differentiation and novelty?

Whether *Titus Andronicus* was developed contemporaneously with *The Spanish Tragedy* or after it, the approach it took to dramatic structure was significantly different and seems to both presume and invite a very different kind of engagement with its audiences. The kind of patient explication of the development of plot and motive that distinguishes *The Spanish Tragedy* was not, for instance, at all a characteristic of this play. In comparison, the action in *Titus Andronicus* emerged as immediate and immersive. *The Spanish Tragedy* was clearly a play about revenge, but it was not until Act 3 that Hieronimo, to that point a relatively secondary figure, began to emerge as an avenger, and not until the later acts that his centrality and plans for revenge were made manifest. The play, in other words, was about the *invention* of Hieronimo and his motivations and actions. The first act of *Titus Andronicus*, by comparison, was littered with actions and motives for revenge, and Titus himself was immediately identified as a central figure. The quality of action was also different. Howard Baker noted that the immersion into the actions of the first act initiated a different pattern for tragedy in many ways. Unlike Greek tragedies in which motives for revenge were exogenous and derived from larger narrative patterns, he contended, *Titus Andronicus* was distinguished by the almost immediate internal development of motivations from interactions on stage that were presented without external reference or explanatory framing.[14] In comparison, this pattern of action was acutely different, not only from Greek tragedy but from *The Spanish Tragedy*, in that it was unmediated: in *The Spanish Tragedy* the opening scene presented Andrea and Revenge as a prologue and framers of the larger patterns of motivation and action, commenting on the action from a position intermediary to the audience. *Titus Andronicus* had none of that.

Baker made two further observations about these changes. He noted that in many earlier narrative forms such as epics, characters were presented, as it were, side-by-side. Their positions and functions were clarified in set pieces, and their interactions more formulaic. Similar patterns operated in Senecan and much medieval drama. *The Spanish Tragedy*, however, operated in this "epic" fashion only for its first third in the many formal speeches through which its characters established their positions. As Baker argued, characters developed patterns of more intense and direct interaction only in the later acts as the more explicit revenge motivations become manifest. Those interactions are, in effect, part of what the

play both produces and explicates. In *Titus Andronicus*, however, that pattern was inverted, with interactions beginning immediately and defining the play and its characters from the opening scenes. That exposition precluded the need for lengthy explanations. Baker also observed that medieval tragedies were typically structured around the story of a single central character who experienced a rise and fall, in what he termed a pyramidal structure, and in which the explanatory functions of fortune or divine retribution were always clear.[15] That pattern, of course, was part of what separated medieval from Aristotelian tragedy, since it located unity in character rather than action and used moral certainty to reduce ambiguity rather than cultivating it to produce *katharsis*. It was, by comparison, relatively static. *Titus Andronicus*, Baker argued, *did* include that kind of medieval pyramidal plot, centring around Titus's rise and fall, but encapsulated it, almost as a kind of citation, in the first act. A. C. Hamilton observed that "the concept of tragedy which Shakespeare inherited is complete by the end of the first act, while the remaining acts show an extension of the tragic form through language which is uniquely Shakespearean."[16] But what *were* the extensions projected by both Baker and Hamilton, and how did they form the new territory that emerged in the rest of the play?

The first act, besides encapsulating the rise and fall of medieval *de casibus* tragedy, set the stage by replicating (or citing) many of the other themes of *The Spanish Tragedy* in an accelerated frame. One was the relation of feudal systems of duty and obligation to emergent concepts of personal agency. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, both Horatio and Hieronimo were defined by their positions in a feudal hierarchy, and it was only through the somewhat painful and circuitous processes of the entire play that Hieronimo was eventually shown to be dislodged from the constraints of fealty and, as a newly constituted and relatively autonomous individual, able to perform independent actions of revenge against more powerful figures. Titus too, though a military hero, was initially defined by his subordinate location in a political order. Like Horatio, the description of his military success had also seemed to place him in a position of conflict with his superiors, as he was positioned in the play as having the power to decide between the two brothers claiming succession to empire. Where Horatio, to his peril, appeared to actively challenge Lorenzo for the rights of Balthazar's capture, Titus appeared to attempt a return to his subordinate position by surrendering power and affirming orthodoxy. He was presented as first choosing the elder brother Saturninus over the younger Bassinius as legitimate heir, and then affirming his loyalty to Saturninus by killing his son Mutius when Mutius defended Bassinius's prior claim to Titus's daughter Lavinia. Because Saturninus was then shown to seek both to remove the stain of his indebtedness to

Titus, free himself to ally with the captured Goth queen Tamora, and claim to have been wronged by his brother, he was then shown to reject Lavinia and demote Titus. Tamora, who first appeared as a defeated captive, was then shown to have a particular reason to seek revenge against Titus, since, in spite of her pleas, he executed her son Alarbus to expiate the deaths of his other sons in the war. While there was certainly more to come, the fall of Titus completed this opening cycle of revenge before the end of the first act.

Though Titus's rise and fall rehearsed a familiar medieval dramatic pattern, it appeared as a more Aristotelian tragedy in the sense that Titus's fall derived from a "tragic flaw" or *hamartia* (translated by some as "missing the mark"[17]), here in the form of a misapprehension of context and adherence to a feudal code that was no longer protective or functional. He was shown to remain true-to-character and immobilized in the face of changing circumstances. Only by allowing the entombment of Mutius was his former moral authority as head of his family shown to be partially restored, and with it the frame necessary for more sympathetic audience interpretation of his later actions. In setting these and other patterns in motion, the first act also established the exoticized "Roman world," and the stage itself as zones of imagination in which ideas of political order might be examined, and even the perils of succession, so recently a source of national jeopardy in England, at least obliquely considered.[18]

The Spanish Tragedy operated by forming a chain of smaller sequences in which individual patterns of revenge become visible as plotted causal actions, and those patterns, presented first in less sympathetic characters, eventually transferred to more sympathetic characters, producing a more satisfying resolution. The same pattern was pursued in *Titus Andronicus* but with the difference that plotting was represented, especially in the middle acts, with greater clarity, largely through the depiction of the central and celebrated character of Aaron. Aaron's agency as an explicit plotter and director of scenes and actions was most succinctly rendered in Act 2 in his elaborate planning surrounding the death of Bassianus, the rape of Lavinia, and the assignation of blame to Titus's sons Martius and Quintus, all of which condensed the kinds of internal dramas that occur throughout *The Spanish Tragedy* in smaller plots, into something more extended, central, and explicit. This sequence began with Aaron, in an act perhaps resonating with Barabas's in *The Jew of Malta*, hiding a bag of gold, announcing it to the audience in a short soliloquy as "a stratagem" that would later be revealed. He was then seen to counter Tamora's paean to pastoral love with his own discourse of martial vengeance, though the image of vengeance he presented might well have been interpreted as his attempt to forestall his own displacement by Tamora's strengthening alliance with Saturninus.

The arrival of Bassianus and Lavinia then set up another contrast. Their rather stiff and accusatory discourse on Tamora's infidelity with Aaron appeared to rely on notions of integrity, morality, and virtue. Tamora's reply with a discursive salvo of her own, accusing them of plotting her murder, announced the victory of opportunistic dishonesty and planning over position. Aaron, returning with her sons Demetrius and Charon, was then shown to further his plot by directing their murder of Bassianus, depositing his body in a pit (the area below stage), and authorizing the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, while manoeuvring Titus's sons Martius and Quintus into the pit to take the blame with the arrival of Saturninus and his courtiers. In the final movement of Aaron's plot, Tamora was shown to produce a forged letter from Martius and Quintus arranging for the murder and promising payment. Aaron was then shown to produce the gold he had sequestered earlier as proof of this payment. As she introduced the letter, Tamora declared

> Then all too late I bring this fatal writ,
> The complot of this timeless tragedy,
> And wonder greatly that man's face can fold
> In pleasing smiles such murderous tyranny.
>
> (2.3.264–267)

The obvious irony of diverting blame upon the victims (anticipating *Volpone*'s later revelling in the same), the explicit attention to themes of planning and deception and their association with writing and scripting, and the description of the entire sequence as a "timeless tragedy" joined in the play's long, and early, dedication to metadramatic commentary on its own status as an arranged performance. And in all of that, Aaron was foregrounded as a scripter, director, and producer—and forerunner of New Comedy.[19]

A final aspect of this elaborately staged deception was the linkage it made between planning and futurity and investment. Aaron's sequestering of the gold was an investment that paid handsomely when it was then discovered and retrieved. Like Barabas's investment in ships in *The Jew of Malta*, it was an explicit commitment of resources in expectation of future gain. Gain was reasonably expected because investment and return were so demonstrably linked to the context of predictable and meaningful actions in which the transactional value of the gold was defined. That linkage tied this play and the commercial interests of the theatre of which it was a part to the burgeoning economic patterns that were becoming ascendant in Elizabethan culture and a means of economic survival in an environment in which the functions of older patterns of heredity and loyalty were not always guaranteed, and certainly not for all people. Like the earlier

(or more patient) expositions of *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* was providing examples of this kind of planning and investment and operating as a kind of primer to thinking in this mode.

> He that had wit would think that I had none,
> To bury so much gold under a tree
> And never after to inherit it.
> Let him that thinks of me so abjectly
> Know that this gold must coin a stratagem
> Which, cunningly effected, will beget
> A very excellent piece of villainy.
> And so repose, sweet gold, for their unrest
> That have their alms out of the empress' chest.
>
> (2.3.1–9)

The rise and fall of Titus in the first act was not, however, the only *de casibus* pyramidal plot structure in this play. His descent in the first act was coincident with the rise of Tamora and Aaron and was followed by Aaron's rise throughout Act 2 through the means just noted. In Act 3, the portrayal of Aaron's ascendency continued, though it was then followed by his fall. He was shown to rescue his child and inflict further atrocities on the Andronici, tricking Titus into sacrificing his hand and confronting him with both the heads of the two sons he had sacrificed to save and with the ongoing spectacle of Lavinia. Yet in Act 5, Aaron was shown to be captured by a returning Lucius and, by the end of the play, taken to his death. Similarly, Tamora, also apparently ascendant in Act 3, was shown to fail in her clumsy staging of a morality play in Act 5 and to be outmanoeuvred by Titus. She was shown to be served the pie containing her dead sons and then to be killed by Titus in the final scene. The depiction of the rises and falls of these characters was resolvable in a kind of medieval morality frame—a point made somewhat ironically in Tamora's allegorical staging, and yet in their encapsulation they accomplished other purposes in the main plot. As their rises were coincident with Titus's fall in Act 1, their falls in the later acts were coincident with Titus's re-emergence, reconfiguration, and triumph as an avenger. Through these changes the mantle of causal thinking, planning, and futurity was transferred from failed characters who initially appeared more opportunistically attuned to their changing circumstances, to Titus and his family, who were shown to be no longer immobilized by their loyalty to a discredited power structure based in fealty.

Titus's transformation began, as Hieronimo's did, with catastrophic losses. Those losses created a comprehensible and sympathetic explanation for his transformation but also served to strip away all of the elements

that had stabilized his character within the traditional structures of feudal identity such as loyalty and family. While these had provided a stable social location, they constituted a kind of paralysis until they were abandoned. In contrast, Aaron, a marked outsider and secret lover of Tamora, had from the outset no stable position on which to rely and was constantly at risk due to changing circumstances and constant aspersions concerning his race. He was, however, shown to be able to save his son through the speed and precision of his opportunism. Many have found him, in this respect, more sympathetic than Titus. Aaron also clearly presented an alternative form of being and action. Aaron, though rhetorically demonized, also represented a new class, encompassing dramatic writers, producers, and actors who all lived by their wits. Titus, though only seeing such possibilities negatively, if at all, in the opening act, was shown to be able to gain interpretive skills in understanding these terms of survival and to emerge as a skilled manipulator of events, actions, and other characters as the play progressed. He became, in effect, an internal model of his creators, a dramaturge superior even to Aaron, representing those skills in a rehabilitated, if not fully sanitized, form.[20]

The depictions of Titus's transformation and success were most evident in the final act, but were signalled much earlier, in part in his scenes of pathos and enacted madness, his railing against a political order that no longer made sense to him, and especially his growing ability to plot, with all of its metadramatic implications, as early as the beginning of Act 3. By the beginning of Act 5, however, Titus was clearly depicted as emerging from the sea of references to literacy and classical precedent as a scripter in his own right:

> Who doth molest my contemplation?
> Is it your trick to make me ope the door,
> That so my sad decrees may fly away
> And all my study be to no effect?
> You are deceived, for what I mean to do
> See here in bloody lines I have set down,
> And what is written shall be executed.
>
> (5.2.9–15)

It was made clear in the scenes that followed that, while Tamora had arranged a drama in which, perhaps in homage to *The Spanish Tragedy* and medieval allegory, she played Revenge, Titus appeared as *il miglior fabbro*, the one more perceptive and better able to direct the final lethal actions.

The death of Tamora's sons and the depiction of her consumption of them in a pie prepared by Titus echoed a scene at the end of another

Roman work that Shakespeare was perhaps less likely to have known. In *The Satyricon* of Petronius, the consumption of a dead body by legacy hunters seeking to receive an inheritance at least plausibly served as an emblem for the entire metadramatic operation of that work, as readers consumed scenes of disgust (of which there were many) to "inherit" whatever pleasure and meaning might lie in its critique of the late Roman Empire.[21] Similarly in *Titus Andronicus*, audiences, like Tamora consuming the bodies, consumed the scenes of horror that have outraged so many generations of Shakespeare critics and apologists in expectation of whatever pleasures and wisdom this play had to offer. Whether or not this scene has operated as metadramatically as this comparison might suggest, it came at the end of a long sequence of metadramatic references that populated earlier points in the play. The most pungent of which were spoken by Marcus at the beginning of Act 4. First, he asked,

> O, why should nature build so foul a den,
> Unless the gods delight in tragedies?
> $\qquad$ (4.1.59–60)

and then, a few lines later,

> O heavens, can you hear a good man groan
> And not relent or not compassion him?
> $\qquad$ (4.1.123–124)

It is very hard *not* to see these lines as metaphors for the theatre, with the theatre itself as a "foul den" built for audiences, who, like the gods, witnessed and delighted and, in the case of the powerful, authorized and paid for. The entreaty to pity and mercy, for Titus, Lavinia, and the rest, was the offer for exoneration, that audiences might distinguish themselves from the increasingly demonized Tamora and Aaron through their indulgence in those emotions. Perhaps, in the changing fortunes and just revenge of the final act, it also offered the possibility of a kind of transcendence.

And what would that transcendence have been? Critics for generations, and particularly in recent times, have speculated about the character of Aaron. Not only did he reprise Ithamore in *The Jew of Malta* and anticipate Iago in *Othello*, he was emblematic of the emergence of racial discourses that would function for centuries, oppress many, and continue to this day. Some critics have noted the additional complexity, mentioned earlier, that, especially in the middle acts, Aaron offered a kind of positive contrast to Titus, not just in his evident awareness and intelligence but in his concern for saving his son after Titus had sacrificed his. Whether in his villainous or fatherly actions, he was, without a doubt, a singular and

powerful emblem of agency. Exactly because he *was* an outsider to the established orders of legitimacy and power, he appeared compelled to follow necessity in plotting and action—the very skills of survival that Titus was shown to lack and gain only late in the play. The transfer of this agency to Titus was even more dramatic in this play than the similar transfer in *The Spanish Tragedy* in part because it was so much more explicit, but also because Aaron was a much more compelling character. Here too, however, as in *The Jew of Malta*, the insertion, hardening, and policing of a racialized boundary served an explicit and necessary function in the plot.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, sequential and causally linked chains of action were presented as if they were not understood and needed to be explained. In *Titus Andronicus*, they were presented as if they would be understood and assumed, if at first only by some. Amidst an array of characters still defined by position, heredity, and class, these subversive understandings appeared first, once again, in subaltern outsiders. *They* understood, even if their actions were not immediately perceptible to the privileged. They were, however, clearly visible and explicitly declared before audiences, and those were audiences who had read or heard of Machiavelli and had seen or heard about *The Jew of Malta* and *The Spanish Tragedy*. *They* would have understood what they were seeing, even if Titus, Bassianus, and Lavinia were represented as being unable to. Especially through their witnessing of Aaron's speeches and actions, those audiences were placed *inside* these ways of thinking about action and agency, and they were aligned *in their knowledge*, if somewhat guiltily, with Aaron and his plotting. In contrast, Titus, as he fell and after he had fallen, seemed most pathetic because he *didn't* see and only suffered. As the play progressed, however, he was shown as coming into knowledge, as those who had had it before, Aaron and to a lesser extent Tamora, began to lose their singularity and the exclusivity of their claim to that kind of agency faded. Like Barabas and Ithamore in *The Jew of Malta*, they became, in the later acts, more like caricatures of evil—Tamora explicitly so in her abortive allegory. As depreciated agents, they became *merely* symbolic. Titus, in the final acts, was depicted as both canny and righteous, a character of more perceptible depth, and a representative of that category of acquired knowledge. Though the audience had been privy to that knowledge *before* him, as he gained it and became more fully valorized, he joined them in their knowledge and perhaps came to represent it. Its exogenous origins of plotting in the suspect scheming of foreigners and slaves were expunged with this transfer and sanitized with their discarding and deaths. That knowledge, associated with an active hero who had endured so much, became both necessary and valorized. Correspondingly, in that result, race, that construct which has been used time and time again to appropriate, punish, and discard, was successfully deployed to purge less desirable attributes of this process. It performed its

work, in this play, but also at the beginnings of a kind of cultural opportunism that would be ascendant for continents and centuries.

In contrast to some of his contemporaries, Marlowe in particular and especially Jonson, Shakespeare was both remarkably skilful and most cleverly conservative. The kind of thinking that *Titus Andronicus* represented in making the case for an emerging middle class and economic institutions based on investment, futurity, and exchange was potentially disruptive in its positing of a new social order and its critiques of power—all attributes of the theatre. For Shakespeare, however, *Titus Andronicus* was rescued from the dangers of such thoughts by the singular sleight of hand that the work of race, exotic characters, and places did to locate those ideas at a safe and objectifying distance. All of these work conceptually to expel and sanitize the awareness of these very real forms of change in which *Titus Andronicus* participated and formed such an integral part. Some critics, notably Harold Bloom, have characterized *Titus Andronicus* as a kind of elaborate parody, grim humour based on the very overblown aspects of its plot and horrors.[22] There are, however, perhaps some less thematic ways in which that characterization makes a certain kind of sense. In relocating agency and plotting late in the play to a Titus who emerged as a kind of hero, this play moved beyond others, such as *The Spanish Tragedy* in the kind of sophistication it called for or helped to create in its audiences. What *did* they know about plotting, planning, and value after experiencing this play? If "tragedy" played a role in the development of awareness of such changes, what followed for tragedy as that awareness grew and became increasingly normalized? Nietzsche lamented that the relation between tragedy and comedy, and especially the parodic structures of New Comedy, had proven to be closer than he desired. The further exploration of that relationship, and perhaps its inevitability, was yet to come, and somewhat paradoxically, it may have come first in that greatest and most iconic of tragedies, *Hamlet*—the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1 References to this play are indicated parenthetically by act, scene, and line from William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (New York: Routledge, 1995).
2 For very detailed account of scholarly approaches to dating and authorship, see Jonathan Bate, introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, edited by Jonathan Bate (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–121, esp. 69–79.
3 Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), 78.
4 Bate, 4.
5 Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*. ll. 105–12, 6: 16..From the induction on the stage, *Bartholomew Faire*.

6 For a fascinating discussion in a contemporary context, see Philip Auslander, "Liveness: Performance and the Anxiety of Simulation," in *Performance and Cultural Poetics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London: Routledge, 1996), 196–213.

7 Bernard Beckerman, "Shakespeare's Theatre," in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1969), 24.

8 Through various measures such as the Licensing of the Press Act, 1662, and the Statute of Ann, 1710. Joanna Kostylo, "From Gunpowder to Print: The Common Origins of Copyright and Patent," in *Privilege and Property: Essays on the History of Copyright*, eds. Ronan Deazley, Martin Kretschmer, and Lionel Bently (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 21–50. http://books.openedition.org/obp/1062.

9 The considerable critical effort over centuries devoted to suggesting that Shakespeare could not have written such a bad or violent play is recounted by Bate, whose defence of the play is categorical: see esp. 79–83; for an additional rebuttal, see Albert Charles Hamilton, "*Titus Andronicus*: The Form of Shakespearian Tragedy," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1963): 201–1. For a more general review of the criticism, see Philip C. Kolin, "*Titus Andronicus* and the Critical Legacy," in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (New York: Garland, 1995), 3–55. The play has done much better in more recent assessments, as noted below.

10 Critics, especially after Eugene Waith's influential article, have often attributed more influence to Ovid than Seneca: Eugene M. Waith, "The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus,*" *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957): 26–35.
For a more recent review of some of those arguments, see Clifford Chalmers Huffman, "'*Titus Andronicus*': Metamorphosis and Renewal," *Modern Language Review* 67, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 730–41.

11 Bevington, David, "'O Cruel, Irreligious Piety!' Stage Images of Civil Conflict in *Titus Andronicus*," in Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays, ed. Philip C. Kolin (New York: Garland, 1995), 357–72.

12 Bate, 90.

13 Howard Baker, *Induction to Tragedy: A Study in the Development of form in Gorboduc, The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1939), 129. Though published more than 80 years ago, Baker's observations still open territory that has remained largely unexplored.

14 Baker, 162.

15 Baker, 155–59.

16 Hamilton, 207.

17 See William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1957), 39.

18 Katharine Eiasaman Maus, Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, in Vol. 4, *Tragedies*, of *Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton 1997), 79–85, 83: "In *Titus Andronicus*, then, Shakespeare portrays a society teetering on the verge of obsolescence: a place with a long, long history but not much of a future. The signs of decadence, corruption, and loss of cultural confidence are everywhere."

19 Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, 5: 109. From *Volpone:*"Mos. Nay, sir, / To gull the court—Volp. And, quite diuert the torrent, / Vpon the innocent," 5.2, ll.15–17. The association of *Titus Andronicus* with New Comedy has become a theme in modern criticism, beginning, perhaps with John Dover-Wilson in 1948: John

Dover-Wilson, Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, ed. John Dover Wilson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1948), vii–lxi. See also Bate's Introduction. More recently, Harold Bloom has extended this reasoning, seeing *Titus Andronicus* as a parody of *The Spanish Tragedy*: Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), 78. See also Misha Teramura, "Black Comedy: Shakespeare, Terence, and *Titus Andronicus*," *ELH* 85, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 877–908" and John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 170–81. Julie Taymor's 1999 film *Titus* certainly runs with this interpretation. This line of thought is central to the play's more recent critical rehabilitation.

20 One noteworthy aspect of the revival of critical interest in *Titus Andronicus*, linked in part to its potential reading as a comedy, has been lengthy discussion of the role of Aaron and the role of racial difference in the play. Many have noted Aaron's significant agency and more sympathetic portrayal of fatherhood in comparison to Titus, who willingly sacrificed his son. The bibliography is extensive, so the following is selective. John Dover-Wilson, Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*; Eldred D. Jones, *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Gustav Cross, "Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare," in *William Shakespeare, The Complete Works*, edited by Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1969), 823–25, 824: "The most powerful single ingredient in *Titus Andronicus* is Aaron. Of all the characters he is the most fully developed and the most convincing." Emily Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: from "Alcazar" to "Othello"* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Meg F. Pearson, "'That Bloody Mind I Think They Learned of me': Aaron as Tutor in Titus Andronicus," *Shakespeare* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 34–51; Carolyn Sale, "Black Aeneas: Race, English Literary History, and the 'Barbarous' Poetics of *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 25–52; Peter Mwikisa, "In Their Fathers' House: Resistant Alterity and the Law of the Father in *The Tempest, Othello and Titus Andronicus*," *Marang: Journal of Language and Literature* 18 (2008): 137–52; Margaux Deroux, "The Blackness Within: Early Modern Color-Concept, Physiology and Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare's 'Titus Andronicus'," *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 86–101; Francesca T. Royster, "White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 432–55.

21 Petronius, "Satyricon," in *Petronius Satyricon and Seneca, Apocolocyntosis*, trans. and ed. Michael Heseltine, rev. Eric Herbert Warmington, 1–384 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). Latin texts of *The Satyricon* proliferated throughout the sixteenth century, though it was not published in English until the late 1600s. For a bracing modern adaptation, see Federico Fellini's 1969 film version, *Satyricon*, in which the closing cannibalistic scene, like the "Who's in charge"? scene in *Apocalypse Now*, forms a metacommentary on, among other things, cinematic production in an era of epics.

22 Bloom sees *Titus Andronicus* as a parody of *The Spanish Tragedy*, congruent, of course, with suggesting a succession in dates: Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 78. He is by no means alone in this. See also Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 170–81. Julie Taymor's 1999 film *Titus* certainly runs with this interpretation. This line of thought is central to the play's more recent critical rehabilitation.

Reference List

Auslander, Philip. "Liveness: Performance and the Anxiety of Simulation." In *Performance and Cultural Poetics*, edited by Elin Diamond, 196–213. London: Routledge, 1996.

Baker, Howard. *Induction to Tragedy: A Study in the Development of form in Gorboduc, The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1939.

Bartels, Emily. *Speaking of the Moor: from "Alcazar" to "Othello"*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Bate, Jonathan. Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, edited by Jonathan Bate, 1–121. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Beckerman, Bernard, "Shakespeare's Theatre." In *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Alfred Harbage, 21–29. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1969.

Bevington, David. "'O Cruel, Irreligious Piety!' Stage Images of Civil Conflict in *Titus Andronicus*." In *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip C. Kolin, 357–72. New York: Garland, 1995.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

Cross, Gustav. "Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare." In *William Shakespeare, The Complete Works*, edited by Alfred Harbage, 823–25. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1969.

Deroux, Margaux. "The Blackness Within: Early Modern Color-Concept, Physiology and Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare's 'Titus Andronicus.'" *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 86–101.

Dover-Wilson, John. "Introduction to *Titus Andronicus, by William Shakespeare*." Edited by John Dover Wilson, vii–lxi. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1948.

Hamilton, Albert Charles. "*Titus Andronicus*: The Form of Shakespearian Tragedy." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1963): 201–13.

Huffman, Clifford Chalmers. "'*Titus Andronicus*': Metamorphosis and Renewal." *Modern Language Review* 67, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 730–41.

Jones, Eldred D. *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson*. Edited by Charles Harold Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols Oxford: Clarendon, 1925–1963.

Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Kolin, Philip C. "Titus Andronicus and the Critical Legacy." In *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip C. Kolin, 3–55. New York: Garland, 1995.

Kostylo, Joanna. "From Gunpowder to Print: The Common Origins of Copyright and Patent." In *Privilege and Property: Essays on the History of Copyright*, edited by Ronan Deazley, Martin Kretschmer, and Lionel Bently, 21–50. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010. http://books.openedition.org/obp/1062.

Maus, Katharine Eiasaman. "Introduction to Titus Andronicus, by William Shakespeare," in *Tragedies*, of *Norton Shakespeare,* Vol. 4. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 79–85. New York: Norton 1997.

Mwikisa, Peter. "In Their Fathers' House: Resistant Alterity and the Law of the Father in *The Tempest, Othello* and *Titus Andronicus*." *Marang: Journal of Language and Literature* 18 (2008): 137–52.

Pearson, Meg F. "'That Bloody Mind I Think They Learned of me': Aaron as Tutor in Titus Andronicus." *Shakespeare* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 34–51.

Petronius. "Satyricon." In *Petronius Satyricon and Seneca, Apocolocyntosis*, translated and edited by Michael Heseltine, revised by Eric Herbert Warmington, 1–384. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Royster, Francesca T. "White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 432–55.

Sale, Carolyn. "Black Aeneas: Race, English Literary History, and the 'Barbarous' Poetics of *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 25–52.

Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus*. Edited by Jonathan Bate. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Teramura, Misha. "Black Comedy: Shakespeare, Terence, and *Titus Andronicus*." *ELH* 85, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 877–908.

Waith, Eugene M. "The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957): 26–35.

Wimsatt, William K., Jr., and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. New York: Vintage-Random, 1957.

7 Hamlet

> The time is out of joint — O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!
>
> (1.5.188–189)[1]

> Would not this, sir … get me a fellowship in a cry
> of players?
>
> (3.2.260–263)

Hamlet is perhaps the most famous of Shakespeare's plays and the play about which the most has been written. It has generated many adaptations on stage, and more recently in film, across languages and cultures, all responsive to the specificity of their own conditions. As with the plays already considered, critical opinion has also shifted over time, not so much regarding the quality of the play but about its implications and meaning. Critics have celebrated Shakespeare's genius in this play and have traced the many thematic and cultural currents that animate the theory and interpretation that have surrounded it. The purpose of this chapter is not to dispute those many interpretations or contest Shakespeare's genius but to argue that both the expression of creative genius and the address of social and human concerns occur, especially at the point of origin of a work such as *Hamlet*, in the pragmatic and structural contexts that both constrain and define the opportunities for expression. All creative works, however influential they may be over time, speak to the moment of their inception. For *Hamlet*, the context of that moment was defined by physical opportunity, the development of drama, the stage, the commercial contexts of the theatre, and by those things that configured the receptivity of audiences, the interpretive schema and expectations with which they approached *Hamlet* as a new work. All involved the precedents of existing practice. New works can, and, under commercial circumstances must stretch the boundaries of existing practice in order to distinguish themselves and not simply replicate the old, but they must also remain close enough to established practices if they are to be recognized, identified, and understood at all.

It is always risky to make assumptions about the knowledge and circumstances of audiences without first-hand accounts of reception, and perhaps not entirely safe, at least in theoretical terms, to generalize even when those are available.[2] It is, however, possible to consider precedent and assess the platform on which the subsequent innovations that constituted *Hamlet* were constructed. Some of the precedents of *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy have been considered in preceding chapters. Their extensive circulation would suggest that they were likely to have been at least partial determinants of the interpretive predispositions of audiences. If they were the templates from which *Hamlet* proceeded, what did *Hamlet* do to use and further develop them? What were its innovations?

Closure

Certain aspects of drama, and revenge tragedy in particular, had become well-established conventions by the time *Hamlet* was written. One, as considered at some length in earlier chapters, was closure. As demonstrated by the Greek and Roman epics, revenge as a pattern of action is essentially open ended: each act of revenge had the potential to become the motive for a subsequent act of retaliation. The *deus ex machina* that concludes the canonical and literary version of *The Odyssey* is one example for contending with the adaptation of the revenge pattern to the closed narrative form of the literate version of this epic. Where an epic in the circumstances of oral transmission did not need to end, or effectively never ended in its episodic and repetitive retelling, the written representation was encapsulated by its very form; that the thematic closure *within* the work reflects the formal closure *as* a work became something more like a structural necessity as it migrated to written form. In commercial revenge plays, such as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, the need for formal closure in commercial plays seems to have become fairly absolute, with the result that another convention, quite different than that in the epic, was well-established. That convention was that at the end of the play all of the characters principally involved in the revenge plot, and especially the revenger, the last to violate the rules of order, had to die. Only residual characters or characters external to the primary drama could survive to conclude the play, represent some version of order, and carry the responsibility for memory. Externally to the play, if the play were successful, as *Hamlet* certainly was, that responsibility also fell to audiences who remembered its actions and perhaps canonized the play in a wider cultural memory.

The role of these residual characters charged with memory and the restoration of social order can be thought of as having served a set of important thematic and formal functions. One was to affirm that the central actions of the play were, in fact, "complete," with any subsequent actions

projected into some briefly imagined futurity. A second was to affirm that, while the deaths had been extensive and significant, life within the represented world could have been imagined to continue. In doing so, these characters may have served as an analogue and double within the play for the audiences external to it. A signature function of drama, tragedy in particular, and revenge tragedy *par excellence*, was that, *because* they were closed forms, audiences did survive them. While the play ended, audiences did not: while characters died, audiences walked away. That simple fact was key to the very crucial role that closure played in both Greek and early modern commercial drama: it inverted the relationship between representation and the lives of audience members as it had been configured by other, precedent forms. In Chapters 2 and 3, for instance, the functioning of both epic narratives and medieval cycle plays as recurrent and atmospheric narratives was considered. People came into consciousness in an environment saturated with their repetition, and experienced them repeatedly through episodic, partial, and non-sequential retellings, each metonymically invoking the sense of a greater cultural whole that might never fully be represented at any single time and never seen from "outside." Those narratives functioned as environments larger than their participants, who were always within and never outside of their narrative functions: coextensive with culture (the "mind of Zeus," the "Book of Nature," the liturgical cycle, ideology) those narratives simply *were* as important parts of an enveloping social framework.

As noted in Chapter 1, Nietzsche argued that Greek tragedy changed those relations. The wall of the chorus separated audiences from the stage and objectified the speakers. As a result, in tragedies and especially revenge tragedies, audiences witnessed catastrophic loss and closure as something that they survived, and from which they were distanced by their survival. Their positions were constructed as "outside" of the narratives: they could leave them, comment on them, judge them, and consume them, as if they were objects (which they had become, visually in the theatre, and even more evidently so in writing and print). The idea of comparison and judgement, formalized in Greek festival practice, and clearly evident in London theatrical practices (the wars of the theatres, Jonson's many comments and interludes), all asserted the externality of audiences, even if, during performances, they identified strongly with characters. With that externality, their power as newly constituted subjects, constructed in their survival, their separation, and their ability to assess and judge, formed a new kind of spectatorship.

In *Hamlet*, this complex relationship between closure, internal organization, and audience relations reflected a kind of breakpoint in tragic development. More clearly than in the plays considered earlier, Hamlet was from the very start the central and perhaps more sympathetic figure in the play,

and yet the separation of audiences as survivors from him clearly marked a turning point. Havelock argued that recurrent forms such as the Greek epics operated through the close identification of audiences with characters who, even when they were represented as dying, remained present in the retelling of the narratives. In *Hamlet*, the separation of audiences from such a central character shifted functionality decisively away from such identifications, making them a quality, not of a recurring present but of a past created, at the end of the play, by that very separation. The play was over, never to be experienced again in the same way.

As considered previously in Chapter 2, Walter Ong, in his 1958 *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, traced the ways in which human subjectivity transitioned from location within a system (such as that associated by Jesse Gellrich with "the Book of Nature") to definition by *method*: those practices through which varying circumstances and occurrences of life could be resolved, understood, and mastered through the repetitive application of specific and consistent techniques and habits of thought. As noted in Chapter 1, that kind of functional definition or pattern is exactly what Aristotle proposed for understanding tragedy. Furthermore, method became a kind of mediation. The vastness of the world could be understood through the repetition of method and practitioners became separate from that world and achieved a kind of objectivity and superiority to it (an attitude that would later define empire and all its works, not to mention environmental crisis). Practitioners applied that method *on* rather than *in* the circumstances they sought to navigate. Politically, an analogue would have been the positioning subjects, defined as individuals, outside of their former locations within feudal or other similar social structures to became "independent" and individually empowered both conceptually and, for some, economically. In revenge tragedy, they were represented as having acquired the ability to perform acts of revenge even though it resulted in or followed the loss of their traditional social locations. As in previous plays, that acquisition produced them as "individuals," defined by their trajectories.

In many respects, *Hamlet* was the apotheosis of this movement, the point at which the single character of the hero, coextensive with the actions of the play in ways in which its predecessors had not been, achieved a more complete and independent definition. As the character Hamlet dominated the play and its actions, it also became part of the "object" that the method of the play presented for analysis. In previous revenge plays, the stigma surrounding the actions of revenge was ameliorated by the location of those actions in characters of lower status who were displaced by the actions of their superiors, against whom they were eventually forced to act. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet was presented as similarly wronged by his uncle, but his actions began in a different and more evidently "heroic" social position

as he was attempting to regain a high position from which the wrongful actions had displaced him. His trajectory in the sequence of causal actions that formed the play, however, removed him even more clearly from the conventions of feudal order and defined him in the autonomy, personhood, and interiority. He became an iconic subjectivity that has stood for centuries. The death of his father, rejection of his mother, and relegation of Ophelia to inconsequentiality all constituted and produced his singularity in the actions of revenge. The pattern of action that encapsulated him rendered him, while a double of the audience, a double at a distance, and that was a distance that his represented death only confirmed.

In more general terms, the death of the revenger was a convention that resolved multiple problems. Like the expiation of the violations of order chronicled in a play such as *Macbeth*, the trope of death functioned by expelling those responsible for the breach of order while also closing off further iterations of the revenge cycle. There would have been no one remaining upon whom the relatives the dead would have needed to seek vengeance, and both the wrong initiating the revenge and the transgression of the act of revenge itself would have been expunged. In Aristotle's theory, tragedy was defined not only by its insistence on action but on its insistence that the representation of action served the purpose of catharsis (κάθαρσις): "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."[3] Tragedy could be seen to effect a kind of release, objectifying fears of disorder and suffering but then releasing them for the audience in the *schadenfreude* in its survival. This result had at least the potential to be profoundly homeostatic and socially conservative: in *The Spanish Tragedy* members of the ruling class were represented as surviving, though their children and heirs were not. In *Titus Andronicus*, Lucius returned from the Goths to restore Roman order to Rome. In *Hamlet* that role was given to the young Fortinbras.

As noted at the end of the last chapter, that "restoration" may well have functioned as a kind of sleight of hand, allowing audiences to accept potentially revolutionary content by covering them with more explicit images of a return to orthodoxy. While representations of successful attacks on authority appeared to have been recouped in the subsequent return to order, an even more significant operation of these plays was the redefinition of action understood as sequence and the subsequent redefinition of identity in the terms not of social position but relation to action understood as individual and self-directed. Though more abstract, these changes had the potential for even more disruptive effects, but they too were overshadowed by the homeostatic valence of that return. Audiences left the theatre as survivors to resume their material lives even if their conceptual lives may have shifted, though subtly, in potentially revolutionary ways.

The centrality of action and the homeostatic encapsulation of change in the return to order redefined plot and its functions. External to the play,

the fixed duration of performance and the need for closure imposed significant limitations. Internal to the representations of the play, however, the constraints of those circumstances could not have been directly acknowledged and characters could not have been represented as knowing of them. Or could they? In any event, what was narrative necessity outside the play may well have been represented internally to its actions more directly, as in *Macbeth*, only as Fate.

The Question of Knowledge

That possibility quite likely brought into focus again, in this very specific art form two congruent, but very different conditions of knowledge that had been there from the beginning: what the characters were represented as knowing, and what audiences from their perspectives outside of the action could be thought of as knowing. These had analogues in the bifurcation of audience responses and the alternation between identification with characters and the distancing objectification of closure that had been there at least since *The Spanish Tragedy* but was more advanced here. Audiences, for instance, must have *known* that the representations of the play were bound: they must have known that they would leave the theatre at the conclusion of the performance, having seen "the whole play." In *The Spanish Tragedy*, they knew that they were being shown actions and, at points, knew things that were represented as beyond the knowledge of some characters internal to the play. Characters, however, were *not* represented as knowing everything, and certainly not knowing the external conditions constraining the representations of the play. Any constraints imposed by the limitations of the play, especially the imperative for closure, could, perhaps, only be represented as indirectly intuited by characters within the play as something like "fate." Built into the distance between what audiences could have known and what characters could have been represented as knowing was the potential for irony, and for the growing sense among audiences, or at least the cognoscenti within them, of their superiority in both knowledge and fortune.

Audiences came by their knowledge through their prior experiences of tragedies or through the relation of the experiences of others. A good percentage of them most certainly knew something about *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* and the patterns of revenge tragedy that they embodied and represented. Those conventions, if they were available to Shakespeare, were also available to his audiences. Their knowledge and their expectations created the platform and opportunity for innovation and for its comprehension by audiences knowledgeable enough to absorb it. And once they knew, like us, they could not unknow. As noted in the last chapter, as innovations were naturalized, older formulations became cliché,

just as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* had become by Jonson's time. So then, what *did* the audiences primed for the first performances of *Hamlet* bring with them? What did their knowledge allow, and what did it make no longer possible, at least as innovation? How did it configure both the possibilities and the constraints to which *Hamlet* responded?

The last two chapters argued that these earlier revenge tragedies operated as pedagogical devices or modelling systems through which the understanding of actions as causal sequences was demonstrated, explicated, and normalized. As characters were shown to gain knowledge and understanding of causal sequences, so audiences were given the means to share in that knowledge. As a pair, these plays also operated as a sequence: *The Spanish Tragedy* made the case for thinking in causal sequences and thinking of time structured by progressive development. *Titus Andronicus* assumed much of that and began to more clearly differentiate between characters who understood and exploited causal sequences and those who did not and remained ignorant of the predictive capabilities to imagine and produce an endpoint. In *Titus*, the fifth act even presented a contest between planners of such sequences. By the end of *Titus Andronicus*, the hero was someone *who did know*—knew about causality and sequential linkage and how to exploit them, and knew how those operated in drama. That knowledge was also, for audiences, the logic of the very play in which he was represented.

The transfer of that knowledge, from discounted and peripheral characters to the central characters, and then to audiences, represented a coming into knowledge that was then acknowledged and valorized, if politically contained in the circumstances of the end. By the end of *Titus Andronicus*, the revenge play had become about prediction—the ability to extrapolate from an existing circumstance, a likely, if not inevitable result. In that sense, it was the recognition that something equivalent to "fate" had a structure and a path. It is reasonable, then, to presume that audiences, or at least the cognoscenti among them, in witnessing a new play built upon the same premises, knew what to expect. They would have known, at least based on precedent, for instance, that in a revenge play, the sequential pattern of action would lead to revenge, and revenge would lead to death: "narrative necessity" external to the play, "fate" within it.

What were the implications of this knowledge for the representation of characters in subsequent plays? What could a later character such as Hamlet be presumed to know, and how would the assumption of his knowledge affect the representation of his actions? Could a central figure or a "hero" be assumed to be less well informed, less aware, or less competent than those who watched from the audience? And if ignorant, could such a figure have been "heroic" enough for his difficulties to be "tragic" at all, and not just pathetic?

The answer *Hamlet* proposed was complex, but within the play there were many indications. Hamlet himself was presented as part of a literary

elite. He was represented as a student at Wittenberg and as reading in his exchange with Polonius in 2.2, shortly before his seemingly erudite reflections on man. He was also depicted as a knowledgeable and competent dramaturge, beginning, in the same scene, with his reflections on the arrival of the players:

HAMLET: … What players are they?
ROSENCRANTZ: Even those you were wont to take such delight
in, the tragedians of the city. (2.2.318–320)

   When the players arrived, he was presented as speaking with them at length and demonstrating familiarity with them and the latest developments in stage practice, such as the emergence of the children's companies. He requested a recital of a particular passage—a very Marlowesque narration of the fall of Troy—and then proceeded to develop his own emendations for the subsequent staging of *The Murder of Gonzago/The Mousetrap*. That play was, of course, an internal icon of the adaptation of existing conventions to present circumstances, and of the potential for represented drama to mirror and map events and relations in the conditions of its audience. By the end of the play, Hamlet, like Titus, was depicted as adept at staging and identifying the attempts of others to do so. Unlike Titus, however, he was also presented as a scholar, student, and committed aficionado of the very form in which he was appearing. Comparison with other characters, such as Polonius, who "played the fool," and Laertes, a man of action not reflection, only underscored the condition of his knowledge. Horatio, presented as having some similar level of knowledge, was charged with the responsibility for memory at its conclusion, again a telescoping reference and, perhaps, an analogue for the role of the playwright and production in "retelling" the story it was inventing and the activities of audiences (for centuries) in remembering it. Is it possible, given all of that, for audiences to have thought that Hamlet, with the introduction of the ghost in the first scene and Hamlet's encounter with him shortly after, *did not know?*
   Different levels of knowledge were presumed or represented throughout this play. The ghost, for instance, was presented as visible to some characters but not to others. It was visible to Horatio and the men of the watch at the beginning of the play and to Hamlet throughout but not, apparently, to Gertrude in 3.4. Perhaps most critically, however, when it appeared to be visible to Hamlet, it was also visible to audiences. While that perhaps strengthened the identification of audience members with Hamlet, it also located audiences firmly within a zone of special knowledge, made privy to many secrets in this play that did not appear known to many characters.[4] In fact, as in other plays, audiences *always* enjoyed a position of privilege

in this respect as they viewed all of the actions by all of the characters that appear on stage throughout a play, whether seen by other characters or not, though often the imagined intent of characters was not fully revealed and the emerging patterns of action not always predictable. That has been true of all of these plays, from the "mystery tour" of medieval plays and *The Spanish Tragedy*, to *Hamlet*, though the nature of the revelations they were privy to had changed.

One of the features of *Hamlet* that has been the occasion for much commentary and responsible for part of its fame has been the play's extensive use of soliloquies. It is perhaps no exaggeration to suppose that through the years many people have even known the term "soliloquy" through their exposure, at some point, to *Hamlet*. Hamlet's soliloquies have often been seen, by Harold Bloom most recently, as evidence of the development in this play of a kind of interiority to character that was not present in earlier plays such as *Tamburlaine*, or even *Dr Faustus*, but were made visible to audiences in this play.[5] Soliloquies were also the way in which, in this play even more than its predecessor, the directions and machinations of causal plot sequences were revealed. Aaron's soliloquies in *Titus Andronicus* revealed much about his intentions, as did Barabas's or Ithamore's in *The Jew of Malta*. Hamlet's soliloquies, however, developed other dimensions since they were often reflective and did not always, or even primarily, lay out immanent action. In fact, they did rather the reverse, delaying rather than advancing the plot.

It is possible that both the use of soliloquy and the involvement of leading characters in acts of revenge had the effect, under certain conditions, of bringing audiences *closer* to some characters. Titus, for example, became arguably more sympathetic to audiences as he was presented as moving closer to the transgressive realms of agency and action. But what about Hamlet? Unlike Titus, Hamlet did not "come into knowledge" and therefore become more like the audience in what he knew. He *already* had knowledge, though where that left him remained for a time unclear. His knowledge, however, did not immediately lead to action. Famously, he was depicted as postponing action when the motivations to it were made most evident. Generations of viewers, readers, and critics, responding with a new kind of impatience, have seen the play being about both "madness" and "delay." But what were "madness" and "delay," and what functions, especially what *structural* functions, did they serve?

A Return to Plot

That question may be resolvable by returning to considerations of knowledge, convention, and plot. One of the patterns made more explicit in *Titus Andronicus* was the transfer of both knowledge and agency to act in

an independent and non-feudal manner from exogenous and suspect characters (Aaron, Tamora), to valorized and "heroic" ones—especially Titus. Aaron's speeches and actions first demonstrated the effectiveness planned, sequential actions in producing a desired result. Titus, initially very much the hapless (and handless) victim of those patterned actions, became, by the end of the play, their master, triumphing over Tamora and Aaron in the final act. Titus was then represented as *understanding* sequential action— and after such clear demonstrations, so must have at least the more attentive members of audiences. They knew, in other words, that initial actions could now be relied on to produce final, desirable, and predictable results. While the point of *The Spanish Tragedy* was to explicate this pattern, and of *Titus Andronicus* was to normalize it and effect its sanitation, by the time *Hamlet* was produced, given the popularity of the earlier plays, it was very likely to have been simply part of the theatrical vocabulary for producers and audiences alike. The very patient explication of *The Spanish Tragedy* would not likely have attracted audiences in a new play since they already had *The Spanish Tragedy*, but building upon its assumptions could, as *Titus Andronicus* effectively demonstrated, capture interest while advancing their understanding. But outlining all of those steps from the initiation to the conclusion of a causal sequence, as *Titus Andronicus* did, would also not have appeared either novel or intriguing ten years later. As a normalized understanding, it too would have become cliché.

Given this baseline of convention and understanding, *Hamlet* was addressing a circumstance quite different from its predecessors and would necessarily have required a different approach. It began with a very direct entry into the revenge plot with the ghost presenting both the occasion and imperative for revenge, first to Horatio and his companions, and then to Hamlet. *Hamlet*, like its predecessors, also included some other internal images of causality and sequential action. Polonius was presented as constantly, if unsuccessfully scheming, and Hamlet was depicted as deftly countering Claudius's plot with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to kill him. The plan that Laertes and Claudius developed for revenge was also ultimately shown to be thwarted, though its dedication to action (and learned patience as in *The Spanish Tragedy*) provided a useful contrast to Hamlet's inaction in the middle parts of the main plot. These patterns were important elements to the middle section of the play, but in some crucial respects, they were also diversions and distractions that did nothing to advance the action of Hamlet's revenge. Like the many metadramatic performances, such as Hamlet's *Mousetrap*, that afforded audiences the telescoping vision of their own positions as viewers of a constructed sequence, they were ways of elaborating aspects of a theme that was already in motion—but also in suspension.

The very economy of the main plot of *Hamlet* did present at least a potential problem. If audiences knew the revenge tragedy pattern—if it

were normalized for them and they were habituated to their knowledge of it—they would have recognized, with the appearance of the ghost, that *Hamlet* was a revenge play and they would have been able to intuit its entire structure. At its base, the causal structure of the revenge plot as they knew it was extremely simple: a wrong had been committed, an obligation for revenge fell upon one or more characters, the act of revenge was accomplished, and the avengers died. They would have known then, in the first act, that within the structure of *Hamlet*, once the motive and charge had been made clear in the opening scenes, only two further actions could actually have been significant in terms of the main plot: one would have been the act of revenge, and the second would have been the death of the revenger that would follow. Where other plays had laboured and entertained audiences with the explication of the need for the linkages that would lead to or produce this sequential pattern or explicate the linkages of understanding and agency that would explain and justify the actions of the revenger, those things would now have been known. Since *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* had become cliché, they would have been conventional and audiences habituated to them. In *Hamlet* then, in terms of necessary demonstrations or explanations, nothing stood in the way of performing these culminating actions. A new problem, however, emerged: these following actions, now clearly understood, could not have been performed without immediately precipitating the end of the play. Since audiences would have paid for something like 3 hours of entertainment, those actions quite necessarily *had* to be postponed: they could not have been performed until the Fifth Act. The result was that, between those initial actions that announced the theme of revenge and the concluding actions that would have completed it, by the necessities of a plot structure premised on that knowledge and a 3-hour play, the intervening interval was time in which literally nothing of actual significance to the main plot could occur. In terms of the main plot, this interval of time, structured by the narrative necessities of the form of the play, could only have been defined as empty.

The implications of this pattern and structural conundrum in revenge tragedy were considered in James Calderwood's very subtle and exhaustive 1983 study of Hamlet, *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet*, and Calderwood began by noting that this very problem was identified as early as 1736 by an anonymous critic:

> To ſpeak Truth, our Poet, by keeping too cloſe to the Ground-work of his Plot, has fallen into an Abſurdity; for there appears no Reaſon at all in Nature, why the young Prince did not put the Uſurper to Death as ſoon as poſſible, eſpecially as *Hamlet* is repreſented as a Youth ſo brave, and ſo carleſs of his own Life.

The Ca*f*e indeed is this: Had *Hamlet* gone naturally to work, as we could *f*uppo*f*e *f*uch a Prince to do in parallel Circum*f*tances, there would have been an End of our Play. The Poet therefore was obliged to delay his Hero's Revenge; but then he *f*hould have contrived *f*ome good Rea*f*on for it.[6]

Especially in hindsight, this structural problem, and all that follows from it, might seem obvious. For audiences in 1601, however, it was, perhaps, only with *Hamlet* that that particular form of "hindsight" became available and this structural conundrum began to be visible as a problem. For all of the detail in which Calderwood elaborated the possible implications of this problem, he saw *Hamlet* primarily as Shakespeare's attempt to revive an older form. While the implications of the idea of "reviving" a form will be considered in later chapters, the situation for *Hamlet* at the time of its origin might be better conceived in the dynamism within which tragedy and audience expectations were necessarily changing, and, in some ways, producing conflict.

All of the narratives considered thus far have been ways of thinking about and structuring time—epics and liturgy structured time as eternal, and a play such as *Dr Faustus* structured time as experientially compressible and accelerating towards an inevitable end. *The Spanish Tragedy* operated by contrasting two concepts of time, one based in feudal time, or a succession of states structured by obligation, discomfort, and release, and the other based in following the progression of unfolding linkages in a sequential plot to a desired end. *Titus Andronicus* followed with a more concentrated and extended meditation on the progressive and sequential understanding of time as more characters appeared to be locating themselves within it. But *Hamlet* proceeded through something subsequent to both of these and dependent on the groundwork established by their prior operation. Because it assumed knowledge of the patterns they had established and did not need to explicate its linkages and would not have been likely to attract new audiences by doing so, it could, and in some ways had no choice but to contract the sequential plot to its core elements. And because it located one core element (the appearance of the ghost) at the beginning and necessarily located the other two (revenge and the death of the revenger) at the end of a time constructed by the *external* necessity of the 3-hour requirements of its operation as a commercial unit, *Hamlet* structured time as a kind of space. It was not the space diffused with the plenitude of signification (Gellrich's Book of Nature), but something like space emerging in Newtonian physics and perspective art, that could be defined by its vacancy, as an interval that *could* be or was empty, or at least empty until it was filled. And filled with what? Calderwood explicated many possibilities, and some of the contents, or fillers for this space, have already

been identified: the subplots with Polonius and Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes's return and plans for revenge, and, of course, the metatheatrical centrepiece of the *Mousetrap*. Though they were without question very skilful diversions that contributed to the thematic content of the play, they *did not advance the main revenge plot*.

Returning, then, to the question of Hamlet, the hero, and his knowledge: another core observation of Aristotle's theory was that the unity of the play did not reside in the unity of the hero but in the unity of the central action. Character does not define plot; but plot defines character.[7] So how was the character Hamlet defined by *this* plot, given its very particular structure, which did not construct a sequence replete with necessary actions but rather an empty space? Was Hamlet too then defined as an "empty space," at least until he could be seen to perform the significant actions of the revenge plot in Act 5? Since he could perform no actions that were actually meaningful in terms of the main plot, how could he be defined and have meaning at all?

POLONIUS: What do you read, my lord?
HAMLET: Words, words, words. (2.2.190–191)

Hamlet was shown to enter, before this exchange, as Gertrude duly noted, reading a book, reminding audiences of his status as an educated man and scholar. As noted above, Hamlet was defined later in contrast to Laertes, especially in the death-spiral dyad that structured the last two acts, and Laertes was clearly defined as a man of action, the avenger the ghost of Don Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy* would have preferred. In this passage, from Act 2, Hamlet was defined by another opposition, to Polonius, who had filled his previous exchange with Claudius and Gertrude with speeches that have stood as icons of excess verbiage for centuries. Hamlet's words were different in that they were not "empty" in that sense at all: they were filled with ostensible meaning, reflecting some of the finest traditions of thought of his period and its deepest philosophical questions, and culminating in the reflection on the nature of man that followed in this scene. Yet even as he cursed his own inability to act and feel in the famed "Hecuba" speech, he filled the time with—words:

> Why what an ass am I! This is most brave,
> That I, the son of a dear [father] murthered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
> A stallion. Fie upon't, foh!
>
> (2.2.563–567)

This challenge to himself is followed shortly after in 3.1 by his very most famous soliloquy:

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing, end them….
>
> (3.1.55–59)

This speech has been, perhaps, most emblematic of Hamlet and his problems, and in the twentieth century, it came to be viewed as the most "existential" among the many speeches in Shakespeare's works. And perhaps this is a key both to the genius of *Hamlet* in announcing the next 400 years of interiorized and individualized subjectivity, and to understanding its structural origins in the necessities of the conventions of revenge and the tragic plot at this point in their development. If *Hamlet* was a play that, due to its place in the development of these conventions, defined its actions in time not as progressions, exactly, but as a space evacuated of plotline significance, and if Hamlet was a character similarly undefined by actions not spurious to the main plot and therefore superfluous or "empty," and who filled that void with "words, words, words," what could have been more fitting than that he should have filled that time with words that reflected on the meaning of his existence as an empty space, and ultimately, a space awaiting its end? It was a very modern and existential result indeed—one to be announced more explicitly, perhaps, only 400 years later in the works of Samuel Beckett.[8]

Viewed in this way, the fabled interiority of Hamlet was the result, not solely of a philosophical reflection or the emergence, in the first instance, of a modern subjectivity but of the necessities of a plot and the sequential development, not just of the plot within this play but of the succession of tragedies that imposed a developing sense of knowledge of their own conventions of structured action and character defined in this way. To argue this is not to argue that the thematic aspects of *Hamlet* that have absorbed audiences, readers, and critics for centuries are not important or innovative but to suggest that these developments in drama, and specifically in tragedy, presented a platform and a container for such reflections that, however interpreted once announced, not only supported, but in a sense demanded, their articulation. Nietzsche asked why the Greeks "of all people should have needed tragedy," and *Hamlet* answered one aspect of the same question for England in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century. It needed tragedy to both effect and model a critical social transformation, and in the process, simultaneously announce a new form of

subjectivity and effect its own supersession. The moment, however iconic, once articulated, was past.

Nietzsche noted that tragedy died "by suicide" and that it eventually gave way to New Comedy. That transition will be considered in a later chapter and is best more fully considered through the works of New Comedy's greatest practitioner, Ben Jonson. For now, however, it is enough to take the hint of emerging comedy somewhat seriously in considering this greatest of all tragedies. The middle acts of *Hamlet* were defined as a space—a zone within which nothing of primary plot significance could happen, and in which the main character filled the time by reflecting upon his existence as a space. Structurally, the play *Hamlet* required that in order to fulfil its obligation to its audiences to entertain them for a period of 3 hours. In 5.2, Hamlet, in preparing to enter the final scene of the play, which was to conclude, quite precipitously, the actions of the revenge plot and result in his own death, observed:

> There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet will come—readiness is all.
>
> <div align="right">(203ff)</div>

Words, words, words, and yet it might have been possible, perhaps, to have seen a sly metadramatic humour in these lines. Bloom posited that *Titus Andronicus* was a burlesque version of *The Spanish Tragedy*. *Hamlet*, with all of its meta-commentary, was, perhaps, a parody of both. The ironies were perhaps more subtle and less perceptible to many audience members, but they may have been perceptible to some nevertheless, as they are, perhaps, to us. The "readiness" in question was also the arrival of the play at the fifth act, the fulfilment of the obligation to the audience to have provided, as Aristotle would have it, "an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude." It was the point at which the play *could* end, Hamlet *could* act, and his existence, as a character, *could* achieve the "fulfillment" of its form in its final moments of pregnant meaning that accompanied his death. It was the most sombre but viewed from another angle, the most ironic and comical of results.

Notes

1 Citations to this play are given in act, scene, and line numbers from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by Susanne I. Wofford (Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1994). Every aspect of this play has received extensive critical attention, and it is not the intention of this chapter to review or respond to many aspects of that history. For a very brief overview of the history and some contemporary approaches, see Wofford's introduction to this edition and the selected essays it contains.

2   For an in-depth and thoughtful consideration of the questions of hypothesizing audience response, see Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann, *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

3   This passage has been subject to multiple interpretations for centuries. A good account of this history and convincing rationale for an interpretation were given by Samuel Henry Butcher in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 1911, Reprint (New York: Dover, 1951), 242–73. See also the more extended treatment in Chapter 1.

4   "Hamlet observes and understands more efficiently than the other tragic heroes, being usually on the right scent (though at times he may feel confused, even lost). Accordingly the audience has a different task in observing the observer, judging the judge." Honigmann, 57.

5   Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 410.

6   *Some remarks on the tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Written by Mr. William Shakespeare*. As quoted (in modernized spelling) in James L. Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 22–24.

7   Aristotle, "The Poetics," in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, ed. and trans. Samuel Henry Butcher (1911: Reprint. New York: Dover, 1951), IX. 10 (1451b), 33.

8   Of course, the space and the words that fill them are crucial to the play and its many interpretations. John Kerrigan, for instance, associates them with the creation of the play itself as an artifact of memory. John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*: Aeschylus to Armageddon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 181–92.

Reference List

Aristotle. "The Poetics." In *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, edited and translated by Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111. 1911. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1951.

Butcher, Samuel Henry. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. 1911. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1951.

Calderwood, James L. *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in* Hamlet. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Honigmann, Ernst Anselm Joachim. *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Susanne I. Wofford. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1994.

Some remarks on the tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Written by Mr. William Shakespeare. London: printed for W. Wilkins, 1736. Gale Primary Sources: Eighteenth Century Collections Online. GALE|CW0116674653. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0116674653/ECCO?u=ubcolumbia&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=67374616&pg=1.

8 Othello

> But jealous souls will not be answered so:
> They are not ever jealous for the cause,
> But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster
> Begot upon itself, born on itself.
>   (3.4.159–162)[1]

Emelia's commentary on jealousy is, in the context of *Othello*, not quite accurate, since the actions of the play go far in providing a proximate cause, if not a satisfying motive, for Othello's jealousy, and yet, in a fundamental sense, her comments speak to a strong tendency in the criticism, and perhaps the popular reception of this play, to think of it, in the end, as a play about "jealousy." To think of it this way is to reconstitute it within a humanist tradition that sees Shakespeare's plays as investigations of primary aspects of human psychology or emotion—the "invention of the human" as Harold Bloom would have it.[2] There may be a lot to recommend such a view, or at least find satisfaction in it, but to espouse it completely is to occlude the possibility of seeing other factors at work behind the patterns of the play, and likely, in particular, to make the kinds of structural issues and constraints described here all but invisible. To wit, in the 1980s I gave a lecture on some of these structural themes, especially in *Hamlet*, and was approached afterwards by a senior colleague who commented that, though what I had said had been very interesting, none of it, of course, applied to Shakespeare.[3]

But what then, if not "jealousy," is *Othello* actually about? A way to begin to answer this question is to consider the repetitive thematic patterns of the play that, at times, might be interpreted as "jealousy," but might also, perhaps more comprehensively, be understood as something more like "displacement." Previous chapters have traced the ways in which revenge motives had emerged with increasing directness as the patterns of revenge tragedy had become more familiar through subsequent iterations. *Othello* began even more abruptly in its first scenes with major statements

of action-generating motives in the dialogue between Iago and Roderigo. Both appeared angry at having experienced forms of displacement. Iago expressed outrage at having been displaced from appointment as Othello's lieutenant by Cassio, whom he deemed less qualified but perhaps more entitled. Roderigo expressed his anger at having been displaced in Desdemona's affections by Othello. Both indicated a shared desire for revenge, in which both Othello and Cassio emerged as targets, and these relations became patterns of motive that operated throughout the play.

One of the most interesting aspects of this exchange was the way in which images of displacement and substitution proliferated, even in this initial introduction. They, rather than "jealousy," might have seemed to have become their own motivations in ways that would have seemed arbitrary, if not gratuitous. By the end of scene 3, for instance, Iago was presented as manufacturing an image of his own displacement and substitution to justify his actions against not Cassio but Othello, thus appearing to absorb Othello within the same motivational pattern of substitutions:

> Iago
>   … I hate the Moor
> And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
> He's done my office. I know not if 't be true,
> But I for mere suspicion in that kind
> Will do as if for surety.
>   (1.3.385–389)

To imagine one displacement, however arbitrarily, was presented as providing the motive for vengeance within another.

In the later acts of the play, this pattern of displacements and substitutions became increasingly pronounced. In 3.3, Iago's continual suggestion that Cassio had taken Othello's place with Desdemona resulted in the displacement of Cassio from the role of Othello's lieutenant and Iago's substitution for him. In an earlier revenge play, this might have been seen as a pattern of action that redressed an earlier wrong, but here it advanced a pattern in which further wrongs were perpetrated. In 4.1, to further Othello's misperceptions, Iago was shown to position Othello to hear Cassio's dismissive comments about a lover, and then to prompt Othello to think that it was Desdemona, though Cassio, equally carefully positioned, was speaking about Bianca. Through the apparent substitution of Desdemona for Bianca in Othello's perception, Iago appeared to be furthering his schemes. Shortly after, as Lodovico announced Othello's recall to Venice, Othello disgustedly declaimed that "Cassio can have my place" (261), with the potential double meaning of "as governor" and

"with Desdemona." The idea of displacement, and specifically of Cassio replacing Othello as governor, then became the motivation for Roderigo's attempt to murder Cassio after Iago convinced him that it was the only way to prevent Desdemona's imagined departure with Othello for Mauritania (a destination substituted for Venice: 4.2.226), as well as a motive for Othello's further actions against Desdemona.

The swirling pattern of these various displacements and substitutions suggested a situation within which identities, established by positions and connections, were extremely fluid and vulnerable—a circumstance in which the occupant of a position or an identity could easily be displaced by another. In this way, identity became open to interpretation as something like a token that could be easily shuffled, had no inherent meaning, and was only invested with meaning as it was repositioned. At various points, the notion of tokens became an explicit part of the narrative: Roderigo, for instance, had sent Desdemona "tokens" through Iago, though Iago later revealed, in soliloquy, that he had never delivered them. The most obvious example of this pattern of reassignments and the tokenizing of identities and markers was, of course, the handkerchief. In the initial set of dialogues about the handkerchief, it was, if anything, over-invested with significance: it had an elaborate pattern of embroidery that would at first seem to make it unique, though there were soon announcements of plans to replicate its pattern and thus compromise its singularity. In (3.4.57ff), Othello recapitulated the story of the original handkerchief's investment with special powers by a Sybil before it is given to his mother, powers through which it would serve as a test of loyalty. The handkerchief was then shown to enter its own path of repositioning and transference on the stage, first described as having passed to Othello's mother, then from her to Othello, and then from Othello to Desdemona. When Desdemona dropped the handkerchief (3.3.291), it began a second pattern of transference as it passed rapidly through a succession of other hands, first to Emilia, who retrieved it when it was dropped (3.3.292), then, a few lines later to Iago, who had long coveted it, then to Cassio when it was planted in his rooms, then to Bianca when Cassio gave it to her "to take out the work" (3.4.188ff), then back to Cassio in an exchange that Othello was positioned to misconstrue (4.1.147ff). Through this transit, it was continually re-invested with meaning on each exchange to become, finally, not just a test but proof of Desdemona's betrayal.

> Iago
>   And did you see the handkerchief?
>
> Othello
>   Was that mine?

Iago
> Yours, by this hand: and to see how he prizes the
> foolish woman your wife! She gave it him, and he
> hath given it his whore.

Othello
> I would have him nine years a-killing. A fine
> woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman!
>
>   (4.1.170–176)

In these transitions, the earlier meanings and specificity of the hand-kerchief were largely displaced by the situational function it acquired as assumed evidence. As it passed back and forth, it became, if anything, more tokenized and arbitrary as a marker. From the position of audiences, perhaps only visible as a white cloth or perhaps one with red markings, it became the perfect emblem of identity that was totally transactional. Its investment with meaning in this scene had a parallel later in (4.2.72–73) as Othello characterized Desdemona: "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,/Made to write 'whore' upon." Meanings were shown, in this sense, to be inscribed, shockingly arbitrary, and, as the play progressed, stunningly false.[4]

The fluidity of these kinds of identity assignments was contrasted within the play with two other categories of identity that were, in important respects, less arbitrary. The first was in the kind of complex and dual-layer identity advanced in the character of Iago; the second was in the kind of consistent identity structure represented by Desdemona, who, in the later acts, was defined largely by her apparent resistance to such inscriptions. From the very opening speeches of the play, Iago's speeches proclaimed a double identity—fluid, but apparently controlled and intentional, with one layer controlling the other. Iago appeared to project one identity in the public realm, while revealing another more selectively in speeches to certain other characters and in soliloquies heard only by audiences. The public identity was performative in that it appeared to structure Iago's perception by other characters and was the means through which he appeared to manipulate situations and their responses. His speeches and actions appeared to present the persona that other characters could be imagined as wanting to see, as in 3.3, when he knelt with Othello:

Iago
>   Do not rise yet.
> Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
> You elements that clip us round about,
> Witness that here Iago doth give up

> The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
> To wronged Othello's service. Let him command
> And to obey shall be in me remorse
> What bloody business ever.
>
> (3.3.465–472)

Here, his speech proclaimed loyalty, and indeed, throughout the play, the speeches of other characters confirmed their apparent perception that he was loyal and honest. In 3.1, Cassio proclaimed "I never knew/A Florentine more kind and honest" (3.1.40–41).

These ascriptions are, of course, highly ironic, both in terms of what Iago's other speeches revealed to other characters such as Roderigo from the very opening of the play and what audiences were given to hear, over-hear, and witness. In fact, the underscoring of such ironies and the gaps between the knowledge of audiences and other characters appeared to become a major constructive element of this play. In reality, though, it was there from the first moments of the play in Iago's extended declaration to Roderigo:

> I follow him to serve my turn upon him.
> We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
> Cannot be truly followed....
>
> ... these fellows have some soul
> And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
> It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
> Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.
> In following him I follow but myself:
> Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty
> But seeming so, for my peculiar end,
> For when my outward action doth demonstrate
> The native act and figure of my heart
> In complement extern, 'tis not long after
> But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
> For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.
>
> (1.1.41–64)

This passage is noteworthy in several respects. One is its defence of duplicity and, in that doubled sense, "acting." A second was the confusing structures of identity and non-identity it introduced ("Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago"; "I am not what I am"), images that were reversed in direction later in the play but evinced equal instability (Desdemona: "My lord is not my lord, nor should I know him/Were he in favour as

in humour altered" (3.4.125–126)). Perhaps of greater significance, however, of the whole speech was its structural resonance with a dramatic trope from another genre—the scheming servant of New Comedy, perhaps epitomized by Mosca in Jonson's *Volpone* (3.1.12–33),[5] which followed *Othello* by a couple of years, but was preceded by other instances with Brainworm in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* a few years earlier.

The implications of this similarity and of others that might associate *Othello* with New Comedy will be considered later. *Volpone*, though dark in many respects, was indeed a comedy, and though it veered close to the production of harm, its most egregious possibilities for harm were, by the end of the play, largely averted or seemingly deserved. Iago's announcement and evident duplicity, though as unapologetic as Mosca's, appeared to direct this play relentlessly, from its opening moments, towards harm and tragedy, and that relentlessness and its constant demonstration distinguished *Othello* from its inception, even among tragedies. It was also an indication of *Othello*'s position further along the trajectory of the development of revenge tragedy that had begun in earlier plays.

Hamlet played a kind of game with its audiences, making audience members complicit in the revelation of certain kinds of information (audiences, like Hamlet, saw the ghost) while creating interpretive doubt about Hamlet's awareness (was he mad? did he know? was he an agent or a victim?). In spite of his apparent intelligence and familiarity with the dramatic conventions that should have allowed him to predict the inevitability of the ending, he was represented as continuing down his fated path, completing the pattern of the genre, and ending his life as that genre ordained it. That play was constructed in the balance between ignorance and knowledge, in which Hamlet's uncertainty and "madness" mirrored the ambiguity of audiences' growing sophistication in their awareness of the causal plot, while providing a plausible explanation for his apparent ignorance or fatalism. Once audiences could be presumed to have absorbed that knowledge, however, that balance could be neither preserved nor reproduced in a new production, and the path to an ending was no longer either ambiguous or mysterious. By the time of *Othello* there was neither the option for, nor a benefit in, that game of ambiguity, and Iago's opening declaration was correspondingly bold and direct. From the opening scene of *Othello*, audiences who had come to see a tragedy were confirmed in their knowledge that the path to tragedy was inevitable and that Othello, marked as its hero, was to be its victim and sacrifice. Othello, until the final scene of the play—his scenes of recognition and suffering (anagnorisis and pathos) in Aristotle's account—was represented as having been completely excluded from this zone of knowledge. His function was to *be* ignorant, to be led, and to suffer. His fate was arranged for him by both Iago and his double, the playwright. Iago, not Othello, in both knowledge

and direction with which his character was invested, had become, like the character Hamlet, functionally coextensive with the plot.[6]

In this way, *Othello* resolved the problem of knowledge by making the bifurcation implicit in *Hamlet* explicit, splitting the ambiguity of Hamlet's "hero-function" into two parts, neither of which was ambiguous. One part, apparently complicit with the playwright, was represented as knowledgeable in the plot's enactment. The other, more recognizable as a traditional "hero" in centrality and stature, was represented as ignorant and sacrificial. They formed a functional dyad: one represented as having knowledge, but insufficient in stature to be "heroic," the other having stature to be "heroic," but insufficient in knowledge to avoid suffering and the "closure" of his own orchestrated destruction. Both were necessary for the play to operate as a tragedy.

> The Moor is of a free and open nature
> That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
> And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
> As asses are.
>
> (1.3.398–401)

In this iteration, the price of "heroism" was victimization and depreciated status; unlike Hamlet, Othello's ignorance was neither ambiguous nor admirable, though it was, to some extent, rationalized and shared. It was also represented as a function of class: virtually all the other "noble" characters were presented as having similarly guileless faith in the safety of their positions and in each other's virtues. Their confident and guileless nobility provided the rationale for the success of a character such as Iago, who was neither privileged nor bound by it. Appearing subaltern and obedient, he also represented competence and guile—"living by his wits" through the technocracy of "plot."

Before considering the other factors that set Othello's characterization apart, it is worth noting what had become of the trope of "plotting" in this play, especially as it is represented by Iago. Earlier plays such as *Titus Andronicus* had located the ignoble habits of scheming and plotting, as this play does, initially in characters who were represented as being in subordinated or disenfranchised positions. In those earlier plays, however, the progression of the plot effected the eventual redemption of those skills through their transfer to those who would use them to more acceptable ends, to restore, for instance, something like justice by the play's end. By the time of this play, however, the mechanisms of logic and progression were already well known and, if not validated, at least presented as core and consistent plot elements that appeared both obvious and inexorable: there was no transference or rehabilitation for them, but an acceptance

of their centrality to the plot and the inevitability of its results. Iago was given a nominal motive—displacement and "jealousy"—but in more basic terms, his motivation was that of a necessary agent of the plot, producing the suffering that made the play "a tragedy." Shakespeare's genius in this respect had multiple aspects. One was to produce another tragedy at all under the conditions of knowledge that were pushing tragedy towards cliché. The second was to construct a hero who, though ignorant, was of sufficient stature, whose fall and its consequences could evoke the tragic emotions of "pity and fear." The third was to make Iago, though most essentially a plot device, credible as "a person," motivated by the same passions and drives that humans are.

In effecting these transformations, *Othello* incorporated another set of staged causal sequences in the dance between Iago and Othello that appeared to both advance and proclaim the inevitability of the plot. For example, in 3.3, Othello outlined the stages of demonstration that would result in his acceptance of Desdemona's guilt.

> I'll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove,
> And on the proof there is no more but this:
> Away at once with love or jealousy!
> (3.3.193–195)

In the lines that followed, Iago appeared to exploit Othello's belief in this sequence by initiating the first stage of proof,

> I speak not yet of proof:
> Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio.
> (3.3.199–200)

and yet urging restraint:

> I am to pray you not to strain my speech
> To grosser issues nor to larger reach
> Than to suspicion.
> (3.3.222–224)

Iago was thus represented as encouraging Othello's progression along an escalating path of doubt and suspicion while separating himself from it as a proximate cause, transferring the apparent agency for the progression to Othello—as if it were self-generated, as Emilia projected, even though audiences were in a position to clearly see that it was not. In fact, at a later point (3.3.248–253), he again appeared to urge Othello to exercise patience, in effect requiring that the stages of the progression be fully

articulated and understood, advice that reprised his advice to Roderigo several scenes earlier (2.3.365–373).

The advice to have patience and trust in sequence might also recall Revenge's advice to Don Andrea in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. In that play, the advice was both to Don Andrea as a choral character and to audiences not yet schooled in the logic, necessity, or entertainment value of the causal plot. But in *Othello* it perhaps served a somewhat shifted function. Iago's guidance of Othello through the sequential stages of proof not only confirmed the tropes of progression and inevitability but provided evidence of Othello's apparent susceptibility to "jealousy" that made the progression plausible and "human." It also heightened dramatic tension, increasing the likelihood of the audience's acceptance of and complicity in the inevitability and pathos of his causally constructed end. While Iago explicated his apparent construction of this progression to audiences, Othello progressed through the stages of his victimization fully in their view. As in *The Spanish Tragedy* but to a very different end, it was a demonstration, producing pathos and awe, in both its inevitability and the blindness of his victimhood. In this way, both the plot motivation, as represented by Iago, and the plot result, as represented by Othello—both structural necessities of the plot—could be thought of as resulting from "human" characteristics and actions, though in structural terms, they were not. To recognize this is to recognize the pure functionality of characters perceived as "human"—a kind of investigation into the structure of identity ruthlessly pursued by Jonson, but only indirectly explored by Shakespeare. James Calderwood's incisive treatment of the play inscribed a limit to this reasoning: "Thus there is no better place to cry 'Enough!' than the point at which a search for Iago's motives becomes a search for Shakespeare's motives."[7] I would argue that this is exactly the point not only to press forward but to question as well our willingness to rest such an enquiry in the autonomy and motives of an "author."

Othello's language, progressing at points through linked logical chains, also functioned to make the rapid transformation of his characterization appear not only plausible, but inevitable, and seem the result of underlying and fundamental flaws that the plot only appeared to uncover and reveal. His "tragic flaw," as Aristotle and other theorists have argued, *was* located in plot, but it was also yet another substitution. It *appeared* to be located in his "inherent" and flawed being (a shift away from Aristotle and towards Hegel's observations on German tragedy).[8] Following Iago's counsel on patience, Othello announced his own logical chain:

> Haply for I am black
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have, or for I am declined

> Into the vale of years – yet that's not much –
> She's gone, I am abused, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her.
>
> <div align="right">(3.3.267–272)</div>

His logic then progressed through further linkages: that marriage is a curse, women's appetites beyond control, his betrayal worse than captivity, the betrayal of great ones is inevitable, and, like death, it is fated upon conception:

> 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death –
> Even then this forked plague is fated to us
> When we do quicken.
>
> <div align="right">(3.3.279–281)</div>

The ironies of this final conclusion were double. The first was that, in the represented world of the play, Othello's betrayal by Desdemona was *not* inevitable: she had not, in fact, deceived him. The second was that, given the constraints external to the play that determined its structure, his belief in her betrayal was an utterly inevitable necessity of the plot.

Othello's ascription of the inevitability of his rejection, either to his blackness or his age, pointed to the other explanation that made his necessary downfall and the actions that would produce it plausible to audiences. From the very beginning of the play, Othello was identifiable as an outsider whose acceptance in Venetian society was extraordinarily conditional and tenuous. At every opportunity, his status, as an outsider and foreigner, and especially as one marked by an emerging early modern sense of racial difference, was used to ascribe actions and motives to him that were characterized as abhorrent and monstrous, even when they were manifestly untrue. In the first hundred lines, Othello was described to Brabantio by a hidden Iago as "an old black ram/… tupping your white ewe" (1.1.87–88). Brabantio, having first rebuffed the annoyingly persistent boy suitor Roderigo, valorized him after this charge and presented this same case against Othello:

> For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
> If she in chains of magic were not bound,
> Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
> So opposite to marriage that she shunned
> The wealthy, curled darlings of our nation,
> Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
> Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
> Of such a thing as thou?
>
> <div align="right">(1.2.64–71)</div>

In the following scene, before the Duke, Othello related his courtship with Desdemona and she gave testimony of her choice. Perhaps presented as more compelling or opportunistic motivation, the discussion shifted to the Turkish fleet and Othello's obvious military utility. Though Brabantio was shown to relent, the provisional nature of Othello's status was, if anything, confirmed. By the end of the fourth act, however, the exigencies that had apparently allowed for his provisional acceptance, like the conditions of Hamlet's delay, had vanished and the way was clear, not only for Othello's expulsion and tragedy but for the play's descent from a tragedy of state to a tragedy framed in more personal and domestic terms.[9]

Othello's outsider status and his representation as a racialized and depreciated Other, discussed at length by many critics, provided a plausible explanation, in the relationship between the play and audiences, for his failures.[10] As an outsider, the social cues, customs, and interpretive frameworks of Venetian society might well have been reasonably assumed to be unfamiliar to him and his access to them limited. As a "Black" in the developing racism of English society, what might have been open to interpretation as his lower intellectual capacity or susceptibility to unregulated passions might have made his failings seem all too predictable. Like every other aspect of the end of this play, it was made to look inevitable. His insecurity in the face of negative opinions as the play presented them would have seemed to provide then, as they do now for many, a psychological explanation for his vulnerability to self-fulfilling prophesies:

> Iago
>   Ay, there's the point: as to be bold with you,
>   Not to affect many proposed matches
>   Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
>   Whereto we see, in all things, nature tends—
>   Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,
>   Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.
>   But pardon me, I do not in position
>   Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
>   Her will, recoiling to her better judgement,
>   May fall to match you with her country forms,
>   And happily repent.
> Othello
>   Farewell, farewell.
>
> (3.3.232–242)

In this exchange, the spectre of substitution and displacement was revived, but here to suggest Othello's social anxiety and fear of displacement.

His fall, his violence, and his eventual expulsion (a final form of displacement) might then have seemed, rather than the necessities of a constrained, and perhaps contorted, tragic plot, a return to a more normal and "natural" social order.

The representation of Othello's perceived insecurities in his match with Desdemona again may be seen as indicative of more extensive structural issues and the structural motivations at the heart of this play. As noted earlier, many identities in the play were presented as contingent upon position and the threat of displacement, and here that contingency was again made explicit. Othello was paired, however precariously, with Desdemona, and Desdemona was presented as a kind of ideal. In contrast to the contingent identity structures of many in the play and the consistent structure of changeability and duplicity represented by Iago, Desdemona's identity, in functioning as an ideal, functioned as the one consistent point of reference in the play, the lodestar around which the swirling changeability of the plot revolved. Even at the end of the play, in her dying declarations, she appeared to remain consistent, loyal to Othello, and, while blameless, accepting of the responsibility for her own death.

> *DESDEMONA:* A guiltless death I die.
> *EMILIA:*   O, who had done
>   This deed?
> *DESDEMONA:* Nobody. I myself. Farewell.
>   Commend me to my kind lord—O, farewell!   *She dies.*
>   (5.2.121–123)

The representation of Desdemona as absolutely faithful and desiring to exonerate Othello in the face of his precipitous decline into violence and reactivity was an index of the extremities necessary to produce a tragedy under these conditions. In both the relentlessness of the manipulation of Othello and the extremity of his violence towards Desdemona, the play, and its location of audiences in a position to witness but not to intervene, was sadistic.[11] In the representation of her consistent virtue and loyalty, the play in the end approached domestic melodrama. Othello's moment of recognition and subsequent declaration was, in this respect, the play's actual construction of interpretive ambiguity:

>   I pray you, in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely, but too well …
>   (5.2.338–342)

This declaration has, for centuries, presented audiences with, to a greater or lesser degree, an ambiguous choice. One option would have been to validate, in the heightened melodrama of these long scenes of recognition, the idea that Othello "loved not wisely, but too well." The other would have been to recognize the kind of justification that has, since the beginning of time, justified the slaughter of women and children at the hands of distressed husbands.

But then, Desdemona had never been, not exactly or perhaps only, a woman and a wife at all. In Aristotle's theory, a hero is defined by an action. A great hero is defined by a great action. But what does a lesser hero allow for? A lesser tragedy? The concepts of matching, substitution, and replacement were what, from the outset, defined this play. If Desdemona were, in fact, the ideal heroine, the suitable match for her would have been the ideal hero. Together, they would represent the "ideal" of tragedy. Within this play, however, there was no one, not among the "wealthy, curled darlings of our nation," nor in the good but uninspiring Cassio, and certainly not in the callow and inept Roderigo, who could function as "a hero." And, by the end of the play, neither could Othello:

> She loved me for the dangers I had passed
> And I loved her that she did pity them.
> (1.3.168–169)

Pity, though perhaps an element of tragedy, was not a solid basis for equivalence. If a character were constructed, as Othello was, by a plot requiring the actions he performed, then rather than matching that ideal, he could only be represented as destroying it. And that is what he did, creating a last great iteration of this tragic form, only to murder it; resuscitating it, as it resuscitated Desdemona, only to watch it die again.

Notes

1 Quotations from *Othello*, identified in the text by act, scene, and line, are from William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann (Walton-on-Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997). Like *Hamlet* and nearly every other of Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* has been the subject of extensive critical commentary, at least as early as Thomas Rymer's, A Short View of Tragedy; Its Original, Excellency, and Corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespear, and Other Practitioners for the Stage (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693). For a good brief summary of critical opinion, see Anthony Barthelemy, Introduction to *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* Othello, ed Anthony Gerard Barthelemy (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994), 1–18.
2 Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998).

3 One earlier commentator on the play—Samuel Coleridge—observed that the "jealousy" explanation is, at best, complicated. For one commentary, see Harry Levin, "'Othello' and the Motive Hunters," *The Centennial Review* 8, no. 1 (1964): 1–16.

4 The handkerchief has a long critical history, beginning at least as early as Thomas Rymer's comment, "So much ado, ſo much ſtreſs, ſo much paſſion and repetition about an Handkerchief! Why was not this call'd the *Tragedy of the Handkerchief*?" Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy Its Original, Excellency, and Corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespear, and Other Practitioners for the Stage* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693), 135. Lynda Boose has reflected on the ways in which it can be seen as invested with gendered symbolism: Lynda Boose, "Othello's Handkerchief: 'The Recognizance and Pledge of Love." *English Literary Renaissance* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 360–74. For an account of more recent criticism including that on the handkerchief's magical and stage properties, see Andrew Sofer, "Felt Absences: The Stage Properties of *Othello*'s Handkerchief." *Comparative Drama* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1997), 367–93.

5 Ben Jonson, *Volpone* eds. Charles Harold Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925–1963), in *Ben Jonson*, 5: 66–67.

6 Bloom calls *Othello* Iago's play: Bloom, 454ff. James Calderwood also notes Iago's functions as a plotter: James L. Calderwood, *The Properties of Othello* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 120.

7 Calderwood, *Properties*, 119.

8 For more on this, see the final section of Chapter 1.

9 The transition towards domestic tragedy, a genre more explicitly developed by Thomas Heyward and others, has been noted by many. See, for instance, Emily Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: from* "Alcazar" *to* "Othello" (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp. chapter 7. Carol Neely, in her consideration of gender relations in the play, goes so far as to term it "a cankered comedy": Carol Thomas Neely, "Women and Men in *Othello*", in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, eds. Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1980), 211–30.

10 Another long critical legacy, including Coleridge's unfortunate marginalia on Othello and race and Emily Bartels's extensive study. Coppélia Kahn links *Othello* to the longer history of blackface performances: Coppélia Kahn, "Forbidden Mixtures: Shakespeare in Blackface Minstrelsy, 1844," in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, eds. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir, 121–44 (New York: Routledge, 2008). For some other interesting perspectives, see Ania Loomba, "Sexuality and Racial Difference," in *Gender, Race and Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 38–62. See also notes to Chapter 6.

11 The contrasting modes of their deaths were also emblematic. See Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. Anthony Forster (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 7–17.

Reference List

Anthony, Barthelemy. *Introduction to Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* Othello, edited by Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, 1–18. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994.

Bartels, Emily. *Speaking of the Moor: from "Alcazar" to "Othello"*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

Boose, Lynda. "Othello's Handkerchief: 'The Recognizance and Pledge of Love." *English Literary Renaissance* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 360–74.

Calderwood, James L. *The Properties of Othello*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.

Kahn, Coppélia. "Forbidden Mixtures: Shakespeare in Blackface Minstrelsy, 1844." In *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, edited by Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir, 121–144. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Levin, Harry. "'Othello' and the Motive Hunters." *The Centennial Review* 8, no. 1 (1964): 1–16.

Loomba, Ania. "Sexuality and Racial Difference." In *Gender, Race and Renaissance Drama*, 38–62. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.

Loraux, Nicole. *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Translated by Anthony Forster. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Neely, Carol Thomas. "Women and Men in Othello." In *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, edited by Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, 211–239. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Rymer, Thomas. *A Short View of Tragedy; Its Original, Excellency, and Corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespear, and Other Practitioners for the Stage*. London: Richard Baldwin, 1693.

Sofer, Andrew. "Felt Absences: The Stage Properties of Othello's Handkerchief." *Comparative Drama* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 367–93.

William, Shakespeare. *Othello*. Edited by Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann. Walton-on-Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997.

9 Decadent Tragedy

Othello was not Shakespeare's last tragedy, but it did set a pattern that later tragedies would follow. In *King Lear*, the increasing gap between the apparent knowledge of audiences and central characters was made plausible through the trope of Lear's dementia. Other parallels also continued. In *King Lear* the functions of the character Cordelia replicated aspects of those of Desdemona. Like Desdemona, Cordelia appeared to be a kind of moral or ethical centre, but as Lear's role was less dominant, her role was made correspondingly more active. Cordelia functioned as the play's protagonist, working to correct the imbalances introduced by other characters. That role was later replicated in plays such as *The Winter's Tale*, in which characters, such as Paulina, worked to similar ends. Opposing characters were represented as seeking, as Iago had, to plan and effect more pernicious plots to self-aggrandizing purposes, just as the older secondary characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Titus Andronicus* had done. Their motives were amenable to relatively uncomplicated interpretation as expressions of common human desires, striving for money, power, or family position. In contrast to them and in the tragic frame of these plays, Cordelia, like Desdemona, also functioned as an index of loss. While the instructions of Edmund appeared as the proximate cause of Cordelia's death, her catastrophe was also tracible back to the pattern of Lear's earlier actions. The relationship between Cordelia and Lear, though replicating that of Othello and Desdemona as a kind of dyad of failed action and loss, also appeared to have changed substantially. Where the relationship of Othello and Desdemona was structured in questions of comparison, equivalence, and suitability, the one between Lear and Cordelia was cast in generational difference and succession. Rather than appearing in a complex of substitutions, its catastrophe was cast as an interruption in the pattern of orderly succession. While Desdemona's relationship with Othello was structured in asymmetries of power in gender, race, and position, it was ultimately interpretable as a mismatch in virtue. Cordelia's relationship with Lear was presented more as a mismatch in competence and judgment.

Cordelia was presented as deserving a better father, and in that, a better relation to a precedent and lost and more heroic era. The world that had passed was represented, not just through Lear's age and infirmity but also through characters such as Kent, whose loyalty and service appeared now to be superannuated and ineffectual.[1] That world and the great tragedies that it would have supported were represented only as a residual memory, and Cordelia, and perhaps the tragedy she was in, as victims of a present world of diminished prospects.

In the world of *Lear*, even the tragedy of Othello as an active and capable hero with misguided and manipulated passions was no longer possible. Cordelia's pointless death as another death of an ideal was symbolic of the reduced possibilities of the form. As in *Othello*, the image of a return to possibility, and by extension, the revitalization of the form, was raised in the phantom prospect of Desdemona's resuscitation and recovery. She was revived, if only momentarily and only to die again, just as tragedy itself was resuscitated through that play's many accommodations, diversions, and devices. In *King Lear*, the faint hope for Cordelia's revival is raised, but only in the desperate and confused mind of Lear:

> She's gone for ever.
> I know when one is dead, and when one lives.
> She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking glass.
> If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
> Why then she lives....
>
> This feather stirs; she lives! If it be so,
> It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
> That ever I have felt....
>
> Do you see this? Look on her! Look her lips,
> Look there, look there –
> *He dies.*
> (5.3.260–268; 306–312)

Though *King Lear* is undoubtedly one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, its greatness was and is constituted, in part, in Shakespeare's ability to construct it within the increasingly narrow constraints of a form, structured by audience expectation, experience, and knowledge, on the edge of extinction.

Other plays, such as *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*, shifted the pattern in other ways, but all were defined by some form of reduced capacity of the hero. The isolation of the hero in plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet* functioned in the opposite direction.

Though these heroes died, they died ascendant, bringing into visibility a process of redefinition, in which a character originally defined by location within a stable network of feudal connections was stripped of those connections and redefined in terms of a more personal trajectory and agency, and in that sense, more "modern" identity. That character, defined as an individual, was presented as rising *through* the plot to fulfil that greater role and destiny, even if that role was to end in death. As the connections to feudal identity and stability were stripped away, that central character emerged as something heroic—an individual defined in agency and action. Later heroes, in plays such as Chapman's *Busy D'Ambois* (c. 1603) and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1613), recapitulated these roles clearly defined by their separation but were more statically trapped in their isolation as the relentless processes of plot and history moved forward. They were defined by their stoic defiance and endurance rather than their ability to affect or evade their circumstances.[2]

An index of that transition in *Hamlet* was the role assigned to gender. Ophelia, like Desdemona, appeared to have represented a kind of alternate reality, the possibility that, in more ordinary and stable circumstances, a "normal" life for both Hamlet and Ophelia might have been possible, in which she would have functioned as something like a match for the heroic Hamlet. As the play progressed, however, she was positioned as increasingly irrelevant. As Hamlet's trajectory and very male "heroism" came to define him, her representation of the normal connections of domestic life was increasingly diminished. In the later acts, she served, as Desdemona was later to, primarily as an index of loss and, correspondingly, as motive for Laertes's revenge. In contrast, in *Othello*, Othello began as a character who was *already* isolated and only contingently located within the social system of places and ranks, and his isolation increasingly pathological and explicable as the revelation of his underlying "nature" in the social and racial politics of the represented world of the play. He was represented, not as rising in his response to the motivations and methods of justifiable revenge to a new form of heroic agency but as victim to the revenge motives externally and spuriously generated by the plot and its agents who appeared inexorable and fully beyond his control. He was abject.

In both *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*, the isolation of the hero was again presented as something more pathological and similarly vulnerable to an inexorable logic. In *Macbeth* that isolation was represented as deriving from the moral flaccidity of the hero and his susceptibility to ambition, suggestion, and influence. And while those motivating forces were demonized in their gendered representation in Lady Macbeth and the witches, Lady Macbeth in particular was shown to suffer the same fate

as Ophelia, ultimately discarded in the final stages of the hero's isolation. The division of functions so characteristic of *Othello* in the functional split between Othello and Iago was mirrored in *Coriolanus*, in which the signifying roles of women were divided between Virgilia and Volumnia, with Coriolanus's wife Virgilia serving, as Ophelia and Desdemona did, as the emblem of discarded connection to affection and family, while his mother Volumnia, like Lady Macbeth, served as both an explanation for his incapacity and a motivator for his dysfunctional actions. Out of such splits and divisions, all of these plots were created. Coriolanus, like Macbeth and Othello before him, appeared "heroic" through his martial valour but diminished, as they were, in his inflexibility and apparent inability to perceive, as Aufidius and others were shown to perceive, the linkages of cause and effect. Rather than evincing agency produced by action and plot, he, like Othello, Lear, and Macbeth, appeared as their victim.

For Shakespeare, the greater harmonizing of those who could be presented as having a canny understanding of the linkages of the causal plot and devising more positive trajectories for navigating the perils of power required a new formal solution and a new venue. As in Jonson's New Comedies in which manipulators such as Brainworm and Mosca outwitted characters of higher status, characters in Shakespeare's Romances plotted for better outcomes, providing an alternative to the conundrums of the exhausted tragic form. In *The Winter's Tale*, the array of characters from the later tragedies were reconfigured to threaten tragedy but, through such interventions, arrive at a happier result. While Leontes, like Lear, was depicted as making similar errors of judgment through assertive and impulsive male action and Hermione presented as both a target and index of loss and harm, Paulina emerged, like the scheming servant of New Comedy, as a new kind of hero, able to manipulate, from a lower position, characters of higher status, and able to effect actions that averted harm and restored a more compassionate order. Finally, in *The Tempest*, a new kind of hero was able to emerge and all the scheming of lesser characters was finally eclipsed and contained by the reassertion of a hero, Prospero, the magus who appeared, finally, to be able to orchestrate and restore a kind of ideal order, just as his representation was also able to bring such a complete and majestic end to Shakespeare's long career. In this play that order, however, did open a "new world" of imagined capability and power. Its very success reflected and contributed to the conceptual groundwork for empire, the conquest of new worlds, and subjugation of peoples. As the child of a darker American Indian mother and a very white segregationist father, I can never read the line "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" without a certain *frisson* of depression and anger. It is indeed a long and difficult history that is very much still with us.

Decadent Tragedy: Tracking the Changes

These plays too may be seen to have been logical results of the patterns in tragedy noted above, in which possibilities arose as the form developed and was articulated and new solutions required as older ones lost their viability and slipped into cliché. In more stark terms elaborated by Shakespeare's contemporaries and successors, one result was the emergence of the "decadent" tragedies of the Jacobean stage, more clearly marked by their concentration not on the causes or structure of tragic action but on its acceptance and effects.

One way of understanding the circumstances governing these later inscriptions in the wake of the developments outlined above is to consider the examples of three plays outside of the revenge tragedy tradition, two by Shakespeare and one by John Ford. Shakespeare most likely wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in the first half of the 1590s, the youth of its central figures matching its early position in Shakespeare's exploration of tragic form. Though the fates of Romeo and Juliet were structured in a framing narrative of revenge—the kind of unbounded tribal feud considered in Chapter 2's discussion of Greek epics—their tragedy was not a tragedy of revenge but one of loss. Unlike the later tragedies, the gendered pairing of their central characters was *not* asymmetrical or definitive of other functions: it was more one of equivalence—they *were* presented as a perfect match, even as their circumstances doomed them. Their faults, such as they were, were presented as primarily the result of their youth and impetuosity, and their sacrifice in the end as effecting something like the closure of *The Odyssey* in reconciliation of their feuding families. Appearing considerably later, *Antony and Cleopatra* (c. 1607) revisited these themes, but with central characters who were presented as older and more obviously responsible for their choices. The scale of the drama was also much larger, set in the intersection of empires in a retrospectively grand though lost world. They too were presented as making mistakes, sometimes through misapprehension or miscalculation, but never out of fundamental incapacity or failure to anticipate linkages and futurity. Ultimately, their tragedy was presented as a product of their choice of each other. More legitimately than Othello, they could have claimed to have loved "not wisely, but too well." Their tragedy appeared ultimately to be a tragedy of loss and the tragedy of all flesh, the measure of their loss commensurate to the heroic stature of what they had come to represent:

> This is an aspic's trail,
> And these fig-leaves have slime upon them such
> As th' aspic leaves upon the caves of Nile.
> (5.2.340–342)

This closing image, as Alvin Kernan once remarked, was a retrospective symbol of both their fecundity and loss to a less sympathetic resulting order.[3] Both of these plays had a similar plot trajectory: two characters, initially separated by their locations in the represented worlds of their plays, coming together to form a significant and defining, though fatal bond.

The third play, John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, came much later than both of these, sometime between 1626 and 1633. This play too revisited the "star-crossed lovers" theme of its predecessors, but with a much more "decadent" framing. The twist in its premise was that its lovers, Giovanni and Anabella, were *already* linked from the outset as brother and sister.[4] That such a premise might have scandalized audiences, both then and later, would not be surprising, nor that the play concentrated more on the lurid effects of their transgressive romance than on its causes, which were assumed at its inception, and, if anything, framed in a Marlovian challenge to norms and restrictions. The thematics of this tragedy, like those of *Othello* and other later plays, pointed then, as it points now, to a deeper underlying structural constraint in its circumstances of origin. In the depiction of their family connection as siblings, the scandal of their liaison, in contradistinction to the depictions of *Romeo and Juliet*, was that these lovers were *already connected*. Why, other than the scandalous effect, would Ford have chosen to represent such a circumstance? One answer might well be that, given the popularity of those earlier plays, there was actually no alternative: *any* two such lovers introduced at the beginning of a new play were indeed "already connected" in audiences' prior knowledge of the plots of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Their conjunction, like the causality of revenge tragedies for later patrons, were, at this late date, already known and assumed—the ideological "always-already" in which the experiences of audiences were already defined. The process of their joining, therefore, could no longer have been presumed to be reliably interesting as a novel trope in new work. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, rather than chafe against the impossibility of creating a novel plot about two young lovers, created instead a novel plot premised on the *recognition* of their existing connection in the history and consciousness of the drama.

Many years ago, William K. Wimsatt, Jr., in the wake of T. S. Eliot and others, a champion of what was then known as "New Criticism," wrote with colleague Cleanth Brooks *A Short History of Literary Criticism*, in which he gave a comprehensive overview of western European and Anglo-American literary thought from classical times through the mid-twentieth century. In this work, and more regularly in less formal venues, Wimsatt often classified critical theories as genetic, cognitive, or affective, depending upon whether they focused on generation and causes, such as the circumstances, creativity, or intentions of the author (genetic), the structure

of the work and its relation to an external referential world (mimetic or formalist), or the effect of the work on readers or their reception of it (affective). Elements of this approach also inform Aristotle's *Poetics*, though in many respects advancing a primarily "formalist" theory, in beginning first in a delineation of tragic origins and then justifying the form of tragedy in producing a result, *katharsis*, *The Poetics* is, in the end. Similarly, near the end of Chapter 3, I argued that the restructuring of representation in tragedy from earlier and more inclusive forms marked the transposition from relations of substitution to those of combination—the dominance of combination and syntax in the defining emergence of plot. This final phase moves beyond that, from the explanatory power of syntax and plot to the dubious purity of effect. For the three tragedies just considered, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* represents that final moment.

Decadent Tragedy: A Final Look

But what of later revenge tragedies? There were more than those noted above, and perhaps none more iconic as a "decadent" tragedy than *The Revenger's Tragedy*, produced in 1606, after *Othello,* perhaps roughly contemporaneous with *Lear, Macbeth,* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, but before *Coriolanus* and the Romances. This play, for years attributed to Cyril Tourneur but now generally thought to have been written by Thomas Middleton, was in many respects the revenge tragedy equivalent of the much later *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* in its relation to earlier revenge tragedy expressions.[5]

Even at the moment of its origin, *The Revenger's Tragedy* must have seemed a dark play, though not in fact as bloody as predecessors such as *Titus Andronicus*. It was certainly a play more focused on effects than causes, and effects produced by processes of intertwined plots that were each sequential and logical but frequently ironic in their effects. The irony was significant: the individual plots appeared as almost mechanical processes that produced results antithetical to their projected intent. One example was presented in Act 3 in a complicated sequence of actions that bracketed the turning point (Aristotle's περιπέτεια, *peripeteia*) in the main plot and the play. In this bracketing subplot, beginning in 2.3, the main plot's revengers, Vindice and Hippolito, diverted the Duke's son Lussurioso from his intention to rape their sister Castiza by telling him the Duke's bastard son Spurio was in bed with the Duchess and compromising the family honour. When Lussurioso then attacked the Duchess in her curtained bed, he discovered her, not with Spurio but with the Duke. Lussurioso, otherwise the heir apparent, was then imprisoned for treason. Two of the Duchess's sons, Ambitioso and Supervacuo, then devised a plan to secure the execution of Lussurioso, while also effecting the release of their

younger brother, Junior, who had earlier been imprisoned for the rape of
nobleman Antonio's wife. In this entangled set of plot threads, Lussorioso's
clear intention to avenge the family honour and eliminate the succession
threat of his half-brothers first produced an unintended and opposite re-
sult. That the Duke and not Spurio was in bed with the Duchess was
an accident that even Vindice and Hippolito were represented as having
neither anticipated nor orchestrated, though, of course, their double, the
playwright, certainly had (2.3.28–31).[6]

Since the Duke survived, the driving revenge motive of main plot re-
mained, but, that aside, the surrounding convoluted sequences continued.
In its second action, Ambitioso and Supervacuo made a show of pleading
for Lussurioso's release, while angling for the opposite result. In 3.1, they
secured the Duke's warrant for Lussurioso's execution, to be taken to the
judges of the court. Suspecting their intentions, the Duke subsequently or-
dered Lussurioso pre-emptively released. The brothers, however, diverted
the Duke's order to the officers of the court for immediate action. They left,
gleefully congratulating each other for their wit in devising this stratagem.
The officers then executed the only "brother" they had, the unfortunate
Junior. Scene 3.4, in which the officers confront Junior, was filled with ironic
exchanges, especially concerning Junior's interpretation of a letter from the
brothers promising "a trick" through which he would be "not long a pris-
oner" (3.4.59). The officers' divergent interpretation of that line focused,
ironically, on the "not long." In 3.6, as Ambitioso and Supervacuo vied to
claim the credit for their brilliant plan, the officer arrived with Junior's head,
followed shortly by the appearance of the freed Lussurioso. This elaborate
sequence undoubtedly appeared to audiences to be ironic in its perverse
outcomes and darkly comic substitutions and in the thwarted intentions and
the craven opportunism of the inept brothers. Perhaps more subtly ironic
was that those plans and actions of the two brothers may also have seemed
to be something of a mirror image to the more effective and equally lethal
plotting of the *other* brothers, Vindice and Hippolito, in their conspiracy to
kill the Duke in the main plot actions that these other plots bracket.

Before considering the operation and possible symbolism of what was
presented as their masterpiece, the actual murder of the Duke in Act 3,
it is worth noting one other variation on the theme of intended actions,
mistaken identities, and unintended consequences that close the play.
Throughout the play, Vindice, disguised as the bawd Piato, had taken ac-
tions that spurred Lussurioso's desire for revenge against him. Fully reveal-
ing to audiences in an aside his intent to kill them afterwards, Lussurioso,
in 4.2, commissioned Vindice and Hippolito to find and kill Piato. Since
Vindice *was* Piato, the brothers resolved this conundrum through a strata-
gem, costuming the body of the dead Duke in Piato's clothes and position-
ing it at a table. Seeing the figure at the table and apparently believing it to

be Piato, Lussurioso ordered Vindice to attack. After he stabbed the body, the corpse was revealed to be the Duke's, but, since the body was cold, the blame for his death was shifted to the fugitive Piato, and those who appeared to have assisted in Piato's plot by withholding information. In the events that followed, more about the Duke's disappearance was revealed, and the circumstances set for the final flurry of rivalries and murders among the Duke and Duchess's sons that resulted in all of their deaths in the play's catastrophe. Throughout this sequence, in which actions were taken again with exchanged objects and unanticipated results, Vindice and Hippolito provided ironic commentary in asides to each other and, of course, to overhearing audiences. Audiences, as in *Othello*, were positioned as both voyeuristically watching and complicit in the actions. Though the heavily ironic framing left little to find truly "tragic," it left much for them, in their superior position of knowledge, to enjoy and consume.

Though both *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Othello* worked with tropes of action and substitution, their operations were substantially different. In *Othello* social patterns defining identity at least initially appeared to be relatively fixed, with characters jockeying for advantageous positions, and therefore identities, within the slots they defined. In this play, far more sardonic and grimly ironic, characters were certainly portrayed as ambitious and their identities relatively constant, but the patterns of action to which they were subjected shown to shift over them, often producing unexpected results. The ultimate result was a kind of flattening or lack of differentiation among characters who, to a much greater extent, appeared as types rather than personalities, as their various names suggested.[7] The kind of parallelism between the two sets of brothers—the ineptly scheming Ambitioso and Supervacuo and the more effective avengers Vindice and Hippolito—differentiated between them, but not by much. The kinds of actions they performed were similar. Following their murder of the Duke, Vindice proclaimed

> When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good.
> (3.5.201)

It was, by the time *The Revenger's Tragedy* was produced, a consistent trope of revenge tragedy that the avengers, having most likely violated social restrictions in order to effect revenge, no matter how justified, should die, providing aspects of closure to the play, but also setting the stage for some kind of purgative return to a better social order. At the end of this play, it was, then, not surprising that Vindice and Hippolito were to bleed:

> 'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes.
> (5.3.108)

While the impending deaths of Vindice and Hippolito did complete the convention in revenge tragedy that the revengers too must die and bring closure, it also completed the play's pattern of irony. One of the motives for the play's central revenge was the rape of nobleman Antonio's wife by the Duchess's son Junior and her subsequent suicide. With the death of the Duke, Lussurioso, the Duchess, and her three sons, control and responsibility for the state fell to the apparently virtuous—and now avenged— Antonio. Vindice and Hippolito, as agents of both that vengeance and their own, revealed their roles and effective plotting. And again, as Ambitioso and Supervacuo had done earlier, they appeared to revel in their wit. Though presented as secure in the righteousness of their revenge and service to Antonio, they appeared surprised, if somewhat philosophical, in their acceptance of the result:

HIPPOLITO: 'Twas all done for the best, my lord.
VINDICE: All for your grace's good. We may be bold
                      To speak it now: 'twas somewhat witty carried,
                      Though we say it. 'Twas we two murdered him.
ANTONIO: You two?
VINDICE: None else, i'faith, my lord; nay, 'twas well managed.
ANTONIO: Lay hands upon those villains!
                         [*Guards seize Vindice and Hippolito.*]
VINDICE: How, on us?
ANTONIO: Bear 'em to speedy execution.
VINDICE: Heart, was't not for your good, my lord?
ANTONIO: Away with 'em. Such an old man as he!
                      You that would murder him would murder me. (5.3.93–103)

This result undermined any sense that the cycle of revenge had actually produced something purgative, such as a return to a more just and ethical society. Anthony was depicted as reacting, not from a sense of justice but from fear of his own displacement and his own desire to consolidate power.[8]

What then, in this play's very cynical view of human action, represented anything like a "better" alternative? As was a pattern in some other plays, the definition of such possibilities fell to the symbolic representations of women characters. Throughout the play, as was the case even in *Titus Andronicus*, the roles of women characters were also, however, quite ambiguous. Clearly ideals of virtue were not to be found in the Duchess, who, though wronged by the Duke, sought revenge in cuckolding him with his bastard son, nor in Vindice and Hippolito's mother Gratiana, who declared her willingness to prostitute her daughter to Lussurioso, even though she later repented it. That left only Castiza, Vindice and Hippolito's sister,

and even she was represented as wavering, if only, she claimed, to further test her mother.

To the extent that this play had images of something like purity and virtue, they did not exist so much within the scope of the represented actions of the play but in the residual images of other characters represented as dead in the play's opening moments—Antonio's wife, and the *primum mobile* and motive for Vindice's revenge, his dead betrothed Gloriana, reported to have been poisoned by the Duke some nine years prior to the play's action. Both were retrospective images of idealized virtues that no longer appeared to exist in the represented world of the play.[9] Gloriana's introduction as a lost ideal occupied the first 50 lines of the play, which also included a narrative catalogue of craven characters that would populate the play and would then depict in a demonstration, hosted, facilitated, and at points narrated, by Vindice and Hippolito, just what did remain possible in that world. The actions of the play completed a variation on the familiar pattern of revenge, but one that, while full of actors, was devoid of identifiable heroes. It did, however, have a central character of elevated status—the Duke. But if the Duke too was a residual image of something like an earlier tragic hero, what an altered image he was—not Hamlet, not Othello, not Lear, nor Coriolanus, but something very much less. If Hamlet represented something like the closing moments of Eliot's undivided sensibility, in which knowing, acting, and suffering could all be represented as integrated within the same character, later plays, beginning with *Othello*, had already begun to separate those functions. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, that separation became a chasm. If all of those earlier plays had raised the question of equivalence and the proper matching of a hero of stature to a scale of action large enough to define him, an adequate match, in other words, to something like an ideal of tragedy, what kind of a match remained possible in this play? What match indeed did *The Revenger's Tragedy* propose?

The defining moment in *The Revenger's Tragedy* occurred in 3.5, with the death of the Duke. It was a moment saturated in metadrama that appeared to be orchestrated and stage-managed by Vindice and Hippolito to complete Vindice's revenge for the death of Gloriana. As in *Othello*, and in the satirical plots of New Comedy, it depicted the fall of a person of stature at the hands of a decidedly scheming servant. Here, however, the pairing of the Duke and Gloriana, like the recasting of Romeo and Juliet as brother and sister in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, took a very different turn. The Duke, expecting an assignation arranged by Piato/Vindice in a tomb, kissed what he assumed to be a woman, but was, in reality, the poisoned skull of Gloriana, dressed once more as a fine lady. The symbolism could not have been clearer—this was what the "hero" had become, and this was the image of tragedy to which he was matched—residual, retrospective, ironic, decadent and morbid, and utterly devoid of any redeeming virtue.[10]

Perhaps "decadent" tragedy was simply the tragedy of loss, and of the passage into a different era. Elizabeth I, who had often been referred to during her lifetime as Gloriana, had been dead for some years at the time of the play's first production, and England was moving on towards its own apocalypse. The losses depicted in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, however resonant with this cultural moment, may have had more immediate and inescapable origins, more specifically occasioned by the state of tragedy in general and revenge tragedy in particular, and the ways in which the more complete articulation of those forms had exhausted the possibilities of generating new and more innocent expressions before the expectations of increasingly saturated, and perhaps increasingly jaded, audiences. Neither the introduction of the "plot," nor its elaboration and the conundrums of knowledge that accompanied it, nor the initial separation that rendered the hero a victim, could be presented as new. With the structure fully articulated, there could only be effect. One index of this situation was the extremity of the irony structuring this play. Irony *always* plays against the expectations of a known and reliable pattern: without that pattern, there can be no ironic deviation or commentary. The early theatre of blood that is *Titus Andronicus* played against the popularity of *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was already sinking into cliché. By the time of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, that eclipse was far more acute and complete, and irony had become the last refuge in that long history and its exhausted conventions. *The Revenger's Tragedy* was not the great humanist drama that *Hamlet*, *Othello*, or *Lear* were, but it was a fitting and profound commentary on the collapse of the tradition that had produced them.

Notes

1 On Kent's superannuated concept of loyalty and its political context, see Matthew M. Davis, "'My Master Calls Me': Authority and Loyalty in *King Lear*." *Renascence* 70, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 59–78.

2 Both *Bussy d'Ambois* and *The Duchess of Malfi* present central "heroic" figures as stoic and immobile, their virtue expressed in their endurance of factors they cannot control. The interpretation of *Bussy* as a Senecan stoic, rather than Christian play, was made in the 1950s. See Elias Schwartz, "Seneca, Homer, and Chapman's 'Bussy D'Ambois,'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56, no. 2 (1957): 163–76; Irving Ribner, "Character and Theme in Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois." *ELH* 26, no. 4 (1959): 482–96. For the static endurance of the Duchess, see Susan C. Baker, "The Static Protagonist in The Duchess of Malfi." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22 (1980): 33–57.

3 Alvin Kernan, lecture, Yale University, April 1969.

4 For some of this analysis, I am indebted to a relatively off-the-cuff remark by Howard Felperin in an undergraduate class in 1968. R. L. Smallwood gave a later and more detailed account of the similarities between the plays and the critical history in Robert Leo Smallwood "'*Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Romeo*

and Juliet." Cahiers Élisabéthains 20, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 49–70. Smallwood did not, however, make the same startlingly clear observation as Felperin, nor with the panache of Felperin's characteristic flourish of a Schimmilpenninck Duet.

5 The authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy* has remained something of controversy. It was attributed at times to Cyril Tourneur, and occasionally others, but the weight of opinion now seems to be on the side of Thomas Middleton. For a review of this controversy as well as dates and texts and critical history, see Gretchen E. Minton, Introduction to *The Revenger's Tragedy,* by Thomas Middleton, ed. Gretchen E. Minton (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 1–106.

6 References and quotations, by act, scene, and line number are from Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. Gretchen E. Minton (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

7 John Kerrigan has observed that "In revenge tragedy, the point of maximum stylization is often the moment of repetition. It is also that phase of an action in which characters most behave like puppets." John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 202.

8 Irony in *The Revenger's Tragedy* has been a persistent theme in criticism. See, for instance, Jonathan Dollimore, "*The Revenger's Tragedy* (c. 1606): Providence, Parody and Black Camp," in *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 139–50.

9 For a consideration of the iconography of dead women in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, see Christine M. Gottlieb, "Middleton's Traffic in Dead Women: Chaste Corpses as Property in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Lady's Tragedy*," *English Literary Renaissance* 45, no. 2 (May 2015): 255–74.

10 On the theatricality of this moment, see Peter Stallybrass, "Reading the Body and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption." *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 121–48.

Reference List

Baker, Susan C. "The Static Protagonist in The Duchess of Malfi." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22 (1980): 33–57.

Davis, Matthew M. "'My Master Calls Me': Authority and Loyalty in *King Lear*." *Renascence* 70, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 59–78.

Dollimore, Jonathan. "*The Revenger's Tragedy* (c. 1606): Providence, Parody and Black Camp." In *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 139–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Gottlieb, Christine M. "Middleton's Traffic in Dead Women: Chaste Corpses as Property in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Lady's Tragedy*." *English Literary Renaissance* 45, no. 2 (May 2015): 255–74.

Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Middleton, Thomas. *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Edited by Gretchen E. Minton. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Minton, Gretchen E. Introduction to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, by Thomas Middleton, edited by Gretchen E. Minton, 1–106. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Ribner, Irving. "Character and Theme in Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois." *ELH* 26, no. 4 (1959): 482–96.

Schwartz, Elias. "Seneca, Homer, and Chapman's 'Bussy D'Ambois." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56, no. 2 (1957): 163–76.

Smallwood, Robert. Leo. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Romeo and Juliet*." *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 20, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 49–70.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Reading the Body and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption." *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 121–48.

Part IV

Reflections on Process

10 Epilogue and Conclusions

In 1985 Marvin Minsky, co-founder of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at MIT, proposed what to many seemed the radical thesis that what we consider "intelligence" is the accumulated effect of many processes which are, in themselves, unintelligent.[1] In some respects, this book proposes a kind of inversion of that idea, positing that many processes we consider evidence of high degrees of intelligence constituted, operated within, and were responsive to larger patterns that, while interpretable as patterned if not logical, were in themselves unintelligent and, in their larger frame, not intentional in any direct sense. They operated to form the context for tragedies and delimit their possibilities but were, perhaps, never fully seen or understood by participants as they might be now, in the retrospective gaze of 400 years and two major revolutions in the fundamental structures of representation.

The previous chapters have argued that each point in the development of tragedy, and especially revenge tragedy, was constrained by the patterns set by its predecessors and the changing expectations of audiences. While the strategies devised by playwrights were certainly intelligent, the development of the circumstances they addressed were the result of processes less clearly defined and, in exactly the way just posited, "unintelligent." To argue this has not been to deny the importance of intelligence and creativity. In fact, rather the opposite: it has been to argue that those developments presented a constantly changing circumstance to which artists and playwrights were compelled to respond with all the creativity they could muster. Creativity is the ability to respond to opportunities as they develop, and genius the ability to respond to openings that others do not see. All of the works discussed here were certainly the products of creativity and genius.

To recap the arguments of the previous chapters, the progression of tragedy in the dialectic between innovation and audience adaptation involved several important developments. One was certainly the emergence of the sequential plot. Medieval dramas were characterized by repetitive

and episodic structures, and even a play such as *Tamburlaine* initially proceeded through a succession of episodic incidents that repeated the same pattern until, in *Tamburlaine, Part II*, as in the *Odyssey,* a form of closure effected an endpoint to that pattern. As in the *Canterbury Tales*, that closure came through a kind of mortality: in the case of the *Canterbury Tales,* through literate representation that turned a collection of stories into the work of a single author that the mortality of that author then left incomplete. In *Tamburlaine*, *Part II*, it came through the closure of the play as a commercial unit and the internal and symbolic equivalent in the death of the hero. Even in *Tamburlaine*, however, that death set a pattern. In a way completely opposite to the "eternal present" of representation theorized by Havelock for the epics that, of course, included many deaths, or the medieval liturgical cycle that centred upon a singular death that repeated every year, closure in the commercial theatre, or the competitive theatre of ancient Greece, meant the arrival of the play as a unit at an endpoint, a teleology that inexorably shaped its internal representations and located them in a history that progressed, but did not recur. Plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy* began by explaining the value of that plot to audiences unfamiliar with its extended linkages. It argued for patience, elaborating the linkages of the plots and actions that constituted the play to produce a result that, in the feudal world of obligation and discharge would otherwise have happened too soon, foreclosing the time required to make a play. Later plays, such as *Hamlet*, necessarily presumed at least some audience members' internalization and awareness of those patterns and were slyly constructed, at least on the metadramatic level, to form a kind of commentary on the ironies and necessities of their own processes. In plays past that point, that kind of causality was a foregone conclusion, no longer "mysterious" and requiring demonstration, nor entertaining as a novelty, nor ironic in the play between insight and indecision, but focused on the effects of causal chains and their often grisly consequences. They too, at times, commented ironically on their own "decadent" necessities, but through a more acknowledged and less subtle humour. In New Comedy, the jokes and parodies were explicit and central to a redefined notion of plot.

In the course of those developments, tragedies also redefined notions of character. At the outset, characters appeared as representations of locations within a familiar social order, defined by the relatively fixed structures of feudal society and the system of subject positions, relations, and obligations that sustained it. Even in a play such as *Macbeth*, to violate the conventions and obligations of that order was to become, not so much an "individual" in the modern sense, as an anomaly, an outcast, and a monster, eventually to be expelled in the reassertion of order, legitimacy, and kingship and, in *Macbeth*, in the enduring lineage of Banquo's heirs.

Plays such as *Hamlet,* however, though full of misdirection, presented a slower and more certain process of stripping away from the central figure the stabilizing elements of feudal identity in the construction of a new identity defined by its relation to singular action. Those processes separated the character Hamlet from the secure ties of past and present family and kinship through the death of his father and betrayals of Claudius and Gertrude, and from the future prospects of family and kinship through the increasing marginalization and death of the hapless Ophelia. Through these processes, *Hamlet* the play did indeed produce Hamlet the character as an "individual," and what has appeared for generations of audiences and critics to be a thoroughly prescient model of "modern" subjectivity, able to comment on his own existential abandonment in a universe devoid of a rationalized feudal order and faced with the necessity of directing his own fate.

The irony, as in *Oedipus*, however, was that in this pivotal and iconic tragedy, to direct one's fate was not to escape it. The development of plot, while creating the appearance of individuality and agency, in retaining its recognizable form and the conventions necessary to produce "a tragedy," still contained it. The conventional requirement of revenge tragedy to end the play with the death of the perpetrators of the initiating wrong *and* the revenger, created exactly the "empty space" in which none but the final actions could be significant and the existential peregrinations of the character Hamlet, both in delay and eventual readiness for the inevitability of death, could take shape. It also required his apparent inability to navigate around the circumstances of his own death. In plays beyond *Hamlet*, however, the irony between foreknowledge of patterns of action and complicity in their completion could no longer be either sustained or reproduced.

At least as far as tragedy is concerned, it is remarkable, given the extent of its subsequent influence, how limited and evanescent that iconic notion of individuality and the "modern individual" was in the development of drama. *Hamlet* was a kind of *momentary* balance between knowledge and ignorance in which the hero could be represented as having become knowledgeable enough to understand and predict the causalities of the plot in which he found himself but could also be credibly represented as not quite aware or mobile enough to know what to do to avoid its outcomes. For Hamlet to avoid disaster, to sidestep the impending trajectories of plot, and, perhaps, grab Ophelia, move to the outskirts of Paris, and live a happy life would have been to become very different kind of hero—the successful hero of a New Comedy, living in the life of "everyday" that Nietzsche rightfully saw as inimical to tragedy. *Hamlet* was, in this sense, a story (or joke) that, in its original form, could only be told once, though it could and clearly has had a long repertory afterlife with shifted functions. The subsequent path of development led either towards the decline of the

"individual" hero in incapacity or decadence, or towards romance and New Comedy in which heroism took on less iconic, if more survivable, forms. Both of these latter two alternatives centred on characters who *did* understand causality and prediction and displaced others who did not. These shifts in characterization increasingly subordinated character to plot as they redefined class terms, upending the pivotal balance of tragedy and reducing its ability to define a hero "of sufficient magnitude," representing "men as better than they are," and defining an agency rooted in intelligence and ambition and the possibility of class mobility. Jonson's characters, in particular, extended this paradigm in their total subordination of character to plot, in which characters, however clever, were defined as "humours" or types, ordinary language ("language such as men do use"), and the *routine* exercise of strategy.

Though we might think of individual plays as eternal, in this larger picture, tragedy was nothing if not transitional. In tragedy, Aristotle's dictum that character did not define plot but plot defined tragedy, produced, in both the Greek and early modern worlds, the modelling of conceptual shifts congruent with emergent economic orders and conceptual frameworks pointing towards literacy, the externalization of representation into objectified, limited, and examinable units, and a system of memory no longer, at least for some purposes, dependent on oral repetition, recreation, and renewal, but predicated on the permanence of written records. Those systems allowed for authorship and the systematic philosophies of Aristotle and Descartes and demanded innovation and change. Even for Shakespeare's work, in the 1623 publication of the First Folio, or for Jonson, in the 1616 publication of the scandalously titled *Works*, the transition to print marked their passages, as performance and orally oriented works, into the retrospective and literary past and iconic repertory functions, as it also signalled much larger changes.

This transition was, in both classical Greece and Elizabethan and Jacobean England, of course, a matter of scale. Greece had forms of literacy for centuries before the great tragedies and the theory of Aristotle, and literacy had persisted in England since 597 and the return of the church. Yet in both these earlier circumstances, literacy played different roles, transforming oral forms in their transcription, as considered in Chapter 2, and stabilizing cores of memory, as the codification of oral epics did for the Greeks, the Talmud had for Hebrews, and the Gospels for Christians, at the literate centres for practices that were, in the lives of a great many, still profoundly oral and based on repetition and renewal. Oral cultures persisted in the recitations of rhapsodes in Greece, the disputations among members of Hebrew temples, and the oral transmission of Christian doctrine. In those Christian structures, manuscripts were precious, the level of literacy to read them uncommon, and the authority of the church dependent on the

hierarchy that operated, at lower levels through the inaccessibility of texts and the need for delegated oral transmission and interpretation. In England and Europe, all of that changed dramatically when the introduction of printing made direct access to texts and more widespread literacy not only possible but, for some purposes, absolutely necessary. The changes in conceptualization and habits of thought that tragedy, in the short span of some 25 years effected, were training for life in the new terms of that revolution. As Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and many later plays suggested, the transition into thinking in terms of causality and plot was also the transition to thinking of power and wealth in terms, not of property and inheritance, but of planning and investment, and the more fluid structures of identity and social position that would accompany them. All of these were routine features of Jonson's New Comic world and constituted both modelling and participation in these new circumstances.

In tracing these developments, we have traced two related patterns that now need to be defined more explicitly. One, as just recounted, was the development, internal to tragedies, of the modelling of causality in the sequential plot and the structuring of time that accompanied it. Internally, these dramas, as they developed, provided patterns for thinking about the relationships between actions as they unfolded, and thinking about time and change in patterns that were not recurrent, but predictable and irreversible. In the larger frame, the very development of these tragedies also did something else that was equally remarkable. In the pattern of development or evolution deriving from the need for novelty and differentiation, in the sequence that *they* presented, they too traced out, however roughly, a pattern of incremental, causal, and irreversible change. They did not just describe change but enacted the kind of change they described. As the end of a revenge tragedy produced a circumstance very different from its beginning, so the plays that ended this sequence were very different from those that began it. The sequence of plays as described here can also be seen to have a kind of order or logic that, while apparently sensible in retrospect, was undoubtedly harder to see by those who participated in it, even as they, in their very intelligent and creative acts and innovations, gave it form to audiences that absorbed new habits of experiencing change.

The development of that pattern also required new ways of thinking about change and its implications. In his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot argued that

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and

so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the
whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the
new.[2]

In making this argument, Eliot was drawing on the ideas about time
and interpretation advanced by Edmund Husserl in *Phenomenology and
Internal Time Consciousness*.[3] Husserl argued that as events succeeded
into the past, they were constantly reinterpreted in the context of a present
inflected by newer experiences that in turn began their own process of re-
interpretation. In Eliot's explanation, that shift in interpretive frameworks
was cumulative: newer instances added to the context in which all were
then interpreted.

As considered in Chapter 2, Bogatyrëv and Jakobson and Havelock ar-
gued, in the circumstances of oral transmission, that is not quite the case:
the context always appears as present, and items are repeated and renewed
within it. If not, they fade from memory and lose their influence. What is
retained and renewed is always, in that sense, perceived to be "present."
What epic did the story of *Beowulf* supplant? The ones from which its
formulas were repurposed and whose images were embedded within it. As
Greek epics became rhapsodic and repertory, or medieval dramas faded in
function, their mnemonic functions began to erode. In the radically altered
circumstances of Greek festival tragedy or, even more markedly, the com-
mercial drama of Elizabethan England, past instances and representations
did not evanesce, but persisted, if not in repertory performance, in literate
and available texts. The context for interpretation, in this respect, was
radically shifted by a field of instances that grew ever more crowded.

In Nietzsche's theory, tragedy began as the inclusive experience of the
throng gave rise to the objectification of the single speaker who became the
projection of the throng's desires and spoke in alternation with the chorus.
That drama was always iconic and singular. As in Aeschylus's *Prometheus*,
until the very end, the interaction of throng and speaker operated in some-
thing like a constant state. In later plays, the single speaker was joined by
a second, resulting in the further objectification of dialogue that produced
a more explicit trajectory. With the further addition of speakers, interac-
tions became more complex and plot became more active as an organizing
principle. For Nietzsche, the critical transformation of tragedy, its loss of
mythic potential and subsequent "death," began with Euripides and the
further crowding of the stage:

… It is sufficient to say that Euripides brought the *spectator* onto
the stage. He who has perceived the material out of which the Pro-
methean tragic writers prior to Euripides formed their heroes, and
how remote from their purpose it was to bring the faithful mask

of reality onto the stage, will also be aware of the utterly opposite tendency of Euripides. Through him the everyday man forced his way from the spectators' seats onto the stage; the mirror of which formerly only grand and bold traits were represented now showed the painful fidelity that conscientiously reproduces even the botched outlines of nature. Odysseus, the typical Hellene of the older art, now sank, in the hands of the new poets, to the figure of the Graeculus, who, as the good-naturedly cunning house-slave, henceforth occupies the center of dramatic interest.… The spectator now actually saw and heard his double on the Euripidean stage, and rejoiced that he could talk so well.[4]

The internal manifestation of change in the crowded stage of Euripides mirrored the external circumstances just described: the stage crowded with characters in plays mirroring the historical circumstance in which the number of plays proliferated and formed an ever more crowded field of representations. *That* crowded stage, with all of its articulations of possibilities and exhaustion of alternatives, pushed tragedy ever farther towards its extinction as successive positions were taken and exhausted, eventually giving way to New Comedy, in which knowledgeable and savvy characters routinely threaded their way through crowded and complex circumstances towards satisfying comic outcomes. Tragedy did not die "by suicide" or by the moral and artistic failings of Euripides and others, as Nietzsche lamented, but by the inevitability of its very success. It was not an antidote to "the crime of individuation" as Nietzsche had hoped, but part of the very system that not only created it but made it an institution, as *Hamlet*, in both its originating circumstance, and long afterlife, has attested. By articulating change, tragedy *became* change, setting the stage for new forms: the internalized literate poetry of Herbert and others (the heirs of tragic individual subjectivity), and eventually, the epics of Milton with their reflections on time, progression, and free will.

All of that having been said, an objection might be raised that the account given here is both somewhat deterministic and mechanical. It is hardly surprising that it offers such an explanation, as it describes circumstances in the early development of exactly the regime that made such explanations both possible and routine, and within which they worked *because* they described their own processes and environment.

Did Shakespeare "intend" to create "the human"? Possibly, but it is also possible to think of that creation as an opportunistic accident or the product of an opening in this sequence of developments that Shakespeare recognized and exploited but did not create. The apparent need for the hero in all of the revenge plays to have agency, and, eventually, the *structural* need, as in *Hamlet*, for self-reflection in the empty space created

by the plot, manifested the pattern of change inherent in the form and circumstances of tragedy. It coincided with the transition towards literate representation that had begun to reward the playwright's production of change as authorship. It required identifiable agency and the theatre company's production of it, in the circumstances of literate reproduction, demanded the "author" as its cause and explanation. As Aristotle remarked,

> For, assuming that if one thing is or becomes, a second is or becomes, men imagine that, if the second is, the first likewise is or becomes. But this is a false inference.
>
>   (*Poetics* XXIV, 95)

Homer may have been the back projection by an oral and communal epic that had become a text that required someone to have written it, or, like Socrates, dictated it. Perhaps, in some sense, Shakespeare was the same. Had he not existed, it would, perhaps, have been necessary to have invented him. The "human" in this respect may not have been a self-creation or sole result of an act of genius, but a response to circumstances that "logically," though not necessarily intelligently or intentionally, created both opportunity and necessity for its invention. "Humanity," in this respect, was not its cause, but its outcome.[5]

And what of the image of "humanity" that it did create?

We have, of course, to a greater or lesser degree, been somewhat conditioned to think of this form of subjectivity and all the habits of thought that attend it, as relatively normalized if not as representing a teleological ideal to which we should aspire, though all of that is certainly changing. In spite of some evidence to the contrary, such as that offered by Laura Bohannan's 1966 article "Shakespeare in the Bush," we have also been conditioned to think of them as universal.[6] We have also been conditioned to think of Shakespeare as an icon of literacy, our habits of thought all but occluding oral origins on which he drew that seem distant and opaque to many of us. But oral cultures are all around us, in spite of the best efforts of many, now and in the past, to eradicate them. What of the societies that have *not* demanded authors and sought explanations through limited causal chains but seen value in the processes of renewal and recreation of connection, community, and extended relationships? Since Shakespeare's time and the first hints in *The Tempest*, those societies have not always fared so well.

This reflection began with some thoughts on Indigenous history and present circumstances. In North America, the history of the Indian residential schools has recapitulated all of the attendant problems with these interactions. The survivors of the schools too were produced as "modern

individuals," but often in a parodic reversal Shakespearean possibility in lives of alienation, trauma, and abuse. With the discovery of mass graves at the sites of such schools, North American societies are beginning to come to grips with these aspects of their pasts, and similar circumstances may be found in many other places. Part of that reckoning must be the recognition that our assumed habits of thinking about time, causality, and identity, creativity, and genius are not natural, but produced, and also have a history. They were generated by processes through which we may have benefitted but did not create. Our efforts to understand them may provide a new form of agency—not solely with the intent of undoing the past, but with understanding what may still be available to us as alternatives.

This may seem a disturbing conclusion to thinking about an era and form in which Hamlet so famously encapsulated emerging reflections on identity:

> What a piece of worke is man …

But we are living in a different era that is marked less by the opening of apparently limitless possibilities than by contending with the consequences of developments that, while "logical" and "progressive," have not always been in all respects either intelligent or intentional, and have resulted in difficulties to which we can only respond with creativity and genius—and hope that it will be enough.

In the meantime, we are also in a time in which a bit of humility may be warranted. We can trace back the ways in which the birth of Shakespeare and widespread literacy coincided with four centuries that we have often characterized, and in some ways rightly so, as "progress." We can also note the ways in which other habits of thought and social organization were supplanted by these changes and became increasingly hard to see or understand but have still retained their value. We might also consider the ways in which our own habituation to such thinking has resulted in a kind of back-formation of literacy that has distorted our own considerations of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In the twenty-first century, in some locations, and as the hold of classical literacy itself has been eroded by new media, we are beginning to reckon with the devastation that has been created, and the dismissal and destruction of oral cultures and their ways of thinking about the world and all of its relationships, just as we all, now, seek connection and need them most. Shakespeare too, like the rest of us, was only a bit player in this larger drama. His legacy, like so many other aspects of our contemporary situation, is here for us to understand, assess, and, if possible, use more wisely.

Notes

1 Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).
2 Thomas Stearns. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In *Selected Essays*, 13–21 (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), 15.
3 Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, ed. Martin Heidegger and trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1964).
4 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, transl. Walter Kaufmann, 15–144 (New York: Vintage-Random, 1967), section 11; 77.
5 The entire argument of this book has been to suggest, perhaps in somewhat new ways, that notions of both "character" (in the drama) and "subjectivity" (outside of it), are constructed rather than natural categories. This is hardly a new argument, from Aristotle onward, but it has had more recent and explicit explication in many theoretical venues informed by Marxism, feminist, structural and post-structural thought, and other developments. For one obvious and clear example, see Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Methuen, 1985).
6 Laura Bohannan, "Shakespeare in the Bush." *Natural History* 75 (August–September 1966): 28–33.

Reference List

Belsey, Catherine. *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Bohannan, Laura. "Shakespeare in the Bush." *Natural History* 75 (August–September 1966): 28–33.

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In *Selected Essays*, 13–21. London: Faber and Faber, 1932.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, edited by Martin Heidegger and translated by James S. Churchill. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1964.

Minsky, Marvin. *The Society of Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, 15–144. New York: Vintage-Random, 1967.

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, 85–126. New York: NYU Press, 2001.

Aristotle. *Art of Rhetoric*. Translated by John Henry Freese. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Aristotle. "The Poetics." In *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, edited and translated by Samuel Henry Butcher, 5–111. 1911. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1951.

Armstrong, Jeannette. "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmixwcentrism." PhD diss. Universität Greifswald, 2010.

Armstrong, Karen. *A Short History of Myth*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

Auslander, Philip. "Liveness: Performance and the Anxiety of Simulation." In *Performance and Cultural Poetics*, edited by Elin Diamond, 196–213. London: Routledge, 1996.

Baker, Howard. *Induction to Tragedy: A Study in the Development of form in Gorboduc, The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1939.

Baker, Susan C. "The Static Protagonist in The Duchess of Malfi." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22 (1980): 33–57.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikailovich. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968.

Baron, Sabrina Alcorn, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin. *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

Bartels, Emily. *Speaking of the Moor: From "Alcazar" to "Othello."* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Barthelemy, Anthony. Introduction to *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* Othello, edited by Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, 1–18. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1994.

Basso, Keith. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

Bate, Jonathan. *Introduction to* Titus Andronicus, edited by Jonathan Bate, 1–121. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Beckerman, Bernard. "Shakespeare's Theatre." In *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Alfred Harbage, 21–29. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1969.

Belsey, Catherine. *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. London: NLB, 1977.

Bevington, David. "'O Cruel, Irreligious Piety!' Stage Images of Civil Conflict in *Titus Andronicus*." In *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip C. Kolin, 357–72. New York: Garland, 1995.

Bevington, David. *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

Bogatyrëv, Peter, and Roman Jakobson. "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity." In *The Prague School: Selected Writings 1929–1946*, edited by Peter Steiner, 32–45. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.

Bohannan, Laura. "Shakespeare in the Bush." *Natural History* 75 (August-September 1966): 28–33.

Boose, Lynda. "Othello's Handkerchief: 'The Recognizance and Pledge of Love." *English Literary Renaissance* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 360–74.

Borrows, John. "Sovereignty's Alchemy: An Analysis of Delgamuukw v. British Columbia." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 37, no. 3 (1999): 537–96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.1522.

Calderwood, James L. *The Properties of Othello*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.

Calderwood, James L. *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in* Hamlet. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Carlson, Keith Thor. "Orality About Literacy: The 'Black and White' of Salish History." In *Orality and Literacy: Reflections across Disciplines*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Fagan, and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, 43–69. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3–328. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Collins, Stephen L. *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State: An Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Order in Renaissance England*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

Cox, B. Douglas. "The Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en as 'Primitive' Peoples Incapable of Holding Proprietary Interests: Chief Justice McEachern's Underlying Premise in Delgamuukw." *Dalhousie Journal of Legal Studies* 1 (1992): 141–60.

Cox, John D., and David Scott Kastan, eds. *A New History of Early English Drama*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Cressy, David. *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Cross, Gustav. "Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William ShakespeareAlfred Harbage." In *William Shakespeare, The Complete Works*, edited by Alfred Harbage, 823–25. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1969.

Cruikshank, Julie. *Life Lived as a Story*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Davis, Matthew M. "'My Master Calls Me': Authority and Loyalty in *King Lear*." *Renascence* 70, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 59–78.

de Grazia, Margreta. "World Pictures, Modern Periods, and the Early Stage." In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 7–21. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Delgamuukw v. British Columbia. 1991 CanLII 2372 (BC SC). https://canlii.ca/t/1g2kh.

Deroux, Margaux. "The Blackness Within: Early Modern Color-Concept, Physiology and Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare's 'Titus Andronicus.'" *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 86–101.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closing of Representation." In *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 232–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Dollimore, Jonathan. "*The Revenger's Tragedy* (c. 1606): Providence, Parody and Black Camp." In *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 139–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Dover-Wilson, John. Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare. Edited by John Dover Wilson, vii–lxi. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1948.

Drakakis, John, and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds. *Tragedy*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Eagleton, Terry. *Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*. 2 vols. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation." In *Selected Essays*, 65–105. London: Faber and Faber, 1932.

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In *Selected Essays*, 13–21. London: Faber and Faber, 1932.

Ferguson, Arthur B. *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1979.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" In *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, 113–38. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by Alan Mark Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Fox, Adam. *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Fox, Adam, and Daniel Woolf. *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Gage, Justin. *We Do Not Want the Gates Closed Between Us: Native Networks and the Spread of the Ghost Dance*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020.

Gell, Alfred. *The Anthropology of Time*. Oxford: Berg, 1992.

Gellrich, Jesse M. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Girard, Rene. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

Gottlieb, Christine M. "Middleton's Traffic in Dead Women: Chaste Corpses as Property in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Lady's Tragedy*." *English Literary Renaissance* 45, no. 2 (May 2015): 255–74.

Grier, Miles P. "Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England's Early Imperial Imagination." In *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush, 193–220. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Grier, Miles P. "Staging the Cherokee *Othello*: An Imperial Economy of Indian Watching." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (January 2016): 73–106.

Hamilton, Albert Charles. "*Titus Andronicus*: The Form of Shakespearian Tragedy." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1963): 201–13.

Havelock, Eric A. "The Preliteracy of the Greeks." *New Literary History* 8, no. 3 (Spring, 1977): 369–91.

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge: Belknap-Havard, 1963.

Havelock, Eric A. *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. "Tragedy as a Dramatic Art." Translated by Francis Plumptre Beresford Osmaston. In *Hegel on Tragedy*, edited by Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci, 1–96. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Higgins, Anne. "Streets and Markets." In *A New History of Early English Drama*. Edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan. 77–92. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Hollander, Robert. *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Homer. *The Odyssey of Homer*. Translated by Richard Lattimore. New York: Harper Collins, 1965.

Honigmann, Ernst Anselm Joachim. *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies Revisited: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Horace. *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*. Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Houston, Robert A. *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500–1800*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Howell (Quintus Horatius Flaccus), Wilbur Samuel. *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961.

Hoxby, Blair. *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Huffman, Clifford Chalmers. "'*Titus Andronicus*': Metamorphosis and Renewal." *Modern Language Review* 67, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 730–41.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, edited by Martin Heidegger, translated by James S. Churchill. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1964.

Innis, Harold. *Empire and Communications*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950.

Innis, Harold. *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951.

Jakobson, Roman. "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics." In *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, 350–77. New York: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley & Sons, 1960.

Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." In *Fundamentals of Language*, by Roman Jakobson and Moris Halle, 69–96. 2nd ed. New York: Mouton, 1971.

James, Kaylen J., and Kellyn J. James. "Putting Research into the Heart: Relationality in Lakota-Based Research." In *Indigenous Research Design: Transnational Perspectives in Practice*, edited by Elizabeth Samida Huaman and Nathan D. Martin, 243–62. Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2023.

Jaynes, Julian. *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

John Dover-Wilson, Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, ed. John Dover Wilson. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1948.

Jones, Eldred D. *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson*. Edited by. Charles Harold Herford and Percy Simpson. 11 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1925–1963.

Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Edited by Richard Ferrar Patterson. London: Blackie and Son, 1923.

Kahn, Coppélia. "Forbidden Mixtures: Shakespeare in Blackface Minstrelsy, 1844." In *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, edited by Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir, 121–44. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Klaeber, Frederick, ed. *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd ed. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950.

Kolin, Philip C. "Titus Andronicus and the Critical Legacy." In *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip C. Kolin, 3–55. New York: Garland, 1995.

Kolve, Verdel A. *The Play Called Corpus Christi*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966.

Kostylo, Joanna. "From Gunpowder to Print: The Common Origins of Copyright and Patent." In *Privilege and Property: Essays on the History of Copyright*, edited by Ronan Deazley, Martin Kretschmer, and Lionel Bently, 21–50. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010. http://books.openedition.org/obp/1062.

Kott, Jan. *The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy*. Translated by Boleslaw Taborski and Edward J. Cherwinski. New York: Random House, 1970.

Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Edited by J. R. Mulrayne. New York: Norton, 1970.

Levin, Harry. "'Othello' and the Motive Hunters." *The Centennial Review* 8, no. 1 (1964): 1–16.

Liebler, Naomi Conn. *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Loewenstein, David, and Janel Mueller. *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Loomba, Ania. "Sexuality and Racial Difference." In *Gender, Race and Renaissance Drama*, 38–62. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.

Loraux, Nicole. *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Translated by Anthony Forster. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Lord, Alfred B. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Lyons, Scott Richard. *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Machiavelli, Nicolo. *The Prince*. Translated by William. K. Marriott. Project Gutenberg ebook, 2006, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1232.

Maguire, Nancy Klein. "The Theatrical Mask/Masque of Politics: The Case of Charles I." *Journal of British Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 1989): 1–22.

Marotti, Arthur F., and Michael D. Bristol. *Print, Manuscript and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000.

Maus, Katharine Eiasman. Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, in Vol. 4, *Tragedies, of Norton Shakespeare*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 79–85. New York: Norton 1997.

McLuhan, Herbert Marshall. "Notes on Burroughs." *The Nation*, December 28, 1964, 517–519.

McLuhan, Herbert Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

Mendelsohn, Daniel. "Is the *Aeneid* a Celebration of Empire—Or a Critique?" *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/15/is-the-aeneid-a-celebration-of-empire-or-a-critique.

Middleton, Thomas. *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Edited by Gretchen E. Minton. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Miller, Bruce Granville. *Oral History on Trial: Recognizing Aboriginal Narratives in the Courts*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011.

Minsky, Marvin. *The Society of Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Minton, Gretchen E. Introduction to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, by Thomas Middleton, edited by Gretchen E. Minton, 1–106. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Mulryne, J. R. Introduction to *The Spanish Tragedy,* by Thomas Kyd. Edited by J. R. Mulrayne, xii–xxxiv. New York: Norton, 1970.

Mwikisa, Peter. "In Their Fathers' House: Resistant Alterity and the Law of the Father in *The Tempest, Othello* and *Titus Andronicus*." *Marang: Journal of Language and Literature* 18 (2008): 137–52.

Neely, Carol Thomas. "Women and Men in Othello." In *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, edited by Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, 211–39. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, 15–144. New York: Vintage-Random, 1967.

Ong, Walter J. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Orgel, Stephen. *The Idea of the Book and the Creation of Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Pearson, Meg F. "That Bloody Mind I Think They Learned of Me': Aaron as Tutor in Titus Andronicus." *Shakespeare* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 34–51.

Petrina, Alessandra. *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of* The Prince. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Petronius (Gaius Petronius Arbiter). "Satyricon." In *Petronius Satyricon and Seneca, Apocolocyntosis*, edited and translated and by Michael Heseltine, revised by Eric Herbert. Warmington, 1–384. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Plato. "*Cratylus*." In Collected Dialogues, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, translated by Benjamin Jowett, 421–74. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Pocock, John Greville Agard. *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History*. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

Poulet, Georges. *Studies in Human Time*. Translated by Elliott Coleman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956.

Rama, Angel, *The Lettered City*. Translated by John Charles Chasteen. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Ribner, Irving. "Character and Theme in Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois." *ELH* 26, no. 4 (1959): 482–96.

Richardson, Christine, and Jackie Johnston. *Medieval Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Robb, Kevin. *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece*. New York: Oxford, 1994.

Rosenberg, Daniel. "Joseph Priestley and the Graphic Invention of Modern Time." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 36, no. 1 (2007): 55–103.

Royster, Francesca T. "White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 432–55.

Rymer, Thomas. *A Short View of Tragedy; Its Original, Excellency, and Corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespear, and Other Practitioners for the Stage*. London: Richard Baldwin, 1693.

Sale, Carolyn. "Black Aeneas: Race, English Literary History, and the 'Barbarous' Poetics of *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 25–52.

Schiffman, Zachary Sayre. "An Anatomy of Historical Revolution in Renaissance France." *Renaissance Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 507–33.

Schwartz, Elias. "Seneca, Homer, and Chapman's 'Bussy D'Ambois." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 56, no. 2 (1957): 163–76.

Semenza, Gregory M. Colón. "The Spanish Tragedy and Metatheatre." In *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, edited by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., 153–62. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Susanne I. Wofford. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1994.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997.

Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus*. Edited by Jonathan Bate. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Sidney, Philip, Sir. *The Defence of Poesie [Defence of Poetry]*. London: Ponsonby, 1595. https://www.proquest.com/books/defence-poesie-sir-phillip-sidney-knight/docview/2248500521/se-2.

Smallwood, Robert Leo. 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Romeo and Juliet." *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 20, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 49–70.

Smith, Cassander L., Nicholas R. Jones, and Miles P. Grier, eds. *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 2018.

Smith, Ian. *Black Shakespeare: Reading and Misreading Race*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed. London: ZED books, 2021.

Sofer, Andrew. "Felt Absences: The Stage Properties of Othello's Handkerchief." *Comparative Drama* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 367–93.

Some remarks on the tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Written by Mr. William Shakespeare. London: printed for W. Wilkins, 1736. Gale Primary Sources: Eighteenth Century Collections Online. GALE|CW0116674653. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0116674653/ECCO?u=ubcolumbia&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=67374616&pg=1.

Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Reading the Body and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption." *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 121–48.

Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

Sterponi, Laura. "Literacy Socialization." In *The Handbook of Language Socialization*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, Elinor Ochs, and Bambi B. Schieffelin, 227–46. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Street, Brian. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Teramura, Misha. "Black Comedy: Shakespeare, Terence, and *Titus Andronicus*." *ELH* 85, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 877–908.

Thomas, Rymer. *A Short View of Tragedy; Its Original, Excellency, and Corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespear, and Other Practitioners for the Stage*. London: Richard Baldwin, 1693.

Thompson, Ayanna, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Thomson, George. *Æschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968.

Thrush, Coll. *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Trusted, Jennifer. *Physics and Metaphysics: Theories of Space and Time*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Collected Reports, 2015. https://nctr.ca/records/reports/

United Nations General Assembly. A/res//61/295, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2 October 2007. UN Document A/RES/61/295. Available at https://documents.un.org.

Virgil. "The Aeneid." In *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid*, edited and translated by Rushton Fairclough, 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916.

Waith, Eugene M. "The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957): 26–35.

Walker, James R. *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.

Westfall, Suzanne. "'A Commonty a Christmas Gambold or a Tumbling Trick': Household Theater." In *A New History of Early English Drama*. Edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 39–58. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1966.

Wimsatt, William K. Jr., and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. New York: Vintage-Random, 1957.

Wu, Cheng'en. *Monkey*. Translated and abridged by Arthur Waley. New York: Grove Press, 1970.

Wu, Cheng'en. *The Journey to the West*. Translated by Anthony Yu, 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Index