

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare in Hate

Emotions, Passions, Selfhood

Peter Kishore Saval



Shakespeare in Hate

Hate, malice, rage, and enmity: what would Shakespeare's plays be without these demonic, unruly passions? *Shakespeare in Hate* studies how the tirades and unrestrained villainy of Shakespeare's art explode the decorum and safety of our sanitized lives and challenge the limits of our selfhood. Everyone knows Shakespeare to be the exemplary poet of love, but how many celebrate his clarifying expressions of hatred? How many of us do not at some time feel that we have come away from his plays transformed by hate and washed clean by savage indignation? Saval fills the great gap in the interpretation of Shakespeare's unsocial feelings. The book asserts that emotions, as Aristotle claims in the *Rhetoric*, are connected to judgments. Under such a view, hatred and rage in Shakespeare cease to be a "blinding" of judgment or a loss of reason, but become claims upon the world that can be evaluated and interpreted. The literary criticism of anger and hate provides an alternative vision of the experience of Shakespeare's theater as an intensification of human experience that takes us far beyond criticism's traditional contexts of character, culture, and ethics. The volume, which is alive to the judgmental character of emotions, transforms the way we see the rancorous passions and the disorderly and disobedient demands of anger and hatred. Above all, it reminds us why Shakespeare is the exemplary creator of that rare yet pleasurable thing: a good hater.

Peter Kishore Saval is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Brown University, USA. In addition to *Shakespeare in Hate*, he is the author of *Reading Shakespeare through Philosophy*, also published by Routledge.

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1 Introduction

Shakespeare is the greatest of all dramatists of anger and hate. Everyone speaks of Shakespeare as the exemplary poet of love, but as a young man, I was transfixed by his hatreds. My life had not prepared me for the new feelings I found in Shakespeare's rancorous and disobedient tirades: Timon inviting his flatterers to feast on empty bowls of water as he assails them with stones; Coriolanus telling the people of Rome that he hates them as he banishes them: these demonic, unruly passions challenged the antiseptic safety of my world.¹ As I moved on to other plays, the spite, the rage, the enmity again intensified me. The willingness of these characters to expose their most undecorous feelings was addictive and uncomfortable at once, because I knew that I had these feelings in myself, but my white-collar education valued equanimity and coolness, and made passion seem stupid or immoral. "No one is born hating," said so many sanctimonious teachers. "People have to *learn* to hate." But in Shakespeare learning to hate seemed like one of the conditions of a fully lived life. Later, when I discovered the poetry of Dante, the tragedies of Aeschylus, or the characters of Dostoevsky, I realized that to appreciate their greatness was to be implicated in hatred.

I found that discussions of Shakespeare by teachers and critics had little to do with my experience of his dark, unsocial passions. Hate rarely got its due. Anger, of course, had the more respected pedigree: I was taught about the rage of Achilles, and the savage indignation of Juvenal; I read in Blake that the tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction. *Si natura negat, I learned, facit indignatio versum*: if nature denies, indignation will make verse. But hate rarely ever occasioned the response of wonder or pleasure. "Anger occasionally gets a better press," says the classical scholar David Konstan, "but hatred is almost universally condemned."² Jack Levin has a theory why:

Until recently, the term 'hate' referred to any intense dislike or hostility, whatever its object ... Beginning in mid-1980s, the term "hate" became used in a much more restricted sense to characterize an individual's negative beliefs and feelings about members of some other group of people because of their race, religious identity, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability status.³

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The meaning of “hatred” has been transformed in our minds to be synonymous with prejudice.⁴ So much of the study of early modern literature has focused on hate from this perspective. Anyone daring to suggest that hate can be thrilling and clarifying risks being called a reactionary. Yet wasn’t there something to Flaubert’s remark that “hatred of the bourgeois is the beginning of wisdom”?⁵ Isn’t there more than “prejudice” in Satan’s celebration of “immortal hate / And courage never to submit or yield” (1. 107–8)? Hatred in these cases has the power to lift us out of servility and ennoble us.⁶

Such lines show us that there is an aesthetic pleasure in hating, and that part of the appeal of the greatest works of art is that they revitalize our *capacity* to hate. In 1939, the critic D.W. Harding insisted, in an essay entitled “Regulated Hatred,” that the pleasure we should take in Jane Austen is inseparable from the pleasure of hating. The readers who would be most likely to appreciate the art and power of her work are “those who would turn to her not for relief and escape but as a formidable ally against things and people which were to her, and still are, hateful.”⁷ He reminds us of a passage in *Emma* whose actual force so many readers are likely to miss:

Miss Bates stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having so much of the public favor; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself or to compel an outward respect from those who might despise her.⁸

Except, says, Harding, that’s not what Jane Austen says. The passage above ends like this:

... she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement for herself, or to frighten those who might hate her into outward respect.⁹

Frighten; hate: “This eruption of fear and hatred into the relationships of everyday social life is something that the urbane admirer of Jane Austen finds distasteful; it is not the satire of one who writes securely for the entertainment of her civilized acquaintances.”¹⁰ Yet unsocial passions like fear and hatred are everywhere in Austen. According to Harding, Jane Austen’s work does not just represent hatred as a quality that various characters feel: her work is meant to educate us in *ways* of hating, to teach just which people we are to hate, how to hate them, or how to see characters as pleasurable and detestable simultaneously. The element of hate in the work, says Harding, is not to be misread as *satire*: it is rather fundamental to her art that hate is taken seriously as a judgment.¹¹

To assess the value of Harding’s claims, and their validity for the art of Jane Austen, is, of course, outside the scope of my book. I mention the essay not in order to read Austen’s work, but to point to a possibility in literary

criticism that may have escaped us: that part of the pleasure of great works of art is the *pleasure* of hating, and the delight and instruction of learning to hate *well*. The greatest Shakespeare critic, William Hazlitt, pointed to similar possibilities in his essay, *On the Pleasure of Hating*:

Nature seems ... made up of antipathies: without something to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action. Life would turn into a stagnant pool, were it not ruffled by the jarring interest of the unruly passions of men. The white streak in our own fortunes is brightened. Pure good soon grows insipid, wants variety and spirit. Pain is a bittersweet, which never surfeits. Love turns, with a little indulgence, to indifference or disgust; hatred alone is immortal. Animals torment one another without mercy: children kill flies for sport ... Even when the spirit of the age (that is, the progress of intellectual refinement) no longer allows us to carry our vindictive and headstrong humors into effect, we try to revive them in description, and keep the old bugbears, the phantoms of our terror and our hate, in the imagination.¹²

Though Hazlitt is one of my favorite writers, here he is carried away, even false. The tone is cynical, even a little posturing. But still, there is style, verve. This celebration of hate as a joyful rapture is delicious and breezy. It reminds me of E.R. Dodds on *menos*, the ancient “anger” that enlivens the soul:

When a man feels *menos* in his chest, or “thrusting pungently into his nostrils,” he is conscious of a mysterious access of energy; the life in him is strong, and he is filled with a new confidence and eagerness. The connection of *menos* with the sphere of volition comes out clearly in the related words *menoinan*, “to be eager,” and *dusmenes*, “wishing ill” ... In man it is the vital energy, the “spunk,” which is not always there at call, but comes and goes mysteriously and (as we should say) capriciously. But to Homer it is not a caprice: it is the act of a god, who “increases or diminishes at will a man’s *arete* (that is to say, his potency as a fighter).”¹³

The passage provides a window into the vehement passions as a claim about the world and a mysterious access of energy; at its most sublime, anger is not a failure of deliberation but a supernatural power. The unruly and fighting emotions are not just pathologies to be stigmatized, but forms of life to be celebrated.

The greatest art often brings us close to those forms of life. About William Butler Yeats, Joseph Hassett rightly pointed out, “Hate is Yeats’s passion of preference – so much so that when he dreamed of his goals as a poet, he ‘dreamed of enlarging Irish hate.’ ... Yeats’s letters and essays bristle with a

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hatred that is never far beneath the taut surface of his poetry.”¹⁴ In one of his great verses hate is not even beneath the surface:

Why should I seek for love or study it?
It is of God and passes human wit;
I study hatred with great diligence,
For that's a passion in my own control,
A sort of besom that can clear the soul
Of everything that is not mind or sense.

Yeats felt that hate connected him to a tradition of writers like Jonathan Swift. Hassett identifies this tradition of hate with the very form of Dionysian frenzy: “The use of hate as a wellspring of creative activity did not begin with Yeats. It is at least as old as the process by which the angry frenzy of Dionysac ritual gave birth to the Greek practice of ecstatic prophecy and the related notion of the divine madness of the inspired poet. Yeats forcefully asserted his place in this tradition when, in ‘Blood and the Moon,’ he declared himself an heir of ‘Swift beating on his breast in sybilline frenzy blind.’”¹⁵

Like Yeats, Robert Browning famously identified not only his own verses but the very spirit of poetry with the power of hating, as in his encomium that Dante is the greatest poet-lover because he is the greatest hater:

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper ‘Beatrice.’
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left hand I’the hair o’ the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man’s flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence) –
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel, –
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he – ‘Certain people of importance’
(Such he gave his daily, dreadful line to)
Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet,
Says the poet – “Then I stopped my painting.” (32–49)¹⁶

The poet hearkens back to Dante as the great precursor, not only of the spirit of love, but of poetry, and insists that this poet “loved well because he hated,” in order to identify the poet’s creativity with that spirit. Daniel

Karlin says: “Here, at the heart of Browning’s tenderest and personally most expressive lyric, is a figure of astonishing violence and cruelty, a figure of hatred, blistering, savage, demonic. ... What ... is the figure of hatred doing here? And what larger questions does it raise about Browning’s creativity?”¹⁷ Asking that question, Karlin goes on to identify hatred not only with the impulses to creativity in Browning but to the very pleasure we take in his poetry.

Gr-r-r—there go, my heart’s abhorrence!
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
 God’s blood, would not mine kill you! (1–4)¹⁸

Despite the fact that Brother Lawrence’s activities seem comically incongruous with the speaker’s rage, all the thrill and power of this poetry comes from the enlivening power of the speaker’s hate. Yeats and Browning place themselves in a literary tradition that links the pleasure of art with hate, and finds its creative impulses in the capacity for hatred and rage. The feelings of literary power can connect us to fighting emotions.

The fighting emotions; the darker and more demonic drives: did not so great a thinker as Freud teach us that we could not evade them? Yes, but what Freud gives me in his account is powerful and limiting at once. His most comprehensive study is in “Instincts and their Vicissitudes.” There he insists that hate is an instinct older and more fundamental to the establishment of the ego than love:

The relation of hate to objects is older than that of love. It is derived from the primal repudiation by the narcissistic ego of the external world whence flows the stream of stimuli. As an expression of the pain-reaction induced by objects, it remains in constant intimate relation with the instincts of self-preservation, so that sexual and ego-instinct readily develop an antithesis which repeat that of love and hate.¹⁹

So hate is older than love. It comes about from the separation of the ego from the outside world. Before that separation, Freud tells us, we are indifferent, closed, solipsistic beings who do not experience the external world as external. That state is called the “original reality-ego.” Eventually the “pleasure principle” begins to assert itself, and we experience an “outside” that the ego identifies with “unpleasure.” The ego wishes to incorporate that which gives pleasure and expel that which gives unpleasure: to suck at pleasure and to spit out what disgusts us.

The problem is that not everything unpleasurable can be expelled, and not everything pleasurable can be incorporated. There is an actual world over which the ego has no power and an actual body that it cannot wish

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away. The ego is no longer satisfied with dividing objects into those that exist inside and out, but begins to discriminate among those things that are outside: some external things are more pleasurable than others. This moment of the ego is what Freud calls the move from “judgments of existence” to “judgments of attribution.”²⁰ Without judgments of attribution, what is external to the ego would offer no pleasure. Without the capacity for pleasure in the external world, there would be no possibility of desire, or love. Behind every experience of desire for someone or something outside of ourselves is the original experience of hating. Hate, as the philosophers like to say, is the “condition of possibility” of loving, of desire, or even of pleasure in external things. Underlying every desire for what is outside us is that original spitting that establishes in the first place our separation from what we desire.

I said that Freud’s account is both powerful and limiting. Powerful because it argues that the primordial source of our hatred comes from our original condition of dependency. Freud reminds us that the darkest and most unsocial feelings may have a source in a prehistoric need, and our refusal to confront the fact that our self-sufficiency is an illusion. In my chapter on *King Lear* I explore the reality that such a refusal can be a source of our most vehement and aggressive passions. At the same time, Freud is limiting. By giving hatred a clinical, latent cause, a Freudian explanation deprives individual hateful feelings of their capacity to leave the psyche and become specific judgments about our world.

I find the same simultaneous power and difficulty of a Freudian reading of emotion in Janet Adelman’s excellent essay on *Coriolanus*, of which I will quote a little here.²¹ Adelman makes much of the following lines by Volumnia about her son after he is wounded:

The breasts of Hecuba
When she did suckle Hector look’d not lovelier
Than Hector’s forehead when it spit forth blood
At Grecian sword contemning. (1. 3. 40–3)

Adelman reads the lines above very much in line with Freud’s account of self-sufficiency and hate as a kind of original denial of dependency. In the lines above, the sucking from a breast and the spitting of a wound are brought together. Both loving and hating then become impossible to distinguish. Says Adelman:

The metaphoric process suggests the psychological fact that is, I think, at the center of the play: the taking in of food is the primary acknowledgment of one’s dependence upon the world, and as such it is the primary token of one’s vulnerability. But at the same time as Volumnia’s image suggests the vulnerability inherent in feeding, it also suggests a way to fend off that vulnerability. In her image,

feeding, incorporating, is transformed into spitting out. ... expelling: the wound once again becomes the mouth that “spits forth blood / At Grecian sword contemning.”²²

Wounds are compared to breasts; sucking to spitting. Dependency and self-assertion, pleasure and unpleasure, loving and hating, are mixed. The Freudian reading, then, leads where you might expect: Coriolanus is caught between a relationship of dependency and a striving for self-sufficiency that creates an ambivalence of love and hate in his relationship both toward Rome and to enemies like Aufidius. The play transforms Coriolanus’s love to hate, and his friendship to enmity, when he turns to fight on behalf of Aufidius, the general who was previously the man of his “soul’s hate,” and when he makes Rome, which he previously claimed to love, his enemy. But this transformation, as the reading suggests, is not a contingent accident but the outer expression of inward drives. By talking about dependency, Adelman identifies a feature I consider central to Shakespeare’s art. My study of *Lear* is about how self-knowledge in that play cannot arrive until characters confront a dependency that can never be managed or adjudicated. The reading above, too, shows how an original dependency can become a primary fact about his relationship to Rome that Coriolanus refuses to confront. On the other hand, by transforming an emotion from a claim that is patent into the sign of something latent, Adelman can avoid becoming implicated in Coriolanus’s anger. She can treat Coriolanus’s rage as a sign of his own evasion and insufficiency, and therefore evade it herself. Seeing the patent judgment in emotions evades what is latent, and seeing emotions as signs of something latent evades what is patent.

But whether we see them as patent evaluations of our lives with others, or signs of a latent cause, I am not writing the book simply to celebrate anger and hatred.²³ Hate can also be destructive prejudice or petty malice; anger can be trivial or damaging. There is nothing inherently noble or grand in any emotion. The name of an emotion, like “anger,” implies no necessary set of values. The value of an emotion is in the judgment it renders about the world, the claim it makes upon our experience.²⁴

To say that emotions evaluate our experience is to say that they are judgments.²⁵ We find the canonical expression of such a view in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*:

Let the emotions (*pathe*) be all those things on account of which people change their minds and differ in regard to their judgments, and upon which attend pain and pleasure: for example, anger, pity fear, and all other things and their opposites. (2. 1. 1378a20–3)²⁶

Emotions are those things about which people differ with respect to their judgments. They are attended by pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are sensations. In emotions, sensation and judgment are yoked. That vision of

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judgment as central to emotional experience remains a challenge to our assumptions. Emotions can be judgments in Stoic philosophy, too, but they are almost invariably bad judgments. As Robert Solomon points out, “Seneca the Stoic argued a more elaborate general thesis, about the nature of emotions, following the forerunner Chryssipus. On the Stoic analysis, too, emotions are judgments, ways of perceiving and understanding the world. Unlike Aristotle, however, Seneca saw these emotional judgments as essentially irrational – misinformed or in any case mistaken attitudes, distorted by desire, which philosophical reason, properly applied, would correct.”²⁷

Still, the matter is obscure. The passage from Aristotle would have meant nothing to me had I not read two books: one by Daniel Gross and another by David Konstan. Daniel Gross’s book *The Secret History of Emotions* takes Descartes’ account of the emotions as a shorthand for the kind of perspective that Aristotle helps us to challenge. Descartes’ study *The Passions of the Soul* begins by insisting that ancient perspectives on the passions have misled thinkers by turning them away from the body and toward the world:

There is nothing in which the defective nature of the sciences which we have received from the ancients appears more clearly than in what they have written on the passions; for although this is a matter which has at all times been the object of much investigation, and though it would not appear to be one of the most difficult, inasmuch as since everyone has an experience of the passions within himself, there is no necessity to borrow observations from elsewhere in order to discover their nature.²⁸

The truth of the passions lies in the science of the body: there is no necessity for appealing elsewhere. Gross says: “With this preliminary remark, Descartes renders human nature in its quintessential modern form: it is something housed in a body and subject to the self-evidence of a descriptive science.”²⁹ The assumption leads Descartes to his principle: “The ultimate and most proximate cause of the passions of the soul is none other than the agitation with which the spirits move the little gland which is in the middle of the brain” – namely, the pineal gland.³⁰ The passions are external signs of a cause that is internal to the body, and whose elaboration depends upon the language of science.

By contrast, take both Aristotelian account above and Aristotle’s specific definition of anger:

Anger is a desire, accompanied by pain, for a perceived revenge, on account of a perceived slight on the part of people not fit to slight one or one’s own.

(*Rhetoric* 2. 2. 1287 a 21–3)

How is Aristotle different?

First, anger in Aristotle is public rather than private. Daniel Gross says, “Anger presumes a public stage rather than private feelings. Alone on a desert island, [a] king would not be subject to anger, because he would lack any social standing that might be concretely challenged.”³¹ John Elster says that the social world implied by Aristotle’s conception of emotions is “intensely confrontational, intensely competitive, and intensely public; in fact much of it involves confrontations before a public. It is a world in which everybody knows that they are constantly judged, nobody hides that they are acting like judges, and nobody hides that they seek to be judged positively. It is a world with very little hypocrisy or ‘emotional tact.’”³² David Konstan’s book, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, is a study of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. Konstan writes, like Elster, that Aristotle’s world changes when the competitive atmosphere Aristotle presupposes becomes more suspicious and disguised; where “people tend to assume a demeanor comfortable to the ruler,” and there is a “new premium placed on identifying an inner emotional state from the close examination of outer signs.”³³ In a world of court foppishness, or white-collar niceness, where flattery replaces frankness, emotions become inner disturbances to be “managed” rather than judgments to be countered with competing judgments.³⁴

That is another difference: emotions for Aristotle are social rather than psychological. Gross says, “Aristotle’s anger does not presume our familiar psychological individual whose feelings are expressed in a fit. And despite its cognitive movement ... anger is not the expression of an opinion, as Stoics and contemporary philosophers would argue. Rather, its presumptions are thoroughly psychosocial. ... [A man] is angry because his entitlement is concretely threatened, and without that extra-cognitive entitlement manifest in the world around him ... [he] would have no angry thoughts at all.”³⁵ When we speak of anger in Aristotle’s sense, we leave the solitude of the body and enter social reality. Aristotle’s account presents a world where the response to an emotion is not a clinical description but a competing judgment. This is not because Aristotle doubts that emotions have a physical basis (cf. *De Anima* 403a16-b12, esp. 403a25). In fact, he Aristotle says elsewhere that emotions are “reasonings set in matter [*ta pathe logoi enuloi eisin*].” [*De Anima* 1.1. 403a16-b2]. Nevertheless, as David Konstan points out, he does not *reduce* emotions to such bodily states but rather emphasizes what can be gained by considering their non-material dimension.

This approach to emotions, as I suggested, is both insightful and limited. To see emotions as “social” rather than “psychological” allows us to confront the open, patent claims of an emotion. As a result it allows us to see them as moral evaluations rather than as psychological disorders. On the other hand, as I have said before, not every emotional judgment is patent. We do not always really feel what we claim or appear to feel. Our emotional judgments are not just the ones we openly avow, like our public anger, but the ones that we hide, like our fear of humiliation, or our refusal to confront certain kinds of incapacity. The fact that some emotional judgments are

latent is connected to another limitation of the approach I describe above: Aristotle's connection between judgment on the one hand, and rhetoric and persuasion on the other. Aristotle connects emotions to judgments in the *Rhetoric*, and he defines rhetoric as the discipline of finding, in each case, the available means of persuasion. But the emotional power of some of Shakespeare's greatest plays, like *King Lear*, comes from the disjunction between emotion and persuasion. Cordelia's love for her father has nothing to do with persuasion, because it is based upon a dependency that precedes our entry into the world of rhetoric and persuasion. Seeing emotions as patent judgments can be reductive, but also insightful, so long as we do not tether ourselves too strictly to Aristotle's frames and categories.

So we have encountered Aristotle on anger, and emotions as judgments. What about Aristotle on hate?

Concerning enmity [*ekthra*] and hatred [*to misein*] one can understand them on the basis of their opposites. Anger, spite, and slander are productive of enmity. Anger, however, derives from what happens to oneself, whereas enmity also arises without [the offense] being directed to oneself. For if we believe that someone is a certain kind of person, we hate him. Also, anger is always about however, derives from what happens to oneself, whereas enmity also arises without [the offense] being directed at oneself. For if we believe that someone is a certain kind of person, we hate him. Also, anger is always about individuals, for example Callias or Socrates, whereas hatred [*misos*] I also felt towards types: for everyone hates a thief and an informer. Moreover one is healed by time, while the other is incurable. Also, the one is a desire to inflict harm: for a person who is angry wishes to perceive [his revenge] but to the one who hates this is a matter of indifference ... Besides this, the one is accompanied by pain, while the other occurs unaccompanied by pain: for someone who is angry feels pain, but someone who hates does not. Also, the one might feel pity if enough [misfortunes misfall the other], but the other in no case: for the one wishes that the person with whom he is angry should suffer in return, but the other wishes that he should cease to exist.

(*Rhetoric* 2.4. 1382 a 1–14)

So much in this passage is wearisome and complicated. Everything is obscured in bewildering subtleties and over-fine distinctions: the Aristotelian disease. Why differentiate between "pain" and "harm"? Why must anger be directed only at individuals, while hatred can be directed at groups? Why is hatred "not accompanied by pain," a fact that, Konstan points out, would seem to "exclude hatred from the category of the emotions"? There are also the distinctions for the philologists: Greek language distinguishes between *ekthros* as personal hatred, and *polemios* as the hatred for a military enemy.³⁶ But

what is that to me? My interest is elsewhere than Greek philology. Everything becomes hair-splitting. The resonance of the emotions is lost. I begin to grasp the Renaissance distaste for those scholastics who cared more about Aristotle than the world. I abhor the pedantry that would bind itself in a servile way to Aristotle's concepts. But the lines still give me an insight. The passage, says David Konstan, "is a salutary reminder that there may be people deserving of our antagonism."³⁷ One sees a related point, says Konstan, in Euripides' *Electra*, where Clytemnestra remarks that "when people understand a matter, then it is right to hate it, it is just to feel disgust [*stugein*] at it." [1015–17]. The idea that anger or hatred is a judgment, Konstan shows us, means that it is possible to hate well as well as poorly; that there is good anger as well as bad. But what if there exists no independent metric that will establish those values? The grand emotions on the Shakespearean stage become a challenge to our own limited emotional range.

In studying the unsocial passions, we use words like "anger" and "hate." But these words are only provisional terms for a wide variety of possible judgments and feelings.³⁸ As spectators designating the name of an emotion, we do not mean that single state underlies a plurality of experiences that we might name, say, "anger." A variety of names in Greek alone designates what we might characterize as anger or a feeling that attends anger: *orge*, *menis*, *cholos*, *thumos*, *nemesis*, *achos*, *menos*, *chalepainein*, *ochthein*, *choesthai*, and others. And that list tells us nothing of our own synonyms for the same word.³⁹ Consider, also that we and even other Greek thinkers might call "anger" what Aristotle does not. Aristotle's anger is an emotion provoked by a personal "slight." What then, about the emotions we feel are provoked at the feeling of a public *injustice*? Other Greek rhetoricians, but not Aristotle, have included such a notion in their conception of the word. Moreover, in talking about the *Iliad*, we might use, with dangerous vagueness, the same word "rage" to describe Achilles' anger (*orge*) at being slighted by Agamemnon, and the hero's outraged grief (*lupe*) at Patroclus' murder.⁴⁰

A great work of art reveals that words like "anger" or "hate" lead us to emotions too subtle and various to be encompassed by these names. I believe, however, that the best way to confront such emotional subtlety is not through a fastidiousness about the terms we will use, but the sensitivity with which we interpret the emotional judgments in the work that we read.⁴¹ Philosophers often explain how emotions are judgments by providing simple examples: a woman crossing the street is pushed from behind and does not know why, or by whom. If she turns around and discovers that she was pushed by someone trying to get her out of the way of a moving car, she will not feel the emotion we designate as "anger." If she turns around and discovers she was pushed by someone who wished to injure her, she will. That is what it means to speak of the emotion of anger here not as a mere bodily sensation, but a judgment about *intentions* of another, and

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a claim about a relationship.⁴² But instructional anecdotes are by necessity bloodless and anemic. No one would watch a play about a woman crossing the street. The potency of rage in art and life is more fluid and alive than in these anecdotes. The serpent of “anger” in Shakespeare uncoils with greater demonic energy because its universe is more complex. We discover the fullness of a play’s emotional life in its richness of human delineation: we specify the emotion by specifying the world that it judges. We go from the simplicity of a name to the complexity of an emotion by providing a context. But that context comes from the passion and the claims that it makes upon us.

At the same time, in a work of art, seeing an emotion as a judgment requires *more* than giving it a context. Being implicated in a judgment requires that we see, not just how we arrive at an emotion, but rather what is of value in that emotion. Charles Altieri says: “Suppose that, rather than judging how Othello goes wrong, we ask what might be of value in the experiences he has by virtue of going wrong.”⁴³ That sentence means: what happens if we confront the value of feeling Othello’s jealousy and anguish before we explain how he has arrived at the feeling? The explanation of how the feeling arrived, says Altieri, has the danger of presenting “the sense of pathos seen from the outside.” By contrast, “Othello’s awareness of the tragedy he is enacting gives him access to ecstatic states completely lost in a moral or strictly action-oriented account of his situation.”⁴⁴ In Shakespeare’s theater we often access emotions as judgments before we see them as signs of particular motives or causes. Most criticism explains how Othello’s jealousy is rooted in his sexual anxiety, his relationship to the commercial politics of Venice, his encounter with Iago, or his sense of internal division between his status as foreigner and Venetian. “Yet the play,” says Altieri, “is not at all content with stressing what Othello leans about reality as a set of limits or what the audiences can learn through him, but all this is a means to an end that takes us far beyond concerns for knowledge.”⁴⁵ Othello when he feels jealousy has access to “ecstatic states” that are *preferable* to the sanitized, antiseptic safety of our professional lives. If they were not preferable, we would not go to the theater to experience them: or do we go to the theater only to receive explanations about the causes of Othello’s jealousy? No: we experience Othello’s emotions in a way that takes us beyond our desires for self-protection, and when we are taken beyond a desire for safety, we do not care only that the emotion of jealousy is “self-destructive” and we do not experience it as a form of blindness or an impediment to knowledge of the world: we experience it as an intensification of the world.

When we see Shakespeare’s passions as an intensification of our world, rather than a problem to be solved, we may look differently upon one of the most frequently described “problems” in the plays: the enigma of an apparently causeless passion. Critics have described the enigma as Hamlet’s lack of an “objective correlative” for his anger, the “motiveless malignity” of Iago’s hatred, and so on.⁴⁶ As I have said, our perspective sees an emotion as an evaluative

judgment and an intensification of experience. When we refuse to evade seeing emotions as judgments in their own right, we don't allow ourselves the refuge of dispassionately seeing them as "problems" requiring a solution, or replace our feeling of being taken out of ourselves by another's anger and hatred with the safety of searching for a "ground" for that anger and hatred. What adjectives like "problem," "groundless," "excessive," or "unmotivated" give away in our description of Shakespearean emotion is our inability to experience how distant the emotions in our ordinary lives are from those in Shakespeare's plays.

Richard Nettleship, a nineteenth-century philosopher, has an observation about *Antony and Cleopatra* that helps me clarify the point:

If you take *Antony and Cleopatra*, for instance, I should have thought you could safely say to anyone, "By all means go and live like Antony if you feel disposed to do so by reading Shakespeare; only remember that you must be ready to die like him; otherwise it is not Shakespeare's Antony that you are imitating." And I should be inclined to point the moral, not by saying, "You see what lust can bring a great man to," but, "You see what you must be prepared to face if you are going to make lust a grand thing, a thing to throw away an empire for."

What I feel very strongly is that most people, when they take what they call the artistic point of view, really do no such thing. They have no conception, as a rule, of the distance of their ordinary life from that which the artist represents. They are often just as bad, though in a different way, as the Philistine who sees in Cleopatra nothing but a common prostitute."⁴⁷

Nettleship implies that our enlightened, condescending compassion toward Antony as a "flawed hero" is as narrow as the philistine's desire to moralize about his sexual behavior. Neither attitude takes seriously that a passion might impinge on us, challenge us, and not just be a minatory example. The passions of *Antony and Cleopatra* present us, among other things, with a judgment that lust is *worth it*. Those passions judge that lust is worth throwing away an empire for, worth every personal and worldly consequence. They make us ask: what if a passion were not the sign of a character's opacity, or a bodily experience that offers us the safety of a clinical description, but a vision that marks the distance between our own lives and the work of art? Seeing a passion as marking such a distance means feeling its demands upon us. Shakespeare's emotions in my book are not the things to be explained, but the things doing the explaining.

Notes

1. References to Shakespeare in the text will be to Shakespeare 2008.
2. Konstan 2006, 191.

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3. Levin 2002, 1.
4. There has, in the last decade, been a growing interest in the interdisciplinary study of hatred that often goes under the name of “hate studies.” Hate studies attempts to promote, from many disciplines, a study of human hatred. However, it has tended to focus more on prejudice than on other dimensions of human hatred. For a good description of some of the aims of this journal, see Stern 2004.
5. Flaubert, letter to Georges Sand, May 10, 1867.
6. I do believe that the remarks I have quoted feel like a challenge to servility. As my book makes clear, however, I believe that the attempt to redescribe the hatred of Shakespeare’s characters in the metaphysics of freedom is a mistake. See my chapters on *Othello* and *Timon*.
7. Harding 1998, 25.
8. *Id.*, 9.
9. *Id.*
10. *Id.*
11. *Id.*, 10–26.
12. Hazlitt 2005, 88.
13. Dodds 1951, 8–10. Transliteration of Greek in this book is largely done without marks to indicate the length of vowels.
14. Hassett 1986, 4.
15. *Id.*, 14.
16. Browning 1995, 478.
17. Karlin 1993, 2.
18. Browning 1988, 199.
19. Freud 1958, Vol. 12, 109–40, 139.
20. Freud 1958, Vol. 19, 233–9. See the account in Recalcati 2012, 151–82. However, Recalcati’s Lacanian interpretation of the passage is less important for my purposes.
21. Adelman 1976, 353–373.
22. *Id.*, 359.
23. The rehabilitation of anger and other unsocial passions has been a small part of the tradition of literary criticism. Knight (1977) sings the praises of Timon’s rage. Braden (1985) studies anger in Renaissance drama and its indebtedness to the Senecan tradition. Outside the field of Shakespeare studies, Fisher (2002) is important for my work, and seeks to rehabilitate anger, rashness, and related “vehement passions.” Ngai (2005) discusses negative affect.
24. The reader may wonder about my use of the terms “emotion,” “passion,” and “feeling,” which I tend to use rather interchangeably. Burke 2005, *passim*, has surveyed the range of related words and concepts. Some scholars, like Mullaney (Paster et. al. 2004, 4), object to using the term “emotion” for early modern literature, claiming that the word did not come to designate feelings in our sense until 1660. The appropriate early modern words, it is claimed, are “passion” and “affection.” I do not find such historicist relativism to be particularly helpful, since the very term “passion” embraces conceptions as widely divergent as the Cartesian, clinical perspective, and the Aristotelian vision of passions as judgments. I follow the tendency of non-academic speakers, who use “passion,” “emotion,” and “feeling” interchangeably, because I dislike turning everyday words into technical jargon. Finally, in this book I tend to refrain from use of

the term “affect,” which frequently brackets out what the vision of emotions as judgments is interested in exploring. Rei Terada (2001, 82) has pointed out that affects are “bodily feelings, whereas emotions...are conscious states.” Since I am more frequently exploring conscious states than bodily feelings (see my discussion of Descartes, below), I find the term “emotion” more appropriate for my purposes than “affect.” Affect theory has produced some perceptive work (see Terada 2001, Sedjwick 2003, Altieri 2003, Ngai 2004, Jameson 2013). But the implicit assumptions of affect theory have not gone unchallenged, particularly in a recent account by Ruth Leys. In “The Turn to Affect: A Critique” (Leys 2011, 436–7), Leys remarks that “affects must be viewed independent of, and in an important sense, prior to ideology – that is, prior to intentions, meaning, reasons, and beliefs – because they are nonsignifying autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning...Whatever else is meant by...*affect*...the affects must be non-cognitive corporeal processes or states.” In opposition to affect theory, many Aristotelian thinkers from whom I take my lead, like Martha Nussbaum, Jonathan Gross, and David Konstan, are interested precisely in the cognitive, political, and social dimension of an emotion. All of those elements that affect theory wishes to push away (“intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs”) are often fundamental to the attempt to see an emotion as a judgment. That difference between affect theory and the approaches I have discussed above is no doubt why Leys singles out Gross’s Aristotelian approach as one study that opposes “the tendency to separate affect from meaning” so central to affect theory (*Id.*, 440). The perspectives I have quoted from Gross and Konstan are also close to Martha Nussbaum’s approach. In *Upheavals of Thought*, as Nussbaum summarizes in a later book (2013, 299), she defends “a conception of emotion according to which they [i.e. emotions] all involve intentional thought or perception directed at some object and some type of evaluative appraisal of that object made from the agent’s own viewpoint.” I have largely confined this kind of academic throat clearing to the footnotes, rather than the body, of the book.

25. I take my lead from the quasi-Aristotelian position that emotions are judgments. But the range of early modern perspectives on emotion is wide, and too great to account for here. Seneca cautions against anger in *De Ira* (1. 1. 3–5), but on the more complicated place of this condemnation in Senecan thought, see Braden 1985. Richard Strier (2005, 23) points out that the “Renaissance revived anti-Stoicism as well as Stoicism.” Seneca’s condemnation of anger depends upon the identification of anger with madness. But although the Renaissance revived the distrust of madness it also restored, in Ficinian and other revivals of Platonism, the celebration of madness. See Allen 1984. It is no accident that Montaigne’s condemnations of anger are written by a man distrustful of the exaltations of Platonism. We encounter another early modern revival of vehement or negative emotion in Reformation theology. Streier (2005, 23) remarks: “One of the great paradoxes of Reformation theology is that it is the doctrine of total depravity that yields such humane and comforting consequences.” Luther’s willingness to acknowledge his susceptibility to the concupiscentia of the flesh, and his expansive notion of “flesh” to include negative passions like “wrath, hatred, or envy against any brother,” relaxed the condemnation against such negative passions (see *Id.*, 23–31). In short the Renaissance discussion of vehement passions includes not just Stoic and

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Neo-Stoic condemnations, but their rehabilitation in Platonic, Neoplatonic, Lutheran, and other traditions.

26. Aristotle 1975. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
27. Solomon 1988, 183.
28. Descartes 1953, 331.
29. Gross 2006, 22.
30. *Id.*, 1, Descartes 1953, 341.
31. Gross 2006, 2.
32. Elster 1990, 75.
33. Konstan 2006, 31.
34. *Id.*
35. Gross 2006, 3.
36. For a discussion of all these features see Konstan 2006, 192–4.
37. *Id.*, 187.
38. Frederic Jameson (2013, 29) thinks that we should make a distinction between “emotion,” which he also calls “named emotion,” and “affect” as something that “resists the name”: “The new implication is that affect (or its plural) somehow eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings), whereas emotion is preeminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names. Traditionally those names – love, hatred, anger, fear, disgust, pleasure, and so forth – have been grasped as a system of phenomena.” By contrast, says Jameson (*Id.*, 30), the notion of affect helps him to clarify “the reifying effects of the name itself.” By “reifying effects” Jameson partially means that it is easy for us, when using words like, “anger,” “envy,” or “hate,” to treat these words as things in themselves, rather than provisional categories that embrace a variety of different moods, passions, or related states. An extreme version of treating names of emotions as though they were things happens when literature personifies emotions, as in allegory. An obvious example would be the personification of “furore” as bound in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, or the personifications of anger and wrath we described earlier in Spenser’s description in book II of the *Faerie Queene*, and so on. The example Jameson provides is of this account of jealousy in Spenser. In such occasions, Jameson points out, “passion or emotion lose their defining characteristics and become pure reification as such.” (*Id.*, 118) I interpret Jameson to mean that passion and emotion become *things*, and the name no longer appears as a tentative word to describe a range of emotions, but as identical to the emotion itself. Jameson indicates the danger with using words like, “hatred,” “anger,” or “envy” in talking about Shakespeare. We should avoid talking about a play as though it were an allegory that told us something about “envy” as though envy were a thing in itself. Instead envy should be treated as the starting-point for interpreting a variety of experiences for which the word itself is inadequate. Without insisting on this distinction between “emotion” and “affect,” I think that Jameson offers a useful caution.
39. Braund et al. 2003, 21–48.
40. See Taplin 1992, 193–202, and the discussion by Konstan 2006, 49–55.
41. That is why, although I approve of the remarks he makes later, I do not share Charles Altieri’s following point of view (2003, 1): “I had always hated criticism that preferred context to text and insisted on situating works in relation to historical forces and sociopolitical interests. But the imperative to work intensely on the affects came from recognizing that even criticism sharing my overall

values seemed to me too eager to equate texts with the interpretive frameworks we could put around them." As I say later, I do not distinguish between the emotions themselves and contextualization of those emotions, because for me seeing an emotion as a judgment necessarily involves contextualizing it.

42. See Konstan 2006, 44.

43. Altieri 2003, 21.

44. *Id.* I depart, however, from Altieri's claim that the "ecstatic" states to which Othello gives us access have nothing to do with a "moral ... account of the situation." For me the intensification of experience in an emotion is inseparable from its evaluative judgment. An emotion is a claim about how the world "ought" to be, and therefore is a moral account.

45. *Id.*

46. For Hamlet's lack of an "objective correlative" for his disgust, see Eliot 1921. For "motiveless malignity," see Coleridge 1969, 315.

47. Nettleship 1897, 95.

2 Rage in the World

The glamor of Cleopatra or Rosalind: none of that is in *Coriolanus*. It glows with no magic of personality. Its hero has no charisma, comes to no self-knowledge, participates in no miracle, transforms nothing in himself. “The hero is not a hero,” writes the poet Geoffrey Hill, who says, “What makes *Coriolanus* unique, and what I think causes it to be unpopular, is the complete absence of miracles.”¹ If ever there were a man who had no idea how to be “popular,” it would be the poet Geoffrey Hill. Still, “miracles” is a good word. Hill means: the open curtain that reveals the injured wife thought sixteen years dead, or the mad king kneeling before his wronged daughter to ask her blessing. These miracles are, Hill admits, “prosaic,” because so lacking in apparent supernatural magic.² Yet they participate in a mystery: the mystery of reconciliation, love, or what he calls “wondrous charity and forgiveness.” Self-knowledge, too, is one of those miracles and mysteries: “coming to one’s right senses, however briefly, whether in time or too late ... always has something miraculous in it or surrounding it.”³

None of that, as I said, is in *Coriolanus*. So why bother? For its rage, its disgust, even its contempt.

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As the reek o’th’rotton fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you. (3. 3. 121–4)

Those who have worked in unpleasant jobs might have daydreamed of saying such lines themselves. Isn’t that a familiar dream that this kind of anger feeds?

Rage can provoke fantasies that are petty. But anger as rebellion against the decorum of work is a real fantasy for everyone. Professors of Shakespeare and their students are white-collar workers. We push paper, sit in offices, go to meetings, and submit to managers. We obey private power, held by private institutions, funded by private wealth. We live in a world where the power we confront is often not the marketplace, the public square, or the senate, but the workplace. We write about the “rage” of Coriolanus as a threat to the “civility” of public life, yet we frequently write not as public citizens but

as private employees: employees for whom anger is a threat to the managerial “civility” of corporate, white-collar power. The scholar Eva Illouz, in a popular summary of her academic book *Cold Intimacies*, describes the problem:

Around the 1920s, psychologists started entering the American corporation. They helped executives better manage the workforce to increase productivity. One of the main effects, historically, of psychologists entering the corporation was to ban the expression of anger from the workplace. A good manager and a good worker had to display at all times their capacity to understand others and act to defend their self-interest. Anger became an expression of lack of professionalism, of someone who did not “have it together.”

Of all emotions, anger is probably the most political one: without it, one can hardly think of revolutions, demonstrations, and social protest. Yet angry people are told overwhelmingly by the surrounding culture that their anger is their private problem, that it has a psychic cause, that it can and should be managed and that failure to do so only shows one’s incompetence. But is anger a private problem? Think, for example, of the many ways in which the modern workplace is structurally made to produce anger: People are taught and trained to be original and creative, and yet for the most part work in entirely uncreative places; people are taught to be autonomous and self-reliant, but most often have to comply with strict bureaucratic rule and hierarchies; people are taught that their efforts and talents will be rewarded, but experience widespread cronyism and unfairness. People are taught to be cool and happy, yet the capitalist workplace can dispose of you whenever it needs to “increase efficiency.”

Modern workplaces are bound to produce chronic anger because they create chronic, structural deficits in recognition, where “recognition” is a crucial benefit sought by workers. Yet, the expression of anger has never been as illegitimate as it is now, because it supposedly points to a lack of maturity and competence. Anger is thus redirected to psychological couches, self-help books, workshops on anger management – thus defusing the enormous political power and potential of anger. When appropriated by psychologists anger then becomes delegitimized; it becomes unhealthy; it becomes a sign that one must work out some inner conflict. It becomes the private problem of the person who feels anger, a sign that she is not well-groomed or well-bred enough.

As a result of the delegitimation of anger in culture, anger workshops have mushroomed since the 1970s. Their techniques consist, for example, of imagining the object of anger, learning techniques of deep-breathing, meditating, empathizing – in short, of defusing anger.⁴

In the workplace, anger is stigmatized. Passion and frankness threaten it, and bland, antiseptic middle-managers fear explosions of rage, hate, and vituperations of passion. So anger is treated as a feature of defective character, is stigmatized as “immaturity,” irrationality, infantilism; given a clinical description. The discipline of psychology colludes with this stigma. Illouz doesn’t mince words: “when it becomes appropriated by psychologists, anger then becomes de-legitimized: it becomes unhealthy; it becomes a sign that one must work out some inner conflict.” Anger, in short, retreats into the privacy of the psyche or the body, and is the sign of an inner struggle against oneself, rather than an outer struggle against an illegitimate, corrupt hierarchy. The workplace wants us to see anger as the symptom of a *latent* cause, rather than the outward judgment upon a *patent* social reality. If anger is an inner disturbance to be “managed,” rather than the index of an outer failure to recognize the worker, the judgment of anger fails to challenge the workplace. If anger is the sign of the worker’s immaturity, rather than of the workplace’s inequality, then anger can be treated, rather than interpreted.

Yet, asks Illouz, how many revolutions, revolts, or protests have ever existed without anger? How could a politics devoted to challenging the status quo ever be a politics that had no connection with vehement passion? Private white-collar workplaces, manifestly hierarchical, threatened by any sign of rebellion, must convert anger from a political to a private problem. It is easier to treat the politics of anger in some sphere other than the workplace where the discourse of decorum and docility will appear less reactionary. *Coriolanus* is a good occasion for that kind of politics, since the explosions of rage come from a character manifestly anti-democratic. Coriolanus’s tirades against the people enable the critic to stigmatize anger as a “conservative” public emotion, and speak about the necessity of public “civility,” while securing consent for a private workplace where anger serves the needs of private power. The danger of Coriolanus’s anger, however, ought at least for a moment to have an allure that is preferable to the safety of our own “professional” workplace persona. The “reactionary” anger of Coriolanus may be anti-democratic in the fictional world, but in the space of our theater it is rebellious, because it threatens the posture of “reasonability,” “thoughtfulness,” and caution that we members of the managerial class, sitting in the audience, take for granted as the only permitted emotional responses to white-collar power.

I won’t bore you by quoting every critic who stigmatizes Coriolanus’s anger as childishness: I can think of very few who do not. But let us take, as a representative example, these lines from Kenneth Gross:

Despite his physical bravery and military leadership ... Coriolanus’s rage undoes him. His commitment to the public terms of heroism is curiously fragile, at odds with itself; it radically endangers the civic order he claims to serve. ... the specifically self-destructive form of that vitality can make his suffering seem more grotesque ... the specifically

self-destructive form of ... [Coriolanus's] vitality can make his suffering seem more grotesque than tragic, in particular because ... Coriolanus's self-created sufferings serve no larger or ideal end.

For all his *Romanitas* and aristocratic stature, Coriolanus keeps about him the energy of an angry, dissatisfied child, a boy in love with the expression of his will through verbal taunt and physical violence. His quickness in anger suggests a child's desperate need ...

Gross takes it as self-evident that Coriolanus's anger is childishness. He doesn't say what specifically makes Coriolanus's anger childish, because he can assume that his readers share the values of his social class: "maturity" is the absence of anger. Gross also insists that this form of anger threatens the public sphere, or the "civic order." But Gross's own writing is funded by private, not public, institutions: he has written this essay as a professor at a private university, in a book produced by a private publishing company. Gross writes not as citizen but as employee: his essay is private work, not public speech. The goal is not to attack Gross, a perceptive critic. The point is that we critics are constrained by history of our own, and that when we talk about the emotions needed for public life, we often do so within private institutions.

Gross says that Coriolanus's anger reveals the "self-destructiveness" of Coriolanus's character. There is no doubt, of course, that Coriolanus is destroyed in the play: the people banish him, and Aufidius murders him. The leap that we make from "destruction" to "self-destruction" is not in the play itself, but our reading of Coriolanus's anger. Illouz helps us to see how our institutional position promotes such a reading: workplaces will certainly destroy you if you exhibit anger, but they will also stigmatize that anger as "self-destructive." To privatize emotions evades something fundamental about their judgments. As Illouz implies, if anger were seen as a *patent* claim about recognition, for which the firing of the worker might be a response, workplaces would be forced to recognize that their relationship to anger involved a conflict of competing judgments, as opposed to the "self-destructiveness" of an employee who lacked the "maturity" to cope.

"When critics say that Coriolanus is immature," Geoffrey Hill asks, "to whom are they looking as a criterion of adult behavior? Would they rather have Menenius with his bland confidence in his class and his opinions ...?"⁵ Coriolanus is destroyed, Menenius succeeds: but if destruction in the play is a sign that anger is immaturity, is success in the play a sign that class mendacity is maturity? Ideology, I suggest later, is the belief that those in power deserve to have it, and those without power don't. That belief is shared by Coriolanus himself. Ideology, in short, is meritocracy. What is more fundamental to the workings of ideology than to stigmatize those destroyed by power as "self-destructive"? When we speak about Coriolanus's relationship to "civility" and to public life, or when we insist that his anger is self-destructive infantilism, we cannot be certain that our description of Coriolanus's anti-democratic anger is not also the ideology of our managerial class.

Eva Illouz indicates that white-collar workplaces tend to insist upon anger as a *psychological* rather than a social category. It is tempting, for this reason, for white-collar readers of Shakespeare to locate a substantial source of the play's dramatic energies in the psychology of the main character, as the essay by Janet Adelman I quoted in the first chapter has done. Not all critics have resorted to character or psychology in their study of anger and hate in the play. Madeleine Doran, in a study of *Coriolanus*, describes the "rhetoric of contention" in the play.⁶ She notices that the play expresses anger and hate in four principle rhetorical forms. One form is antithesis, the direct opposition of contraries:

COR.: What would you have, you curs,
 That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
 The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,
 Where he should find you lions finds you hares,
 Where foxes, geese ... (1. 1. 162–167)

It is hard to miss the "antitheses" in the passage above: peace versus war, lions versus hares, fear versus pride, and so on. Similarly, Volumnia's speeches are full of antitheses in the form of comparisons, like: better to die nobly than voluptuously surfeit out of action. Two other forms, closely aligned with antithesis, are synoeciosis, the "composition of contraries in the form of an oxymoron," and "paradox: logically a statement which is self-contradictory."⁷ The play has many of those:

VOL.: Anger's my meat, I feed upon myself
 And so shall starve with feeding. (4. 2. 50–1)

CIT.: We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do. (2. 3. 4–5)

Finally, Doran points out the rhetorical feature of *dilemma*, which she calls "a form of argument in which one is refuted whichever argument one chooses."⁸ The early lines of the play are just that:

CITIZEN 1: You are all resolved to die rather than to famish
 ALL: Resolved, resolved. (1. 1. 4–6)

The "rhetorics of contention, therefore" are everywhere in *Coriolanus*. And although the terms of rhetoric are rather clumsy, there is an advantage to seeing contention through these rhetorical perspectives.

First, we notice is that this kind of rhetoric can't just be identified with one character. Each of these features can be found both in the citizens and patricians, in *Coriolanus* and *Volumnia*, in the people and the elites. The presence of these features enables us to see that they may be

a sign of something other than character. The Citizens' resolution to die rather than famish need not be an index of their stupidity; the paradox of Volumnia starving by feeding need not be a sign of her psychological relationship to "nourishment," and Coriolanus's combination of desire and enmity in his relationship to Aufidius need not be a sign only of the erotic desire inherent in his hatred. I have said before that a psycho-analytic perspective on emotions can be both powerful and limiting at once. In some studies, like my chapter on *Lear*, I find it indispensable. I also think that psychoanalysis can be powerful for understanding the role of dependency in the character of Coriolanus. The focus on emotions through the perspective of rhetoric alone is, therefore, a form of reduction; but it provides insights we miss by seeing emotions principally as signs of a latent cause. As Jonathan Gross has pointed out, seeing contention through its rhetoric rather than its psychology enables us to see how emotions are an index of a social rather than private reality.⁹

In this essay on *Coriolanus*, I explore how reasonability, caution, and deliberation, on the one hand, and anger, rashness, or vehement passion on the other hand, can point beyond the psyche, toward social and political pressures. I used the terms "reasonability, caution, and deliberation," and I would like to remind the reader that "reasonability" is not reason, and "thoughtfulness" is not thought. Yet we are accustomed to think so, and to forget that rashness may have its own reason. Classical philosophers knew this. They praised something that they called *parrhesia*: fearless or frank speech. In Michel Foucault's lectures on the topic, he says: "For there to be *parrhesia* ... the subject must be taking some kind of risk [in speaking] this truth which he signs as his opinion, his thought, his belief, a risk which concerns his relationship with the person to whom he is speaking. For there to be *parrhesia*, in speaking the truth one must open up, establish, and confront the risk of offending the other person, of irritating him, of making him angry and provoking him to conduct which may even be extremely violent. So it is truth subject to the risk of violence."¹⁰

Truth subject to the risk of violence is *parrhesia*. This truth has an emotional character. Its emotions are hostile:

And in speaking this truth far from establishing this positive bond of shared knowledge, heritage, filiation, gratitude... [the parrhesiast] may instead provoke the other's anger, antagonize an enemy, he may arouse the hostility of the city, or, if he is speaking the truth to a bad and tyrannical sovereign, he may provoke vengeance and punishment. And he may go so far as to risk his life, since he may pay with his life for the truth he has told. Whereas, in the case of the technician's truth-telling, teaching ensures the survival of knowledge, the person who practices *parrhesia* risks death. The technician's and teacher's truth-telling brings together and binds; the parrhesiast's truth telling risks hostility, war, hatred, and death.¹¹

The truth of the parrhesiast is not the truth of consensus, generosity, or common concern and interest. The truth in this picture results from the possibility of hostility, hatred, and enmity, and the willingness to risk provoking them. The truth is not technocratic: it has nothing to do with the “technician’s” display of expertise and specialized knowledge. It is not “tradition,” the handing down of knowledge in order to ensure survival. This truth is not a bond, not a way of forming “community.” Truth telling is vehement, aggressive, unsocial. Foucault in these cases focuses on speech, and the emotion that the speech provokes. But since we see emotions as judgments, we ought to move easily between speech and feelings. Any judgment, whether in emotion or speech, that risks the provocation of hostility for the sake of truth, is *parrhesia*, frankness.

Thomas de Quincy uses the word in passing as a way of talking about *Coriolanus*.¹² And thanks to an essay by Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, the relationship between Coriolanus’s words and *parrhesia* is now a topic in Shakespeare criticism.¹³ Vienne-Geurrin recognizes the possible connection between Coriolanus’s words as and the distinction between the parrhesiast and the flatterer. Vienne-Guerrin, however, wishes to distinguish between good parrhesia and bad parrhesia, and insists that Coriolanus’s *parrhesia* is bad. Vienne-Guerrin offers Foucault’s claim that “without *mathesis*, learning or wisdom, *parrhesia* is no more than *thorubos*, or ‘sheer vocal noise.’”¹⁴ As a result, any account of *parrhesia* must distinguish wise from unwise frankness, or as she calls it, from good or bad *parrhesia*: “Foucault’s description of the fragile frontier between good *parrhesia* and bad *parrhesia* that turns into noisy babbling seems to be particularly relevant to *Coriolanus* and to the difficulty there is in this play in distinguishing ‘rougher accents’ from ‘malicious sounds.’” (3. 3. 53). For Vienne-Guerrin, the distinction between good and bad *parrhesia* turns on emotion. In the previous quote we already see malice (“malicious sounds”) as the emotion most appropriately associated with noise as opposed to articulate criticism. Later Vienne-Guerrin also includes anger or choler:

What makes Coriolanus tumble into bad *parrhesia* is choler, with which he is associated in the play and which implies a fiery lack of control. In *The Dumb Divine Speaker*, one can read that “The mouths of angry men [are] like unto a pot boyling upon a fire.” Coriolanus’ tongue is fire ...

One cannot but hear Menenius saying that [Coriolanus] spends his ‘malice’ in his ‘breath’ (2. 1. 51–2) with a double ear, as it means both that he is honest and that his tongue corresponds to his heart, while, on the other hand, it suggests that the malice he has in his heart defiles his tongue ...

His tongue is the “sink” (1. 1. 119) of the Roman body through which he evacuates all the choleric humors that infect him. It is not fortuitous that there should be an explicit reference to Galenic medicine in the play (2. 1. 113).¹⁵

Vienne-Guerrin's account is smart. But she assumes that anger alone makes frankness bad. Parrhesia delivered in anger or hatred ("choler" and "malice") not only inhibits the telling of truth, it actually makes the speech unintelligible, turns it into mere noise. The "historicism" actually tells us something about us, not them: we know by now that the historical tradition of anger is too diverse for us to assume that "choler" makes speech unintelligible. Such a reading shows the survival in our own time of the belief that passion is madness, that speech delivered in anger is noise that cannot even be interpreted.

It is easy to stigmatize frankness by saying that frankness must always be "good." It is mere tautology to say that "bad" parrhesia is parrhesia spoken when the person should have been silent, that the person should be silent if he is unwise, and that the index of his lack of wisdom is badness of his speech. Doubtless: only the wise should speak the truth, and those whose words we dislike are unwise. The effect of such a description is finally to silence truth-telling. I wish, however, to escape the circularity of insisting that only the wise may speak by looking at parrhesia not from the perspective of its content, but in relation to the *risk* that the speaker takes in speaking. I wish to show that the vehement passions of malice and anger are not limits making good frankness bad, or turning speech into noise. On the contrary, the unsocial passions are central to the very conception of frankness. As we'll see, the fact that Coriolanus' speech is delivered in "choler" does not deprive his words of their meaning. On the contrary, Coriolanus's anger has *reasons* that are susceptible to evaluation and interpretation, rather than simply to a clinical description.

When frankness is truth, we stigmatize rage and hate at the cost of stigmatizing truth itself. Frankness might stir hostility. The parrhesiast cannot see unsocial passions as outbreaks of irrational behavior and speech. No: the assumption that reasonable speech is conducted without anger can only be assumed by someone who does not take the risks of the parrhesiast: "if the parrhesiast's truth may unite and reconcile ... this is only after it has opened an essential, fundamental, and structurally necessary moment of the possibility of hatred and a rupture."¹⁶ "Civility" is the necessary condition of interaction only in a speech where no one engages in the practice of frankness.

We can see Coriolanus through this vision of frankness. The man expresses hate and risks provoking it, not because he cannot "control his anger" but because his speech has a relationship to risk that other kinds of speech do not. His tirades indicate a willingness to risk banishment and death. Coriolanus may not be as wise and truth-telling as the exiled Ephesian Hermodorus (whose misanthropic exile also recalls the tirades of Timon):

The Ephesian had exiled Hermodorus precisely because he was wise and better than them. They said: "We want there to be no one among us who is better than us. And if there is someone who is better than

us, let him go and live elsewhere.” The Ephesians could not bear the superiority of someone who tells the truth. They drove out the parrhesiast. They drove out Hermodorus, who was obliged to leave, forced into exile with which they punished the person capable of telling the truth.¹⁷

Hermodorus leaves the city to practice the “contempt of men” (*misanthropon*).¹⁸ His fearlessness is identical with his exile, and is contrasted, says Foucault, with the posture of the sage, who speaks in riddles, or the teacher, who takes no risks in the truth he tells.

The explosion of unsocial passions and the willingness to provoke them risk hatred and enmity for the sake of truth. The suddenness of that risk, and the refusal to obey caution, is what makes this frankness rash. Philip Fisher, in an essay on rashness, writes that deliberation is only one kind of thinking. It is true, he acknowledges, “that we are ... able to be thoughtful and to act deliberately if and only if there is uncrowded time.”¹⁹ But we must recognize, as Aristotle has claimed, that character was often revealed in “how a man reacted to sudden danger, because in the case of quick, reflective response, the ethic or character of the person, along with the habits that define or settle our courageous character, had to be revealed.”²⁰ Of course, because “fear or anger alter us to something in the near zone of time,” and because “anger notices and then reacts to a slight or insult that has just happened,” anger is more immediately concerned with the rashness needed in a world of danger and risk than the emotions of deliberation and caution are.²¹ Anger, in short, is at odds with deliberate or thoughtful speech, but is closer to courageous and high-risk speech. This characteristic of anger goes hand-in-hand with Aristotle’s conception that there are two forms of weakness of will: rashness can be an indicator of one form, but the failure of rashness can be an indicator of the other:

But there are two forms of [*akrasia*], Impetuosity and Weakness. The weak deliberate, but then are prevented by passion from keeping to their resolution; the impetuous are led by passion because they do not stop to deliberate ... It is the quick and excitable who are most liable to the impetuous form of [*akrasia*] because the former are too hasty and the latter too vehement to wait for reason, being prone to follow their imagination.²²

But though Aristotle sees rashness as courage, in our time “rashness, commonly understood,” says Fisher, “is the defective minor partner term to our central notion of the deliberate pace of reasonable action.” Rash emotions are at odds with “hesitation, Hamlet-like doubt,” or a “prudence that slows down the will, allowing time for careful thought before action begins.”²³ So isn’t the suddenness of rash emotions, which is at odds with a prudence that “slows down the will,” at odds itself with reason? Isn’t, in short, rashness a form of madness? “Prudential rationality,” says Fisher, “is now so

basic a phrase that it might seem impossible to describe any other kind of rationality that gives us an acceptable relationship of the intellect to oral action.”²⁴ Fisher’s book is, however, entirely about the idea that passions at odds with prudence have a relationship to reason that we might not otherwise have recognized: “Throughout my argument I claim that by means of the passions a kind of revealed, instantaneous understanding is discovered by anyone in a state of vehemence at the same moment that it is revealed to others observing that state ... [S]uddenness and rashness in combination define a different kind of rational action.”²⁵

When prudence and deliberation have become so closely identified with reason itself, it becomes impossible to grasp the idea that non-deliberative, rash action might be something other than the other side of reason: madness. However, says Fisher, Shakespeare’s plays are meant to direct us precisely to such reason: “In those of Shakespeare’s plays designed around the passions the essential trait of the will of Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Romeo, or Juliet is that the will is rash.”²⁶ Indeed, Kent calls what Lear has done “hideous rashness.” Rashness is willful: “Rashness and stubbornness are aspects of the inflamed will. Both reveal, by being opposite to it, a norm of the will in caution and deliberation, a deliberation that also allows for reconsideration and later adjustment.”²⁷

But there’s a problem with “reconsideration,” “adjustment,” “deliberation”: “For Aristotle rashness was one of the extremes that defined the virtue of courage; inaction or cowardice defined the other extreme.”²⁸ If you believe that vengeance is ever desirable, then you have to believe in anger: “As we see from the street encounters in *Romeo and Juliet*, retaliation that follows from aroused anger must be sudden. Rashness implies suddenness. Anger and vengeance as forms of justice depend on rashness.”²⁹

The difference between justice and vengeance is delay. Vengeance is rash; justice is deliberate. The greater the delay between anger and its resolution, the greater the deliberation that leads from anger to its vindication, the more likely judgment is to be connected to justice and not vengeance. Emotions happen in time. Deliberation is about allowing *time* for the emotion to “cool off”: the notion of justice is so bound up with ideas of procedure and deliberation precisely because “rashness” is involved with revenge, and therefore with injustice. Yet, some moments call for justice and some for vengeance; some for deliberation and pause and others for immediate courage. As Macbeth once says, it is impossible to possess, at one and the same moment, these divided and conflicting virtues:

Who can be wise, amaz’d temp’rate and furious
Loyal and neutral in a moment? No man.
Th’expedition of my violent love
Outrun the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan
His silver skin laced with his golden blood
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature. (2. 3. 108–11)

Macbeth's remark reminds us that there are other virtues than the ability to "pause," as there are other qualities we admire beyond process. Macbeth praises not of temperance but love, not neutrality but loyalty. Macbeth shows that vengeance, and, therefore, rashness is morally legible. But matters are not that simple: Macbeth's rashness is a ruse, because it was premeditated. What the critic G. Wright says about the meter shows it: breaks in the pentameter line ("Who can be wise, amaz'd, temperate, and furious") precede lines that scan perfectly ("his silver skin laced with his golden blood").³⁰ The form of Macbeth's lines reflects what we know about the context: the speech shows rashness and deliberation at the same time. We will return in a moment to what it means to interpret such a combination. For now the point is that both rashness and delay can be as morally legible, and as legible in poetic form, as the emotions that give rise to them.

Rashness, however, is what you need in vengeance and war, while delay is what you need in justice. That is Menenius's point to the Tribunes:

MENENIUS: One word more, one word!
This tiger-footed rage, when it shall find

The harm of unscanned swiftness, will too late
Tie leaden pounds to's heels. Proceed by process ... (3. 1. 310–313)

"Tiger-footed rage" is rashness, and its "unscanned swiftness" threatens "process" and procedure. For Coriolanus, however, the delay of swiftness shows not justice but the failure to fight. That's why when he arrives at the battle of Corioles, he asks: "Come I too late?" (1. 6. 23) Lateness is the sin, not haste. For Coriolanus the human values of courage and risk still require the existence of rash emotions.

Politics is a conflict of emotions, but emotions exist in time: some are impetuous and some are drawn out. In the opening scene of the play, the particular form of judgment that we identify with the citizens is the form of deliberation; and deliberation is identified with speech:

FIRST CITIZEN: Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.
ALL: Speak, speak. (1. 1. 1–3)

Our question is not: "can the subaltern speak?" Their incapacity for speech is not the problem. The problem, for Coriolanus, is that they do nothing *but* speak. The problem is not that the "Other" lacks a "voice." On the contrary: they have way too many "voices." The opening lines tell us something about the speech of the citizens that Coriolanus dislikes. Their

speech is the opposite of rashness: speech takes the form of deliberation and procedure. Speech does not lead to action here, speech delays action: *before* we proceed, hear me speak. As a form of rhetoric that requires procedure, deliberation requires emotions capable of delay. The speech of the citizens is dilatory rather than immediate, and its emotional character must reflect that. The speech of public debate is not the speech of the parrhesiast because, although there may be polemics, arguments, and contention, in public the threat of violence and present strife is delayed by the necessity and form of procedure. Truth comes from a *process* and an *outcome*, not from the exhibition of *courage*.

So the character of the citizens' institution ensures that the intention behind their speech is a result of outward process rather than inward character. Take the remark made by a citizen about whether or not to deny Coriolanus the counsel if he asks properly: "Once if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him." (2. 3. 1–2). Stanley Fish remarks that "The 'ought' here is not moral, but procedural; they incur the obligation because they have bound themselves ahead of time to the system of conventions."³¹

Rashness is impossible for the citizens because they have committed themselves to a certain procedure. The procedure determines in advance that no sudden explosions of rage can alter the decision. That's why the citizens say that if Coriolanus tells the citizens his "noble deeds," the citizens are compelled to a "noble acceptance of them." Fish says: "It is not that they personally regard his deeds as noble (although some of them may), but that they are noble by virtue of their position in the procedure. Similarly, we are not to imagine that they really feel gratitude; rather they engage in a form of behavior which *counts as* an expression of it."³² Fish, in short, describes a situation in which intention is the retroactive determination of a procedure: "intentions are available to anyone who invokes the proper (and agreed upon) procedures, and it also means that anyone who invokes those procedures (knowing that they will be recognized as such) takes responsibility for having that intention."³³ We can see that the very character of the institution makes "frankness" of the kind the parrhesiast values impossible. Speech can never be a transparent indication of the "intention" of its members because the procedure makes divorces speech and intention from "character." Coriolanus is right, for this reason, to hate public speech as flattery. It is "flattery" because such character traits as "gratitude" or "acceptance of nobility" come from a formula for *deliberating* rather than the emotions of the people who speak them. We discover, in the way these citizens deliberate, what we have come to identify with public bureaucracies. Certain institutions cannot be rash: they have ways of proceeding and formulas of decorum. Everything Coriolanus finds "noble" in emotion and speech – fearlessness, directness, and frankness – are threatened by those formulas.

There can be no “public sector” without bureaucracy. And bureaucracy isn’t poetry. Maybe William Hazlitt is right, in his essay on this play, to call poetry a “conservative” force:

The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power. The imagination is an exaggerating and exclusive faculty: it takes from one thing to add to another: it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favorite object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty, it judges of things not according to their immediate impressions on the mind, but according to their relations with one another. The one is a monopolizing faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion; the other is a distributive faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty. The principle of poetry is a very anti-leveling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast, it admits of no medium. It is everything by excess. It rises above the ordinary standard of sufferings and crimes. It presents a dazzling appearance. ... Poetry is right royal. It puts the individual before the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right. A lion hunting a more flock of sheep or a herd of wild asses is a more poetical object than they.³⁴

The imagination is “aristocratic” and the understanding “republican”? The claim sounds bogus. Still, it can be the starting-point for understanding the institutions that constrain speech and emotion in the play. So much that Hazlitt identifies as dazzling in the language of poetry – its “excess,” its excitement, its *disproportion*, and its lion-like ferocity – is at odds with the necessarily formulaic character of the citizens’ way of proceeding. Public institutions of the kind that the citizens represent can never have the relationship to spirit that poetry demands, because their character is about conformity to forms. Poetry must break with ceremony, decorum, and formula in order to renew and refresh the language. Public institutions are precisely about ceremony, decorum, and formula. As Fish has noticed, this is precisely how Austin distinguishes the public ceremony of promising from the private character of the promise:

We are apt to have a feeling that their [words] being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance. The classic expression of this idea is to be found in the *Hippolytus* (1. 612) where Hippolytus says, “my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other

backstage artiste) did not.” Thus “I promise to ...” obliges me – puts on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle.

It is gratifying to observe in this very example how excess of profundity, or rather solemnity, at once paves the way for immortality. For one who says ‘promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward and spiritual act!’ is apt to appear as a solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theorizers: we see him as he seems himself, surveying the invisible depths of ethical space, with all the distinctions of the specialist in the *sui generis*. Yet he provides Hippolytus with a let out, the bigamist with an excuse for his “I do” and the welsher with a defense for his “I bet.”³⁵

Leave the words “inward” and “outward” behind for a moment. Austin and Fish point out that the formal and procedural ideas of commitment are different from the kind of “personal” commitment that emphasizes, not the formal character of the words, but the relationship that these words have to the emotions, or the “spirit” of the person who speaks. This distinction helps us to understand the difference between Coriolanus’s commitments and those of the citizens. Once the citizens commit themselves to a statement (such as their phrase “It shall be so!” whereby they banish Coriolanus), that statement must be carried out regardless of the individual feelings of the citizens. By contrast, the character of Coriolanus reveals himself, in the end, to have no commitment to his country, friends or family: he betrays his country after having agreed to fight for it; he betrays Aufidius after being persuaded by his mother and family to do otherwise; and in the end, he even betrays them. This betrayal, however, is meant to accord with a commitment to a different kind of “truth.” His words are true not out of *formal* commitment but out of “frankness”: they always reflect the “spirit” and emotion of the person who speaks them.

Such a distinction between what we might call procedural or formal commitment on the one hand, and emotional commitment on the other, helps us to understand the otherwise absurd lines below, in which Coriolanus begs freedom for a host who shelters him, only then to forget the name of that host, and thus, fail to carry out the request:

COR.: I sometime lay here in Corioles,
 At a poor man’s house. He used me kindly.
 He cried to me; I saw him prisoner;
 But then Aufidius was within my view,
 And wrath o’erwhelmed my pity. I request you
 To give my poor host freedom.

COM.: O, well begged!

Were he the butcher of my son, he should
 Be as free as is the wind. Deliver him, Titus.

LAR.: Martius, his name?

COR.: By Jupiter, forgot!

I am weary, yea, my memory is tired.

Have we no wine here? (1. 10. 83–90)

Fish is right to notice what distinguishes Coriolanus's speech from speech acts: formally, Coriolanus has no commitment at all.³⁶ By failing to mention the name of the host, and carry out the request, he gives his favor no *procedural* meaning. The spirit in the words, the emotion behind them, is more important for Coriolanus than the process of freeing the poor man he mentions. No one doubts the *frankness* with which the words were delivered: Coriolanus speaks not out of formality but real gratitude. Yet without the formality of actually knowing the man's name, the freedom of this poor man is impossible.

It is typical of Coriolanus to care more about the feeling in his words than the formal commitment they produce. After all, he betrays everyone in the play, while remaining *true* to himself. But we should not see Coriolanus's feeling as "inward," and the Citizens' formality and process as "outward." After all, Coriolanus's emotional commitment is *equally* "outward": the emotions in his words are not states inaccessible to others, in the privacy or interior of the man. We are distinguishing rather between two different forms of outward commitment. One is commitment to an emotion, and the other is a commitment to a procedure. Both are patent, both are visible. But while Coriolanus's speech expresses commitment as emotional "authenticity," speeches of the Citizens and tribunes, as deliberative bodies, reflect and demand formal outcomes, rather than "authentic" emotions.

Coriolanus's expressions of gratitude toward the people need not, for them, reflect an emotion of gratitude; nor would the Citizens' decision to accept them reflect the emotion of acceptance. But the formality of these deliberative bodies has the character of a *decision*, however emotionally inauthentic, while the *informality* of Coriolanus's speech expresses a real feeling, yet frequently deprives it of the capacity to result in decisive promises for anyone but himself. In short, the "truth" of words like the request above is a truth of frankness, but not of commitment. "Let him alone," says Coriolanus to Cominius when the latter is about to beat a messenger for delivering bad news; "He did inform the truth" (1. 6.) Terry Eagleton remarks on moments like this: "Coriolanus is obsessed with truth, but truth as authenticity, not loyalty or fidelity ...: it is his nature to be wholly himself, and he stays committed to this wholeness even when it involves betraying others, or turning on his own society."³⁷ For Eagleton, the simultaneous authenticity and infidelity of Coriolanus's words make it impossible to be as self-sufficient as Coriolanus wishes. We, however, might see the disjunction between his frankness and his commitment not just as a flaw in his posture of self-sufficiency, but as the reflection of an institutional reality. Certain institutions, like the public body of the citizens and tribunes, promote deliberation. Other institutions, like the military, promote rashness. These

institutions also reveal a different relationship between speech and commitment: for deliberate institutions, that commitment is formally binding, but emotionally “inauthentic.” For rash institutions, the commitment is formally less binding because rashness lives according to its present feeling, not its previous or future commitments. For that reason however, the language in an institution that promotes rashness is more emotionally “authentic,” which is to say, it has a closer connection with the emotion of the speaker who delivers it. The disjunction between formality of deliberative speech and the “inauthenticity” of its relation to them helps us to interpret some of the citizens’ jokes and paradoxes: “though we willingly consented to his banishment yet it was against our will.” (4. 6. 145–6). Or “We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do.” (1. 3. 4–5). We will, but against our will. We have power, but we don’t. The patricians stigmatize this kind of language as “fickleness,” but these words reflect a distinction between the will in the procedure of the collective body and the will of its individual members. As Stanley Fish has pointed out, something is interpreted as being “willed” or “intended” if it has gone through the formal procedures of “willing.” As a result, because the “power” of the deliberative body is so formal, it takes away the power that belongs to will of the individual members within it. Even if the citizens reject as inauthentic the empty formality in Coriolanus’s exhibition of his wounds, they might have been required by mere procedure to accept them.

Different institutions, then, give rise to different forms of speech and emotion. We have seen one side of this disjunction in the opening deliberations of the citizens, which are about the hoarding of the grain, and subsequent inflating of grain prices that are causing the citizens to go hungry: we’ll come back to this. The debate is interrupted by Menenius, who discovering the contention, proceeds to answer the citizens with a *parable* or a tale about a belly facing a revolt by the other members of the body, as an analogy between the patricians (the belly) and the other members of the body politic (the citizens) (1. 1. 95–105). The “tale” introduces another mode of speech: the *pedagogic* mode, whose goal, in this case, is not actually to teach but to placate, to delay further, to prevent action under the guise of pedagogy. The citizens recognize this in their first remark, “You must not seek to fob off our disgrace with a tale.” (1. 1. 92–3)

The subsequent responses indicate that the oily Menenius is going on endlessly: “Well, sir, what answer made the belly?” Menenius’s form of “education” reminds me of Ezra Pound’s definition of a teacher: “a teacher is a man who must talk for an hour.”³⁸ As Pound sarcastically implies, the content of what the teacher says is sometimes less important than the act of filling up time. His posture of thoughtfulness and deliberation might be a ruse that hides his desire to delay and to draw out his words. Menenius makes this clear in the way he values keeping in check the explosive power of rashness:

Note me this, good friend,
Your most grave belly was deliberate,
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answer’d. (1. 1. 126–8)

The parable praises the values it hopes to exhibit: deliberate is good, rash is bad. No one has failed to note the obvious irony that the “belly” is more easily associated with the hungry citizens than with the patricians. Similarly, despite Menenius’s intention, we see that the deliberate character of the belly is more associated with the democratic character of the citizens than the patricians. Menenius’s speech, however, shows us how the posture of deliberation can be mendacious.

The opening lines of Coriolanus’s speech instantly indicate the disjunction between the bluntly aggressive character of his own speech and the cloying rhetoric of others:

MAR.: What’s the matter, you dissentious rogues
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Make yourselves scabs? (1. 1. 163–5)

The speech is more than frank, it is insulting. “Insult”: another category whose emotional character we must interpret:

MAR.: I will go wash;
And when my face is fair, you shall perceive
Whether I blush or no, (1. 9. 67–8)

One is tempted to characterize lines like these as *wit*, but they do not quite rise to that level. We have a form of speech more studied than rudeness, yet less glittering and polished than wit. There is a certain glee in Coriolanus’s insulting posture, and above all one finds in the speech the deliberate refusal of tact. Such tactless speech is rash, to be sure, since it is opposed to the caution one associates with tact. Gleelessly rude speech is thoughtless, non-deliberative, and does not defer the gratification that comes from immediately saying what one thinks. Aleksandr Solzhehnitsyn once said, “In the West, one must have a balanced, calm, soft voice; one ought to make sure to doubt oneself, to suggest that one may, of course, be completely wrong. But I didn’t have time to busy myself with this.”³⁹

“Parrhesiast,” in short, is a fancy word for “asshole.” But a parrhesiast has the courage to be an asshole. Coriolanus, as he says to the citizens, is blunt because of his courage:

MAR.: He that will give good words to thee, will flatter
Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs,
That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;
Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,

Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue is,
 To make him worthy whose offense subdues him,
 And curse that justice did it. (1. 1. 166–175)

Martius's point is that the virtues of deliberation that the citizens celebrate come directly from their fear of death. Martius means: the audacity you exhibit in these moments of peace, or the pride you exhibit in revolt, are a direct result of the security you have been given by those who have had the courage to do what you would never do. We ought to be familiar with this characterization of the master-slave relationship: you are slaves because you failed to risk your life. Your resentment of this position is only a celebration of the security provided by those who have won that struggle. Your audacity is a gift given by those with greater courage.

Elsewhere Coriolanus explicitly connects the risk-taking of *parrhesia* with the courage of the soldier:

As for my country I have shed my blood,
 Not fearing outward force, so shall my lungs
 Coin words till their decay, against those measles
 Which we disdain should tether us, yet sought
 The very way to catch them. (3. 1. 74–9)

Coriolanus says that he speaks the way he fights. Says Jan Blits: “Coriolanus equates speaking freely and fighting fearlessly. To be less than candid, he says, is to be timid and unpatriotic. In the same way that he never retreats in battle when fighting for his country, he will not remain silent when his country's good is at stake.”⁴⁰ It follows, therefore, that the emotions behind Coriolanus's speech are the *fighting* emotions: those of anger, courage, enmity, and rashness. The emotions behind those he addresses are the *non-fighting* emotions: deliberation and thoughtfulness. Kenneth Gross has pointed out that for Coriolanus even the inhuman sounds of battle carry a frankness that public speech lacks: “what Coriolanus primarily takes from the noise of war is a kind of moral candor and freedom; it is a freedom associated with a realm of physical risk and violence, but also one of clear knowledge and action.”⁴¹ The sounds of fighting have a strange “candor” even though they are not technically speech, because they are sounds free of dissimulation and lying.

Since Coriolanus identifies speaking with fighting, and fighting with speaking, his speeches are therefore not only delivered in hate but designed to provoke them. Yet the hostility of the speeches is clarifying in a way that Menenius's empty parable, with its explanatory posture, is not. In Menenius's tale, the belly is a placeholder that could be delivered about any group: the audience in the theater is made to feel that, should Menenius wish to, the same story could be delivered to the opposite group. Coriolanus's response is

not so universally applicable: it is hard to misunderstand his point. He states that the elites deserve to rule because they have more courage, and the people lack the strength for revolt.

Parrhesia as frankness: it doesn't mean that the parrhesiast knows the truth. It means that the parrhesiast puts the whole of himself behind his words, so that the discovery of the truth becomes possible. This is the point about Coriolanus's anger and hatred, and his desire to provoke those hostile emotions. We may hate the man. But that doesn't mean his anger is only a loss of rationality, a bodily disturbance, a humoral imbalance, a problem with his mother, or – what did Stanley Cavell once call it? – a refusal to exist within “the limits of finite human existence.”⁴² Coriolanus's anger has claims. Take a look at one of the most recognizable moments of anger in the play: it is the moment when Coriolanus reacts to the use of the word “shall” by Sicinius, one of the tribunes. The moment is particularly appropriate because it follows upon a rebuke against Coriolanus for his “choler,” a term ironically offered by Menenius:

SIC.: 'Twere well

We let the people know't.

MEN: What, what? His choler?

COR.: Choler!

Were I as patient as the midnight sleep,
By Jove, 'twould be my mind!

SIC.: It is a mind

That shall remain a poison where it is,
Not poison any further.

COR.: Shall remain!

Hear you this triton of the minnows? Mark you
His absolute 'shall'?

COM.: 'Twas from the canon.

COR.: Shall?

O good but most unwise patricians: why,
You grave but reckless senators, have you thus
Giv'n Hydra here to choose an officer,
That with his peremptory “shall,” being but
The horn and noise o'th'monster's, wants not spirit
To say he'll turn your current in a ditch
And make your channel his? If he have power,
Then vail your ignorance: if none, awake
Your dangerous lenity. If you are learn'd
Be not as common fools; if you are not,
Let them have cushions by you. You are plebeians
If they be senators; and they are no less
When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste

Most palates theirs. They choose their magistrate,
 And such a one as he, who puts his "shall,"
 His popular "shall," against a graver bench
 Than ever frown'd in Greece. By Jove himself,
 It makes the consuls base; and my soul aches
 To know, when two authorities are up,
 Neither supreme, how soon confusion
 May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take
 The one by th'other. (3. 1. 83–112)

Coriolanus's anger can be interpreted. In its own way, it seems planned. Jan Blits says: "Despite his rage," if one considers everything Coriolanus says from 69 until 169 as a single oration, "Coriolanus's speech follows the rules of classical deliberative oratory."⁴³ There are, says Blits, exordium, narrative, partition, proof, and all the other necessary parts of classical speech.⁴⁴ "Exordium": did you know it? I had to look it up. How tedious those terms of rhetoric are. Thank goodness Blits and Doran have learned them. Thanks to Blits, we can see an internal contradiction between the apparent rashness of Coriolanus's emotion, and the "deliberative" character of the oratory he employs to express it. In short, if anger is rash, and the non-vehement passions are "deliberative," the oratory here forces us to confront a *deliberate* anger. Rashness is itself meant to be a judgment against deliberation: the implication is that deliberation and caution are cowardice, because they lack the courage to make an immediate risk. Deliberation, in turn is meant to be a judgment about rashness: that impetuous emotions reflect a failure of the will; the angry and excitable "are too hasty and too vehement to wait for reason."⁴⁵

By eliding that distinction, the manner of deliberate oratory exhibits the courage of anger without the impetuousness anger. The oratory forces the listener of the speech to wait, while simultaneously exhibiting the frankness otherwise implicit in a rash emotion. The speech also offers *reasons*, and therefore cannot easily lead to the characterization of anger as an "unreasoning" emotion. The other speakers use the humoral term "choler," but the nature of the oratory forces one to see the anger *not* as a humoral imbalance but rather as a rhetorical strategy. In this speech the *rhetorical* account of the emotion reveals more than bodily or clinical explanations.

The second thing that we discover is that Coriolanus's anger does not exhibit a change in the self. The notion of anger as an "eruption" implies a discontinuity between the angered and the non-angered self. Yet everything in Coriolanus's speech above is consistent with an opinion he holds at every other point in the play. Coriolanus believes that giving extra power to the tribunes is a poor choice, that the patricians have superiority over the tribunes because of their greater virtue, and that greater concessions to the plebeians threaten the patricians with insurrection and loss of power. All of those beliefs are reflected in the lines above.

As Jan Blits points out, a key part of Coriolanus's argument turns on the rejection of a "mixed regime" of aristocratic and democratic components. A mixed regime will not, according to Coriolanus, be beneficial to the patricians. Blits summarizes the argument as follows:

For Coriolanus, power sharing is impossible. If the tribunes have any power, they are in effect senators and senators are plebeians. A mixed regime is not a mixture of aristocratic and democratic elements, but a democracy dominating and destroying aristocracy: "[A]nd they are no less [than senators], / When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste / Most plates theirs" (3. 1. 101–3). Such a regime is defined by the sort of men who rule and what they honor most highly, "[w]here virtue is not honored above all, an aristocratic regime cannot exist securely" (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1273a40-b1). A mixed regime, however, must always make concessions to non-virtue. ... A mixture of patrician and plebeian is necessarily plebeian. ... The fundamental problem of a mixed regime, however, is not simply that the low dominates and degrades high. In the end, a mixed regime is no regime at all. "[A]nd my soul aches. To know ... when two authorities are up, / Neither supreme, how soon confusion / May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take / The one by th'other."⁴⁶

As Blits unfolds it, Coriolanus argues that a mixed regime of patrician and plebeian elements supports the plebeians. One might remark on his inability to recognize Menenius's alternative position, in which the apparent deference of Coriolanus to the tribunes is only a form of flattery that gives the *appearance* of shared power while granting more political authority to the patricians. Coriolanus, however, argues that a regime should be determined not on the basis of which people are in power but on the basis of values or "virtues" that determine how power is accorded. Coriolanus wishes for an aristocratic regime that upholds the virtues he possesses: courage and the willingness to risk one's life. Courage in his mind equals service. The citizens do not offer that service because they do not possess that courage, and therefore should not be given either corn or tribunes in the senate:

They know the corn
Was not our recompense, resting well assur'd
They ne'er did service for't; being press'd to the war,
Even when the navel of the state was touch'd,
The would not thread the gates: this kind of service
Did not deserve corn gratis. (3. 1. 121–5)

The argument is that a mixed regime is an incoherent regime. A coherent regime rewards "service" and "virtue," and he identifies these words with the service he does and the virtues he possesses: courage and risk. It therefore

follows that Coriolanus's very conception of an ideal regime, one in which his virtues are rewarded and other virtues are devalued, also demands the emotion of anger. First, if anger is a form of frank or fearless expression, one that implicitly values present risk over deferred gratification, and courage over thoughtfulness, then to subordinate anger to non-vehement passions is *itself* to advocate for the very mixed regime Coriolanus dislikes: the subordination of angry, rash speech to deliberate "thoughtful" speech in the public space of the senate implies that the values of the citizens should govern in the political sphere, and that virtue of courage implied by rashness is a virtue to be confined to the activity of war. If Coriolanus is to exist in a regime in which his virtues have authority over the virtues of the citizens, he must exhibit the emotion that accords with such authority. To argue for his position without rashness and anger would implicitly condemn the argument he is making: if the rash patrician soldiers should rule over the deliberate citizens because the former have courage and the latter do not, then the argument itself must be made in rashness and anger. This emotional act about Coriolanus's argument puts him at odds with Menenius in his conception of the nature of rule. Such a case shows us what it means to see anger and rashness as *judgments* rather than as the humoral imbalances implied by the word "choler": Coriolanus recognizes that to "control his anger" is implicitly to concede the value that he insists a mixed regime would no longer prize above others.

To argue for an aristocratic regime of the kind Coriolanus wants is necessarily to argue for the superiority of rash, vehement passions. Some commentators on Aristotle's description of anger as a judgment have argued that this conception implies inequality of status and power. Daniel Gross, for example, says:

Anger [in Aristotle's description of it] assumes asymmetrical power. Some are perfectly entitled to belittle others and can expect no anger in return, while others, such as the slave, are entitled to none of the pride that would make them susceptible to anger. In other words, anger, according to Aristotle, is directed at those who have no right to belittle, and "inferiors have no right to belittle." (1379b12)⁴⁷

In this account, the very expression of anger implies entitlement to anger, and therefore power. The slave is not "entitled to pride," or perhaps fears retribution for his anger. The master is angry because he feels entitled to pride and does not fear retribution. Even when the inequality is not as directly given as in a master-slave relationship, the expression of anger implies an asymmetry based upon fear. The anger of a soldier like Coriolanus implicitly claims: "I am entitled to anger because of my superiority; I am superior because I do not fear retribution for my anger. My anger, therefore, expresses my superiority and my entitlement to that superiority based on the virtue of fearlessness." Coriolanus's arguments against the tribunes and

the people always turn upon the belief that those who rule *deserve* to rule, and their speech, manner and action must be a *present* exhibition of that desert. Coriolanus's anger attempts to express hierarchy and virtue at the same moment.

But anger and rashness are delivered in the form of *deliberative* oratory. The necessity of making the hearer *wait* until Coriolanus has delivered his reasons has to undercut the power of his attempt to distinguish himself from the public tribunal. For all of his apparent rashness, the very use of deliberate oratory legitimizes the tribunal's form of speech and emotion. What undercuts the character of Coriolanus's speech is not that it is angry and rash, but that it is not angry and rash enough. Coriolanus's form of deliberation is visible in the rhythm of the verse, which does not scan as we would expect from rash speech. George Wright, in his account of the relationship between emotion and meter, says:

The sudden flare-up of feeling ... is a favorite resource of Shakespeare's and some of the most memorable moments in his plays involve characters in sudden rages or recognitions ... What gives some such speeches, especially the later ones, their notably furious sound is that much of the anger seems concentrated in single words. This is an important Shakespearean metrical technique: one extremely forceful syllable (or sometimes two) may come to dominate a whole line and destroy an appearance of stress-equality among its strong syllables. ... Sometimes the strongly stressed syllables rise out of a long series of fairly strongly stressed ones, like suddenly dramatic peaks in a range of mountains:

Bloody bawdy *villain!*
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless *villain!*
(*Hamlet* 2. 2 580–1)

Not only rage, says Wright, but any rash emotion is legible in the meter:

Rage is not the only emotion that heats up the verse; fear, love, revenge, anguish, relief, or joy may have the same effect. Any emotion, discovery, perception, any change in understanding, may find voice in a quickened language. Certain characters – Hostspur, Capulet, Shylock, and Coriolanus, among others – are distinguished by their readiness to passion, by the rapidity with which they are crossed. Certain plays ... are constructed in a series of flare-ups.⁴⁸

Some of Wright's account of inflamed emotion fits *Coriolanus*, but many features of his account do not. "Some of the anger seems concentrated in single words."⁴⁹ That observation well describes the role of "*shall*" in

this speech. Otherwise, however, the poetic rhythm is remarkable for lacking those features that Wright has noticed in other Shakespeare plays. In fact, the “shall” becomes, metrically, so subordinated to the rest of the dramatic speech that it ceases to be an interruption of the poetic rhythm and becomes, instead, a part of the pentameter line. Indeed, most of the lines above scan as regular blank verse. By contrast, look at how rage throws off the meter in the line from *Hamlet* Wright quoted (“bloody bawdy villain”). Such a line indicates how Shakespeare *could* have represented Coriolanus’s speech if he wished to dramatize the effect of rage choking up the capacity for deliberate speech, and to indicate how the “flare-up” would have otherwise expressed a poetic rhythm dammed up with passion.

The other dimension of the speech that seems to lack “rage” is the syntax. Whereas the other expressions of disgust and rage above scarcely seem capable of distinguishing subject and predicate (“bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, kindles villain!”), the rage of Coriolanus is hypotactic rather than paratactic, and full of parenthetical clauses. The subject verb and predicate form (“Why have you given hydra to choose an officer?”) is delayed by first by vocative forms (“O good but most unwise patricians”), appositions (you grave but reckless senators), and parenthetical clauses (“That, with his peremptory shall,”), only to be followed by further parenthetical clauses (“being but / The horn and noise o’th’monster’s, wants not spirit / To say he’ll turn your current in a ditch / And make your channel his”). The syntax exhibits a capacity for delay of the gratification of meaning, a willingness to subordinate itself to the larger structure of the sentence, that seems at odds with the rashness outlined in these other examples that, to borrow of a phrase of Wright’s, are otherwise “syntactically disconnected.”

Had “shall” been the type of word that, through rage, made it impossible to continue, Shakespeare certainly knew ways to make such repetition of words happen, whether in prose or verse:

Handkerchief! Confessions! Handkerchief! To confess, and be hanged
for his labor! Is’t possible? ... Confess! Handkerchief! O devil!
(*Othello* 4. 1. 37–47)⁵⁰

The lines above show us how passion interrupts rhythm and syntax, and what happens with *Othello* above is not what happens with *Coriolanus*. We therefore need an explanation for the difference between the “rashness” of anger and the deliberate character of the form. The explanation that makes sense to me is not psychological, but rhetorical and institutional: *Coriolanus* is addressing deliberative bodies, that require deliberative rhetoric, and for whom the blunt address of insult is no longer effective. He finds it impossible, therefore, not to be “deliberative” under institutional conditions that require such deliberation.

Public institutions like the one above often constrain speech within limits that make frankness impossible. They create a distinction between the public and private self. Coriolanus doesn't see that distinction: in public he holds the values that would govern private activities like friendship. Foucault describes how, prior even to Plato and Aristotle, there began to emerge a kind of private parrhesia that turned on the distinction between friendship and flattery. Plutarch's essay, "How one may discern a flatterer from a friend," becomes a central text for understanding the stance of the parrhesiast in an important aspect of the tradition: the parrhesiast defines himself as the opposite of a flatterer. The parrhesiast is, in short, a friend. This is what distinguishes Plutarch from a Galenic tradition:

In [the texts of Galen] the parrhesiastes – which everyone needs in order to get rid of his own self-delusion – does not need to be a friend, someone you know, someone with whom who are acquainted. And this, I think, constitutes a very important difference between Galen and Plutarch. In Plutarch, Seneca, and the tradition which derives from Socrates, the parrhesiastes always needs to be a friend. And this friend relation was always at the root of the parrhesiastic game.⁵¹

It is fundamental to a very significant tradition of parrhesia, therefore, that its rejection of the language of flattery implicitly involve a stance of friendship. Such a stance at first seems utterly bizarre when applied to Coriolanus. Doesn't Coriolanus's enmity necessarily rule that out? "Who deserves greatness / Deserves your hate," he says to the people (1. 1. 171–2). And yet his entire stance of anger and enmity is predicated on the rejection of flattery: "He that will give good words to thee will flatter / Beneath abhorring ..." (1. 1. 162–3). And something that complicates the distinction between enmity and friendship occurs in the scene where he offers to show his wounds to a citizen in private: "I have wounds to show which shall be yours in private" (2. 3. 75–6). There is an obvious intimacy there that cannot easily be contrasted with friendship. The implication seems to be that the public display of one's wounds is mere servile flattery, while the private display is something else, more intimate, which we can only analogize with friendship. When addressing his soldiers, Coriolanus adopts the tone of rage, insult, and even hate in a way that is designed, paradoxically, to yield fraternity:

All the contagion of the south light on you,
 You shames of Rome! You herd of – boils and plagues
 Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorred
 Farther than seen, and one infect another
 Against the wind a mile! You souls of geese
 That bear the shapes of men, how have you run

From slaves that apes would beat! Pluto and hell!
 All hurt behind, backs red, and faces pale
 With flight and agued fear. Mend and charge home,
 Or by the fires of heaven I'll leave the foe
 And make my wars on you. (1. 4. 31–41)

It seems paradoxical to use the language of rage, hate, and enmity to achieve the ends of solidarity, but that is what happens here. The same imagery of “geese” that Coriolanus uses on the citizens he now addresses to the soldiers. The insults cause the soldiers to rally to his cause. Coriolanus’s insults are in a sense the stance of the parrhesiast whose steadfast refusal of flattery is the way of cementing these bonds of aid and closeness. In such a world, then, the difference between friendship and enmity may not be what is at issue. Friendship and enmity are sometimes indistinguishable from one another because both are stances of refusing to flatter. Coriolanus offers to show his wounds to a citizen in private for the same reason that he insults the citizens: both friendship and enmity for him are relations of intimacy or fraternity that the public world of flattery threatens to dissolve.

This perspective helps us to see why it is so easy for Coriolanus to move from friendship to enmity. That he turns on the people for whom he claims to have fought and makes friends with Aufidius whom he previously hated is no enigma. The important distinction for Coriolanus is not between friendship and enmity but between both of these and flattery. Coriolanus is a parrhesiast, who puts the whole of himself behind his words. Integrity is wholeness: being entirely the thing that one is. Acting before a public in flattery involves breaking that wholeness into different parts that can be used for different purposes.

Philip Fisher’s book cites an important passage in Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, arguing that body and soul have a certain unity in vehement states. In my first chapter I talked about my desire to emphasize the judgmental dimension of emotions as distinguished from their bodily character. Such a distinction is admittedly complicated in descriptions of the body and the mind uniting to form a single, unity judgment, as in Lucretius’s account:

Now I assert that the mind and soul are kept together in close union and make up a single nature. . . ., when some part of us, the head or the eye, suffers from an attack of pain, we do not feel the anguish at the same time over the whole body, thus the mind sometimes suffers pain by itself or is inspirited with joy, when all the rest of the soul throughout the limbs and frame is stirred by no novel sensation. *But when the mind is excited by some more vehement apprehension, we see the whole soul feel in unison through all the limbs, sweats and paleness spread over the whole body, the tongue falter, the voice die away, a mist cover the eyes, the ears ring, the limbs sink under one; in short we often see men drop down from terror of mind; so that anybody may*

easily perceive from this that the soul is closely united with the mind, and when it has been smitten by the influence of the mind, forthwith pushes and strikes the body. (emphasis added by Fisher)⁵²

If vehement passions, like anger, are judgments, we should note the integrity of body and mind for those judgments here. As Fisher summarizes: “No part remains focused in another direction or distracted by its own actions. ... vehement states saturate the body as a whole and the soul or psyche as a whole.”⁵³

The fundamental belief that unity, integrity, and wholeness are good, and that any division of the whole into its parts are bad, characterizes Coriolanus from the beginning:

COR.: I am half through,
The one part suffer'd, the other will I do. (2. 3. 122–3)

But the courage, rashness, and vehemence of the soldier is such that neither the body nor mind can be broken into halves or parts: every gesture of the body is meant to reveal the character of the mind. That's why for Coriolanus a body can teach the mind something about judgment:

Lest I surcease to honor mine own truth
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness. (3. 2. 121–3)

The idea that the *body* might teach baseness to the mind arises from the integrity of body and mind in the activity of Coriolanus the warrior. The point here is neither that emotion is an activity demanding a clinical explanation in the causes of the body (the “pineal gland”) nor that emotion is a purely “mental” or “cognitive” activity having nothing to do with the body, but rather that emotion, whether it come from the body or the mind, is a judgment about the world and the person who has it: Coriolanus's body might *reveal* the emotion that he tries to hide, and thus deliver the judgment he wishes to dissimulate. It is for this reason that Coriolanus often describes his body giving away those features of his judgment that his dissembling would have tried to hide:

COR.: It is a part
That I shall blush in acting, and might well
Be taken from the people ... (2. 2. 145–6)

Coriolanus reveals the impossibility that a “part” can be taken for a whole: if he tries, his body will revolt and reveal, through blushing, the integrity of his original emotion.⁵⁴ Coriolanus cannot display his wounds precisely because he cannot treat the part of the body as though it were the whole:

he cannot make the wounds *represent* him as though they could stand in for him. Adrian Poole puts this well:

But standing *for* things (in both senses) is what he finds abhorrent. “I won’t stand for it!” might well be his motto. He does not care to stand for praise, the consulship, the people’s voices – any activity that would involve conceding that he is representing a “part” rather than a whole.⁵⁵

In short, Coriolanus’s argument against “representative” government goes more deeply to the fundamental integrity of body, soul, and judgment that the soldier exhibits during vehement states. It is not that Coriolanus “fails to control” his anger but rather that his anger is bound up with the integrity of vehement passion that he must embody and reveal. No wonder his principal argument is against the very idea of a “mixed regime” (as Blits calls it) between the tribunes and the patricians such that integrity will be assailed by division:

This double worship,
Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
Insult without all reason ...
Your dishonor
Mangles true judgment, and bereaves the state
Of that integrity which should becom’t ... (3. 1. 139–157)

“Double worship,” divided rule, breaking into parts: all these threats to “integrity” cannot be argued in an emotional state that would *itself* break whole into its parts, and divide the inward feeling from its outward expression; therefore, the very claim must be delivered in the state of vehemence Coriolanus identifies with wholeness. A fundamental unity therefore binds together the political position of Coriolanus, his emotions, and his character as a soldier.

The unity of the fighter is the reason for the absence in Coriolanus of that feature we venerate in Shakespeare: “interiority.” We have remarked on Coriolanus’s failure, or refusal, to exhibit that self-questioning, that private introspection, that is so often celebrated in Shakespearean character. Coriolanus’s very anger, however, is a judgment against the division of a public and private self that such a desire for interiority implies. Philip Fisher again:

From our modern perspective, one of the most important features of the [vehement] passions was their capacity to override any division between inner states of feeling and outward expression. The passions make impossible any split between the spirit and the expression of

the spirit in the language of the body. The creation of the crucial realm of privacy is partly made possible by an ethos of restraint that severs the surface of the body from the feelings within. In the blush, the shout of rage, smile of wonder, and the flow of tears, the inner passions of embarrassment, anger, wonder, and grief are displayed in the outer world. The realm of privacy and inwardness can be created only at the cost of redesigning and filtering the passions, creating a new inner world composed of emotions, feelings, moods, and sentiments. This new realm of privacy presupposed a control over the distribution of knowledge about oneself and one's inner states. ... *To share or not share details of consciousness and feeling became one of the features of the decorum of civil society* and of the confessional or reticent self ...⁵⁶

Fisher's description hits the mark on how this private realm of moods changes our relationship to the body and the world. Both Menenius and Coriolanus perceive that the emergence of a more "representative" government demands the emergence of a different kind of "public" self. The very existence of a public self means the division of the self into parts: the public self is not the private self, and must conduct itself with a "decorum" that demands the breaking up one's inner from one's outer states.

Coriolanus insults the citizens through synecdoche. When the Citizens refer to their "voices" the word instantly becomes a term of abuse. In Coriolanus's sneering vocabulary the citizens are replaceable with their "voices," "tongues," "teeth," and so on. He hates that the part stands in for the whole, that the body can be broken into parts, and lack integrity and unity. We can see Menenius's parable in this context, which implausibly imagines the integrity of body divided among its members. Such a parable both imagines the impossible division of the body and reflects the dissembling character of Menenius himself.

For Coriolanus, of course, "integrity" is fundamental to the concept of "nobility." As he says above, he cannot see how something can be divided in its wholeness and integrity and yet retain its nobility, whether that something is an individual soldier or the senate as a whole. The word "noble" in the play means two things: it refers to those who *have* power and those who *deserve* to have it. In Martius's language we often have uses like the address to those that "prefer a noble life before a long" (3.1.154), indicating that nobility is a *virtue* but also implying the other meaning, "those who prefer not to give their nobility to those who lack the courage to risk their life." Of course, the two meanings are the same for Coriolanus: the refusal to overvalue one's life is both the thing he demands of the nobility and the quality he identifies with the nobility. In the speeches of the people the attempt to describe nobility as an attribute of virtue rather than as a mere social position doubles back on itself: "So if he tells

us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them” (2. 3. 8–9). One implication of “noble acceptance” is that nobility can apply equally to Coriolanus and the people: just as Coriolanus displays nobility in showing his deeds, the people display nobility in ratifying his display. But “noble acceptance” also implies a ratification of the existing social order: we *accept* that he is “noble” by virtue of his display, and therefore accept that the nobility deserve their status. The nobility that is supposed to transfer to the people through “noble acceptance” becomes an “acceptance” of the position of the nobles.

The people elsewhere indicate that they are aware of the collusion between this meritocratic rhetoric and the status quo. They remark that the hoarding of grain is meant not only to inflict suffering but to an index that the people merit that suffering:

CITIZEN 1: We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely. But they think we are too dear. The leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularize their abundance; our sufferance is a gain to them. (1. 1. 14–21)

“We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good.” This phrase is like Rastignac’s realization in Balzac: Only the rich are virtuous! In short, the citizen’s phrase seems to mean, “we are made poor so that the patricians may appear good.” The reason for such appearance is that the leanness of the citizens is meant to “particularize their [the patricians’] abundance”: in short, to make the patricians appear deserving of their position through their visible abundance.

Those who have power deserve to have it; therefore, to have is to deserve. Not to have, to crave, or to need, is the opposite of deserving. By this logic, craving and deserving are incompatible for Coriolanus:

COR.: Better it is to die, better to starve

Than crave the hire which first we do deserve (2. 3. 11)

CIT. 3: Tell us what hath brought you to’t

COR.: Mine own desert.

CIT. 3: Your own desert.

COR.: Ay, but not mine own desire ... (2. 3. 63–7)

Stanley Cavell and Janet Adelman are very good at noting this rhetoric of desert and desire in the play. Says Cavell: “Coriolanus’s way to avoid asking for something, that is, to avoid expressing desire, is by what he calls deserving the thing. His proof of desert is his valiantness ...” Cavell is right. And in a social world where the existing order of nobility is ratified through desert,

to ask is ignoble. It's therefore appropriate that Coriolanus acknowledges that "hate" and deserving can go together:

COR.: Who deserves greatness

Deserves your hate ...

COM.: For his best friends, if they

Should say, "Be good to Rome," they charged him even

As those that should do that had deserved is hate

And therein show like enemies ... (1. 1. 174-7)

Whether Coriolanus encounters a friend or enemy, one form of emotion that can be paired with "deserving" is hate. The reason why he can desire hate and immediately insist that he deserves it is because hate is one form of expression that does not have to mingle desiring with lacking. Hating another will never provoke their friendship: to desire hate is already to have it. If greatness is the thing that great people already have, then greatness and hate aren't opposed: you can be great, just as you can be hated, without asking for it.

The play might stage one moment that breaks with this stance of hate. Coriolanus's mother, Volumnia, burdens Coriolanus with all her maternal love after he has switched to Aufidius's side, and charges Coriolanus with the "bond and privilege of nature" in order to transform his warrior's coldness. The anguish and pain of an entire family, kneeling before him to ask for mercy in the Volscian camp near Rome, for a time seems not to work. It culminates, however, in the stage direction that Brian Vickers has called "one of the most poignantly expressive stage-directions in all drama":⁵⁷ *he holds her by the hand, silent*:

COR.: [*holds her by the hand silent.*]

O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,

The gods look down, and this unnatural scene

They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!

You have won a happy victory to Rome;

But for your son – believe it, O, believe it –

Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,

If not most mortal to him. (5. 3. 193ff.)

Yawn. I cannot agree with Vickers. I find the whole scene largely untouched by feeling or intellect. With that repetition of "mother, mother," the moment reads like parody of something in *Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*. There's no accounting for taste. But Geoffrey Hill, again, makes a provocative point, though he doesn't say that he dislikes the scene, as I do. He says that the scene reverses no determinism because it continues what the relationship between Coriolanus and Volumnia has already exhibited: we already knew Martius

was a mama's boy, so we find no new "miracle" of "self-knowledge" here.⁵⁸ In such a reading as Hill's, Coriolanus's emotions continue to reflect the institutions that constrain him: just as his rashness reflects the institution of the military, his reversal reflects the institution of the family. As we've said, Coriolanus's emotions are marked by the refusal to establish a difference between these spheres. The institutions themselves have created Coriolanus's inability to dissimulate, so his emotions reflect his social position more transparently than those of others. Menenius could lie. That was his great advantage. We must not underestimate that advantage. Menenius lied perhaps because he had a grander idea of the destiny of his social class. Coriolanus's sense of the destiny of his class was inseparable from the role that was given to him, so he assumed that to criticize an institution for its lack of integrity was sufficient to destroy it.

We know, of course that the very "integrity" that his institution promoted necessitated Coriolanus's betrayal of it: integrity to himself required fighting for his enemy. The tendency has been, of course, to psychologize as erotic ambivalence the fact that Coriolanus ended up joining the very man of his "soul's hate" that he had previously fought against. We can read the matter psychologically, as sexual desire mingled with Coriolanus's hatred, and hatred with his sexual desire. But there are reasons more than psychological why a fighter, when he is discarded by his city, might then fight against it. Geoffrey Hill asked: "what does a republic do with the kind of fighting machine that Caius Martius represents when the fighting machine is no longer needed? They know what he ought to do: become a farmer, plough his fields, know himself and his place, like Grand old Cincinnatus. ... But Caius Martius does not know himself or his place."⁵⁹ As we've said, the very "integrity" that Coriolanus's vision demands is that he will not see himself as a placeholder for something larger than himself. Coriolanus does not see himself as a "voice" of something else, or the means to a vision – even a bogus, lying vision – of which he is a subordinate part. Whether what he will not see is a "failure" of vision or a refusal of the destiny that others assign him, I will not answer. But when Coriolanus is murdered by Aufidius at the end of the play, we see a world in which the murder of Coriolanus is also a transformation in the expression of hatred and rage:

AUFIDIUS: My rage is gone

And I am struck with sorrow. Take him up,

Help three o'th'cheifest soldiers. I'll be one.

Beat thou the drum that I speak mournfully. (5. 6. 148–150)

Brian Vickers remarks: "What is new in this scene is that the enemies of Coriolanus not only express their hatred openly, but follow it with apparent regret."⁶⁰ Yet everything in the words is bogus. The words "rage" and "sorrow" are no longer passions but imposture. "Setting aside the military

details,” Vickers remarks, “we have here an utterly unconvincing *volte-face* from Aufidius, who changes from ‘rage’ to ‘sorrow’ in the twinkling of an eye ...”⁶¹ The very division of whole into part by which Coriolanus hoped to stigmatize the people now characterizes the soldiers. Emotions among the nobility become a mask, not a claim, in a class where feelings, again false, fail to judge the world.

Notes

1. Hill 2000. In my discussion of the play I often call the main character “Coriolanus” throughout, even though he only receives that name in 2.1. Before, of course, he should more properly be called “Martius” (a name I occasionally use), but I tend to use “Coriolanus” even before Act 2 for ease of reference.
2. I claim that the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale* is lacking in apparent supernatural magic despite Leontes’ and Paulina’s words about magic, because the most powerful interpretation of that scene for me is one that offers a secular and non-magical interpretation.
3. *Id.*
4. Illouz 2012.
5. Hill 2000.
6. Doran 1976.
7. *Id.*, 188.
8. *Id.*
9. Gross 2006, 1–20.
10. Foucault 2011, 11.
11. *Id.*, 24–5.
12. De Quincy 2003, 16: 26.
13. Vienne Guerrin 2007.
14. *Id.*
15. *Id.*
16. Foucault 2011, 25.
17. Foucault 2011, 19.
18. *Id.*, 18.
19. Fisher 2002, 73.
20. *Id.*
21. *Id.*, 71.
22. *Id.*, 101.
23. *Id.*, 93.
24. *Id.*
25. *Id.*
26. *Id.*, 94.
27. *Id.*
28. *Id.*, 95.
29. *Id.*, 103.
30. Wright 1988, 232.
31. Fish 1976, 985.
32. *Id.*, 985–6.
33. *Id.*, 986.

34. Hazlitt 1991, 346–7.
35. Fish 1976, 986–7, quoting Austin 1962, 9–10.
36. Fish 1976, 990.
37. Eagleton 1976, 105.
38. Actually he says, “A lecturer is a man who must talk for an hour.” Pound 1934, 83.
39. Quoted in Remnick 2006, 173.
40. Blits 2006, 119.
41. Gross 2006, 146.
42. Cavell 2003, 143.
43. Blits 2006, 118.
44. *Id.*
45. Fisher 2002, 101.
46. Blits 2006, 122.
47. Gross 2006, 3.
48. Wright 1988, 237–8.
49. *Id.*
50. See Wright 1988, 238.
51. Foucault 2011, 7.
52. Fisher 2002, 53–4, quoting Lucretius 1900, 68.
53. *Id.*, 54.
54. For a reference to Tiffany Hoffman’s perceptive reading of Coriolanus’s blush, see above, note 46.
55. Poole 1988, 48.
56. Fisher 2002, 59.
57. Vickers 1976, 49.
58. Hill 2000.
59. Hill 2000.
60. Vickers 1976, 54.
61. *Id.*

3 The Arrival of Enigma

I have said that one challenge to seeing emotions as judgments is to call them motiveless or causeless, as in Coleridge's remark that Iago's hate is "motiveless malignity." When we claim that we are baffled by why someone hates, we are saying that the emotion is meaningless to us until we can find the motive that will explain it.

Iago's hatred is "motiveless," they say, because he gives too many reasons, and the reasons contradict.¹ That's why Robert Heilman, for example, looks at Iago's speeches and is not convinced by what he sees. Heilman tries to pick apart the personal grievances that give rise to Iago's hatred and they don't, to Heilman's mind, add up. He says: "Iago's first grievance is that in disregard of Iago's practical experience (1. 1.28–30), seniority (37), and political support of 'three great ones of the city' (8) Othello gave the lieutenancy to Cassio, whose only equipment for the position, according to Iago, is theoretical training' (19–27)." The problem he says: "1. We have only Iago's word on this. ... 2. Iago himself never again mentions his loss of the lieutenancy after 1. 1. 38. ... 3. Nobody else ever mentions Iago's professional disappointments. No one ever offers him condolences or encouragements."² He adds:

Of the 66.5 lines which precede the beginning of Iago's and Roderigo's effort to set Brabantio on Othello, 59.5 are spoken by Iago: those concerning his case against Othello are split almost evenly between the allegation of injustice and the boast that he will get even: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (42). When it is important to make a case, the amount of time spent on describing the intention and the style of revenge is disproportionate, and the disproportion opens up the possibility that the feeling of enmity is the only real truth here, that it is not of recent birth, that the appointment of Cassio is less a cause than an occasion ...³

Iago says that he is personally slighted by Othello because of Othello's choice of Cassio as lieutenant. Heilman doubts this reason because Iago's resentment is echoed by no other character in the play, and because Iago's speech is "disproportionate[ly]" devoted to describing something other than the personal reasons for his revenge.⁴

That hate is a mystery if we give too many reasons for hating is a classroom idea, too remote from life. Some years ago my friends Shoba and Ashok got a divorce. The divorce was bitter. I knew Shoba better than Ashok, and remember her complaints: he was a bad father; it nauseated her to watch him eat; she suspected that he cheated; he dressed badly; she never loved him; he was racist; he impeded her career. Some days she took back her suspicion that he cheated. Other days she took back the taking back. Contradictory reasons! Was this “motiveless malignity”? Outside the university, the term is an abstraction. We hate. We give reasons: they contradict; but the hate is real.⁵

I offer this anecdote to show how hate often seeks a litany of reasons. But I also offer it to specify the particular way in which Iago’s hate “motiveless.” We say that Iago has “motiveless malignity” because the mere statement that Iago hates the Moor is opaque to us without a reason, and because the reasons he offers seem too inadequate and contradictory for us to take them as the real ones. I clarify how we typically understand the enigma, because there are other ways that a character’s malignity could strike us as “motiveless.” Compare Iago’s hate, for example, with the bafflingly opaque malignity of Dostoevsky’s characters. Viktor Shklovsky has mentioned that things in Dostoevsky happen “suddenly.” “Suddenly,” in Dostoevsky, says Shklovsky, “is an introduction of a new force, new qualities, and new proposals. ‘Suddenly’ is a discovery.”⁶ In Dostoevsky’s novel, a character will “suddenly” do something for which no previous notion of their character and personality might have prepared us. For example, in *Demons*, the narrator tries to come to terms with sudden explosions of comically unsocial behavior in his hero, Stavrogin, who, up until that point, had struck the narrator as a man of pre-eminently “reasonable” character:

It also turned out that he was quite well-educated, and rather knowledgeable. Of course, it did not take much knowledge to surprise us; but he could reason about vital and rather interesting issues as well, and what was most precious, with remarkable reasonableness.⁷

Of course, the comic repetition in “reason with remarkable reasonableness” provokes the thought that “reasonableness” is not “reason” but the mere posture of thoughtfulness that the narrator misunderstands. But what follows challenges even this perception of the character’s “reasonable” personality. No sooner does the narrator observe this feature in his hero than some baffling behavior “suddenly” makes its appearance:

Our prince suddenly, for no reason at all, committed two or three impossibly brazen acts upon various persons – that is, the main thing lay in their being so unheard-of, so utterly unlike anything else, so different from what is usually done, so paltry and adolescent, devil knows why, with no pretext whatsoever ...

One of the most respectable senior members of our club ... an elderly man, and even a decorated one, had acquired the innocent habit of accompanying his every word with a passionately uttered: "No sir, they won't lead me by the nose!" And so what. But one day in the club, when he uttered his aphorism. ... [Stavrogin] ... suddenly came up to Pavel Pavlovich and seized his nose unexpectedly but firmly between two fingers, and managed to pull him two or three steps across the room. He could not have felt any anger towards Mr. Gaganov ... it was recounted later that at the very moment of the operation he was almost in a reverie, "just as if he had lost his mind."⁸

The narrator, of course, promises at least *two* brazen acts. The second act follows very soon upon the one above: in the midst of a conversation, Stavrogin suddenly turns and bites a man's ear.⁹ For a character who has until recently presented the persona of "reasonability" and decency, later to pull one man's nose and bite another man's ear, certainly sounds like an enigma of motiveless malignity! And in the case above, Dostoevsky certainly draws our attention to the difference between the "reasonableness" and reason, and between the posture of thoughtfulness and the question of actual judgment. By presenting us with human beings who are capable of such sudden and seemingly inexplicable forms of emotion and action, Dostoevsky reminds us that the fixed and stable conception of "character" that we offer as the cause and motive of human feeling and behavior will always be outrun by the emotions and actions themselves. But the example above is as far as can be from the motiveless malignity that Iago presents us in *Othello*. In the case of Stavrogin, the lack of pretext, explanation, and motive for the action include a total lack of foregrounding. At no point before that moment in the story are we presented even with the possibility of enmity between the hero and the characters whom he injures. And in each case, at the moment of injury, the emotional meaning is not even legible. Is Stavrogin's behavior malice, spite, anger? Or is it boredom, whimsy, comedy?

If the malignity in the Dostoevsky example is an enigma, the reason for that enigma is that we cannot even accurately describe the judgment in which we might be implicated. By contrast, Iago's behavior is more legible as hate. Iago's destruction, unlike Stavrogin's, has a foregrounding: he declares his hate, and offers reasons for the hatred. He exhibits planning, patience, design. Very little of Iago's action occurs too "suddenly" for the spectator. On the contrary, Patricia Parker has pointed out the importance of "dilatatory time" in Iago's plan.¹⁰ Iago's work is the opposite of rashness:

IAGO: How poor are they that have not patience!

What would did ever heal but by degrees?

Thou know'st we work by wit and not by witchcraft

And wit depends on dilatatory time. (3. 2. 391–4)

Iago's lines could be mere dissimulation, but as Parker's article suggests, patience and delay turn out to be central to Iago's strategy.

So the idea of motiveless malignity is not transparent on its own. In our account of Iago's hatred we mean something different than we might mean for other literary characters. I have said that one reason why Iago's malignity is emotionally legible as "hate" is that Iago openly declares his hate. Robert Heilman is struck by the fact that little in the play contradicts Iago's hatred:¹¹

ROD: Thou toldst me thou didst hold him in thy hate. (1. 1. 7–8)

IAGO: Despise me if I do not.

IAGO: Though I hate him as I do hell pains. (1. 1. 155)

IAGO: I have told thee often, and I tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor.
(1.3. 372–373)

IAGO: I hate the moor. (1. 3. 392)

Heilman points to these lines and says: "Here is something that Iago does not hurriedly allege and forget, [but] something that he comes back to repeatedly, and something that is consistent with all of his conduct. In such a statement must be sought the key to his being. Iago not only reasserts his hatred of Othello but is also at pains to deny his love."¹²

Heilman suggests that the feeling of hate overwhelms even its specific reasons:

IAGO: I hate the moor

And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
'Has done my office. I know not if't be true;
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. (1. 3. 392–396)

For Joel Altman the lines above are an example of what he, following Locke, identifies as a "twilight of probability," which Altman calls "that region of variegated grayness between the light of certain knowledge and the darkness of nescience in which men and women, for the most part manage their lives."¹³ Altman admits that many audiences would find Iago's remark above to be an "unconscionable decision." Yet such suspicion is evidence of a larger role that the poetics of "probability" plays in the work. "'Mere suspicion,' to be sure, is a relatively weak degree of probability by any count, and we recognize the promptings of malice behind the rashness with which Iago grasps it as a basis of action. Nonetheless, his bold announcement that he will be acting only 'as if' he possessed the truth opens a unique perspective on the behavior of everyone in the play ... everyone ... does 'as if for surety.'"¹⁴ Altman goes on to develop a conceptually powerful reading of the role of probability in the play, but ignores the possibility of malice that he raises at the beginning as the real reason for Iago's actions. It doesn't occur to him

that Iago's reasons need not be epistemological, but rather emotional. For Heilman, by contrast, the key word in the passage above is "*and*." Iago says, not, "I hate the Moor because it is thought abroad," but rather he hates the Moor *and* this thing about him is thought abroad. The "and," in other words, means that the possibility that Othello cuckolded Iago is presented not as a reason for the hate but in addition to it.¹⁵ The problem of Iago's action is not a problem of *knowledge*. Iago's behavior is governed not by the probability of a previous event, but by the passion of hatred.

In the statement, "I hate the Moor," we should linger on the words, "I hate." What is the difference between feeling repugnance, and making a statement like, "I hate him"? Jean-Paul Sartre writes with intelligence on this issue. In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, he describes the difference between the feeling of repugnance or anger, and the binding character of declaring one's hatred. The statement of hatred includes a relationship to the future in which we foreclose certain possibilities of action:

Let us consider a reflective appearance of hatred. I see Peter, I feel a sort of profound convulsion of repugnance and anger at the sight of him ... I cannot be mistaken when I say: I feel at this moment a violent repugnance for Peter. But is this experience of repugnance hatred? Obviously not.

In reality, I have hated Peter a long time, and I think that I shall hate him always. An instantaneous consciousness of repugnance could not, then, be my hatred. If I limited it to what is, to something instantaneous, I could not even speak of hatred any more. I would say, "I feel a repugnance for Peter at this moment," and thus I would not implicate the future. But precisely by this refusal to implicate the future, I would cease to hate.¹⁶

Sartre joins Aristotle in excluding hatred from the category of rashness. Hatred cannot be a *momentary* experience. One can indeed experience a sudden flash of anger, or a momentary enchantment of rage. One can even experience the feeling of repugnance or repulsion. But vehement passions like those can arise and subside. On the contrary, hatred, unlike anger, must "implicate the future" and be more than instantaneous. Sartre later says that hatred "overflows the instantaneousness of consciousness" where "no distinction is possible between appearance and being," and, therefore, goes beyond consciousness and becomes "a transcendent object." "Hatred," Sartre says, "is credit for an infinity of angry or repulsed consciousnesses in the past and future." Sartre imagines a situation in which someone says, "I detest you," and then, in correction, says, "it is not true, I do not detest you, I said that in anger." If it were not possible to make such a distinction between truly hating and mistakenly expressing hate out of anger, the concept of hate as Sartre describes it would not be intelligible.¹⁷

Sartre helps us see why it matters that Iago continually declares his hate. Iago's statement is not the description of a momentary feeling, or the account of a particular consciousness of repugnance. On the contrary, "I hate the Moor" is also implicates the future: the statement becomes a placeholder, as Sartre says, for an infinity of possible moments where one may feel, or be conscious of, repugnance. Nevertheless, it is precisely this fact that hatred makes claims upon the future that causes Sartre to dislike it. Sartre sees in hatred a certain passivity that causes him to call hatred a "state."

Hatred is a *state*. And by this term I have tried to express the character of passivity which is constitutive of hatred. Undoubtedly it will be said that hatred is a force, an irresistible drive, etc. But an electric current or the fall of water are also forces to be reckoned with: does this diminish one whit the passivity and inertia of their nature? Is it any less the case that they receive their energy *from the outside*? The passivity of a spatio-temporal thing is constituted by virtue of its existential relativity. A relative existence can only be passive, since the least activity would free it from the relative and would constitute it as absolute.¹⁸

The transcendental character of hatred does not, for Sartre, make it any less passive. Hatred's passivity comes from its "relativity," and its relativity comes from the fact that it still relates to that original "reflective" consciousness. "Hatred," Sartre says later, "appears through the consciousness of disgust as that from which the latter emanates."¹⁹ In other words: the statement "I hate Peter" transforms disgust from a conscious experience into the cause of that conscious experience: when I claim hatred, I decide that I am conscious of my repugnance toward Peter *because* I hate him. My disgust now emanates from my hatred. The relationship between my feeling of repugnance and the new emotional state of hatred, says Sartre, is not a "logical bond," but a "magical" one.

You can tell by the word "magical" that Sartre does not think very highly of emotions, which he sees as a form of bad faith. Elsewhere, in his *Sketch Toward the Theory of the Emotions*, he explains what he means by the idea that an emotion is a magical transformation of the world:²⁰

We can now conceive what an emotion is. It is a transformation of the world. When paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic.²¹

Emotions for Sartre are ways of refusing to see the world as governed by actual deterministic processes. Emotion is a false enchantment that tries to change the world through some other processes than material ones. That enchantment is what gives emotion its character of passivity. Sartre provides the example of fear:

Take, for example, passive fear. I see a ferocious beast coming towards me: my legs give away under me, my heart beats more feebly, I turn pale, fall down, and faint away. No conduct would seem worse adapted to the danger than this, which leaves me defenseless. And nevertheless it is a behavior of *escape*; the fainting away is a refuge. But let no one suppose that it is a refuge *for me*, that I am trying to save *myself* or to *see no more* of the ferocious beast. ... being unable to escape the danger by normal means and deterministic procedures, I have denied existence to it. I have tried to annihilate it ... I have annihilated it so far as was in my power. Such are the limitations of my magical power over the world: I can suppress it as an object of consciousness ...²²

In the example of fear above, and the discussion of hate we have previously quoted, Sartre presents an emotion as an evasion of action, and a passive attempt to transform the world through magic. To hate, then, is bad faith: it assumes the connections of the world are something other than they are. Hate is also a denial of my freedom: by saying that I “hate” another I constrain my behavior in the future: indicating that I will always feel repugnance toward another, and implying that this repugnance emerges from something outside of me, a “hatred” that is transcendental. Sartre appears to dislike the judgment of hatred precisely because it constrains and makes impossible actions like the ones we observed with Dostoevsky’s Stavrogin. The judgment of hate causes the hater to foreclose, in her mind, the free capacity “suddenly” to perform acts inconsistent with that hatred.

I do not see Iago’s hatred as a form of bad faith or a magical evasion of the world precisely because Iago effects the course of events in the play. I also believe that the attempt to interpret emotions through the metaphysics of freedom is a mistake, for reasons I explain further in the next chapter. But whether we see the emotion of hatred as a magical evasion of one’s freedom, as Sartre does, or a way of implicating others in the world, as I do, we might agree that Sartre recognizes an important temporal feature in the judgment of hate: the declaration of “hate” creates a certain expectation about future acts. When Iago declares, “I hate the Moor,” we expect that Iago in the play will not suddenly offer gestures of love, compassion, and charity to Othello; and we are right. Iago is often described as a genius of “improvisation,” a man without identity or a stable personality.²³ But Iago’s hatred is a limitation upon that improvisation. As long we describe the persona of Iago in the language of latent motives, Iago’s actions confront us as an enigma. But when we see Iago through the primary thing he has identified with himself – when we see Iago through his hate – we see that

Iago is not so empty and unstable. Not wholly formless, he is limited by the emotional claim he makes from the very beginning.

Despite the way that Iago's emotional judgment clarifies his future action, critics continue to see Iago as a kind empty cipher or void: a man capable of anything. Harold Bloom says:

Iago is Shakespeare's largest study in ontotheological absence, a sense of the void that follows on from Hamlet's, and that directly precedes Edmund's more restricted but even more affectless excursion into the uncanniness of nihilism. Othello was everything to Iago, because war was everything; Iago is nothing, and in warring against Othello, his war is against ontology.²⁴

Bloom's account of Iago's nihilism sounds more like Stavrogin in Dostoevsky than an audience's perception of Iago. I am also lost in Bloom's style. Bloom takes for granted that Iago's hateful emotion makes less sense than the abstraction "ontotheological absence." Bloom assumes that, while no one understands why a man like Iago would hate a man like Othello, we can understand quite clearly why a man would "war against ontology." My contrary position is that *extreme states do not require extreme explanations*. Familiar emotions strike us as unfamiliar in *Othello* because we have never felt them with this intensity. Portentous phrases like "affectless excursion into the uncanniness of nihilism" send us down a maze of discourse so that we can avoid the emotion. To be told that Iago resents Othello for his achievements or status is something I understand. To be told that Iago despises "ontology" leaves me emotionally blank.

One way not to find extreme words for Iago's extreme state is to take up an emotion whose name has more readily occurred to critics: envy. The critic Joseph Epstein put it best in a recent book with that title:

As with all Shakespeare's plays, there is a great swamp, a big muddy, of criticism instructing one how to read *Othello*, and providing guidance on the character of Iago. I think he is better understood not as a character of pure evil – though, God knows, he is evil enough – but one behind whose evil lurks envy.²⁵

Epstein is not the first critic to suggest that Iago is guided by envy, and we would have to wade too deeply into the "big muddy of criticism" to discuss just how many people have suggested as much. But Epstein has some advantages. His account at least has the virtue of describing something we have felt, since I assume that some of us can admit to envy, but few have felt "ontotheological absence." Aristotle groups envy in in his *Rhetoric* with the passions he calls "the rivalrous emotions." Of course, rivalry and competition are involved in almost every aggressive passion, including anger. Aristotle

says we are angry because we are slighted by others, and because we desire revenge. As Cristina Viano points out, there is even competition in contempt (*kataphronesis*), which thinks something of “little worth,” and particularly in the varieties of contempt, like affront (*hubris*), and the kind of affront called dishonor (*atimia*).²⁶

Two fundamental competitive emotions are envy and indignation. Let’s start with the last one: indignation. Indignation is “pain caused by the sight of undeserved good fortune” (1387 a9; 1386 b 8–9). In indignation we don’t just hate the fact that other people have something we don’t have, we consider it just that we think so. Indignation is envy plus self-righteousness. Aristotle says, envy “is disturbing pain excited by the prosperity of others” (1386 b 18–19). Indignation differs from envy by having an ethical component, although, in Epstein’s words: “sometimes the distinction between *Schadenfreude* and justice hunger is a tough call.”²⁷

Are these seemingly petty emotions worthy of Shakespearean tragedy? If Shakespeare were Greek, then the answer, according to some, would be “no.” Simon Goldhill tells us that the entire emotional world of a play like *Othello* would have been deemed unworthy of attention by a Greek tragedian:

[F]or all the attention [Greek] tragedy lavishes on the emotional conflicts between rivals and on emotions that create rivalry and tension, it very rarely focuses on ... the rivalrous emotions [e.g., envy and emulation].

If the discussion of the emotions were to allow continuity over cultures and time, a contrast between Greek tragedy, and, say, Shakespeare’s *Othello* or *King Lear* or *Macbeth* ... would be telling. It is not just that Greek tragedy’s grandeur ... resists such ‘small’ feelings (in the way that it avoids mundane events, the props of an average life) as a matter of generic propriety. It is rather that the disastrous violence which is tragedy’s territory depends on an overwhelming power of passion – anger, lust, power within the family or state – for which “spite” (for example) could only appear as a trivialization. Even Euripides, who “represented men as they are” and risked the scandal of a raggedy king, shows little interest in the rivalrous emotions of envy, spite, and jealousy, for all the multiform passions that gust across the stage.²⁸

You might ask: “but isn’t *Medea* about jealousy?” Apparently not, says Goldhill. *Medea* is “regularly said to be motivated by jealousy,” but people who regularly say this are wrong:

Sexual jealousy is part ... of the play’s rhetorical battle of competing explanations and deceptive violence of the tongue, rather than a simple cause for what unfurls in the drama: as a motive, sexual

jealousy is shown to be quite insufficient for what follows in the play. For Medea's emotions are dominated by the grander passions of revenge, heroic self-justification, and consuming hatred. The language of *phthonos* (which is sometimes translated as 'jealousy') is linked, and subordinate, to the language of 'honor' (*time*) and 'wrong' (*adikein*). 'Jealousy' (let alone envy or spite) is not the emphasis of the passionate turmoil of the play's bloody denouement. The cruelty and violence of Medea go far beyond 'envy' or 'spite' in performance and moral implication.²⁹

Similarly, says Goldhill, when one looks to other plays, like *Agamemnon*, or *Oedipus Tyrannos*, one discovers the same feature: "Jealousy and envy both appear within the rhetoric of explanation and within the destructive exchange of tragedy, but neither [drives] plot, dominates action, or even receives extensive representation or debate." It is precisely the subordinate character of such passions that distinguishes Greek from Renaissance tragedy. According to Goldhill, "fifth-century culture is well aware of those rivalrous emotions of envy spite and jealousy, but they are largely repressed in tragedy."³⁰

If Goldhill is right, and emotions like envy, jealousy, resentment, and indignation are too petty for Greek tragedy, then we have arrived at an important evaluation implicit in Iago's envy. Let's return to Epstein's *Envy*:

[Iago] envies Cassio his having been appointed ahead of him as Othello's lieutenant; he may envy Othello an earlier alliance with his, Iago's, wife, Emilia; but perhaps above all he envies Othello the grandeur of his character, the quality he has of operating on the large scale. Such are the multifarious forms that envy may take; it can almost be disinterested, attaching itself to things that do not, in the strict sense, stand in its way, as Cassio, in Shakespeare's play, stands in the way of Iago.³¹

Epstein says that one can envy someone not just for identifiable concrete reasons, like the expressible personal advantages they may have, but for features that go beyond any particular slight. Iago hates Othello not just for this or that *injury* but for the entire "*scale*" in which he operates: for the fact that the world of Othello's conflicts is larger than the world of Iago's: and this hatred can, therefore, never be satisfied simply with the attainment of a few concrete advantages – like a lieutenantcy, or the cuckolding of his wife; it is nearly "disinterested" because it exceeds so many identifiable interests. The world of Othello is a world of conflict on the level of wars and nations, and the hatred of Iago demands diminishing the scale of human conflict within which Othello operates. Iago's emotion is an

implicit judgment of the superiority of petty malice over grand, large-scale enmities. By asserting the priority of his petty rivalries (the rivalry between himself, Cassio, and the Moor), over Othello's greater rivalries (the rivalry between Venice and Turkey over control of Cyprus), he is implicitly asserting the value of play *Othello* too: he implies that the petty jealousies that make up the plot of *Othello* are as worthy of tragedy as the "big wars that make ambition virtue." Iago offers one illuminating reason why Cassio must die:

if Cassio do remain,
 He hath a daily beauty in his life
 That makes me ugly; and, besides, the Moor
 May unfold me to him; there stand I in much peril:
 No, he must die. (5. 1. 18–22)

Envy is here also a clarifying judgment. Cassio has a beauty and charisma that makes Iago look bad, so Cassio has to die. If the line strikes us as an extremely petty form of rivalry, far from the grand passions that Simon Goldhill talks about in his study of Greek tragedy, then Iago's judgment is implicitly a defense that tragedy can be made from forms of hatred so petty.

When we say that Iago's hatred is "envy," we are stigmatizing it as petty. Were we to call such hatred "indignation," we would be implying that the hatred is justifiable. As we have said, while both indignation and envy imply resentment at another's favor, the latter claims that the favorable position is undeserved, while the former does not. Indignation, in short, makes a moral claim. We are more likely to read our own emotions as indignation, and the emotions of others as envy. When we are the object of another's resentment, we are not likely to see the resentment as having moral claims at all.

To return again to that larger scale within which enmity sometimes operates, I find the most obvious example of the refusal to read resentment as a moral claim in the way Americans react to the most extreme kind of hatred: terrorism. "Why do they hate us?" the victims ask. But where is the mystery? Terrorists deliver judgments about policies or values. The victims say, "yes, but why us, why these guiltless children, these everyday men and women?" The answer is always the same: these women and children are not guiltless, because their country is guilty. Grief and anger confront hatred as one set of judgments confronting another, but no one likes to be implicated in conflicting judgments. The victims of terror transform grief and anger into bafflement, and terrorists' judgment of hatred into an enigma.

My usual response to news of terrorism is grief and horror, and my horror is inseparable from my revulsion at the idea of a collective hatred. A work of fiction I find useful for imagining the hatred of a collective, and the horror and refusal it produces, is Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*.³² The main

character, Swede Levov, is the successful owner of a glove factory. His daughter Meredith is a terrorist. Her first bomb explodes in a post office and kills a bystander. Later she plants more explosions and kills more victims. Roth's novel describes how Swede's life is now shattered, and his pastoral world of bourgeois complacency is invaded by forces he does not want to confront. Early scenes show Meredith's hate for her privileged family, her city, their upbringing, and their country. A political and moral corruption infects them all, she feels. Here is Meredith (who, by the way, has a stutter) vituperating about how privileged families fail to see how their privilege colludes with America's military violence:

they just want to go to b-bed at night, in their own country, leading their own lives, and without thinking that they're going to get b-b-blown to b-b-bits in their sleep. B-b-blown to b-b-bits all for the sake of privileged people of New Jersey leading their p-p-peaceful, s-secure, acquisitive, meaningless l-little bloodsucking lives! (108)

I must admit that I do not love Roth's book. It postures a little, and I do not always believe in the characters. Nevertheless, it provides a good portrayal of the father's powerful response to the daughter's claims to loathe America. Both the father and the daughter are confronting the impossibility of distinguishing between the personal and collective:

being an American was loathing America, but loving America was something he could not let go of any more than he could have let go of loving his father and mother, any more than he could have let go of his decency. How could she "hate" this country when she had no *conception* of this country? How could a child of his be so blind as to revile the "rotten system" that had given her family every opportunity to succeed? ... There was much difference, *and she knew it*, between hating America and hating them. (213)

Swede cannot accept collective guilt as personal guilt: how could her hatred of America include people like those he mentions? Yet Swede feels that every collective judgment is a personal judgment about him: "loving America was something he could not let go of any more than he could have let go of loving his father and mother." The personal is collective and the collective is personal.

In the passage above we see that Swede's response is not simply one of bafflement. It is rather the response of a contrary judgment. The claim that emotions are judgments does not mean that emotions are always right, or even that they are always intelligent. On the contrary, the fact that emotions are judgments only means that they are intelligible. Swede may disagree with the hatred of his daughter, but his attempt to claim that he finds it opaque is only an evasion. By describing from Swede's point of view the

thrill and the danger of a revolutionary's hatred and rage, Roth shows us that even when we do not share the feeling, we nevertheless do not confront that feeling merely as an enigma:

There is something terrifyingly pure about their violence and the thirst for self-transformation. They renounce their roots to take as their models the revolutionaries whose conviction is enacted most ruthlessly ... Their rage is combustible ... they sign on freely and fearlessly to terrorize against the war, competent to rob at gunpoint, equipped in every way to maim and kill with explosives, undeterred by fear or doubt or inner contradiction – girls in hiding, dangerous girls, attackers, implacably extremist, completely unsociable. (254–5)

The passage makes us uncomfortable, since it shows us the hate and rage of terrorists not as riddles requiring explanation, but an experience of trilling danger. We discover what hatred and rage must feel like, rather than the reasons for their arrival. Roth wants to expose us to feelings we also have, so that they are not just enigmas in the character of others, but capacities in ourselves. We, too, have these feelings, but we keep them in their limits. Those who exceed those limits, like Meredith, provoke a riddle about motives or causes. Terrorism is thus only “motiveless” for those who assume that their own limits are a standard.

Terrorism is hate directed toward individuals not because of their personal guilt, but because of their participation in a collective guilt. Aristotle can guide us in this insight. He tells us that, unlike the other vehement passions, which react to a personal slight, hate can be directed toward others simply because of their membership in a group:

Anger ... derives from what happens to oneself, whereas enmity arises without [the offense] being directed at oneself. For if we believe that someone is a certain kind of person, we hate him. Also anger is always about individuals, for example Callias or Socrates, whereas hatred [*misos*] is also felt towards types: for everyone hates a thief and an informer. Also, the one is healed by time, while the other is incurable. Also, the one is a desire to inflict pain, while the other is a desire to inflict harm: for a person who is angry wishes to perceive [his revenge], but the one who hates this is a matter of indifference ... the one wishes that the person with whom he is angry should suffer in return, but the other wishes that he should cease to exist. (1382 a2–16)

I've said before that the distinctions can seem hairsplitting. Surely we would not distinguish so finely between anger and hatred as Aristotle does. But the definition helps. First, hate can be directed toward groups. In Aristotelian terms, the bafflement that we feel before terrorists is a refusal to understand hatred itself: hatred is a judgment often rendered at a collective. The idea

that we can be singled out for enmity by those we have never personally slighted is central to the judgment of hating. Second, while anger is “healed by time,” hatred is often “incurable.” Aristotle excludes hatred from the category of rashness, and from the categories of time so important to my previous essay on anger. Coriolanus’s anger is swift and unscanned, while deliberate, thoughtful emotions are slow. Hatred, however, not “healed by time,” can itself be deliberate and thoughtful. Third, hatred, Aristotle says, is the desire not for “pain” but for “harm.” This distinction might again seem hairsplitting or meaningless. But if we should see through the words to their possible insight, we notice that in terrorism there is some difference. The terrorist is not simply angry and desirous of paying back the pain of one slight for the pain of another slight. Hatred is injurious: it wishes harm or destruction upon the object of that hatred. As Konstan says, “we may wish that people whom we hate should die, but when we are angry, what we desire is that the other person should feel hurt in return. In addition, we do not necessarily respond with hatred only to those who have harmed us in particular, but may experience it for wrongs directed to others as well.”³³

I am obviously leading to the question of whether we can read Iago’s hatred as resentment at a group. Far from being “motiveless,” Iago could emerge as chiefly upset about class subordination and see in Othello a chance at revenge. The major problem with Iago, then, would come from readers who refuse to accept revenge as a morally legible form of justice. Readers, that is, who benefit from class exploitation are particularly liable to find Iago incomprehensible. Those who benefit from class exploitation are even more likely to represent themselves as people incapable of malice and resentment. Therefore, they are also even more likely to represent such emotions as illegible, and to cease even to recognize the judgment as a judgment.

What is wrong with the attempt to see Iago’s hatred as class resentment? In an essay on what he calls the “limits of hatred,” Stephen Greenblatt says that class revenge, or the enmity of the terrorists, cannot be ways of describing Iago’s hate.³⁴ Iago, says Greenblatt, is not like Shyock, whose hatred is directed toward a group on behalf of a particular group, and in reaction to a clear injury. He is not like a terrorist, whose hatred is meant to vindicate something identifiable as larger than himself. Certain villains, like Aaron the Moor, Richard III, and Iago, lack the relationship to an identifiable group and to the values of that group. Greenblatt says that these villains exhibit “radical-individuation-through-loathing”:

None of these villains represents an entire group; each is driven by something peculiar to himself. To be sure, the criminal drive always exists in some relation to its possessor’s whole life, a life that invariably includes group identifications. But the hatred that impels these characters is what pulls each of them out of the larger sociological category and makes them distinctive.³⁵

If the class revenger or the terrorist is identifiable by his wish to speak on behalf of an injured group, then Iago does not have this character, says Greenblatt. Iago's hatred takes him out of the group, is identifiable with some purpose too unique to himself. Greenblatt takes as his evidence the following lines:

O sir, content you,
 I follow him to serve my turn upon him.
 We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
 Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
 Many a duteous knee-crooking knave
 That – doting on his own obsequious bondage –
 Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
 For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashiered;
 Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
 Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
 Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
 And throwing but the shadows of service on their lords,
 Do well thrive by them.
 And when they have lined their coats
 Do themselves homage: 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. 41–65)

My eyes quickly find the famous lines: “Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago,” and “I am not what I am.” These are maddeningly difficult phrases. They raise questions of interpretation too great to resolve here: how is the first “I” different from the second? Why is the proper name “Iago” compared to the generic term “The Moor”? Do the lines affirm identity or reject it? I feel, however, that we miss something if we are seduced too greatly into seeing these paradoxes only as riddles. The critics I am drawn to most are those who try to make the paradoxes humanly legible.

Greenblatt has the merit of not resting with the paradoxes but trying to interpret them. For him the lines are a sign of that class revenge, or terrorism, cannot be the right categories for reading Iago's hate. Greenblatt singles out the lines, “my peculiar end,” and “I am not what I am” as instances of

the special character of Iago's malice. Although Iago first mentions the particular group to which he belongs, the class of servants of which "many a duteous and knee-crooking knave" are instances, Greenblatt says that Iago "will not accept the designation" of the "caste to which ... [he] officially belongs." Iago's "hatred is precisely what enables him to escape from it and mark out what he calls his 'peculiar end.'" In such a context, Greenblatt says, "I am what I am" shows "Iago's radical declaration of independence from any group to which his birth and career may have assigned him."³⁶

Greenblatt saves "I am not what I am" from the circularity of paradox, or metaphysical puzzle, by making a powerful claim. In his reading, hatred is the emotion that marks Iago out from the group, rather than places him in a group identity. His hatred is not class revenge or terrorism because Iago identifies hate with a "peculiar end," one that belongs not to his role as a servant but rather to a unique quality that allows him to escape from that role. Greenblatt is right to find lines like the following to be lines more about personal self-advancement and independence from the group than lines of group solidarity: "Others there are / Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty, / Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves." Attending to oneself, seeking one's own personal advancement, is the language of personal rather than collective revenge, individual and not class struggle.

So Greenblatt says that Iago's hate is too individualizing, too unique, too bound up with a "peculiar end," to be terrorism or class prejudice. Greenblatt adds that "Iago is not interested in justice," because "he does not crave the law. He desires only Othello's utter ruin, and he will stop and nothing to bring it about." But why is this surprising? Is the desire for destruction rather than justice as unintelligible as he says? Are there not legible forms of violence and destruction that have nothing to do with justice? Is it actually that hard to imagine a person who hates those who belong to the social class above him, while simultaneously thinking that he is better than the social class to which he belongs? Is that not the usual form that class resentment takes?

One critic's position is the opposite of Greenblatt's. In his essay on the word "honest" in *Othello*, William Empson insists that Iago is motivated by class resentment. Othello's description of Iago as "honest" is a way of belittling Iago's lower class status in a way that feeds Iago's indignation.

Four columns of *honest* in the Shakespeare Concordance show that he never once allows the word a simply hearty use between equals.

Critics have discussed what the social statutes of Iago and Emilia would actually be, and have succeeded in making clear that the posts of ancient and gentlewomen-in-waiting might be held by people of very varying status ... The hints seem to place Iago and his wife definitely enough well below Desdemona but well above Ancient Pistol, say.

He is ironical about the suggestions in the patronizing use, which he thinks are applied to him – "low-class, and stupid, but good-natured."

Iago's kind of honesty, he feels, is not valued as it should be; there is much in Iago of the Clown in *Revolt*, and the inevitable clown that is almost washed out in this play to give him a free field.³⁷

For Empson, Othello's use of the word "honest" is obviously patronizing: it designates the good-natured character of lower-class people, directed at them by people of higher social station.

It is not hard to see how Iago would then hate being belittled in this way. But what then do we make of Iago's "peculiar end," and his statement "I am not what I am," which we might say singles him out from any collective and cannot be given a class reading? Empson sees no disjunction between Iago's insistence upon his uniqueness and the class reading he gives above. Class resentment is not incompatible with a feeling of one's own independence or uniqueness: in fact they are rarely seen apart:

When Iago expounds his egotism to Roderigo, in the first scene of the play, he is not so much admitting a weak criminal to his secrets as making his usual claim to Sturdy Independence in rather courser form. He is not subservient to the interests of the men in power who employ him, he says; he can stand up for himself, as they do. No doubt an Elizabethan employer. ... would think this a shocking sentiment; but it does not involve Pure Egotism, and I do not even see that it involves Machiavelli. It has the air of a spontaneous line of sentiment among the lower classes, whereas Machiavelli was interested in the deceptions necessary for a ruler. Certainly it does not imply that that independent man will betray his friends (as apart from his employer), because if he did he would not boast about it to them. ... [I do not] mean to deny that there is a paradox about the cult of the Independent Man ... but that paradox was already floating in the midst of the audience.³⁸

For Empson there is nothing shocking about a man simultaneously expressing class resentment and independence from that same class at the same time. Greenblatt finds an enigma in the fact that Iago both resents being condescended to as a servant and will not "accept the designation ... [of the] caste to which he originally belongs." But Empson says: Iago is both a disgruntled worker and a believer in the cult of the Independent Man. He hates being condescended to, yet also believes himself to be special.

If Empson is partially right, then try for a moment to imagine the kind of person we are talking about: a man keenly aware of status and class, acutely sensitive to hierarchies, obsessively aware both of how others see his social position and the class-based, or racial, insecurities of others. Such a man knows how others expect a servant like him to behave, but also refuses those expectations. He will play with them only to frustrate them. Is this not hatred clearly legible within a class, caste, and social position? What about such hatred makes it "motiveless"?

One answer comes to mind: Iago's account of his motives here is not real, since the events of the play do not bear them out. Iago in the speeches above relates his hatred both to class resentment and self-advancement. But the play suggests that Iago is principally interested not in his own survival but in another's destruction. The tragedy ends not with Iago "attending on himself," advancing himself beyond his class, or thriving in the way he describes. The play rather ends with Iago's destruction. Such destruction goes beyond any intelligible rhetoric of self-aggrandizement. Greenblatt remarks, "One of the ironies of Iago's celebrated advice, 'Put money in thy purse' (first at 1.3. 333), is that he himself is entirely uninterested in his own well-being. Hatred as intense and single-minded as his is finally indifferent to his very survival."

W.H. Auden makes a similar point when he says that the phrase "motiveless malignity" seems right to him. "The adjective *motiveless*," he says, "means, firstly that the tangible gains if any are clearly not the principal motive and, secondly, that the motive is not the desire for personal revenge upon another for personal injury. Iago himself proffers two reasons for wishing to injure Othello and Cassio. He tells Roderigo that, in appointing Cassio to be his lieutenant, Othello has treated him unjustly, in which conversation he talks like the conventional Elizabethan malcontent ... Finally, one who seriously desires personal revenge desires to reveal himself. The revenger's greatest satisfaction is to be able to tell his victim to his face – 'you thought you were all-powerful and untouchable and could injure me with impunity. Now you see that you were wrong ...'"³⁹ Apparently, however, none of these benefits accrue to Iago. So, what's the point of all that hate, if you don't get any advantage?

Auden's argument makes it hard for us to take our interpretation of Iago's speech above as an account of his own motivation. We may agree with Empson that the cult of the "Independent Man" is compatible with class resentment, or agree with Greenblatt that Iago does not speak for his class since he considers himself special. Either way, however, his speech does not fit the action of the play. Iago says that his secret malice is a way to thrive; in fact that hatred brings about Iago's own destruction. The play is not about a man standing up for himself, it is about a hatred whose destruction is so great that it appears to go beyond the desires of the ego or even the instinct for life. Isn't this hatred, then, more analogous to the terrorist than the Independent Man? It is the terrorist who does not care about his own survival.

In his recent book *Comeuppance*, William Flesch uses words from game theory and the sciences to describe this kind of hatred: the kind that is indifferent to its own life while trying to destroy another. Flesch calls this the problem of "spite." "Spite," says Flesch, "consists of paying to punish, more generally accepting a loss in order to enforce loss on another being." At its greatest extreme spite is "self-sacrifice for the sake of hurting others." This definition makes spite into "a form of altruism, more specifically ... altruistic

punishment.”⁴⁰ Flesch sees altruistic punishment in Iago, since Iago’s position is not advantageous:

Iago seeks to disrupt the erotic lives of both Othello and Cassio; in interfering with their reproductive success he also destroys his own, so that his spiteful genes are not handed down, which means that spite should die out in the long run, or at least turn out not to be genetically determined.⁴¹

Flesch shows how incapable economics or related disciplines are of explaining one of the most familiar human emotions: spite. The bio-determinism of the passage above is not entirely to my taste, but as a reader of *Othello* Flesch asks good questions. How do we understand the emotion of spite, if it illuminates little about the benefit to the person who has it? Iago’s spite destroys others but provides no gain to himself. What account of human motivation helps us to describe that phenomenon? One approach is to see Iago’s hate psychoanalytically: to suggest a latent desire as the real cause of an otherwise enigmatic motivation understood consciously. I have no problem with such psychoanalytic interpretations, which I sometimes pursue elsewhere in the book. But I am interested in this case in Flesch’s desire to explain the emotion through the external analogy of risk and reward, rather than the internal description of latent drives. Flesch says that actors “can act spitefully to demonstrate how unfairly they’ve been treated.”

The expressive content of spiteful behavior will have at its core something like this: “look how angry you’ve made me by the injustice with which you’ve treated me – angry enough for me to cause myself harm.”⁴²

Here Flesch does not distinguish between spite and anger – or rather “indignation” – since the destructive character of spite is meant to be a judgment on a previous injustice. However, examples of the kind of spite whose purpose is to exhibit one’s own unfair treatment for Flesch include Achilles withdrawing from battle and thus risking the diminishment of his own glory, and Lear “storming out of Gloucester’s house into the matching storm on the heath.” In these cases spite as altruistic punishment is not far from our understanding of anger, which also wishes to render the judgment that one has been slighted. Flesch for this reason uses anger in his account of it: “self-destructive anger means to communicate by announcing and displaying its self-destructiveness.”⁴³

Flesch says that the “altruistic quality of spite (or the spiteful form of altruism) consists in its immense efforts at expression, its consuming desire to communicate successfully with the object of hate.” Such an account works

well for Shylock of course, whose “communication” is what Flesch calls Shylock’s “jeering” at Antonio and others in the courtroom. Such a notion seems inappropriate when applied to Iago, who at no point seeks such recognition from Othello, or wishes to communicate his destruction to Othello as something else: as revenge for having been slighted in his lieutenantancy, as a way of being “even’d wife for wife” with for him, as a repayment for mistreatment. So we are left confused about the kind of self-advancement that Iago hopes to attain from such revenge.

But again the ingenious David Hume comes to aid. Flesch quotes a brilliant passage arguing that the typically “self-interested” passions are not actually self-interested:

There are mental passions by which we are impelled immediately to seek particular objects, such as fame or power, or vengeance without regard to any interest; and when these objects are attained a pleasing enjoyment ensues, as the consequence of our indulged affections. Nature must, by the internal frame and constitution of the mind, given an original propensity to fame, ere we can reap any pleasure from that acquisition, or pursue it with any motives of self-love, and desire for happiness. If I have no vanity, I take no delight in praise: if I be void of ambition, power gives me no enjoyment: if I be not angry, the punishment of an adversary is totally indifferent to me. In all these cases there is a passion which points immediately to the object, and constitutes it our good or happiness; as there are other secondary passions which afterwards arise, and pursue it as part of our happiness, when once it is constituted such by our original affections. Were there no appetite of any kind antecedent to self-love, that propensity could scarcely ever exert itself; because we should, in that case, have felt few and slender pains or pleasures, and have little misery or happiness to avoid or to pursue.

Who sees not that vengeance, from the force alone of passion, may be so eagerly pursued, as to make us knowingly neglect every consideration of ease, interest, or safety; and like some vindictive animals, infuse our souls into the wounds we give any enemy?⁴⁴

Hume’s passage does more than argue for the possibility of pursuits for which the notion of “self-interest” would seem at first not to apply. Hume’s passage also shows us that the very notion of the self by which we understand self-interest first depends upon passion. More precisely: the very notion of “self” or character as a means of understanding the interest that motivates behavior is more inconsistent than the notion of passion. Hume’s account, in other words, provides the key to a new reading: the notion of a “self-destructive” passion is only an enigma if we have an idea of selfhood or character that precedes the idea of passion.

Such a description does away with the enigma of spite as an altruistic desire for punishment. Hume suggests to us that many of our hateful passions – including the desire for vengeance – are “altruistic,” because they help form in the first place that notion of “self” by which we would develop the conception of self-interest. As Flesch nicely summarizes, passions such as hate or the desire for vengeance are “unselfish, since they are directed at aims that cannot be deduced from a prior axiom of self-love.”⁴⁵ In short, we assume that hatred of the other is a way of advancing the self only because we assume that passions like love or interest are prior to the passion of hating, and that self-love must therefore underlie any subsequent passion. “Altruistic punishment,” however, loses its enigma as “altruistic” when we see that love of oneself is not the ground by which the unsocial passions are to be explained. Most passions are “unselfish” because they “point immediately to the object” and constitute happiness there, rather than in relation to the self.

So one of the greatest obstacles to a vision of human beings as motivated by “self-interest” is the incapacity to deal with the emotion of spite: which brings me back to Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky is not only a great artist of a different kind of “motiveless malignity”; he is also one of the pre-eminent artists of spite. Dostoevsky’s book, *Notes from Underground*, is entirely about this emotion. Robert Jackson, in *Dostoevsky’s Underground Man in Russian Literature*, shows how Dostoevsky’s presentation of malice and spite is a critique of rationality and egocentrism. Robert Jackson helps us to see Dostoevsky’s book as “the revelation of an ‘underground’ in man ... where suffering becomes a malignant pleasure and humiliation is transformed into rage and hate.”⁴⁶ As James Scanlan points out, *Notes from Underground*, particularly in Jackson’s reading, becomes a relentless rebuke upon the notion of “rational egoism” and “self-interest” as the primary governing factors of human behavior.⁴⁷ Here we have a speaker who continually goes against his interests: refusing to see doctors although he is sick and respects medicine, and remaining with a toothache rather than choosing to get it fixed.

Notes from Underground gives us a speaker who “transforms reason into ‘perpetual malice,’” so that “his knowing dissatisfaction with himself and his hatred of the world are expressed in ‘malice,’ in a combination of vicious self-punishment and a frenzied desire to affront, offend, spite the reality pressing at the outer layer of his consciousness. He is aware of the impotence of his malice and this awareness is a torment which makes him double his self-punishment.” (15, 32). In short, rage, hate, malice and spite are presented as emotions that take the speaker beyond any interest in his own self-protection. The narrator establishes himself in the opening lines as so “spiteful” that he refuses to be treated for conditions that ail him:

I am a sick man, I am a spiteful man ... I think my liver is diseased ... I’m not being treated and never have been though I respect both medicine and doctors. ... No, gentlemen, it’s out of spite that I don’t wish to be treated ... Of course, I won’t really be able to explain to you

precisely who will be hurt by my spite in this case ... I know better than anyone that all this is going to hurt me alone, and no one else. Even so, if I refuse to be treated, it's out of spite.⁴⁸

The underground man establishes right away both an awareness of his position and an indifference to his apparent best interest. In this way, as Jackson points out, the "Underground Man himself is the most powerful refutation of ... [the] ... theory of enlightened self-interest." Malice and spite are his way of refusing to "submit to an inhuman doctrine of necessity" (41). The underground man speaks of the "stone wall" of being aware of the mathematical necessity that "two plus two is four" and the fact that human emotions will always have the capacity to go beyond them.

"For pity's sake," they'll shout at you, "you can't rebel: it's two times two is four! Nature doesn't ask your permission; it doesn't care about your wishes, or whether you you like its laws or not ..."

My God, but what do I care about the laws of nature and arithmetic if for some reason these laws and two times two is four are not to my liking?⁴⁹ (13)

In lines like these I am reminded that there is a great difference between saying that emotions are judgments on the one hand, and that they are thoughts on the other. The passage above shows the limits to a purely cognitive reading of human emotion.⁵⁰ As Altieri points out: "Most American philosophers and social theorists tend to dwell only in those aspects of our affective lives that complement reason. As a result we lose sight of both the danger in and the appeal of affective states that generate values resistant to reason's authority."⁵¹ Simply seeing emotions as analogous to thoughts misses the way that they *resist* the authority of thoughts; seeing emotion by analogy with reason misses how emotions can rebel against reason. We need to be able to save that side of emotion that sees it as judgment, while also saving that side of emotion's judgment that resists the judgment of rationality and thought.

When we look at the emotion this way, we see how spite doesn't have to be legible in the *terms* of reason. The Underground Man, for example, insists that revenge does not have to be a form of justice:

I was talking about revenge before ... I said: a man takes revenge because he finds justice in it. That means, he's found a primary cause, a foundation: namely justice. Therefore, he's completely at ease, and, as a result, he takes revenge peacefully and successfully, convinced that he's performing an honest and just deed. But I don't see any justice here at all, nor do I find any virtue in it whatever; consequently, if I begin to take revenge, it's only out of spite. Of course, spite could overcome everything, all my doubts, and therefore could successfully serve instead of a primary cause ... (17-18)

The lines above present us with a picture of hatred that goes beyond, or rather beneath, the moral legibility of indignation. But part of my argument in this book has been that we can view all emotions as moral evaluations. Envy and resentment make as much of a claim upon the world as those emotions we more readily identify with a hunger for justice. At the same time, seeing an emotion as a moral claim does not require giving it the prestige of “reason” or even “thought.” Often being implicated by an emotion means recognizing it as a challenge to the authority of thought.

In this way, the rebellion of spite becomes an even more complex resistance to authority. It now can no longer easily be legible either as a hungering for justice or as the equivalent of “rational thought.” Robert Jackson helps unfold this complexity, which is both social and judgmental.

The Underground Man ... is the first, fully conscious representative of a line of little men, clerks, dreamers, poor folk, who appear in Russian literature. Their thwarted lives, their injured souls are first disclosed in Pushkin's 'Station Master' ... But it is only in *Notes from Underground* that Dostoevsky discloses the full implications – for both individual and society – of the little man's tragic clash with reality. (26)

The observation helps us to recognize the resentment of the outsider while seeing it neither as revolutionary nor as a pettiness of which we ourselves are incapable. The spite of Dostoevsky's outsider powerfully refuses to differentiate between petty resentment and the hunger for justice.

The purpose of our engagement with Dostoevsky's work is not suggest a unity between Iago and the Underground Man: the purpose is rather to confront one of the most eloquent literary expressions of the judgment of spite, and one of the strongest arguments that human beings are often governed by judgments of hatred that go beyond any interest in their own survival and self-protection. The concept of spite helps us to grasp how Iago is capable of an emotion that, through its manifest self-destruction, exceeds any interest in advancement. The problem, however, is that as audiences we still find it hard to reconcile this emotional judgment with some of his claims about self-interest, like the following:

Iago. O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years, and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found a man that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon. (1. 3. 333–335)

The conventional interpretation of these lines is that Iago has never found a man who knew how to pursue his own self-interest, but Iago is such a man capable of self-love and self-interest, while Roderigo is not. Iago would never drown himself for the sake of a ruling passion, like love, because he knows

how to secure his own advantage. But we are now at the point where we are questioning the idea that Iago is capable of seeking his own advantage. His death at the ruling passion of hate for the Moor is not to his benefit any more than would be Roderigo's drowning for the passion of love for Desdemona. In this case, Iago's claim that he "never found a man that knew how to love himself" could be seen as a statement that also includes Iago. While acknowledging that he would never destroy himself for the passion of love, or lust, Iago might be admitting that no human beings act out of the motivation of self-love: that passion always overrides self-interest, and that each has the passion for which he seeks self-annihilation, even if it is not, in the case of Iago, "the love of a guinea-hen." That suggestion, not that Iago loves himself where others do not, but rather that passion makes self-love an impossibility, accords more with the events of the play than the interpretation of Iago as devious Machiavellian, or Independent Man. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt suggests that even the impression of self-interest might be another of Iago's masks:

Even the general term "self-interest" is suspect: Iago begins his speech in a declaration of self-interest – "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" – and ends in a declaration of self-division: "I am not what I am." We tend, to be sure, to hear the latter as "I am not what I seem," hence as a simple confirmation of his public deception. But "I am not what I am" goes beyond social feigning ... "I am not what I am" suggest that this elusiveness is permanent, that even self-interest, whose transcendental guarantee is the divine "I am what I am," is a mask.⁵²

Few, including Greenblatt himself, have fully taken up the implications of the remark above. It is one thing for Iago to be an ironist who feigns service for the sake of his own advancement. It is another for Iago to feign even that interest in his own advancement. Iago's hate is, in this way, only "motiveless" if we take him to be governed by the prerogatives of the ego, yet this is precisely the prerogative he rejects. Iago's statement "I am not what I am" suggests that his hateful emotions do not accord with the picture of willful self-advancement he exhibits to others. The disjunction between Iago's posture of self love, and his manifest self destruction, is the reason for the apparent emptiness and vacuity that critics seem to find in his character. *Othello* is a world in which the framework of self-interest, or even a conventional understanding of "self," has no capacity to explain the behavior of any of its major characters. Desdemona pursues her love entirely beyond any interest in her own protection. Othello finally pursues his desire for honor beyond his own need for survival. In this play emotional judgments take us beyond any vision of human beings as governed by the demands of the ego.

Othello is a play in which characters confront passions wanting knowledge, or even, as Stanley Cavell has suggested, wanting to evade knowledge.⁵³ But I return to Altieri's remark: "The play is not fundamentally epistemic ... all this is a means to an end that takes us far beyond concerns

for knowledge.”⁵⁴ Nearly every theater-goer finds herself stunned by the final silence in which Iago refuses the demand of explanation for his villainy:

OTHELLO: Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil

Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?

IAGO: Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.

From this time forth I never will speak word. (5. 2. 353–6)

I see Iago’s refusal of explanation as a final refusal of the epistemological drives of the play, and a refusal of any safety those explanations would afford. Iago’s hate, or Desdemona’s love, become an enigma about the self primarily to those that assume they know the emotional limits of the self. When I say that passions in the theater are judgments, I mean that the passions of theater also refuse the decorum and self-protection that we seek in our drive to know. If we were to say that Shakespeare’s plays produce “self-knowledge,” we could only say so by recognizing that the extremity of theatrical emotion is a challenge both to a conventional drive for knowledge and our usual notions of the self, since Shakespeare’s emotions rarely are, or ever will be, in our self-interest.

Notes

1. This chapter offers a reading of Iago’s hatred. It does not study what could be an equally profound study of hate in *Othello*: the problem of Othello’s self-hatred, or the role of hatred in Othello’s jealousy. One issue that is not discussed in this Chapter is the issue of race. Racial hatred is critically important in *Othello*; however, I do not discuss it here because, as I said in my introduction, many contemporary understandings of the emotion of hatred identify it primarily with prejudice. Prejudice is already widely understood as a dimension of hatred, and my book is trying to explore those dimensions of hatred that are not as self-evident and widely explored.
2. Heilman, 1956, 25–6.
3. *Id.*, 28–9.
4. *Id.*, 29.
5. I have changed the names of my friends to protect their identities.
6. Shklovsky 2007, 337.
7. Dostoevsky 1995, 43.
8. *Id.*, 45.
9. *Id.*, 50.
10. Parker 1985, 54–74. “Dilate” has meanings that go far beyond implications of delay. Parker discusses, among other things, the implications of the word for narration, rhetoric, and accusation.
11. Heilman 1956, 29–30.
12. *Id.*, 29.
13. Altman 2010, 1.
14. *Id.*

15. Heliman (1956, 31) says the “charge against Othello is an afterthought, as the syntax makes clear. ... [And] ...”
16. Sartre, 1957, 62.
17. *Id.*, 63.
18. *Id.*, 66.
19. *Id.*, 68.
20. The account below of Sartre’s sketch (in Sartre, 1971) is indebted to Lyons, 1980, 28.
21. Sartre, 1971, 3, quoted in Lyons 1980, 28.
22. Sartre, 1971, 66–7, quoted in Lyons 1980, 28.
23. See Greenblatt 1980, 222–307.
24. Bloom 1998, 435.
25. Epstein 2003, 28.
26. I’m indebted for this section on envy and indignation to Konstan and Rutter, 2003. This observation is indebted to Viano, p.88 of this volume.
27. Epstein, 2003, 65.
28. Konstan and Rutter 2003, 169.
29. *Id.*, 167.
30. *Id.*, 169. I obviously do not go along with Goldhill’s distinction between the “rhetoric” of jealousy and the idea of jealousy as what “motivates” plot. Nevertheless, I am willing to accept his suggestion that the bloody conflicts in the plays he describes do not largely center around jealousy and envy.
31. Epstein 2003, 28.
32. Roth, 1997. Subsequent references to this edition will occur in the text.
33. Konstan, 2006, 47.
34. Greenblatt 2010, 49–73.
35. *Id.*, 2010, 57–8.
36. Greenblatt 2010, 58–9.
37. Empson 1979, 218; 219; 224; 230.
38. *Id.*, 233.
39. Auden 1962, 228.
40. Flesch 2007, 36.
41. *Id.*
42. *Id.*, 37.
43. *Id.*
44. Hume 2006, 94–5, quoted in Flesch 2007, 41.
45. Flesch 2007, 40.
46. Jackson, 1981, 13. Subsequent references to this edition shall appear in the text.
47. Scanlan 2002.
48. Dostoevsky 2001, 3.
49. Dostoevsky 1993. Subsequent references to this translation will also appear in the text.
50. Nussbaum 2001 comes very close to making that claim.
51. Altieri 2003, 4.
52. Greenblatt 1980, 236.
53. See Cavell 2003, 125–143.
54. Altieri 2003, 21.

4 Hating without Hope

Timon of Athens is about friendship, and yet it isn't. Before he is betrayed, Timon displays all the generosity of friendship, but none of its intimacy. "Because it was him; because it was me": Montaigne's unforgettable line about his friend La Boétie would be impossible to imagine coming out of Timon's mouth. Montaigne shows us the irreplaceability and the uniqueness of friendship, but there's no uniqueness of that kind with Timon, who treated everyone he met as his friend. A.D. Nuttall thinks that such lack of discrimination makes Timon a diminished figure: "Timon's period of liberality is unenlivened by any distinct relation of human love ... his sojourn in the wilderness is never fired by any positive affection of a higher order ... Timon finds in his seclusion no divine lover ... we are given, not a Jacob wrestling with the Angel, but a vanishing figure, lost in water and air, forming at the last not substance but words."¹

I find it hard to judge Timon with that severity. Yet it's true that Timon's behavior doesn't encompass the whole of what I would call "friendship." The distance between my own world and Timon's may be historically appropriate. Scholars often argue that the way classical writers talk about friendship is different from the way Renaissance and modern writers talk about it. Classical writing, they say, emphasizes reciprocity whereas our own world emphasizes self-disclosure and affection. Paul Millet, for example, argues that "Homeric 'friendship' appears as a system of calculated cooperation not necessarily accompanied by any feelings of affection."² Christopher Gill's summary of this approach is that our modern idea of friendship is based upon the idea that:

Behind the social self, the bearer of roles and participant in communal action, there is another, deeper and more private self. Although it is the social self which is conventionally treated as the author of morally significant action and the recipient of moral judgment, the need to be one's "real" self is taken to constitute a more profound claim and one that is potentially in conflict with conventional moral requirements.

Modern friendship is based upon the idea that we disclose to our friends some part of this real, private self. Montaigne famously said that his essays

were a replacement for the conversations he had with his friend La Boétie, which is why his essays give us that feeling of intimacy and privacy. By contrast, the ideal of frankness, or *parrhesia*, which ancient or Hellenistic friendship often demands, and which we discussed earlier, is something different from the sincerity we are describing here.³ Not everyone is persuaded by all the claims of this historicist relativism. David Konstan's book on friendship at times disagrees with the claims we see above. "[O]ne strand of the argument developed in this book, according to which friendship in the classical world is understood centrally as a personal relationship predicated on affection and generosity rather than obligatory reciprocity, challenges the prevailing assumptions about the nature of social relations in antiquity. Rather than conceiving of Greek and Roman friendship as seamlessly embedded in economic and other functions, I am claiming for it a relative autonomy comparable to the status it presumably enjoys in modern life ... [Even ancient society produced] a space for sympathy and altruism under the name of friendship that stands as an alternative to structured forms of interaction based on kinship, civic identity, or commercial activity."⁴ Still, even Konstan at one point says: "Never, in antiquity, so far as I am aware, is the revelation of personal intimacies described as necessary to the formation of friendships."⁵ Konstan argues against a tendency to see friendship in antiquity only as a political move or form of "calculated cooperation," but he agrees with the idea that one of the most basic characteristics of friendship from our point of view – the revelation or disclosure to a few people of that side of ourselves we keep from the world – is not quite to be found in the ancient world. There's no reason why Shakespeare would be interested in or capable of an accurate account of the ancient world: but this difference between the ancient world and our own, for whatever reason, helps us to describe what we find missing from the friendships in *Timon*.

The fact that we don't find in *Timon* the kind of intimate disclosure that most of us actually identify with friendship might explain why the play has no soliloquies. A soliloquy is analogous to Montaigne's essays: a form of revelation modeled on the close confidences that friends offer to one another. The fact that Iago's or Hamlet's soliloquies might be deceptions, or that they may obscure as much as they pretend to reveal, presents us with a suspicion not too different from the one we face with some of our own friends: that maybe our confidence in another's intimacy is misplaced. Just as there are no soliloquies in *Timon*, there are no gestures of confidentiality in the manner of Hamlet's to Horatio, Cassius to Brutus, or Iago to Othello, however strategic or occasionally false such gestures might be. In *Timon*'s world, friendship seems to belong almost entirely to the world of reciprocity rather than sincerity. *Timon* is a friend not because he reveals to any one individual a side of himself that he keeps from others, but solely because of a generosity that we identify with ties of friendship.

Timon shows us the limit of friendship understood only as reciprocity. Reciprocity, of course, is not irrelevant in friendship. “One sign of friendship,” says Konstan, “is a disposition to come to the other’s assistance. Failure to provide help in a crisis is correspondingly understood to indicate a lack of the good that characterizes true friendship ... what counts is what one does for a friend, for that is the surest evidence of devotion.”⁶ In the classical world reciprocity is more important than close confidence. Orestes says in Euripides’ tragedy: “Friends should aid friends in trouble; when fortune is generous, what need is there of friends?” (665–7). We might say that our need of friends goes far beyond the desire for aid, but those needs are subordinated in the Greek world, as they are in the world of *Timon*.

Reciprocity may not require intimacy, but it can still be faked. The false friend is a flatterer. The difference between a friend and a flatterer, however, is a different opposition than the one between true and false sincerity. In the latter the real friend reveals something unique about himself; but in the former case the issue is not any individual uniqueness, but simply whether the promise of reciprocity is real.⁷ The absence of flattery is not the same as either the presence of either sincerity or revelation of intimate personality. The contrast between friendship and flattery, however, turns on a question fundamental to *Timon*: whether unequals can be friends. Implicit in “reciprocity” is equality. If you are cannot reciprocate, you lack the liberty to equal your friend’s gestures. Friendship must be given freely, and freedom would seem incompatible with dependency. But it is a more extreme position to claim that dependents who appear as friends must be flatterers by necessity. In such a position we imply that inequality makes not only friendship, but love or desire, unfree.

At the same time, that presumption can be chilling, since it kills the impulses of the heart to go beyond the horizons of experience. Certainly, friendship or love must be given freely, but to make absolute freedom the precondition of love and friendship might make love and friendship impossible. After all, as *Timon* shows us, fortune is fickle, and your rich friend today might be poor tomorrow. The Hellenistic world believed that friendship could exist among unequals, as between patron and client for example. Konstan says: “The relationship between patron and client is asymmetrical rather than equal, and this has given rise to the assumption that when poets speak of friendship with their benefactors they are masking an actual relation of dependency. I argue, on the contrary, that friendship is compatible with patronage but not reducible with it. Roman friendship even more than Greek has suffered from the modern tendency to view it as a strictly practical arrangement ...”⁸ In terms of reciprocity, at least one friendship among unequals in *Timon* is actually real; that is the one between *Timon* and his steward:

STEWARD: I beg of you to know me, my good lord,
 T’accept my grief and whilst this poor wealth lasts
 To entertain me as your steward still.

TIMON: Had I a steward

So true, so just, and now so comfortable?
It almost turns my dangerous nature mild.
Let me behold thy face. Surely this man
Was born of woman.
Forgive my general and exceptless rashness
You perpetual-sober gods! I do proclaim
One honest man.

The passage rings partially unreal to me. The steward is too unrealized and abstract for my taste, and the portrayal of his loyalty, unlike that of *Lear's* Kent, or even *Antony and Cleopatra's* Eros, has no flesh or believability to it. Still, the Steward reminds us that friendship and dependency are not incompatible in the play.

William Empson identifies just such a possibility of friendship among unequals in *Timon* when he comments on the competing meanings of the word "dog" in the play. Apemantus mainly uses the word to describe a "flatterer," as when he calls the courtiers dogs. Timon also uses the term in that sense with the line, "uncover, dogs, and lap." But Empson points out that a dog's flattery is fawning "but also sincere." He quotes Erasmus: "what is more fawning than a spaniel? Yet what more faithful to his master?" The example of a "dog," then, is of a vision of flattery that is both dependent and genuine. Empson suggests that Timon not only imagines the possibility of "dogs" in this sense but presents himself as such a dog: "Timon's generosity was a way of begging for affection, and it makes him the same kind of dog as the spaniels he could hire."⁹ The analogy between human beings and spaniels is not likely to persuade too many people of the value of friendship as dependency. But Timon's hateful emotion upon his betrayal is a judgment that he has a right to expect friendship from those whom he has treated as his friends, whether or not they are his social equals.

In the course of the play the relationship of social inequality is reversed. Timon, as we know, eventually comes to depend upon those who were his dependents. Timon's eventual hate, therefore, is an expression of powerlessness, while his generosity was an expression of power. The critic John Jowett is right to say that Timon's speeches of anger and hate, like those of Lear, "respond to personal suffering by imagining the destruction of human kind ... [but] the use is ironic, in that they express the loss rather than the possession of authority."¹⁰ Timon's hate revitalizes and intensifies him; but unlike the hate of Iago and Edmund, Timon's has no capacity to bring about the destruction of those it judges. How do we interpret the hatred of a non-revenger, in short a non-destructive imagination of destruction? When we imagine that hatred has the power to intensify our experience of the world and to become a more fully realized version of ourselves, we tend to imagine hate in the life of an avenger. A great example of this is the Balzac's description of Cousin Bette after she has joined with the malicious Madame Marneffe to plant the destruction of her former lover and the family that has kept her down. In

these plans, says Balzac, Bette discovers a deeper pleasure and a truer realization of herself than she could have ever found in love:

Lisbeth, had indeed found, in her great plan [for vengeance] far greater scope for her activity than in her insane love for Wenceslas. The pleasures of hate satisfied are the fiercest and strongest that the heart can know. Love is the gold, but hate the iron of that mine of emotions that lies buried within us ... Madame Marneffe was the axe, Lisbeth the hand that was demolishing by blow after blow the family which was daily becoming more hateful to her, because we hate more and more, just as, each day, when we love, we love more and more. Love and hate are emotions that feed on themselves; but of the two hate is more enduring. Love is limited by our limited strength – it draws its power from living and giving; but hate is like death and avarice – it is a sort of active abstraction, apart from people and things. Lisbeth, having entered upon an existence that was her natural self-expression, brought all her faculties into play; she ruled, like the Jesuits, behind the scenes; and the regeneration of her appearance was no less complete. Her face shone.¹¹

The hatred Balzac describes is an entirely different sort from Timon's. Bette's hatred is the hatred of a "great plan," one that finds its full scope in a design of vengeance. Moreover, Bette's hatred is personal and directed: it aims at the active destruction of Wenceslas and her family. Contingent, directed, and specific, Bette's malice is far from Timon's universal, aimless, and directionless hatred. Timon is not interested in vengeance or the destruction of anyone but himself.

Nevertheless, so much of what Balzac imagines might seem to describe Timon. Balzac distinguishes between unlimited desire and the limits of our power. "Love is limited by our limited strength – it draws its power from living and giving." Love is a slave to the finitude of our abilities. Life itself is finite, we cannot give in an unlimited way, and we are subject to the capacity of another to give back to us. Hatred, as Balzac says, in its link to death, is an "active abstraction apart from people and things." Love requires being with others, whereas hatred can keep itself apart. We might plausibly apply this to Timon. Timon's love, we might say, is limited by what he and others are able to give and by the finitude of human relationships. But in his hatred he embraces death and keeps himself apart from those limitations. If personal vengeance has some of its power in the capacity to abstract from a present situation, why not abstract from individuality altogether, as Timon seems to do, and seek total universality in one's hate? After all, since the hatred of Bette has its glory in the promise of a consummation, it is also limited to the contingency of that expectation, whereas Timon's does not wish to limit itself at all to expectation of any kind, including the expectation of someone else's destruction. This account of Timon's freedom that

I have given is plausible, but, as I will show, it is ultimately inadequate. Seeing Timon's hatred as a kind of freedom from limits is an evasion of the feelings of betrayal and hurt in which the play implicates us. It is right to say that Timon's hatred is a hatred without expectation or the desire for vengeance. But seeing Timon's hatred of the city as an emancipation from its limits misses something fundamental about what the word "hatred" in this context actually means.

Timon is not like a monk, who renounces the company of men for a more transcendent ideal.¹² On the contrary, hatred keeps Timon's relationship with the city alive. In antisocial behavior Timon relates to human beings in another way than before, but he does not fully break off ties with them. What Timon finds outside the city is isolation rather than solitude. Solitude is a pleasurable or joyful way of being with oneself, while Timon's isolation is full of pain at his betrayal by the world. In fact, nothing in the play suggests that pleasurable or liberating solitude exists even as a possibility. A.D. Nuttall thinks the absence of such a possibility has a historical reason:

We who live after the Romantics may have some difficulty in registering the degree of shock at Timon's translation. We must begin with the simplest instincts. No one in 1607 thought it bliss to go, say, on a solitary walking holiday ... No one had himself painted as a tiny figure standing alone in an overwhelming desolate landscape. In general it was felt to be more oppressive to be alone than to be in a crowd ... If one looks up the word "alone" in a Shakespeare concordance one becomes aware very quickly that it is far more intimately linked with fear and anxiety than is the case today.¹³

Montaigne certainly praises solitude, and Hamlet says, "now I am alone" in a spirit of relief, not anxiety. Nevertheless, Nuttall's right that the Romantic solitude he evokes – the sublime joy of a "tiny figure standing alone in an overwhelming desolate landscape" – is outside the vision of this play. In Timon we find neither solitude, nor ascetic denial, nor the otherworldly rejection of society. We find an indignation that retains, through anguish, a relationship to those he hates.

After showing great generosity toward his friends for two acts, Timon discovers that he is drowning in debts. He expects that his friends will help him. No one does. In despair, Timon pretends to invite his friends to a feast only to surprise them with the bowls that contain not food but warm water. He calls his guests dogs, assails them with stones, and chases them from his table. He then flees the city walls of Athens to live without comfort or consolation as he thunders against mankind in the guise of a misanthrope. The whole play revolves around this dinner of stones and warm water. So we can see the play itself, to use Nuttall's words, as an "anti-feast."¹⁴ Timon's revolt is against the very *spirit* of the feast, and, as some have said, against the spirit of festive comedy. If we take the anti-feast as an emblem of the

play itself we might classify its very genre this way: not as tragedy, comedy, or satire, but rather as “anti-festive-comedy.”

Of course, there are limits to this idea: the play ends with no marriage, and has almost no female characters. But there is some value to the notion of an anti-feast, and other critics describe the play in similar terms. Northrop Frye points out that, while Timon leaves the city in rage, he does not resemble other tragic characters, like Coriolanus, since Timon attempts no revenge upon the city. On the contrary, through Timon’s defeat in the eyes of the community and his simultaneous refusal to accept that judgment of defeat, *Timon of Athens* comes closest not to tragedy but to comedy as seen from the perspective of the comic victim:

In Plutarch the Greek counterpart, or rather contrast, to Coriolanus is Alcibiades, who also returns in revenge to the city that has exiled him, and it would be a logical development for Shakespeare to go from the isolation of Coriolanus to the isolation of Alcibiades’s friend Timon. It may seem an irresponsible paradox to speak of *Timon of Athens* as a comedy. Yet, if we think of it as a tragedy, we are almost bound to see it as a failed tragedy, comparing it to its disadvantage with *King Lear*. But we can hardly suppose that Shakespeare was foolish enough to attempt the same kind of thing that he attempted in *King Lear* with so middle-class and untitanic a hero. It seems to me that this extraordinary play, half morality and half folk tale, the fourth and last of the Plutarchan plays, is the logical transition from *Coriolanus* to the romances, and that it has many features for making it an *idiotes* comedy rather than a tragedy. If we were to see the action of *Twelfth Night* through the eyes of the madly used Malvolio, or the action of the *Merchant of Venice* through the eyes of the bankrupt and beggared Shylock, the tone would not be greatly different from that of the second half of *Timon of Athens*.¹⁵

Frye describes *Timon* as a comedy as it might be seen from the perspective of the comedy’s anti-festive character, like Malvolio, or Shylock. We might remark that is already possible to see *Twelfth Night* from the perspective of Malvolio, or *The Merchant of Venice* from the point of view of Shylock. We do so when we see their anti-festive anger and hatred not as signs of their bad character but as an intelligible criticism of their comic, festive world.

The category of an anti-comedy enables us to see Timon’s emotions as a refusal of the genre in which he would otherwise be placed. If *Timon* were a comedy, and Timon were Malvolio, we could join in with the larger community that condemns him. But too many acts, too many words, and too many thunderous emotions resist an easy attempt to substitute our knowingness for his anguish. Or so I would have thought; yet, too many readers and critics of the play have refused the possibility that *Timon of Athens* might reflect any point of view other than the judgment of the community

that condemns Timon, and have tended to devote their criticism to moralizing about Timon's failures. A representative of this style of criticism is an old but famous essay by Robert Heilman, who brings out those old chestnuts "self-knowledge" and "self-awareness," to read *Timon of Athens* as a criticism of Timon's faults: "With only a little bit of self-awareness," writes Heilman, "Timon might discover and acknowledge several truths about his give-away program. The first is that the exhaustion of resources has its penalties. Surely we are to sympathize with the efforts of the loyal steward Flavius to persuade 'noble Timon' to take a sensible look at his shrinking capital ... Second, Timon might realize that his manic largesse is not so much a blessing to others as it is a way of leading them into temptation. ... Finally, Timon misconstrues prodigality with cash as generosity of spirit. ... It is in such matters that Timon, were he capable of self-knowledge, might reflect upon."¹⁶

Other critics echo Heilman's remarks. David Cook says, "[Timon's] extreme self-assertion is made possible only by an equal self-blindness which, unlike that of Coriolanus, is irremediable even in the last resort; thus it is impossible for Timon to pass beyond the limitations set by his pride and by his ignorance of himself; he can arrive at no fundamental self-knowledge nor meet any new dispensation in death, as do the greater tragic figures."¹⁷ In such a criticism we find the characteristic move of seeing a vehement passion as the sign of a character flaw, usually under the guise of talking about that character's lack of "self-knowledge" or "self-awareness." Such criticism seems to ratify Geoffrey Hill's remark that critics still have difficulty with the notion of polyphony in literature: with the unwillingness, in short, to be implicated by a character's emotions and to refuse any standpoint that might judge a character except from "above the fray." Certainly ancient writers provided such condemnations as well. Demosthenes (23. 122) says, "For it is not the part of healthy men, I believe, either to trust someone whom they take to be a friend so much that they deprive themselves of a defense if he should try to wrong them, nor again to hate so much that, if he should cease [his enmity] and wish to be a friend, they make it impossible for them to do it."¹⁸ *Timon of Athens* is about a character who lives in a manner precisely contrary to Demosthenes' advice. But the fact that such observations can be put to dramatic purposes does not mean that the drama is meant to condemn the character on the basis of such morality.

G. Wilson Knight once remarked that what makes dramatic personae strong on the stage is often what would make them weak in "real life."¹⁹ He means by this that what makes personae *dramatically* successful is not identical with their success or failure to attain power or authority. Despite Knight's persuasive argument, the way critics frequently talk about character often colludes with the ideology of "success," particularly when critics fault character for his "self-knowledge," or "self-awareness," or speak of his "self-destructive" behavior. It's probably not a coincidence, then, that G. Wilson Knight is one of few critics who sees Timon's hate as something to

be celebrated. Knight says Timon in his tirade is an “emperor still in mind and soul, wearing the imperial nakedness of hate.” “His long curses are epics of hatred, unrestrained, limitless, wild. The whole race man is his theme. His love was ever universal, now his hate is universal, his theme embraces every grade, age, sex, and profession. He hates the very ‘semblable’ of man (4. 2. 22).” But in identifying Timon’s hatred with universality rather than contingency, Knight sees Timon’s hatred as a way of liberating himself from the restrictions of contingency. Timon’s hatred, in Knight’s view, is a way of ascending from the finite to the infinite. “Timon’s love, itself an infinity of emotion, was first bodied into finite things; finite humanity, the sense-world of entertainment and art – and those symbols and sacraments of love: gifts. But his love, itself infinite, has proved itself a ‘slave to limit’; generosity was dependent on the limits of wealth, his faith in man on the limitations of human gratitude ... it now appears as a naked force, undirected towards any outward manifestations, diffused and bodiless, no longer fitted to the finite, a thing inhuman, unnatural, and infinite.” The unrestrained love of finite human beings becomes impossible and uneconomical. Only hatred is capable of reconciling the finite and the infinite and of “spiritualizing” the experience of the actual world.

The relationship between hate and universality is something Knight does not confine to *Timon* but rather sees as exemplary of a theme that includes many other plays. “[T]he Shakespearean hate, as expressed recurrently in what I have called the ‘hate theme,’ is an awareness of the world of actuality unspiritualized, and shows a failure to body infinite spirit into finite forms and a consequent abhorrence and disgust at these forms. It tends to originate in a backward time-thinking, recurrent plot-symbol being the failure of love’s vision in the temporal chain of events.” “Two groups must be contrasted: first, plays of the hate-theme, that is *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*: second, plays analyzing evil in the human mind: the Brutus-theme in *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*.” In other words, the hate plays “point us to good, not evil, and their very gloom of denial is the shadow of a great assertion.” The suggestion is that hate is a way of touching the infinite in a renunciation that leaves behind the realm of the finite.²⁰ Love, in short, can never be love without *recognition* in another subject. Recognition somehow demands reciprocity. As we’ve seen in other cases, and above all with Iago, hatred does not need to be recognized or shared.

The hate that Knight is talking about is the hatred of Othello, Troilus, Hamlet, and Lear, not the hatred of Iago and Edmund. In other words, what we’re encountering is hatred as a kind of anguish: a turning away from the disappointment of life toward the consolation of an ideal. This hatred, says Knight, is an attempt at freedom. It is freedom because it frees the hater the recognition of another. That freedom, for Knight, is what Timon encounters

when he turns toward the cosmos in his bluster and pain. Knight, in other words, is taking the very position I described earlier: the idea that hatred be a way of emancipating ourselves from the limits of a contingent existence. The abstract character of Timon's hatred is what sets apart *Timon of Athens* in Knight's view from even the other plays he identifies with the hate-theme. For Knight the other plays dramatize an attempt by the hater to return to the world of "actuality": Troilus through war, Othello by finding "his ideal again too late," Lear through Cordelia, and Hamlet in the "incertitude" that characterized from the beginning his movement between finite and infinite, crawling between earth and heaven. Timon alone, says Knight, refuses entirely the world of "actuality," and never attempts to retranslate the abandonment of the city implied by his banished love with any re-entering of the world of finite human struggle.²¹

Wilson Knight here exhibits the tendency we have seen before, of thinking that emotions are insufficiently worthy of appreciation when considered only as emotions; therefore they must be given the prestige of metaphysics. We saw that Harold Bloom could not find a concept like "envy" or "hate" worthy of a describing a character like Iago, so he appealed to the term "ontotheological absence." Similarly for Knight. Knight wishes to demonstrate to us that Timon's hatred is more than a sign of his insufficiencies of character. In order for Knight to do so, however, hatred must become the sign of a philosophical struggle: between the finite and the infinite, and between contingency and human freedom. The infinite is a grand idea. Yet, in Timon's rants, the infinite is hard to find. Timon's speeches, it is true, imagine things that are not actually the case. But there is a difference between what Timon literally says, and what his words feel like:

O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth
Rotten humidity; below thy sister's orb
Infect the air! Twinned brothers of one womb,
Whose procreation, residence, and birth
Scarce is dividant; touch them with several fortunes,
The greater scorns the lesser ... (4. 3. 1-6)
Consumptions sow
In hollow bones of man; strike their sharp shins,
And mar men's spurring. Crack the lawyer's voice,
That he may never more false title plead,
Nor sound his quilllets shrilly. (4. 3. 151-156)

The lines describe impossible things, but the feeling is of hurt and anger. Timon is so wounded by his betrayal that he sees signs of that betrayal everywhere, even in the natural order. We see this terrible pain when King Lear is driven to the stormy heath, which so often tempts the critic to raise

existential questions about the absurdity of the cosmos, even though every expression of Lear's pain brings him back to his anguish at his daughters. To find that the whole of your universe resounds with your pain is not a leap into the infinite: it is a constant reminder of how implicated you are in the lives of other people.

Why does the confrontation with a character's passion so often become a discussion of human freedom, as in the example above, or when Hegel famously describes Shakespeare's characters as "free artists of themselves"? I think that the reason for the tendency to describe Shakespeare's emotions in terms of human freedom stems from what we previously noted, that the authority of a character's passion in Shakespeare is so often at odds with any other authority that the character appears to possess in the world of the play. Iago's envy and hatred has more authority than his status as a servant or lieutenant; the authority of Timon's anger is at odds with his penury. One response to that disjunction, as we have seen, is to describe the passion as the sign of an inner failure in the character. The other response, as Knight has shown, is to claim that, because the authority of the passion is at odds with any other actual authority, the passion itself must be a sign of the character's liberation from the contingencies of that authority. And because, after the Enlightenment, freedom is tied to the notion of the self as a subject, the passion of Shakespeare's characters is often described as the expression of a new kind of "subjectivity."

We can see the appeal of these writings from the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, which present us with a vision of hatred as a kind of freedom from human limits. But I hope that my book has made clear by now that, despite my appreciation for the thrilling power of rage and hatred, I have refused to see Shakespeare's haters as heroes of human freedom. On the contrary, I believe that the celebration of hatred as freedom is an evasion of the emotion. It is easier to use a word like "freedom" to describe Iago than a word like "envy," because the latter word exposes us to the possibility that such a petty human feeling is not only available but vital for us. Similarly, it is easier to say that Timon has emancipated himself from human limits than to say that he is betrayed and hurt, because which of us would not rather claim that Timon implicates us in our capacity for liberty, rather than our susceptibility to being hurt?

Wilson Knight seems to be doing what many critics of the nineteenth and early twentieth century did with the passions of Shakespeare's protagonists: they transformed a character's exposure to the betrayals of others into the struggle of an existential hero leaping toward human freedom in an absurd cosmos. I find that existential vision to be wrong, and not simply out of the dogma that one must always "historicize" one's claims about Shakespeare and see him as an "early modern" dramatist rather than a nineteenth- or twentieth-century one. My point is rather that seeing Shakespeare's protagonists as existential heroes misses what is hardest to face about their emotions.

I have explicitly rejected the attempt to celebrate Shakespeare's emotions in the language of freedom and subjectivity, just as I have explicitly rejected

Sartre's condemnation of emotions as an evasion of human freedom. I reject most attempts to give emotions, or their condemnation, the prestige of "freedom" for the same reason that I refuse the tendency to see emotions as motiveless and causeless: these interpretations all tend to assume that emotions are powerful precisely to the extent that they exceed, rather than implicate, the world of others. For example, I have talked before about the use of the term "suddenly" in Dostoevsky, which often sets forth a particular kind of "motiveless" passion for which I find no analogy in Shakespeare. That motiveless "suddenly" is central to the experience of so much nineteenth century Russian literature. In Tolstoy's *Diary of a Madman* a landowner intends to buy an estate in the province of Penza: a rich estate with "large forests."²² He finds a poor fool that he can cheat because that fool knows nothing about the value of the estate he owns. The landowner imagines a "a very cheerful trip," and looks forward to a very successful business venture. But everything in the story changes with the introduction of a single word: "suddenly." "I dozed off, but *suddenly* I woke up." The cheerfulness vanishes. The narrator awakes in a new state of terror, where everything is transformed. Where everything was previously cheerful, now "for me it was all hateful." The following night he finds himself unable to sleep. He felt the voice of death calling out to him. "Why am I anguished what am I afraid of? 'Me,' the voice of death answered inaudibly. 'I am here.' Chills crept over me. Yes, of death. It will come, it's here, but it should not be. ... I attempted to shake off this terror." But he found he could not do so. His former life began to unravel, and now there was madness where there had once been reason, darkness and uncertainty where there had been clarity, terror where there had been cheerfulness. His life goes in a radically new direction. He reads the gospels. He lives among beggars. All the while he attests to the difference from what he sees in himself and what others see in him: "They declared that I was subject to fits and other things of the sort, but that I was of sane mind. They certified this, but I know that I am mad."

In the world of the great Russian writers, a man's life can transform just like that, in a moment: suddenly. Reason can become madness, cheerfulness despair, love hate, clarity obscurity, life death. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky demonstrate to us the *motivelessness* of passion, and its capacity to leap in excess of every human relationship. It is precisely such excess that exhibits to us the terrible reality of our freedom. Freedom: the possibility of all possibilities. "There was innocence," Kierkegaard once said, "and *suddenly*, for an unknown reason, from an unknown place, came fear." What happened "suddenly," Kierkegaard tells us, leads human beings to the anxiety of nothingness which supercedes all finite, certain and definite terrors, and which, says Kierkegaard, is really "the reality of freedom, as the possibility of possibilities."²³ This confrontation with a freedom that exceeds every reality and every possibility causes the human being to leap beyond every relation with others to the realm of the absurd. We see this leap in Tolstoy; we see it in Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard. And yet, here is my point: I see very little of this phenomenon in the plays I have discussed.

I have been arguing, contrary to so much criticism, that very little in Shakespeare *exceeds* the world of our relationship with others. When we are alone, we are confronting, not the absurdity of our relationship to the cosmos, but the anguish and pain of our relationship to other people (even if these “people” have to include figures like faeries, sprites, witches, and ghosts). That is why our emotions are not a sign of “ontotheological absence” and do not enable some leap into the realm of human freedom. As great as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are, and although at times I find that they give me useful categories for talking about Shakespeare’s plays, their world is not Shakespeare’s. As powerful as we find the “existential” vision of the human subject to be, that vision does not for me describe either Lear on the heath or Timon outside the city walls.

The disjunction of vision I have just described helps explain why I find it better to describe Timon’s betrayal at the hands of his friends, Lear’s anguish before his daughters, or Iago’s resentment of Othello, with the simplest possible abstractions for emotional judgments – like “envy,” or “resentment” – rather than lofty metaphysical ideas, like “freedom.” That disjunction of vision also underlies the difference between the metaphysics of freedom and Shakespeare’s hateful emotions also underlies the difference between the motiveless malignity of Dostoevsky’s Stavrogin and the resentment or envy of Iago. The hatred of Iago is a judgment that implicates him in the lives of Othello and others; it is not an unmotivated excess or “ontotheological absence” that transcends the limits of his social world. Similarly, Timon’s hatred of his city is a sign of his betrayal and hurt; it does not enable him to leap beyond the finite limits of an actual life. Seeing emotions as judgments in Shakespeare means recognizing that the category of freedom when applied to his plays is often a ruse.

Timon’s hatred implicates him, and us, in a way that the emotions of other characters in the play do not. That is why Timon’s emotion cannot be re-described as a kind of freedom from actual human relationships. One way to see how hatred implicates us is by distinguishing hatred from *cynicism*. Critics have talked a lot about cynicism this play, and sometimes in pedantic ways. One good interpreter of cynicism is Jeremy Tambling. Tambling finds that the following opening scene of *Timon* is saturated with cynicism:

POET: Good day, sir.

PAINTER: I am glad you’re well.

POET: I have not seen you long: how goes the world?

PAINTER: It wears, sir, as it grows.

POET: Ay, that’s well known. For—

How should we read the tone of these lines? Are they only conversational? Are they friendly? The key, for Tambling and for me, is in Painter’s

response: “It wears, sir, as it grows.” The line itself expresses weariness – “it wears” – and implies criticism, but of a kind so unchallenging that the Poet marks it as “well known.” The tone suggests a boredom and a pessimism about the world in which even a criticism is well known and has very little effect. As Tambling puts it: “The play has begun with boredom and exhaustion in the Painter and the Poet, and their cynicism, which aligns them with the Senators. It continues with Apemantus’s melancholic complaints.”²⁴ I like Tambling’s implicit connection between the cynicism of the other Athenian citizens and that of Apemantus. The mood of cynicism and exhaustion helps explain why the citizens can listen to the harangues of Apemantus and not be upset by his criticisms. The implication is that everyone in the city already knows the truths that Apemantus is leveling. Their knowing participation gives them the alibi of “self-knowledge,” or (worse yet) “self-awareness” that allows them to compromise knowingly. In interpreting the Poet’s statement “It wears, sir / As it *grows*,” as the language of fatigue, or wearing out, Tambling is right that exhausted cynicism is exactly the opposite of Timon’s wish, that “as Timon grows, his hate may *grow* / To the whole race of mankind, high and low (4. 1. 39–40).”²⁵ The distinction between Timon’s growing hatred and the Poet and Painter’s weary cynicism helps to explain a particular crux in the play, when the Poet delivers these lines to the painter while he is gazing at a jewel:

When we for recompense have praised the vil’d
It stains the glory of that happy verse
Which aptly sings the good. (1. 1. 14–16)

Many editors, including that of the New Arden, have marked the speech as an aside. The assumption behind that editorial judgment is that such a criticism ought to have provoked some reaction in the Merchant, whereas in the play it doesn’t. Yet the failure to provoke a reaction is likely the point. Angus Fletcher observes, “the elevated moral reflection has no effect on the Merchant, who continues to scrutinize the jewel in a professionally expert manner.”²⁶ Precisely that fact, Fletcher points out, makes the line funny. The openness of the Poet’s moral criticism, combined with its total lack of effect, reinforces the atmosphere of cynicism. The Poet may write poems of moral criticism in which he does not believe, and his moral point can be met with total indifference by the painter.

That contrast is precisely the kind we see between Timon and Apemantus. Apemantus in this play is full of angry denunciations against the world in which he finds himself. Yet in those denunciations he somehow seems not to risk anything, or to lay himself bare in any way. Apemantus is a cynic precisely in that sense that Peter Sloterdijk criticizes in his book, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Sloterdijk calls cynicism “enlightened

false consciousness,” participating in a bad power system even though one knows better; or the posture of criticizing an existing state of affairs as a way of rationalizing one’s participation in it, and succeeding in it more completely. “Well-off and miserable at the same time,” the cynical consciousness “no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.”²⁷ The cynic, like the misanthrope, needs a city in order to be who he is: “Only in the city, as its negative profile, can the figure of the cynic crystallize in its full sharpness, under the pressure of public gossip and universal love-hate. And only the city can assimilate the cynic, who ostentatiously turns his back on it, into the group of its outstanding individuals, on whom its liking for unique, urbane personalities depends.”²⁸ Like misanthropic hatred, cynical hatred is often also seen as a symptom of melancholia, but it is described as melancholia of a different kind. What Sloterdijk says of modern cynicism is also true of Apemantus: “Psychologically, present-day cynics can be understood as borderline melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and can remain more or less able to work. Indeed this is the essential point in modern cynicism: the ability of its bearers to work – in spite of anything that might happen, and especially, after anything that might happen.”²⁹ Apemantus’s cynicism is of this kind. It insists that the hatred of human beings must nevertheless not incapacitate the hater from being able to live in the city and to seek his own advantage in it. Apemantus’s speeches to Timon when he has left the city make this contrast clear:

Why this spade? This place?
 This slave-like habit, and these looks of care?
 Thy flatterers yet wear silk, drink wine, lie soft,
 Hug their diseas’d perfumes, and have forgot
 That ever Timon was. Shame not these woods
 By putting on the cunning of a carper.
 Be thou a flatterer now, and seek to thrive
 By that which has undone thee. Hinge thy knee,
 And let this very breath whom thou’lt observe
 Blow off thy cap; praise his most vicious strain,
 And call it excellent. Thou wast told thus.
 Thou gav’st thine ears, like tapsters that bade welcome,
 To knaves, and all approachers. ‘Tis most just
 That thou turn rascal; hadst thou wealth again,
 Rascals should hav’t. Do not assume my likeness. (4. 2. 204–220)

Apemantus is not the flatterer that he counsels Timon to be, but he makes clear that his view of the world easily accommodates that flattery. Apemantus’s kind of hatred can still seek its advantage from the city that it hates. When critics assail Timon of Athens for his lack of “self-knowledge” they

are counseling the same kind of cynicism that Apemantus presents us above. Apemantus is criticizing Timon for failing to be a success, and indicating that a more moderate kind of hatred would still be able to accommodate itself to the circumstances that it hates.

Timon's response to Apemantus shows why cynicism protects itself in a way that Timon's hatred does not. Timon remarks that Apemantus's hatred lacks suffering. Timon's hate actually impinges upon Timon, and hurts him. Timon's hating, like his generosity, actually requires giving something up, and therefore rends him in a way that Apemantus's could never do.

Thou art a slave, whom Fortune's tender arm
With favor never clasp'd but bred a dog.
Hadst thou like us from our first swath proceeded
The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
To such as may the passive drugs of it
Freely command, thou wouldst have plung'd thyself
In general riot, melted down thy youth
In different beds of lust, and never learn'd
The icy precepts of respect, but followed
The sugared game before thee. But myself—
Who had the world as my confectionary,
The mouths, the tongues, the eyes and hearts of men
At duty, more than I could frame employment:
That numberless upon me struck, as leaves
Do on the oak, have with one winter's brush
Fell from their boughs and left me open, bare
For every storm that blows – I, to bear this,
That never knew but better, is some burthen. (4. 3. 251–269)

Apemantus's cynicism presents itself as a more knowing, "self-aware" pursuit of self-interest. Timon makes clear that Apemantus's declassified hatred has always been a way seeking his advantage. Apemantus does not choose or crave the pleasures that men of Timon's rank enjoy because he was never bred to enjoy them in the first place; therefore, his gesture of spurning them is not an act of sacrifice. Meanwhile Timon, who had been raised his whole life to enjoy only those pleasures, genuinely suffers by living without luxury. Apemantus is only following his own inclinations, and his cynicism is in short a way of counseling a man to follow his own inclinations. Timon therefore gives a new interpretation to Apemantus's famous claim: "The middle of humanity thou never / Knewest but only the extremity of both ends" (4. 3. 341–2). Apemantus wishes to read that as a counsel to moderation; but the other reading is that Apemantus's cynicism, unlike Timon's, can still place itself right in the *midst* of humanity, unproblematically in the middle of the city, pursuing its own advantage.

Timon is not Apemantus, and Timon's hatred is not cynicism. Unlike the hatred of the cynic, Timon's hatred enables no false belief that one can be liberated from the contingencies of the world while living in the midst of them. Superficially it might be the case that neither Timon nor the cynics have to perform anything, but Timon must open himself to hurt and pain in a way that the cynic does not. The epigrammatic cynicism of the painter reveals how the cynic's posture of freedom from the limits of actuality is very different from the dependency at the heart of Timon's hate:

Painter. Promising is the very air 'o'th'time; it opens the eyes of expectation. Performance is ever the duller for his act; and, but in the plainer and simpler kind of people, the deed of saying is quite out of use. To promise is most courtly and fashionable; performance is a kind of will or testament which argues great sickness in his judgment that makes it. (5. 2. 23–30)

The painter's contrarian attitude toward performance is designed to defend him in advance against the disillusionments of betrayal and failed obligation. It is the painter's false consciousness that, if it were true, would be closer to the freedom from limits that Knight identifies with Timon's hate.

We therefore miss something when we say that Timon's hatred frees him from disappointment by expecting nothing, not even revenge. Timon insists that his hatred actually comes at great cost. But even more: Timon responds to the injuries of others not by seeking his own advantage, or accumulating money to free himself from his debts, but rather by willingly participating in his own further degradation and self-abasement. What happens when we refuse the metaphysical consolation of seeing this degradation from the perspective of human freedom? I have said that although Dostoevsky's world is not always Shakespeare's, I draw upon his work because he is one of the pre-eminent artists of spite. I think that something Dostoevsky calls "the egoism of suffering" gets at something important about Timon's condition. Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky's great biographer, notices that Dostoevsky is obsessed by "The egoism of the insulted and the injured, who revenge themselves on the world by masochistically refusing all attempts to assuage their sense of injury." I have tended to avoid words like "sadism" and "masochism" in talking about hate: those words make it too easy to avoid the judgments of those whose hatred exceeds the boundaries of their self-interest. Dostoevsky, of course, does not use that phrase, and therefore forces us to see what is patent in the emotional judgment he describes. In *The Insulted and the Injured* the narrator describes a character who, having been "ill-treated," is seen

Purposely trying to aggravate her wound by this mysterious behavior, this mistrustfulness of us all; as though she enjoyed her own pain, by this *egoism of suffering*, if I may so express it. This aggravation of suffering and reveling in it I could understand; it is the enjoyment of

many of the insulted and injured, oppressed by destiny and smarting under the sense of injustice.³⁰

Dostoevsky's passage enables us to see the suffering of the insulted, not as a metaphysical problem, or psychological disorder, but rather as a moral claim. Like Timon's own self-abasement, one can express the feeling of insult and injury and participate in one's own disadvantage not as a form of freedom or pleasure, but in order to render the judgment of indignation: one can refuse to consent to one's suffering and humiliation by actively willing it in a different way.

The indignation of Timon's self-abasement is like the description that Flesch has offered of spite: a way of paying to do injury. But Timon's payment goes further, since his injury is only to himself. In his refusal to seek either self-interest or reciprocity, Timon renders a judgment of indignation that fits neither with the economist's notion of self-interest nor with the anthropologist's notion of gift-giving as a way to establish social bonds. Timon uses hatred not to help himself, or to establish friendship, but to render the judgment that there *ought* to be friendship, that there *ought* to be ties between human beings that lie outside self-interest and calculation. When confronting a pair of thieves, Timon offers a justification of thievery that rests on an inversion of reciprocity that accords neither with human bonds nor self-interest:

I'll example you with thievery;
The sun's a thief and with his great attraction
Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun.
The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief,
That feeds and breeds by a composture stolen
From general excrement. Each thing's a thief. (4. 3. 487–495)

Timon's speech looks like an inversion of what anthropologists call "primordial debt." Primordial debt is the projection of a larger cosmic principle of gift and indebtedness that becomes the basis for all other acts of charity and human giving. Timon instead describes a primordial theft that obligates us to thief in turn. All this sounds cynical. But what dashes the illusion of cynicism is that the sea's liquid surge "resolves the moon into salt tears." Timon's cosmos robs itself yet still weeps at its own thievery.³¹ Timon's hate is hurtful to him, yet it grows and intensifies by impoverishing itself. The universe Timon describes is an image of his indignation. He imagines a world that abases itself and weeps at its own abasement in order to judge that it should be otherwise.

We have said that Timon's feelings have all the generosity of friendship, but none of the uniqueness or intimacy of friendship. Timon's feelings are a particular meeting of the universal and the particular. He describes

universal and cosmic powers, but only as a way to express particular pain. His deeply personal pain at being betrayed is directed not to a single friend, but to the feeling that the friendship he never found ought to have been universal. *Timon of Athens* offers Alcibiades as an illuminating contrast to this vision. Alcibiades demands the individuality of friendship without its generosity. Alcibiades demands that the Senate not convict his friend who committed murder in a moment of anger, out of a perceived slight to that friend's reputation:

Seeing his reputation touch'd to death,
He did oppose his foe;
And with such sober and unnoted passion
He did behave his anger, ere 'twas spent
As if he had but prov'd an argument. (3. 5. 19–23)

The lines are paradoxical, as the First Senator rightly notes: he acted out of “passion” that was nevertheless “sober,” and an “anger” that Alcibiades claims he nevertheless did manage (“behave”). Alcibiades attempts to provide a defense of anger that oddly conflates the universality of the emotion with the specificity of the crime he defends:

To be in anger is impiety;
But who is man that is not angry?
Weigh but the crime with this. (3. 5. 58–61)

On the one hand Alcibiades identifies man himself, in his universal conception, with anger. To be a man is to be angry, Alcibiades implies. Yet, Alcibiades' defense is unconvincing precisely because the recognition of anger as common to all men does not implicitly include a recognition that all men commit murder.

Alcibiades is trying to call in a favor: he is asking that the Senators suspend a universal principle simply because the man in question is Alcibiades' friend. What Alcibiades demands is friendship neither as the intimacy of Montaigne's for La Boétie, nor the universality of Timon's for his friends. The friendship that Alcibiades demands is cronyism. He is using the prerogatives of friendship in order to make the senators look the other way at an unequivocally immoral act. E. M. Forster famously said that if he had to choose between betraying his country and his friend, he would hope he'd have the courage to betray his country. The remark speaks to a real impulse in all of us until we realize that the class structure in any society is reinforced by just such a principle. Alcibiades is hoping that the senators have the heart to betray their country, but only according to the most debased possible vision of friendship. Alcibiades uses a universal principle – “What is man that is not angry?” – in order to serve a highly contingent and deeply immoral act. His universal idea that people should help their friends is meant to cement corruption and protect murder.

Audiences are often puzzled by why this tragedy about Timon of Athens should end with an image of Alcibiades violently breaking into the city. Some critics have suggested that Shakespeare may be borrowing from Plato's *Symposium*, in which Socrates' vision of love as the ascent to a universal idea, is interrupted by the invasion of Alcibiades for whom love is an anguished vision of his deeply personal love for Socrates.³² Nothing, however, enables us to see the contingency of Alcibiades' passion in any terms that we can celebrate. The play ends in posturing and fraud. Alcibiades attacks Athens for its greed, while financed by Timon's gold. His moral rhetoric is bogus: he attacks because his circle of elites did not excuse the murder of his friend. Trembling at the terror of Alcibiades' revenge, the senators abandon whatever principled courage they had briefly exhibited:

SECOND SEN: Nor are they living

Who were the motives that you first went out;
Shame, that they wanted cunning, in excess
Hath broke their hearts ...

ALCIBIADES: Then there's my glove;

Descend and open your uncharred ports.
Those enemies of Timon's and mine own
Whom you yourselves shall set out for reproof
Fall and no more ... (5. 4. 31–68)

The very senators who refused to grant Alcibiades' friend an exemption from murder are now dead. The second senator's line is obscure, but it suggests that those who stood by their principles and rejected Alcibiades grew ashamed, not at their lack of principle, but at their lack of *cunning*, in short at their failure to subordinate their principle to expediency. Alcibiades agrees now only to kill those that the senators deem their enemies. If friendship is incompatible with inequality, as Timon's dependents implicitly maintained, then Alcibiades has realized one consequence of that idea. Friendship in Alcibiades' world is a friendship among equals, because it is only a way for elites to protect themselves. Timon's hatred, in its wish to grow, and its refusal to be extinguished, remains a rebuke to such a vision, although the rebuke provides no special emancipation or liberty to the man who hates.

Notes

1. Nuttall 1989, 141.
2. Millet 1991, 121, quoted in Konstan 1997, 4.
3. Gill 1994, 4600, quoted in Konstan 1997, 17.
4. *Id.*, 5.
5. *Id.*, 15.
6. Konstan 1997, 110.

7. See Konstan 1997, 15. "Plain-spokenness and liberty to express dangerous views are not the same as the injunction to self-disclosure."
8. *Id.*, 21.
9. Empson 1979, 182.
10. Jowett 2004, 27.
11. Balzac 2002, 163.
12. Konstan 1983, 97.
13. Nuttall 1989, 90.
14. Nuttall 1989, 85.
15. Frye 2010, 188.
16. Heilman 1999, 173.
17. Cook 1963, 83.
18. Quoted in Konstan 1997, 55.
19. See Knight (1949, 9): "And finally, as to 'character': In the following essays the term is refused, since it is so constantly entwined with a false and unduly ethical criticism ... It continually brings in the intention-concept, which our moral-philosophy, rightly or wrongly, involves. Hence ... the constant and fruitless search for 'motives' sufficient to account for Macbeth's and Iago's actions: since the moral critic feel he cannot blame a 'character; until he understands his 'intentions,' and without the opportunity of praising and blaming he is dumb. It is not, clearly, possible to avoid ethical considerations; nor is it desirable ... it is ... natural to us to like Cordelia better than Goneril with a liking which may be said partly on moral values ..." Knight (*Id.*, 10) also identifies character with a false criticism that takes us precisely away from the recognition of role of emotion in drama. "This false criticism is implied by the very use of the term 'character; It is impossible to use the term without any tinge of morality which blurs vision. The term, which in ordinary speech often denotes the degree of moral control exercised by the individual over his instinctive passions, is altogether unsuited to those persons of poetic drama whose life consists largely of passion unveiled. *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are created in a soul-dimension of primal feeling, of which in real life we may be only conscious or may be urged to control by a sense of right and wrong. In fact, it may well seem that the more we tend away from the passionate and curb-less life of poetic drama, the stronger we shall be as 'characters.; And yet, in reading *Macbeth* or *King Lear* we are aware of strength, not weakness ... We must observe, then, this paradox: the strong protagonist of poetic drama would probably appear a weakling if he were a real man; and indeed, the critic who note primarily Macbeth's weakness is criticizing him as a man rather than a dramatic person. Ethics are essentially critical when applied to life; but if they hold any place at all in art, they need to be modified into a new artistic ethic which obeys the peculiar nature of art ... By noting faults" in Timon's "character" we are in effect saying that he would not be a success in real life: which is beside the point since he, and Macbeth, and Lear, are evidently dramatic successes." We should resist the tendency to assume that because Knight's book was written in 1930, his insights have been "superseded" by more recent and more significant "research." Unlike the sciences, there is no necessary progress in the humanities, and Knight's objections can still be a salutary correction to our own assumptions. Knight says here that the interest in Shakespeare's characters, along with the kinds of ethical preferences and values they imply, will always be desirable, and never be avoided.

Indeed, what is hate if not often a judgment of character? We would be absurd not to notice that we hate the characters of Goneril and Regan, and that this hatred is hardly an idiosyncratic relationship to the play. But Knight says that talking about Shakespeare's "characters" never fully disentangles itself from the moral or ethical implication of the idea of "character."

20. Knight 1949, 264, 257, 140.
21. *Id.*, 104.
22. The quotes are taken from Tolstoy 2009, 27–38.
23. See Shestov 1969, 107–8.
24. Tambling 2000, 150.
25. See *Id.*, 153.
26. Fletcher 1989, 7.
27. Sloterdijk 1987, 5.
28. *Id.*, 4.
29. *Id.*, 5.
30. Quoted in Frank 1986, 120.
31. The first bandit recognizes the problem when he says, "'Tis in the malice of mankind that he thus advises us, not to have us thrive in our mystery." The bandit's phrase can mean, "he advises us to thievery because he is a misanthrope, not because he wishes to have us thrive as thieves," or "he wants us to practice thievery because he wants mankind to be governed by malice, not because he wants us to thrive." But a third reading is that Timon advises them to thievery "in the malice of mankind," which is to say, as a pained victim of mankind's fundamental malice.
32. Kaytor 2012, 136–52. For a discussion of how Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium* opposes the contingency of Alcibiades to the universality of Socrates' vision, see Nussbaum, 1986, 196–7: "Alcibiades suggests ... that there is a kind of practical understanding that consists in the keep responsiveness of the intellect, imagination, and feeling to the particulars of a situation ... [Plato] shows us, through Socrates and Diotima, how, despite our needy and moral natures, we can transcend the merely personal in *eros* and ascend, through desire itself, to the good. But we are not yet persuaded that we can accept this vision of self-sufficiency and this model of practical understanding ... What they omit is ... movingly displayed to us in the person and story of Alcibiades. We realize, through him, the deeper importance unique passion has for ordinary human beings; we see its irreplaceable contribution to understanding."

5 Expose Thyself

Kent's moral power in *King Lear* is inseparable from his anger:

CORNWALL: Peace, sirrah!

You beastly knave, know you no reverence?

KENT: Yes, sir, but anger hath a privilege.

CORNWALL: Why art thou angry?

KENT: That such a slave as this should wear a sword,

Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as these,

Like rats, oft bite the holy cords a-twain

Which are too intrinsic t'unloose; smooth every passion

That in natures of their lords rebel;

Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;

Revenge, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks

With every gale and vary of their masters,

Knowing nought, like dogs, but following,

A plague upon your epileptic visage!

Smile you my speeches, as I were a fool

Goose, if I had you on Sarum plain

I'd drive ye cackling home to Camelot. (2. 2. 60–76)¹

Kent's rage is thrilling, but more: it's a relief. Many of us consider it an act of justice to call a villain a villain. I have spoken of Shakespeare's emotional "polyphony," but it has limits. No one with any sense laughs at the blinding of Gloucester, cheers on Goneril and Regan, or despises Kent. Moreover, *King Lear* seems to divorce anger from malice, as well as from cheerful villainy. In the play it is Kent, Lear, and others like them – those either with moral authority or who are capable of moral transformation – who thunder with rage and anger, while the spokesmen for calm and decorum are the malice-ridden and the villainous:

REGAN: I pray you, sir, take patience ...

LEAR: My curses on her.

REGAN: O sir, you are old.

Nature in you stands on the very verge of her confine.

You should be ruled and led
 By some discretion that discerns your state
 Better than you yourself ... (2.4 138–143)

Those who find Kent unmannerly because he fails to control his anger or who find Lear's humiliation and rage to be nothing more than cheap theatrics and an unsightly breaking of decorum align themselves with Goneril, Regan, and Oswald. Yet so many critics find nothing more self-evident than the principle that anger in the play is that old chestnut, "impotent rage." Kenneth Burke says:

Lear's senile rage also has the advantage that the underlying extra-dramatic realm of experience appealed to needs not be confined to the experiences of age. Even as infants, before our identities are shaped, all of us had in some form the experience of impotent rage, since our 'claims to authority' were so absurdly at odds with our actual powers. And even with persons at the height of maturity and office, there is the sense that rage too spontaneously expressed can usually lead to powerlessness.²

We have seen before how the idea of "impotence" can be a way to avoid being implicated by anger. But there is a further problem with Burke's final remark, "rage too spontaneously expressed can usually lead to powerlessness." Yes, that is true of Lear's banishment of Cordelia. But in the examples above we face a different issue: rage is not the cause, but rather the result, of powerlessness. Kent has lost political authority, but his anger still has moral authority. Is the rage of the powerless always "impotent"? Protests, riots: are they not the rage of those somehow without authority and power? Calling the anger of those without power an expression of "impotent rage" expresses cool contempt toward the powerless.

My main difficulty with Burke's remark, however, has to do with politics, so to speak, than with art: we have said that when Shakespeare's characters lose *actual* authority, they often gain *dramatic* authority. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony loses the Battle of Actium only to gain in imaginative vitality. His speeches grow in power and passion as his authority and self-possession collapse. In that play the poet of metamorphosis and transformation makes order, authority, and stability dull, while dissolution, collapse, and breakdown release energy and creative fecundity. The Romantic and Victorian critics saw Lear in his humiliation and rage not as a figure of impotent rage but of sublimity and strength. William Hazlitt says that Lear's passions are "like a sea, swelling, chafing, raging, without bound, without hope, without beacon or anchor. Torn from the hold of his affections and fixed purposes, he floats like a mighty wreck upon the wide world or sorrows."³ If Hazlitt is right, then those who respond to Lear only with embarrassment, and who find his anger to be only cringe-worthy, have missed something. A character's strength is not identical with his success or failure to gain political power.⁴

Shakespeare's plays are as much about energy as authority. The eloquence of the opening scene has formal grandeur and a fairy-tale glamor. But the destruction of kingly authority releases another kind of imaginative strength. More importantly, it leads Lear and his audience toward a visionary self-knowledge. "Self-knowledge" is a term no longer in fashion. Even I have had my problems with it: I have objected to critics claiming that a character lacks "self-knowledge" as a way of being disinterested and evading the judgments of that character's emotions. I do not however agree with readers or audiences who say that "self-knowledge" has nothing to do with Shakespeare's plays. In the case of *Lear*, critics who say so are too clever. Their remarks are provocatively "counter-intuitive" because they falsify the experience of nearly every non-academic theater-goer. The problem is that even though many of us feel that King Lear has arrived at some self-knowledge in the play, if we were asked to say what that self-knowledge is, we would not be able to tell you. Lear's final litany of "Howl!" and "Never" suggest that this knowledge is beyond doctrine, argument, or even verbalization.⁵

One reason why we cannot clearly verbalize self-knowledge in *King Lear* is because the play divorces self-knowledge from introspection. Shakespeare in *King Lear* is the anti-Montaigne. Self-knowledge in *Lear* is not, as it is for Montaigne, a rhetorical or discursive process. Self-knowledge in *Lear* does not come from essaying, reading, or from a dialogue of the self with itself. It comes from humiliation, exposure, and the incapacity of eloquence to render feelings.

Critics have always been struck by the fact that two of the greatest writers the world has ever known were writing at a similar time, and that Shakespeare read Montaigne. Stephen Greenblatt discusses the connection between the two writers in a recent essay, but avoids making the connection between the writers into a simple agreement in world-view. Greenblatt notices that *King Lear* has borrowed words and ideas from Montaigne's essays.⁶ Shakespeare draws upon the following passage in Montaigne's essay, "Of the Affection of Fathers to their Children":

It is mere injustice to see an old, crazed sinew-shrunken, and nigh-dead father sitting alone in a chimney-corner to enjoy so many goods as would suffice for the preferment and entertainment of many children, and meanwhile, for want of means, to suffer them to lose their best days and years without thrusting them into public service and knowledge of men ... [The condition drives children] to seek by some other way how unlawful soever to provide for their necessities [and] maketh fathers irksome unto children, and, which is worse, ridiculous ...

A father over-burdened with years and crazed through sickness and, by reason of weakness and want of health barred from the society of men, doth both wrong himself injure his idly and to no use hoard up and keep close a great heap of riches and a deal of pelf. He is in state good enough if he be wise to have a desire to put off his clothes to go to bed – I will not say to his shirt, but to a good warm night gown. As

for other pomp and trash whereof he hath no longer use or need, he ought willingly to distribute and bestow them amongst those to whom by natural degree they ought to belong.⁷

Something happens, says Greenblatt, when these reflections of Montaigne are placed in *Lear*. These words and ideas from Florio's translation are put into the mouth of the bastard Edmund. Edmund falsely tells his father Gloucester that he heard his brother Edgar say words to this effect: "I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue (1. 2. 66–70)." Edmund uses Montaigne's very lines to destroy his brother. Shakespeare's borrowing, Greenblatt notes, was an act of "aggression,"

since in [*King Lear*] the words are taken over not by a sweet and unworldly idealist but rather by a cunning a ruthless villain. It is not that Shakespeare necessarily viewed Montaigne's views on the relations between parents and children as themselves wicked; rather the play suggests that they may be exploited by people far nastier than anything the essay allows itself to imagine.⁸

Why should something that seems so reasonable in Montaigne find itself in a context so hateful in Shakespeare? "Here," says Greenblatt, "it is as if Shakespeare thought Montaigne had an inadequately developed sense of depravity and evil. What if the children do not want to leave the father with a good warm night gown? What if they want everything? Montaigne's answer is that, though he would give his children 'the full possession of my house and enjoying my goods,' it would be on 'this limited condition,' that 'if they should give me occasion, I might repent myself of my gift and revoke my deed. Everything in *Lear* is designed to show that this idea is tragically foolish."⁹

Greenblatt shows us that just because Shakespeare has read a great writer does not mean his play ratifies that writer's view of the world. In fact, Shakespeare's borrowings are more often than not aggressive. There is a great difference between Shakespeare and Montaigne. However, unlike Greenblatt, I do not think that the difference between the writers turns on Montaigne's "inadequately developed sense of depravity and evil." Montaigne was a man who lived through bitter human catastrophes like his country's civil war and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. His essays attest that he knows the human capacity for cruelty. "The murdering of children and parents ... traffic of robbing and stealing; free license to all manner of sensuality: to conclude there is nothing so extreme and horrible but is to be found to be received and allowed by the custom of some nation."¹⁰ Moreover, it is not clear to me that awareness of evil alone is the terrible, searing kind of knowledge that comes to King Lear and others in the play. Lear is as wounded by Cordelia's goodness as he is by Goneril and Regan's depravity. It is as hard for characters to confront love in this play as it is for them to confront depravity and evil.

What Montaigne's passages reveal for me is the way an experience confronts us in the safety of introspection, as opposed what we learn in our exposure to others.

I have said that *King Lear* refuses to link self-knowledge with introspection. Introspection demands that to know yourself you must look into yourself, examine and reflect upon yourself. In introspection you read, write, and talk about yourself. *Lear* rejects that vision. "Know yourself" in *King Lear* means: *expose thyself to feel*: "Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel" (3. 4. 35). This demand means exposing yourself not only to evil and malevolence but to love. Montaigne does not lead toward this exposure. He may say, "Of all the opinions antiquity has held of man, the ones I embrace most willingly and adhere to most firmly are those that despise, humiliate, and nullify us most ... It seems to me that the nursing mother of our falsest opinions, public and private, is the over-good opinion that we have of ourselves."¹¹ But those things that for Montaigne "despise, humiliate, and nullify us most" are opinions. Montaigne feels that self-knowledge must level human arrogance. But this leveling arrives in a *copia* of words, doctrines and opinions.

By contrast, exposures in *King Lear* devastate our capacity for verbal eloquence, because they are accompanied by those feelings of violation, defeat, and rage that Montaigne's studied calm, his *ataraxia*, hopes to keep at bay. Humiliation and anger make it impossible to study and write, and Montaigne identifies self-knowledge with self-study. "I spy closely on myself and keep my eyes constantly directed on myself alone – I do not have much else to do ... yet even I hardly dare to tell of the vanity and weakness which I find in myself."¹² Montaigne is capable of a self-deprecation that can talk about his weakness and vanity, but only in the context of a self-study that shelters self-deprecation from the feeling of humiliation. "The world always looks straight ahead; as for me, I turn my gaze inwards, I fix it there and keep it busy ... I continually observe myself, I take stock of myself, I taste myself. I roll about in myself. The capacity for sifting truth. ... I owe principally to myself."¹³ To taste, savor, gaze upon, and roll about in oneself: when reading this it almost seems self-evident that there could be no better way to know oneself, until we remember that Montaigne's is a distinctly non-tragic vision. *Lear* does not "gaze" upon himself in the way that Montaigne means, and no one in *King Lear*, except, perhaps, the villainous Edmund, has the leisure or equanimity to "savor" themselves.

You can only savor yourself in solitude, which is why Montaigne tells us to withdraw, partially, from the world. *King Lear* begins the play in the hope that he might be capable of that very withdrawal Montaigne counsels. "It seems to me that solitude is more reasonable and right for those who, following the example of Thales, have devoted to the world their active and more vigorous years."¹⁴ He tells us to spend our final years in retirement from obligation:

We have lived quite enough for others; let us live at-least this tail-end of life for ourselves. Let us bring our thoughts and reflections back to

ourselves and our well-being. Preparing securely for our own withdrawal is no light matter: it gives us enough trouble without introducing other concerns. Since God grants us leave to make things ready for our departure, let us prepare for it ... let us disentangle ourselves from the those violent traps which pledge us to other things and which distance us from ourselves ...

It is time to slip our knots with society now that we can contribute nothing to it. ... Our powers are failing; let us draw them in and keep within ourselves ... In that decline which makes a man a useless encumbrance importunate to others, let him avoid becoming an encumbrance, importunate and useless to himself, so respecting reason and so fearing his conscience that he cannot stumble in their presence without shame. ...¹⁵

Montaigne says that old age should bring some withdrawal from our obligations to others. It is time to “disentangle” ourselves; to prepare for death by living in solitude. Montaigne’s essay is a vision that the end of life can be managed, that the transition from a life of duty and obligation to a life of renunciation can be guided and directed by us.

Montaigne’s vision seems close to the one Lear imagines is possible for himself as he plans to “shake all cares and business from our age, / Conferred them on younger strengths / While we, unburdened, crawl towards death” (1. 1. 37–9). Lear in that final line imagines, like Montaigne, that death is a thing we can prepare for. “All that you live,” Montaigne says, “you have stolen from life; you live at her expense. Your life’s continual task is to build your death.”¹⁶ Yet everything in *Lear* defeats the notion that death is a thing that we can *build*. Death is not yet another project that we make. Death is the irrational end of every project and design. Lear discovers the terror of that reality as he discovers that he cannot avoid confronting himself as superfluous, as an encumbrance, as “useless to himself” precisely because he appears not to be something that “nature *needs*” (2. 4. 263).

Lear’s world is one where we are incapable of living as Montaigne suggests. Or better yet: *Lear*’s world is one in which Montaigne’s suggestions are beside the point. *Lear*’s is a world of danger while Montaigne’s is of safety. *Lear* of exposure where Montaigne counsels solitude; Lear finds madness where Montaigne finds reason; *Lear*’s wisdom comes from extremity while Montaigne’s comes from moderation. Montaigne counsels skepticism, but *Lear*’s is a world where we are implicated beyond the capacity for skepticism.

I have said that the injunction to self-knowledge in *Lear* could be bound up with Lear’s imperative: “expose thyself.” Montaigne’s essays, too, are famous for self-exposure and nakedness, but self-exposure and nakedness of a different kind than Lear’s. In both *Lear* and Montaigne we find discomfort with the excessive burdens of civilization, but the distrust leads in different directions. Philip Rieff is right, I think, to link Montaigne to Freud in a long

tradition of the “therapeutic” project of self-knowledge. The therapeutic project has a certain confidence in words, and in the possibility that talking and writing about ourselves helps us to know ourselves:

What justly gives *The Interpretation of Dreams* – [Freud’s] first psychoanalytic book, for which much of the material is taken from his self-analysis – its high place in the literature of self-reflection lies not so much in the energy and daring of the interpretations as in Freud’s ... equable, detached mood ... [It] is a great, undisturbed book about a most disturbing subject. While exposing the undignified sources of this or that dream, Freud is neither contrite nor defensive. Though the literature of didactic or Romantic confession yields insights perhaps as commanding, what is distinctive about Freud’s writing is its dispassionate attitude towards the self, and particularly toward illness, sex, and the body. Freud is free from that egoism that improves on honesty ... Prior to the Romantic literature of the self, I know of only one writer who, in a mood of urbanity not unlike Freud’s, may be said to have resolved the problem of being honest about himself: Montaigne. For their disinterested and pragmatic self-analysis, Montaigne’s *Essays* deserve a prominent place among the predecessors of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud’s science completes Montaigne’s humanism. It continues the strategic retreat of knowing men from a civilization of public authority to a civilized inspection of the private life.

With Montaigne begins the modern distrust of civilization; in Freud that distrust found its theoretician. Our civilization does not encourage introspection. Its emphasis falls on practical success, its popular manuals of self-examination are characteristically tools of trade; in a market economy, emotions too can become exchangeable commodities. Only as Science, made impersonal, does introspection still share the prestige of its older solitary and religious forms ... Scientific good manners require that [Freud] apologize, cursorily, for exposing ‘so many intimate facts’ about his own private life ... the self-exposure is, after all, for the sake of throwing light on previously obscure scientific problems. In the earlier traditions of introspection, the value of such exposures was entirely personal; only thus did they become exemplary. Freud’s self-exposure becomes exemplary only as it becomes impersonal ...¹⁷

Rieff shows us that Montaigne makes self-examination and introspection the key to self-knowledge, and Freud gives such a project the prestige of science. “Our civilization does not encourage introspection,” says Rieff. Introspection develops from the distrust of civilization’s demands, and is a strategic and partial retreat from its authority and obligation.

That retreat demands that self-exposure take a very particular form: of copious words and discourse, in which the subject volubly catalogues intimate facts of his individual life. Montaigne’s discussion of his bowels, his

taste for radishes, and his sexual appetites, or Freud's disclosure of his sexual anxieties latent in his dreams, are meant to identify knowing oneself with the nearly limitless production of words, with verbal disclosure of oneself as much as examination of oneself. Fundamental to this project is the rhetoric of *frankness*, which does not hide from embarrassing details. Frankness is not the same as confession, since it need not adopt the penitential stance of confession; indeed, it is more likely, as Freud and Montaigne do, to reject penitence as a threat to that "equable, detached mood" that gives frankness its capacity for discovery. Once again, however, we find that the character in *King Lear* whom readers most often identify with a refreshing "frankness" is, the villainous Edmund. Helen Gardner says that Edmund's frankness takes the edge off his villainy in a way that the self-righteousness of Goneril and Regan does not:

Though a master of duplicity, [Edmund] must be open and frank with us; and we instinctively respond to any character who takes us into his confidence. ... In this play such frankness is almost a passport to the affections; it is a relief as a contrast to the awful self-righteousness, the monstrous acceptance of themselves as being right and justified, the cold priggishness of Goneril and Regan.¹⁸

William Hazlitt, too, remarks on Edmund's "careless, light-hearted villainy, contrasted with the sullen, rancorous malignity of Regan and Goneril."¹⁹ Gardner and Hazlitt are right that the appeal of Edmund, despite everything that makes him hateful to us, is a gaiety and frankness that provides us, like Montaigne's or Freud's talk, with a temporary liberation from the burdens of conscience and civilization. In Goneril and Regan that absence of frankness links their malevolence almost entirely with the feeling of authority. Edmund also draws us in with his deflation of lofty human estimation, in lines like, "Now, you gods, stand up for bastards." Edmund's phrase could go well together with Montaigne's most famous deflating lines: "Kings and philosophers shit and so do ladies"; "And upon the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, on our asses."²⁰

Montaigne and Freud fight against the overestimation of human self-regard. But that deflation of human arrogance is pleasant, cheerful, and above all, emotionally disassociated. Introspection is verbal, and can be voluble, frank, equable, chatty, or detached; the promotion of its mood demands a degree of safety, a place in which one will not be impinged upon too greatly by others. Introspection therefore makes possible only a particular kind of self-exposure: a frankness that emerges only if one is not exposed in other ways. As Montaigne once said, we can give ourselves to ourselves only if we have not already given away ourselves to others.

We have to see Montaigne's negative attitude toward venomous and vehement passion in light of his project of introspection. I have said before that seeing emotions as judgments need not be a way of exalting emotions but may rather be a way of deflating intellectual judgments, by showing that our

thoughts and our feelings are equally unreliable. Montaigne's abstention from anger and hatred is in line with such a view. Since, in his skepticism, he finds his thoughts so susceptible to error, why would he not find the same to be true of his feelings? "Whoever recalls to his mind his last bout of cholera and the excesses to which that fevered passion brought him sees the ugliness of that distemper better than in Aristotle and conceives even more a just loathing for it ... Is not a man stupid if he remembers having been so wrong in his judgment yet does not become so deeply distrustful of it thereafter?"²¹ It is not an accident that Montaigne follows such a statement about anger with this statement about errors of opinion: "When I find that I have been convicted of an erroneous opinion by another's argument, it is not so much a case of learning something new ... but of learning my infirmity in general and of the treacherous ways of my intellect."²² Montaigne does not doubt that emotions are judgments here, but for that reason his skepticism leads him to distrust them as much as he distrusts any judgment, including thoughts and perceptions. "It is to my inadequacy (so often avowed)," he says, "that I owe my tendency to moderation, to obeying such beliefs as well as a loathing for that distressing and combative arrogance which has complete faith and trust in itself: it is a mortal enemy to finding out the truth."²³

Montaigne's equanimity comes from his skepticism. But skepticism and equanimity demand one another: skepticism completes the withdrawal from the world that introspection requires. Montaigne introspects in a relatively undisturbed mood: "undisturbed" either by the excessive demands of the outside world or by a too-great investment in the deflation of human pride that comes from self-analysis. Introspection demands a degree of "opting out": opting out of the intrusion into our solitude by others, and opting out of our commitment to our own judgments.

So long as we hold back, no quality in the endless and copious list of attributes I attach to myself need necessarily be excluded:

I cannot settle my object. It goeth so unquietly and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take in this plight as it is at the instant I amuse myself about it. I describe not the essence but the passage. Not a passage from age to age, or, as the people reckon, from seven years to seven but from day to day, from minute to minute.

If I speak diversely of myself, it is because I look diversely upon myself ... shamefaced, bashful, insolent, chaste, luxurious, peevish, prattling, silent, fond, doting, laborious, nice, delicate, ingenious, slow, dull, forward, humorous, debonaire, wise, ignorant, false in words, true-speaking, both liberal, covetous, and prodigal. All these I perceive in some measure or other to be mine according as I stir or turn myself ...²⁴

Montaigne's love of long and seemingly endless lists is one of the great pleasures of his art. The fertility of his eloquence protects us from being lacerated by the diversity of human delineation.

But the terrible demands of shame and remorse that so often accompany our vision of metamorphosis have to be kept at bay. We can see everything that makes *King Lear* different from the passage above if we were to imagine these words of Lear intruding into Montaigne's copious attributes:

I did her wrong. (1. 5. 21)

"I did her wrong." It is the one thing that has no place in Montaigne's passage above. No matter how diversely one speaks of oneself, one can never put *that* in the list: "ingenious, slow, dull, forward, debonaire, wise, I did her wrong." The thought that I did her wrong instantly shatters the safety of introspection. The equable mood is gone. In turning our gaze upon ourselves and contemplating the diversity of qualities that we find there, we can only keep Montaigne's cheerfulness if we keep away the wounds that are too fresh, and those errors too searing to face. "I would most willingly have portrayed myself ... wholly naked," says Montaigne.²⁵ But in *Lear*, as Edgar and Lear show us, nakedness can still be a kind of avoidance.

That is why King Lear asks questions that sound like they could come straight Montaigne's mouth – "Who is it can tell me who I am?" (1. 3. 218) "Is man no more than this?" (3. 4. 107 – but he is asking entirely different questions). The difference between Lear's questions and Montaigne's is not disclosed in doctrine or the intellect but in feeling. There is self-knowledge and self-exposure. There is nakedness and nakedness. There is self-exposure and self-exposure. The difference in these oppositions is not verbal, because in *Lear*, verbal eloquence cannot too precisely render feelings.

Our ability to keep away the more explosive, aggressive, and humiliating passions, like rage, bitterness, and indignation, depends on our ability to keep from our hearts the terrible realizations that obtrude themselves on the safety of our introspection. We can manage the passions that threaten introspection if we can assure that the wrong thoughts, and the wrong visions of ourselves, do not arrive at the moments when we do not desire them.

We must assure that what we do learn about ourselves does not come to us at moments when we are preparing ourselves for a quite different life. Montaigne has remarked on how painful it would be for him to have to learn new things about himself in old age, when it is too late:

I would similarly regret any new inward attainment. It is almost better never to become a good man at all than to do so tardily, understanding how to live when you have no life ahead. I am on the way out: I would readily leave to one who comes later whatever wisdom I am learning about dealing with the world. I do not want even a good thing when it is too late to use it. Mustard after dinner! What use is knowledge to a man with no brain left? It is an insult and disfavor to Fortune to offer us presents which fill us with just indignation because they were lacking to us in due season. Take me no farther; I can go on no more.²⁶

There seems another terrifying irony in the way the final line above, “take me no farther; I can go on no more,” seems to echo Gloucester’s sentiments at the end of the play. *Lear* is about the fact that our new visions of the world do indeed come to us too late, and when we were hoping to not to learn them, because we cannot control when those catastrophes arrive that change our vision of human life.

“Take me no farther; I can go no more” could well describe the way most of us have spoken about our relationship to *Lear* itself. But how different would the feeling in that phrase have to be! We know that Samuel Johnson found it almost impossible to read the play to the end. Many have remarked on the play’s apparent awareness of its own unendurability: “Is this the promised end?” Compare that with one reader’s description of his reading of Montaigne’s *Essays*: “I have read in it for years, but have only now for the first time read through it ... one feels a sadness at coming to its conclusion. One has lived in the close company of an extraordinary man, swayed for weeks to the undulations of his mind, and now, at book’s end, it is over.”²⁷ Most would agree. The painfulness of getting to the end in *Lear* is not like its sadness in Montaigne. We want one to go on forever. We want another, finally, to stop. We feel could luxuriate forever in the untroubled amplification of Montaigne’s copious lists. The more words he adds to the endless and diverse qualifications of human changeability, the more pleasurable for us. But to want *Lear* to continue forever strikes us almost as an act of cruelty, and the prospect of any further additions to the catalogue of human qualities and feelings unbearable. Perhaps both introspection and this other kind of self-knowledge feel like endless processes, but the endlessness of the latter is too painful and untimely.

In many of Shakespeare’s other plays, the presence of introspection helps us to manage the effect of violence, disorder, or malevolence, and prepares us for the act that follows it. In *Lear* we are given acts with no preceding self-dialogue, and this makes the acts in *Lear* more shocking. Maynard Mack pointed out that, whereas in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*, the presence of interiority and introspection helps to palliate the effect of violence, “in *King Lear* we are not permitted to experience violence as an externalization of a psychological drama which has priority in time and significance, and which therefore partly palliates the violence when it comes. This is how we do experience, I think, Hamlet’s vindictiveness to his mother, Macbeth’s massacres, Othello’s murders; the act in the outer world is relieved of at least part of its savagery by our understanding of the inner act behind it. The violences in *King Lear* are thrust upon us quite otherwise – with the shock that comes from evil which has nowhere been inwardly accounted for, and which, from what looks like a studiedly unward point of view on the playwright’s part, must remain unaccountable, to characters and audience alike: ‘Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?’”²⁸

What Mack describes is true, not only of the malevolent or violent acts of the play but also many of the others, including the acts of love or kindness. Cordelia's "nothing," Edgar's disguise as poor Tom, the blinding of Gloucester; the hatred of Goneril and Regan: the fact that these actions and passions in the play are preceded by so little introspection or private verbalization of motives can make them more terrifying, shocking, or alien to us. The category of causeless or motiveless passions seems again appropriate to our discussion, but in a manner very different from the way such a category is attributed to Iago. Iago's hatred was called motiveless because of a profusion of motives, while passions and acts in *Lear* seem causeless because of their extreme patency and externality. Mack is right to remark that in a world like this, acts appear to have "consequences but little history."²⁹

The emergence of acts that seem to have no precedence in a previously verbalized act of introspection throws into confusion characters' attempt to manage their lives and to impose order and limits upon their worlds. The famous opening scene, or more precisely the second scene, of the play exhibits precisely what in the play becomes absolutely impossible. Lear's ceremonial, formulaic, and highly ritualized division of his kingdom exhibits an attempt to subject the entire realm of human affection, and the human relationship to death, to Apollinian clarification and judgment. We cannot simply see that Apollinian realm as foolhardy, since at this moment in the play we have every reason to appreciate Lear's kingdom as one of the great achievements of order, stability, reason, and peace. As Henry Jaffa points out, this moment in the play presents us with "the old monarch at the head of a united Britain (not merely England) and at peace, not only with all domestic factions but with the outside world as well. France and Burgundy, who represent this world, are suitors for the hand of Lear's youngest daughter. Never in the histories does Shakespeare represent his native land at such a peak of prestige and political excellence; in *King Lear* alone do we find actualized the consummation devoutly wished by all other good Shakespearean kings."³⁰ Our chapter will be about how Lear's Apollinian rituals acknowledge too little of the darker, murkier, disordered, and un-delimited side of human life; but in order to make that claim we must partly wonder, at this stage, at what a paragon of order and stability Lear appears to have achieved.³¹ Apollo's adjudication with its blindness appears not simply to have come upon Lear as upon a foolish and naïve inheritance but as the successful government of sovereign authority.³²

The opening ceremony gives us a vision of Apollinian order, with its false belief that everything in human life can be adjudicated, managed, and subject to verbalization and clarity. But the stability and order within which the ceremony occurs shows us that it is not easy to stigmatize that clarity as emerging from mere foolishness. It seems rather to arise from a real attainment of human civility that has nevertheless come at a terrible cost. That cost is

partly the failure to see that the family is not a realm in which the modes of civility, diplomacy and peace can be managed as they are in the other public realms of the kingdom. That failure of vision is why, says Mack, “into this emblematic, almost dreamlike situation erupts the mysterious thrust of psychic energy that we call a choice, an act; and the waiting coil of consequences leaps into threatening life, bringing with it ... the inscrutable where we had supposed all was clear, the unexpected though we that we had envisaged all contingences and could never be surprised.”

So much of *King Lear* turns on the eruption of passions and acts that seem to have no cause or antecedent. The passions and acts “erupt” before characters who believed they had managed and prepared for every eventuality. They erupt for us in the audience when very few previous processes of verbalized introspection foreground them for us. The unexpected passions and acts are shocking not only because they are so disconnected from verbal disclosure, but because neither the audience nor the characters are ever insulated from the open, exposed places in which we confront them.

King Lear reveals the primordial terror that emerges from the rapid dismantling of human institutions and from the destruction of one’s own illusion of self-sufficiency and order. One of those illusions involves an excessive confidence in the connection between rhetoric and human feeling. Cordelia shatters that confidence with her “nothing.”

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

LEAR: How, how, Cordelia! Mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA: Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me; I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honor you ... (1. 1. 91–98)

Cordelia exposes Lear to the break between emotion and persuasion. She also presents him with the one reality of this love that neither previous daughter has mentioned: dependency. Cordelia’s love is a bond, in a relationship that could never be offered freely. Cordelia is dependent on her father. Lear does not want to acknowledge that kind of love, the kind mixed with our dependency upon others.

At what he might have called the single most significant event in his life, Montaigne faced the limits of verbalized introspection to keep away the realities of dependency. In 1563, Montaigne’s best friend, Etienne de La Boétie, was on his deathbed.³³ Montaigne describes the event in a letter to his father. Montaigne wanted his best friend, in the final moments of his life,

to present him with an exemplary vision that he could take with him for the rest of his life. Death could be reintegrated into Montaigne's activity of writing and conversation, which keeps at bay every irrationality that assails spiritual calm.

But then something unexpected happened. After his wife had left the room, La Boétie proceeded to make a completely enigmatical request to Montaigne. He asked Montaigne, again and again, to "give him a place":

After she had gone, he said to me: "My brother, stay close to me, please." ... Then, among other things, he began to entreat me again and again with extreme affection to give him a place; so that I was afraid that his judgment was shaken. Even when I had remonstrated with him very gently that he was letting the illness carry him away, and that these were not the words of a man in his sound mind, he did not give in at first and repeated even more strongly: "My brother, my brother, do *you* refuse me a place?" This until he forced me to convince him by reason and tell hi that since he was breathing and speaking and had a body, consequently he had his place. "True, true," he answered me then, "I have one, but it is not the one I need; and then when all is said, I have no being left." "God will give you a better one very soon," said I. "Would that I were there already," he replied. "For three days now I have been straining to leave."³⁴

These lines in Montaigne's letter are certainly among the most painful and memorable lines that Montaigne ever wrote. And they linger in our memory because of Montaigne's scrupulous honesty. He makes us see not just his true, real, and anguished friendship, but rather a desperate attempt to offer consolation that exposes him in a way that his *Essays* rarely do. No one doubts the totality and realness of Montaigne's friendship, and yet Montaigne makes us see here that, despite all of his love, he may indeed have failed his friend in final moments.

I am surprised, every time I read this passage, of how baffled Montaigne is by his friend's question. I am astonished to see Montaigne say that his friend's words were those of a man whose "judgment was shaken." Montaigne refuses to confront the idea that this moment has clarified, not shaken, his friend's judgment. Montaigne's essays partly attest to the lost conversation and friendship of his great friend. But the wound at the heart of his essays and that project is La Boétie's question; a question that cannot even really be asked because it designates a feeling beyond eloquence. In the final encounter with the elemental reality of death, a dependency that links us to nature, we cannot verbalize this terrible thing we feel.

At the end of *Anna Karenina* Levin is forced to sit beside his brother and watch him die. The event breaks him. He realizes that everything he

has ever read and believed from his twentieth to his thirty-fourth year of life has been shattered. He peers into new books and new doctrines whose reflections upon nature are meant to steel him against the new terror and emptiness that has convulsed him. But. "These words and the ideas associated with them were very well for intellectual purposes. But for life they yielded nothing, and Levin felt suddenly like a man who has changed his warm fur cloak for a muslin garment, and going for the first time into the frost is immediately convinced, not by reason, but by his whole nature that he as is as good as naked, and that he must infallibly perish miserably."³⁵ Levin has two different experiences of nature. One is nature as it appears to him verbalized and capable of verbal scrutiny. The other is nature not as a doctrine or a verbal encounter but as a feeling of exposure and nakedness; a sense of total vulnerability of his being before a reality over which he is powerless.

At our most lacerating moments of exposure, like our confrontation with dying, introspection fails us. When introspection fails us, eloquence fails too. The ancient Greeks offer a vision about why our desire to make death into one of our projects and designs results only in terrible incapacity and failure. Jean-Pierre Vernant says that, for the ancients, death can be represented in masculine or feminine form. As masculine, *Thanatos*, death is heroic, epic, Apollinian, linked with the world of rhetoric, praise, and immortality. *Lear's* opening scene, of course, is like a parody of that wish. The king who has presided over a kingdom of peace and order wishes to move toward death in a spirit of verbalized eloquence and praise.³⁶ Conversely, death also appears in feminine form. One of those forms is called a "Ker." Some works of art, however, present this "Ker" without its original, terrifying energy. The *Iliad* describes a "destructive Ker" who "carries a warrior still alive in spite of his fresh wounds or another still unhurt, or another already dead whom she drags by his feet through the carnage, and on her shoulders she wears a robe stained red by men's blood." But the author of a poem called *Shield*, which is attributed to Hesiod, describes the same scene like this:

Their white teeth clattering, the black Keres – grim, terrifying, frightful, dripping with blood – fought over the fallen corpses. Greedy, they all wanted to inhale the dark blood. They would dig their huge claws into the flesh of the first warrior they snatched, either as he lay dead, or as he collapsed from his wounds, and his soul would immediately fall into Hades, into icy Tartaros. Then, when they had their fill of human blood, they would toss the corpse behind them and rush back in their fury to the clash of battle.

Homer's Apollinian vision evades what the darker vision of the *Shield* discloses: death not as it is linked to praise and a heroic life but, as Vernant says, "nearer to all the repulsion and horror that can be mobilized by the transformation of a living being into a corpse and of a corpse into a carrion."³⁷

The vision of death as male is connected to eloquence. The vision of that same death as female is linked to the dark furies: the “children of Night – the dark Nux who seems to be completely opposite to shining, golden Aphrodite. The feminine power of death, Ker, occupies a special place among the sinister brood. Night is the power that first arises, along with Erebus, directly out of Chaos, the first primordial gap when nothing exists in the world but an immense dark abyss, an opening without direction.”³⁸ Chaos is related to *caino*, *casiko*, “to open”: Chaos is the open mouth and the open womb.³⁹ The mouth that has nothing to say is also the Mother whose open earth swallows you back into the terror of the underworld.

As we have said, King Lear believes that death can be managed with eloquence, praise, and the formality of his previous power. But Lear comes to discover death in this other, darker, and more unmanageable aspect. Lear comes to see death not as male Thanatos but as energies he identifies as female. That is how Freud reads Lear’s final confrontation with Cordelia in his arms:

The Goddess of Love herself, who even now took the place of the Goddess of Death, had once been identical with her. Even the Greek Aphrodite had not wholly relinquished her connection with the underworld, though she had long surrendered her role of goddess of that region to other divine shapes, to Persephone, to the tri-form Artemis-Hecate. The great mother goddesses of the oriental peoples, however, all seem to have been both founts of being and destroyers; goddesses of life and fertility, and death goddesses.⁴⁰

King Lear abandons Apollo’s order, which identifies death with eloquence and praise. He gives way to a world where emotions can no longer be linked to the art of persuasion. He is forced to see death as a dependency that he can’t help but link to his first dependency: the dependency upon the mother.

All human beings first confront the reality of dependency in their relationship to their mothers. We confront in motherhood the link between humanity and an ineradicable natural power, a fatal need that precedes our entry into discourse and verbalization. As the saying goes, old age is a second infancy; in Lear’s words, we “crawl towards death”: motherhood reminds us that we are born in need and end in need. In Montaigne, the project of introspection demands a swerve away from any confrontation with the reality of dependency. Montaigne describes the beginning of his project of essaying and introspection thus: “at the age of thirty-eight ... long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employments, while still entire ... Michel de Montaigne ... retired to the bosom of the Learned Virgins, where in calm and freedom from all cares he will spend what little remains of his life ... [in] freedom, tranquility, and leisure.”⁴¹ Montaigne’s remark about having “retired to the bosom of the Learned Virgins” sounds so much like Lear’s hope that he might “set [his] rest” on Cordelia’s “kind nursery.” What

Montaigne's project of introspection refuses to acknowledge is the way in which the life of introspection depends upon forces outside of verbalized eloquence. Some of those forces are social, economic, geographical, and infrastructural: who labors to make possible the life in the tower to which Montaigne retires? But some of those forces are also of sex and nature.

Montaigne's attitude toward sex is in line with his project of introspection. Montaigne believes that sex can be a largely discursive matter. Montaigne's essay *On Some Verses of Virgil* exhibits a vision of sex that is without terror and mystery. There are no anxiety-provoking relationships to sex in Montaigne for the same reason that there are no witches, demons, or furies, and no explosions of jealousy or rage. Camille Paglia says: "In his *Essays* ... Montaigne lists his sexual habits as casually as his menus or bowel movements. Sex for Montaigne is office schedule and flow chart: how often and at what times of day does he lie with his wife? The sex act is rhetorically equivalent to his taste in wines or reluctance to use silverware ... Montaigne's identity is not shaped by sex. He is discursive intellect musing on social custom." Camille Paglia is a critic for whom the dependency upon the mother remains an unavoidable rebuke to every illusion of self-sufficiency. "The mystique of our birth from human mothers," she says, "is one of the daemonic clouds we cannot dispel by tiny declarations of independence. Apollo can swerve from nature, but he cannot obliterate it. As emotional and sexual beings we go full circle. Old age is a second childhood in which earliest memories revive."⁴² Richard Regosin points out that the use of the word "mother" is outnumbered by the word "father" in Montaigne by more than two to one. In his essay on the education of children his mother appears twice while his father is mentioned thirty times. References to Montaigne's wife appear five times: four as spouse and only once as mother.⁴³ I believe that Montaigne diminishes the role of woman as mother in his writing because he is unable to confront women in a role that implies his dependency upon them, and because the relation between child and mother so obviously precedes our entry into discourse. The relation between our fathers does too, but Montaigne is able to swerve away from that realization by identifying his father with his childhood learning of Latin. Montaigne must not confront woman in the role of mother because he cannot identify "man" with a non-verbal dependency, whether that dependency is on woman or the fatal demands of nature.

The tragic consequence of our refusal to confront a primordial, pre-historically determined need is a reason why I find a great vantage point for understanding *King Lear* in the dark, bloody, and visionary art of Aeschylus. By tracing some similar patterns of imagery in order to see what makes *King Lear* unlike Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, we can confront the human cost of our attempt to create illusions of self-sufficiency through denials of dependency, particularly upon the mother. Presented at the festival in Athens in 458 B.C., Aeschylus's tragedy enacts the violent consequences that follow from Agamemnon's victorious return to Argos after ten

years at war in Troy. His wife Clytemnestra welcomes him back with apparent joy, even though she has made a secret plan with her lover Aegisthus to kill her husband. The climax of the play is the murder of Agamemnon, a vengeance that Clytemnestra has been nursing for ten years in retaliation for Agamemnon's bloody sacrifice of their daughter Iphigeneia, who was killed to allow the Achaian ships to sail to Troy. The chorus recalls with savage horror the sacred killing:

The prayers go up. Her father
Gives the signal. Iphigeneia
Is hoisted off her feet by attendants –
They hold her over the improvised alter
Like a struggling calf.
The wind presses her long dress to her body
And flutters the skirt, and tugs at her tangled hair –
'Daddy!' she screams. 'Daddy!' –
Her voice is snatched away by the boom of the surf.
Her father turns aside, with a word
She cannot hear. She chokes –
Hands are cramming a gag into her mouth.
They bind it there with cord, like a horse's bit.
Her lively lips writhe at the curb.
So the cry that by chance
Might have cursed the house of Atreus
Is trapped inside her body
Heaving her breasts.
Now rough hands rip off her silks
And the wind waltzes with them
Drawn across the beach, and over the surf.
Her eyes swivel in tears.
She recognizes her killers –
Men who had wept
To hear her sing in the home of Agamemnon
When wine was poured out for the high gods.
They clench their hearts hard
And avoid her eyes.
They stare at a masterpiece of perfect skin
Goose-pimpled in the cold.
Pity is like a butterfly in a fist
As the knuckles whiten.⁴⁴

No surprise, seeing this brutal vision, that butchery should answer butchery: mother avenges daughter, and Agamemnon is murdered in the bath. In the second tragedy, *The Libation Bearers*, describes the barbaric reaction to this crime. The son, Orestes, who was sent abroad when his father was

murdered, returns from exile and kills his mother Clytemnestra. Guided by Apollo, he cuts her and her lover down. But no sooner does his mother die than a terrifying vision of Gorgons covered in snakes, of demonic women from the underworld, rises up out of the earth:

ORESTES: Ah!

Look there – look: women, in grey cloaks
 With the faces of Gorgons. Don't you see them
 Their bodies and their heads wreathed with vipers –
 They are coming ...

These women are real – spirits have power
 Over the spirit of man.
 This is not imagination.
 The demons are the decomposition
 Of my mother's blood.
 They are the wolves of her body, of her breasts, of her womb.

Apollo! The earth is teeming
 With these creatures—
 Apollo, you did not warn me!
 They are climbing out of the earth,
 Out of their burrows in old blood.
 Eyes like weeping ulcers,
 Mouths like fetid wounds ...

CHORUS: Hurry to Apollo's temple –
 Apollo will cleanse you.
 Apollo will wash your eyes clear of these visions.⁴⁵

These terrible demonic, female forces that rise up from the underworld to champion the cause of the mother are the Furies. Also called euphemistically the Eumenides (“The Kindly Ones”), they are terrifying female energies that pant for Orestes’ blood, and demand vengeance for his matricide. They are children of Mother Night, and Curses who dwell below the earth, and now they are enemies of Apollo’s vision and order:

FURIES: Night is our mother
 We live in her womb.
 We swoop out of her womb
 To punish the living
 Who walk about in daylight.
 Apollo
 Thinks he can steal our prey,
 Our allotted victim.

But the one who killed
 His own mother
 Must answer to us.⁴⁶

The final tragedy, the *Eumenides*, resolves this bloody conflict. The trilogy ends with an attempt to decide between competing claims: the dark underworld forces champion the cause of the mother and daughter, while Apollo argues for the cause of the father and son. A jury formed to adjudicate the cause is divided exactly in two. Athena, who had voted in advance, supports the cause of Orestes and Apollo. The Apollinian order is vindicated, and the dark maternal curses are transformed into a blessing.

The world of the *Oresteia*, in elementary ways, could not be more different from the world of *Lear*. But the differences as well as similarities are why the *Oresteia*'s profound vision helps us to interpret some of *Lear*'s darker energies.⁴⁷ In some of its imagery *King Lear* reads like the *Oresteia* in reverse. Aeschylus imagines the foundation of political order, and the arts of persuasion and eloquence, in the ritual exorcism of terrible female energies: mother Clytemnestra and the underworld with its threat of darkness and curse are pacified by Apollo's order. *King Lear*'s imagery of exorcism goes backwards: wisdom comes only when the "darker purpose" emerges from Apollo's false clarity, and law gives way to curse as the Mother arrives with her storms and the Daughters of Night. *Oresteia* begins with a deeply riddling, paradoxical language, and ends with a solution to those riddles. *Lear*, which begins with a language of greater apparent clarity, proceeds to the Fool's riddles and paradoxes and Poor Tom's grotesque catalogues. In *The Oresteia*, Apollo, the famous dragon slayer and killer of the Python, is opposed to Clytemnestra, who is described as dragon or snake. In *Lear* Apollo gives way to the imagery of the serpent's tooth, and Edmund born under the Dragon's Tail. Whereas Orestes is assailed by Gorgons with vipers in their hair, *King Lear* plays out that dragon imagery in reverse, when Edmund, servant of Nature, overturns Edgar's "legitimate" inheritance from his father. Erich Neumann says that the "swallowing of the hero by the dragon – night, sea, underworld – corresponds to the sun's nocturnal journey from which it emerges victoriously after having conquered the darkness." Fear of the dragon, in a variety of myths, corresponds, among other things, to "something far more elemental ... the male's fear of the female in general ... [and his fear of] the Great and Terrible Mother."⁴⁸

Froma Zeitlin says that the *Oresteia* paradoxically transforms Clytemnestra from a rebel against the status quo into the representative of a "pre-existing, archaic, primitive" order.⁴⁹ No mystery why that happens: in the male imagination, the entry into any political order is always preceded by a state of dependency. Men have experienced that dependency

as an undifferentiated, primordial infancy before which any distinction of subject and object, or of ego and world, was possible. In that state there is no distinction between the individual mother and great-creating Nature itself. Robert Fagles says of Aeschylus's Furies: "More than child-avengers, *teknopoinos*, the Furies are *teknopoios*, child-breeding too. They are the Process, like the Great Mother as Nietzsche saw her, 'eternally creating, eternally driving into life, in this rushing, whirling flux eternally seizing satisfaction.' The *Eumenides* sweeps us through a phantasmagoria of light and dark, of darkness breeding light, until the night brings forth the torches of our triumph, like the torches of that Fury Clytaemnestra, 'glorious from the womb of Mother Night.' Night and day are mother and daughter, suffering and the illumination it can bring."⁵⁰ It is not for nothing, therefore, that Apollo's realm of persuasion, eloquence, order, and the state must be blessed by the "motherless" Athena: motherless because she is no mother, and because, emerging from Zeus's head alone, she was never born from a human mother.

ATHENA: My work is here, to render the final judgment.

Orestes,

I will cast my lot for you.

No mother gave me birth.

I honor the male, in all things but marriage.

Yes, with all my heart I am my Father's child.

I cannot set more store by the woman's death –

She killed her husband, guardian of their house ...

ORESTES: O, God of the Light, Apollo, how will the verdict go?

LEADER: O Night, dark mother, are you watching now?

ATHENA: The man goes free,

cleared of the charge of blood. The lots are equal.

FURIES: Oh unbearable,

mortified by Athens,

we daughters of Night,

our power stripped, cast down. (*Eumenides*, 748–66)

The mothers and daughters of the Night are stripped of power and cast down: Apollo's law and the state are put in their place.

With the Night cast down, we return to the realm of daylight and vision. The visually revolting Eumenides are subordinated to clarity and eloquence. Defeating them, however, requires that the mother be denied a fundamental role in the conception of the human being:

APOLLO: Here is the truth, I tell you – see how right I am.

The woman you call the mother of the child

Is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,

The new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
 The *man* is the source of life – the one who mounts.
 She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps
 The shoot alive unless god hurts the roots. (*Eumenides*, 665–671)

Apollo's preposterous embryology acquits Orestes of the crime of kin murder, and "disclaims" his "propinquity and property of blood" by denying the role of the mother in conception. The daemonic claims of the mother Clytemnestra can only be suppressed in favor of Apollo's order by denying the human's fundamental dependency upon the mother.

Critics like Froma Zeitlin appeal in their reading of Aeschylus to psychoanalytic accounts, like Erich Neumann's of the Great Mother. "The wicked, devouring mother," says Neumann, "and the good mother ravishing affection are two sides of the great ... Mother Goddess." We communicate a feeling of dependency to forces outside ourselves frequently in images of fruitfulness, or else or of barrenness and destruction. "[A]s the good mother, she is fullness and abundance; the dispenser of life and happiness, the nutrient earth, the cornucopia of the fruitful womb. She is mankind's instinctive experience of the world's depth and beauty of the goodness and graciousness of Mother Nature who daily fulfills the promise of redemption and resurrection, of new life and new birth." However that same mother can reappear in her terrible aspect. "The overwhelming might of the. ... the devouring, destructive aspect under which [life] may also manifest itself, is seen figuratively as the evil mother ... as the bloodstained goddess of death, plague, famine, flood, and the force of instinct."⁵¹

Neumann says that we find a classic transformation of the Great Mother from her benevolent to Terrible aspect in adolescence, when the ego experiences its increasing self-consciousness as painful, and therefore the pressure of a resistant unconscious, struggling to tear itself free from the dependency it identifies with the mother is felt as a "dark and tragic fate." During this period the maternal archetype now projects nature in transition from fecundity and light "to darkness" where "the world wheel, the humming loom of time, the Weird Sisters, and the wheel of birth and death, all ... express the sadness that rules over the life of the adolescent ego."⁵² We can see how these associations are useful to describe a deprivation that exceeds one's own discursive capacity: such a feeling of gloom finds recourse in a language of the fates, but also in a vision of nature as empty, barren, and grotesque.⁵³

When he rejects Cordelia, as we saw earlier, Lear refers to the "sacred radiance of the sun," and the "mysteries of Hecate and the night." Jeanne Roberts says that Hecate in its benign form "can preside over a joyous celebration like that at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, which incorporates a recognition of death, fertility, and age." But that same Hecate in her Terrible form "can denote a death-dealing crone, ruler of the underworld," that "infects the world with death and decay, blocking forces of fertility and human feeling."

Lear, therefore, discloses a terrible ambivalence in his invocation of Hecate, who he believes at this moment can still be in league with the daylight, Apollinian forces of the sun, but who seems already to be emerging in her more terrible and dangerous form, as Night, and the nocturnal form of madness.

Jeanne Roberts says that whereas the wild form of nature in Shakespeare's early works is usually "a forest – mysterious, magical, and ambiguous," the wildness of nature in *Lear* and *Macbeth* has become empty and barren: a desolate, blasted heath. In *King Lear*, the vision of nature as "shadowy forests" and "champaigns rich" has given way to a more terrifying and impoverished vision. Says Roberts, "the numinous and mysterious forest has already disappeared. The potentially benevolent mother is already entombed in earth. Whereas in the earlier plays the forest offered the promise of fertility as well as frightening sexual confrontation, the barren landscape of *King Lear* is haunted by the specter of the sterility conjured up by Lear against his daughter. Edgar finds sanctuary briefly in the hollow of a tree and deposits his father in a tree's shadow near the final battle; but such trees are merely fleeting and ineffectual memories of former fertility."⁵⁴

In *Lear*, Cordelia can't fit into her father's order and is banished. But in Lear's loss of power the banisher becomes banished himself, and the daughters are refigured as the mother. The thing Lear wishes to avoid confronting is dependency. Dependency precedes Lear's life as king, but follows it too. That's why he sees the order that comes after his state of pre-eminence as somehow *pre-civilizational*: "archaic, regressive, primitive."⁵⁵ They are reminder of the dependency from which they all emerged. Zeitlin's schema of the divisions between male and female in the *Oresteia* (along with some additions of my own) helps us notice in *Lear* a corresponding set of maternal and paternal images:⁵⁶

Male	Female
Apollo	Erinyes, Snake, Dragon
Father	Mother
Odd (three, trilogy)	Even (two, tie, <i>lex talionis</i>)
Culture	Nature
Order	Chaos
Rule	Unruly
Above	Below
Head-Phallos	Belly-Womb
Light	Dark
Life	Death
Clarity	Obscurity (riddle)
Intellect	Senses
Positive	Negative

Aeschylus's images move from right to left. *Lear*'s from left to right. *Oresteia* moves from riddle to solution, *Lear* from solution to riddle. *Oresteia*

from shadow to light; *Lear* from light to shadow. *Oresteia* from madness to clarity; *Lear* from clarity to madness. The *Oresteia* celebrates the emergence of order from the swamp and ooze of vulnerability. *King Lear* re-exposes us to that primordial murk of a fatal defenselessness.

Janet Adelman is right to see breakdown of the authority of fathers in *Lear* and the emergence of the terrible, or as she calls it, “suffocating,” mother. Adelman explores the “familiar trope of psychoanalytically informed criticism that Shakespeare makes his daughters into mothers.” Even though *Lear* “gives us the uncanny sense of a world created by fathers alone,” *Lear* himself is forced “to recognize not only his terrifying dependence on female forces outside himself but also a terrifying femaleness within himself—a femaleness that he will come to call ‘mother’ (2. 4. 56).”⁵⁷

Not only *Lear*, but Gloucester, too, is forced to confront a reversal of his previous patriarchal vision that identifies law and “legitimacy” with the denial of the mother.

KENT: Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER: His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to it.

KENT: I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER: Sir, this young fellow’s mother could, whereupon she grew round-womb’d and had indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her be. Do you smell a fault?

KENT: I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

GLOUCESTER: But I have a son, sir, by order of law ... (1. 1. 11–18)

Adelman is right to point out that Gloucester’s identification of law and legitimacy with the father involves a suppression of mother. “If Edmund is the product of a mother’s womb, Edgar is the product of a patriarchal law, apparently motherless ... in distinguishing between his legitimate and illegitimate sons, Gloucester manages to do away with the womb altogether, making Edgar all his.”⁵⁸ Edgar’s final triumph over Edmund repeats this opposition between the mother’s conception and the father’s law:⁵⁹

My name is Edgar, and thy father’s son.
The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices,
Make instruments to plague us;
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes. (5. 3. 169–73)

Like the dark Furies of Aeschylus who repulse Apollo’s sight, the dark womb of Edmund’s matriarchal authority is bound up with the father’s own blindness. As we said, Edmund overwhelms Apollinian confidence that everything can

be planned, managed, and adjudicated. The overthrow of that order is also identified with the emergence of a new feeling:

LEAR: No eyes in your head, nor money in your purse, and yet you see how this world goes.

GLOUCESTER: I see it feelingly. (4. 6. 139–140)

“Feeling” here is feeling divorced from eloquence, as well as from the clear outlines of the verbal and the visual. Through one of Apollo’s swerves, the *copia* of fertility, abundance, and fruition in the mother, is often identified with the profusion of eloquence in the writer. Conversely, emptiness of eloquence is barrenness. As Terence Cave says, “[c]oupled with other words from the same semantic domain (*abundantia, ubertas, opeas, varietas, divitiarum, vis, cautitas, facilitas*), [*copia*] suggests a rich, many faceted discourse springing from a fertile mind and powerfully affecting its recipient.”⁶⁰ It’s not for nothing that an excess of that *copia* can also be seen, paradoxically, as effeminacy of style. By a conflation of the arts of eloquence with the abundance and fertility of discourse, Lear in the opening scene seems to identify *copia* of words with fertility and fecundity of nature, and Cordelia’s “nothing” with natural deprivation. Whereas in Aeschylus the eye-defeating mothers are put down, in *Lear* they return and replace the order of sight and eloquence with a different vision of the mother.

But in elemental ways, *King Lear* is not the *Oresteia*. In the *Oresteia* the difference between the patriarchal and matriarchal images corresponds to *competing moral choices*. Characters in Aeschylus have to choose between incompatible visions of how the city should be governed. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes are not free to reconcile the demands between the realm of daughters and mothers on the one hand and the realm of fathers and sons on the other. The world of the *Oresteia* is literally broken in two: the jury knows that only one set of values will decide how the state is to be ruled, but it does not know which that should be.

The *Oresteia* gives us competing natural and supernatural orders that demand a moral choice. *King Lear* is different, but no less bloody, violent, and intolerable. *Lear’s* problem is not that it presents us with competing orders of nature and the gods, but that our ideas of order may have no foundation in nature and the gods at all. *Lear’s* problem is that values can be faked. Edmund, Goneril, and Regan thrive when they do, not because they are backed by daemonic or natural powers, but rather because they lie.⁶¹ Confronted with his daughters’ lies, Lear discovers that when he speaks thunderous words, or demands that nature vindicate his feelings of betrayal, no magical order will make those demands happen, and connect his words to nature. Zeitlin points out that in the *Oresteia* Clytemnestra becomes “an archaic *daemon* that menaces the world with a renewed cosmogony,” and a “threat of total disorder.” Lear when driven out into the storm finds not a new cosmos but an old human hurt. The daemonic powers that back

Clytemnestra demand a decision against the existing order. The daemonic words that explode from Lear express pain at a world he can't control.

Gloucester, in the scene we have quoted above, denigrates the role of the mother in his own conception of Edmund. But he does this not because, like figures in the *Oresteia*, he is trying to choose between demands of fathers and mothers. No, rather, the swaggering posture in Gloucester's acknowledgement is an act of self-protection. Gloucester also thinks that Edmund has nothing inscrutable about him; that the lives of his sons will proceed as directed and evaluated by him. He thinks that if he praises Edgar and denigrates Edmund, Edgar will thrive and Edmund won't. Maynard Mack says, "like other consequences, too, Edmund looks to be predictable and manageable in advance. Shakespeare ... could hardly have chosen a more vivid way of giving dramatic substance to the unpredictable relationships of act and consequence than by this confrontation by a father and his unknown natural son."

Edmund becomes a fatal reminder that we cannot always manage our lives with others through our designs and our words. We are always exposed in our lives with others to a world that we cannot control, and to the fact that no special design in nature demands that what we say can wholly order our lives. I said that Edmund identifies himself with the goddess Nature, tells us he was born under the Dragon's Tail, and says that his energy comes from the dark womb in which he was conceived, rather than from the "tired bed" authorized by the law of the father. But unlike in Aeschylus, he is not championing female values. He is not saying he will avenge his mother because her interests were denied. He merely points out that no magical authority guarantees that Edgar will thrive and Edmund will fail, even though the world wishes to attach the word "base" to Edmund, and the word "legitimate" to his brother. No force in nature backs up the apparent authority behind words. Nothing in nature grounds any idea of order in the play. The world of Aeschylus involves a choice between different natural and supernatural orders. The world of *Lear* exposes us to our claims having no natural or supernatural sanction. That awareness in *Lear* creates a new relationship to nature: a relationship of dependency before fatal demands that cannot be managed or adjudicated in advance by our eloquence or our plans.⁶²

Lear continues to believe that some magical power will connect his words to nature when he curses. In Aeschylus, the eye-repulsing Daughters of Night are also called the Curses who dwell below the earth. The difference is that Lear's curses exhibit only a humiliating exposure to powerlessness. Lear refers to his cast out Cordelia as:

Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dowered with our curse, and strangered with our oath ...

(1. 1. 208–210)

That, however, is the last time that his curses will have the power to make things happen. Jane Harrison remarks that in the ancient world, “the person cursed or bound down was in some sense a gift or sacrifice to the gods of cursing ...”⁶³ Harrison speculates that the Apollinian exorcism of the Eumenides and Furies have their origin in festivals designed to expurgate curses and imprecations.⁶⁴ In *King Lear* nothing is expurgated and purged because curses and imprecations are not a supernatural threat. They are only a way of trying cover over our hurt feelings.

Lear and the *Oresteia* present us with a world of curse and blessing. But the transformation of curse into blessing in Aeschylus involves the establishment of a true political order:

You great good Furies, bless the land with kindly hearts,
 You awesome Spirits, come – exult in the blazing torch, exultant in our
 fires, journey on.
 Cry, cry in triumph and carry the dancing on and on!
(*Eumenides*, 1050–1057)

Lear’s imagery is the reverse. *King Lear* in its first three acts transforms the world of persuasion, law, and blessing into the realm of curse. This transformation, though, is not a way of drawing up old, dangerous powers, but of giving voice to feelings of defeat. Geoffrey Hartman says that the opening of *King Lear* turns on the fact that the hope for a blessing is suddenly received instead as a curse. These words “blessing” and “curse,” describe not the attempt to control supernatural forces but rather feelings of humiliation that those whom we love can cause us:

Take Cordelia’s famous ‘nothing,’ which sets going one of the bloodiest of Shakespeare’s plays ... Cordelia’s ‘nothing’ has, in its very flatness, the ring of a curse. Lear gives all, Cordelia nothing. The disproportion is too great. In Lear’s view, order itself is threatened, and his great rage is just. But order, here, is the order of words, the mutual bonding they establish. Lear is asking no more than his daughters blessing; which is, moreover, his one guarantee in a situation where he is about to divest himself. And instead of word-issue Cordelia utters something that sounds as sterile to him ... as a malediction. It is painful to recall how much of the ensuing drama is curse, rant, slander, and impotent fiat.⁶⁵

Cordelia’s words, Hartman says, “approach the status of curse” in their “incapacity to bless.”⁶⁶ Hartman also connects, in his reading, the world of curse and blessing with the language of motherhood – Cordelia’s blessing would be “word-issue,” but her failure to bless is “sterile.” The association makes sense not only because of ancient connections between curse and matriarchy but because Lear seems to identify blessing with the fertility of copious eloquence. It is right then to say that the failure of that eloquence is sterile, barren, and strikes him as a curse.

Lear starts cursing, therefore, because he thinks he has been cursed. Kenneth Gross says that Lear's "curses are as much a way of throwing his rage from him as of giving it voice, finding for it new objects, lest it turn back on himself or expose him to himself to clearly ... He curses, at times, because he does not want to weep."⁶⁷ Lear's curses are a way of avoiding the full confrontation with his incapacity. Lear's curse is a way of making rage into a judgment while at the same time avoiding the exposure that his rage is an expression of powerlessness:

Lear. Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once,
That make ingrateful man! (3. 2. 1–9)

Kenneth Gross says that "Lear tries to identify his own curses with the storm's destructive noises, to find a new source of power in the storm's own echoes of his loss."⁶⁸ Lear not only curses himself but feels nature to be a curse. Others also feel that he lives in an accursed world

Thou hast one daughter
Who redeems nature from the general curse
That twain have brought her to. (4. 6. 194–6)

This curse, however, is no magic. The "curse" is the terrible fact that others can deceive and hurt us. If only Lear's curses really were a supernatural order in the storm, if only the great chain of being had really collapsed, or his sufferings were actually a sign of the apocalyptic "promised end," Lear's defeat would feel less humiliating.

When Lear's language becomes more daemonic, he begins to talk of nature as an underworld, which becomes alien and terrifying. "Beneath is all the fiends," he says, identifying a woman's vagina with underworld forces (4. 6. 120). *Lear* also does not at all lead us to a feeling of communion with non-human animals, in the manner of Renaissance theriophily and the ideas of Raymond Sebond. The lines of Edgar in the guise of Poor Tom, above all, cause us to feel the darkness, the lack of clarity, in nature:

Edgar. Tom will throw his head at them. Avaunt! You curs!
Be thy mouth or black or white,
Tooth that poisons if it bite;
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,
Hound or spaniel, brach or lym,

Or bobtail tike or trudle-tail
 Tom will make them weep and wail:
 For with throwing thus my head,
 Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fled. (3. 6. 64–72)

Edgar. Poor Tom; that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets; swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog; drinks the green mantle of the standing pool ... Mice and rats and such small deer, have been Tom's food for seven long year. (3. 4. 128–132)

Many have rightly called Poor Tom's natural catalogues "nauseating."⁶⁹ And Lear himself draws upon animals with this feeling of nausea and terror: "The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't / With more riotous appetite." Lear's statement might literally mean that we are like animals. But the *feeling* we encounter in this misogynistic equation of women with soiled horses and fitchews is rather one of revulsion. G. Wilson Knight is right to say that, in *Lear*, the reference to other beasts presents us with "animals being strange irrational forms of life to a human mind, perhaps touching some ... stratum in the subconscious reaching back aeons ... now tumbled up in the loosened activity of madness."⁷⁰ No matter how much doctrine or even observation reminds us of our affinity with non-human animals, many of the lines present us with the fact we often experience these animals as "irrational forms of human life."

To say that in *Lear* no actual Curses rise up from the earth, panting for human blood, or that Poor Tom's nightmares will make no actual demons come out, does not mean that these words do not touch a terrible pain. Edgar's catalogue of fiends expresses the feeling of being betrayed, driven out, and exposed. They allow him to voice his anguish in a language other than the language of eloquence and persuasion. This language attests to an actual dependency upon realities outside his control. These realities are not about the cosmos, but about the fact that we are damaged by lives of other people, and all of our designs and hopes for order have failed to save us in advance from that damage. At the same time, Edgar's language of fiends is a way of hiding. Edgar not only puts on the Poor Tom act to avoid being exposed as Edgar. He also uses language of devils to avoid speaking in a way that exposes him to the responses of other people. The daemonic forms of Aeschylus threaten to overthrow an existing order, while both Lear's and Edgar's demonic language are forms of self-protection.

That is why the hard wisdom of the play mandates that the language of curses and fiends partly give way at the end. It does not, as in Aeschylus, give way to eloquence and light. No vision of Apollo makes death and pain seem a meaningful part of a larger order. Instead, characters stop invoking curses and fiends because even that language turns out to be another

evasion. Edgar must eventually stand before Gloucester not as Poor Tom assailed by demons, but in naked truth that son and father are bound by mutual need. The greatest moments in the play are those in which the mere fact of dependency is plainly, if only temporarily, admitted:

CORDELIA: O, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:
No, sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR: Pray do not mock me.
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind. ...
Do not laugh at me;
For as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA: And so I am, I am. (4. 7. 56–71)

I am staggered that in these words, which may be the greatest that Shakespeare ever wrote, nothing more is acknowledged than the fact that Cordelia is his daughter: that is one reality that cannot be faked. The greatest connection between words and feeling are those that simply express a human bond. In such a realm the art of persuasion has no place.

If the play had ended there, we might have said that the relinquishment of demons and fiends had meant a relinquishment of rage itself. But rage and humiliation are never conquered in the play. The actual cursing may stop, but even in the final scene, Apollo's realm must yield to forces it can't control. "All's cheerless, dark and deadly," says Kent in the play's final moments. "Your eldest daughters have foredone themselves, / And desperately, are dead" (5. 3. 289–291). The villainous daughters are poisoned by their own malice, only so that the Daughters of Night may stand in their place. King Lear's final question upon death of Cordelia, "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, and thou no breath at all?" (5. 3. 305–6) does not make sense of our animality or our nature. It rather reminds us, fatally, that no introspection will ever make sense of it. Lear's inconsolable howls reveal that no order will be built to shelter us from shattering, humiliating indignation. In first or second infancy, we will never be reconciled to our dependency.

Notes

1. For this chapter I use the conflated text in the Norton edition. The play raises important questions for the editor and the textual critic, but those questions are not the focus of my chapter.
2. Burke 2007, 161.
3. Quoted in Mack 1967, 17.

4. Because a character's dramatic authority is not the same as its actual authority, the interpretation of a play is not exhausted by examining characters' success or failure to navigate a power structure. Lear's loss of authority reveals more to us than questions about, or "critiques" of, absolutist rule. Northrop Frye says (Kermode 1969, 265), "At the beginning of *King Lear*, we see the hero preparing to take the fatal step of depriving himself of his own social context. He will exchange the reality for the 'name' of king, and instead of being loved by his subjects for his qualities, he will be loved by his daughters for himself alone ... what is the identity of a king who is no longer a king?" Burke (2007, 158) asks, "What is a king without a kingdom, a sea captain without a ship, a general without an army, a politician out of office, a jobholder without a job?" These are powerful and useful questions, but our experience of the play takes us beyond our desire to raise or answer those questions. Halpern (1991, 222) has famously read King Lear's loss of authority as a materialist "critique" of a fiction of absolute power that King Lear fails at first to acknowledge: "To vary James's own aphorism, 'No Land, No King' ... This is, of course, a bit of wisdom that King Lear has to learn the hard way. When the king gives away his land, he seems to expect some residue of the royal office to adhere to him. ... What he discovers, however, is that in giving away his land he has given away all, for the kingship is nothing more than the power that accrued to him from owning the kingdom ... kingly authority is not only legitimated but constituted by landownership." Halpern's excellent essay has helped many of us to understand some possible materialist implications in Shakespeare's play. The play does indeed reveal a world in which Lear's authority cannot survive the material base which sustained it. Nevertheless, because the emotional resonance of the play is not identical with the "lesson" we learn from this loss of political authority, it becomes difficult to see the realm of judgment in the play as exhausted by Lear's "learning the hard way" what the Marxist professor has known all along. To say that King Lear's loss of authority either raises a *question* about kingship, or exhibits a critique of a previous vision of kinship, implies that King Lear's rage is only something to be evaluated, rather than an evaluation itself.
5. Stephen Booth (1983, 162 n. 8), makes a remark to which I partially assent. "Although I insist that Lear learns nothing in the course of the play and that *King Lear* has nothing to teach us, I also insist that the sense that Lear learns and that the play illuminates is *of* the play – is generated by *King Lear*, not foisted upon it by the benignly creative commentators who insist on telling us *what* Lear learns and *what* the great human truths are that *King Lear* so evidently makes evident. The fact that we find *Lear* 'meaningful' leads us to try to identify the meanings that fill it. The fact that we cannot find the meaning or meanings we seek does not, however, deny the fact that sends us questing: *King Lear* feels profoundly illuminating. The play does not reveal the true nature of things, but it does – or seems to – prove that nature can *be* revealed and is contained within *King Lear*, a play whose glow assures us that within its humanly manageable compass is the light by which to see the essential truth of the human condition. An audience to *King Lear* does not see the light but knows itself to be where light is." Booth's remark is a little hard to follow. But I think that Booth means this: we *feel* that King Lear arrives at self-knowledge (he says, "*King Lear* feels profoundly illuminating," emphasis added), but if we try to say *why* we feel this way, and transform that feeling into a doctrine or a set of claims about what *King Lear* does learn, we falsify the play.

However, we falsify the play equally to deny that the feeling of self-knowledge is not part of our experience of the play. I agree with this position. I disagree, however, with the first claim, that “Lear learns nothing in the course of the play.” The word “learn” need not refer to a set of easily verbalizable insights, but rather to the feeling that Lear arrives at some greater knowledge of himself. The feeling is a legitimate judgment about the play, even if such a judgment cannot be translated into a set of doctrines or discursive insights.

6. Montaigne 2014, xxvi.
7. Quoted in *Id.*
8. *Id.*, xxviii–xxix.
9. xxix.
10. *Id.*, 165.
11. Frame 1969, 257. I frequently quote more recent translations (though Shakespeare obviously couldn’t have read them), because they are more literal than Florio.
12. Montaigne 2003, 637. The next bit is more hilarious: “I have such wobbly legs ... Give me an ingrowing toenail, and I am touchy, bad-tempered and unapproachable.” But this endearing self-deprecation is exactly the kind of thing one cannot exhibit in *Lear’s* world, because others deprecate you in a bloodier and more merciless way.
13. Montaigne 1965, 499.
14. Montaigne 2003, 271.
15. *Id.*
16. *Id.*, 103.
17. Rieff 1979, 66. I think that one experience that lies outside of introspection is the kind of dependency that Freud himself is able to notice. Therefore, I think that there is a contradiction between Freud’s insights, and the introspective method, that psychoanalysis cannot fully resolve. I’m not the first person to notice this contradiction, and Rieff’s book in some sense confronts that problem.
18. Gardner 1967, 12.
19. Hazlitt 1902, 259.
20. Montaigne 2003, 1231, 1269. I changed the British “arse” to American “ass.”
21. Montaigne 2003, 1218.
22. *Id.*
23. *Id.*, 1220.
24. Montaigne 2014, xiv–xvi.
25. Montaigne 2003, lxiii.
26. Montaigne 2003, 1142.
27. Epstein 1993.
28. Mack 1967, 91–2.
29. *Id.*, 93.
30. Bloom 1964, 114.
31. See Mack 1964, 94. The beginning of the play shows a world “where complex realities have been too much reduced to formulas, as they are on a map ... Can it be that here, as on that map, is a realm where everything is presumed to have been charted, where all boundaries are believed to have been known, including that of nature and human nature; but where no account has been taken of the heath which lies in all countries and in all men and women just beyond the boundaries they think they know?”

32. Coleridge too noted that the fundamental feature of Lear's rage and the opening scene involves its violation of a scheme that had been so designed as to forestall the unexpected. "It is not without forethought, nor is it without its due significance, that the division of Lear's kingdom is in the first six lines of the play stated as a thing already determined in all its particulars, previously to the trial of professions, as the relative rewards of which the daughters were made to consider their several portions. ... the trial is but a trick; and ... the grossness of the old king's rage is in part the natural result of a silly trick suddenly and most unexpectedly baffled and disappointed ..." (Bate 1992, 385).
33. This episode has been endlessly interpreted, but the most interesting account for me is by Greenblatt (1989b, 223–8). I am indebted in this description to Greenblatt's account.
34. Montaigne 1971, 1055–6.
35. Tolstoy 1991, 837.
36. Vernant 1991, 95.
37. *Id.*, 96.
38. *Id.*, 97.
39. *Id.*
40. Freud 1913, Vol. 12, 298.
41. Montaigne, 1958, ix.
42. Paglia 1990, 158, 20.
43. Regosin 1996, 204.
44. Hughes 1999, 17.
45. *Id.*, 143–4.
46. Hughes 1999, 167.
47. H.D.F. Kitto (1950, 71) points out that at least in the *Agamemnon*, you have a similar refusal to soften the terror of violence through any portrayal of introspection. "In the *Agamemnon*," says H.D.F. Kitto, "there is no revelation of motives. The great fact that in the killing of Iphigeneia is that Agamemnon did it; motive is given only in so far as it is dramatically necessary for so fearful an act to be explained ... So with Clytemnestra. She may justify herself, after the murder, but there is no picture of conflicting passions in her heart." In that respect, like *Lear*, the opening of the tragedy is partially shocking through its refusal to elaborate too greatly upon motive. That aspect of the *Oresteia*, however, changes by the second tragedy in the trilogy.
48. Neumann 1973, 155.
49. Zeitlin 1978, 149–84.
50. Aeschylus 1997, 88–9. Subsequent references to this translation will appear in the text.
51. Neumann, 1973, 39–41.
52. Neumann, 1973, 45.
53. It is also not for nothing that the projection of the mother would be at its strongest at those moments when the ego has not fully developed: in short those moments of childhood or adolescence. In such moments the ego feels small and diminished in relation both to the external world upon which it feels so much dependency, and in relationship to an unconscious whose demands it finds so difficult to manage: "Over against all this the ego ... remains small and impotent. It feels itself a tiny, defenseless speck, enveloped and helplessly dependent, a little island floating on the vast expanse of the primal ocean. At this stage,

consciousness has not yet wrested any first foothold from the flood of unconscious being. For the primitive ego, everything is still wrapped in the watery abyss, in whose eddyings it washes to and fro without orientation, without sense of separateness, defenseless against this maelstrom of mysterious being which swamps it again and again from within and without. ... [E]very man's life feeling is necessarily one of constant endangerment. Life in the psychic cosmos of the primitive is a life full of danger and uncertainty; and the daemonism of the external world, with its sickness and death, famines and floods, droughts and earthquakes, is heightened beyond measure when contaminated with what we call the inner world. The terrors of a world ruled by the irrationality of chance are mitigated by no knowledge of the laws of causality are made even more sinister by the spirits of the dead, by demons and gods, witches and magicians invisible workings emanate from all these beings, and from the reality of these all-pervading effluences shows itself in fears, emotional outbursts, orgiastic frenzies, and psychic epidemics; seasonal bouts of lust, murderous impulses, visions, dreams, and hallucinations." (Neumann, 1973, 40). This description of the Great Mother in its Terrible aspect for Neumann accounts for those moments when the ego feels its own insufficiency in relationship to nature or its own unconscious. Every attempt on the part of human institutions or the human ego to establish the world of consciousness as a world of clarity, self-sufficiency, and order is an illusion. The ego is at the mercy both of its own unconscious and that outside world that it sometimes calls "nature." That nature, when projected onto the archetypal image of the Mother, is capable of "giving and nourishing" or "rejection and deprivation." In its positive aspect, even madness can be seen in a positive light: as "everything mantic, religious, prophetic," or else as inspiration genius, and ecstatic rapture. In its terrible, ensnaring aspect, "where the womb becomes a devouring maw" and nature returns as "diminution, rending, hacking to pieces," or as death, "annihilation ... rot and decay," madness appears not as inspiration but only as the dark, terrifying destruction of reason's order and limitation. (Neumann 1974, 149).

54. Roberts 1991, 49.

55. Zeitlin 1978, 150.

56. Zeitlin 1978, 182. My additions are: "Snake, Dragon," and "Erinyes."

57. Adelman 1992, 104.

58. Adelman 1992, 104–5.

59. Adelman 1992, 105.

60. Cave 1979, 5.

61. Clytemnestra lies too, but by the end of the *Oresteia*, no one is faking it: the conflict is about values that each side actually embodies.

62. That is why Dollimore (1984) is partly right to say that *King Lear* reveals the failure of "essentialism" in the play. He notices, as have many other critics (David Danby, W.H. Auden, etc.), that the word "nature" in the play has many different meanings, and he is right to notice the failure in the play of any attempt to attribute a stable nature or essence to human beings. Nevertheless, as I suggest, certain features of human life are essential: we all die, we all come from human mothers, and we all begin and end our lives in a state of dependency. Greenblatt (1989a) is also right that "exorcism" in *King Lear* is largely a theatrical fraud rather than a real threat. In Aeschylus, the establishment of Apollinian order depends upon actual underworld forces *really* being exorcised. Jane Harrison

(1991, 23) pointed out, “The keynote of primitive ritual ... is exorcism.” The world that exorcism must contend with (curses, daemonic forces, and underworld powers) is in *King Lear* a way of managing and adjudicating that part of our lives that can never be managed and adjudicated.

63. Harrison 1991, 141.

64. *Id.*, 222.

65. Hartman 2004, 279–80.

66. *Id.*

67. Gross 2001, 173.

68. *Id.*, 176.

69. See Frye 2010, 317.

70. Knight 1930, 192.

Epilogue

Not to Trust

I had always loved Shakespeare's sonnets for intensity of their passion. In graduate school this love changed, and I began to approach the sonnets like a puzzle. I was eager to demonstrate my smartness, to show that I had read the latest theory, and could turn art into paradoxes. Hiding behind puzzles is an act of self-protection, and a way to avoid emotional exposure. The problem, as I now see it, is not that I was right at first to luxuriate unreflectively in the passion of the *Sonnets*, and wrong later when I dispassionately examined the difficult puzzles in his work. The belief that there is a conflict between passion and difficulty assumes that passion is simple. When confronted with the emotional self-conflict of the dark lady sonnets, we might have a strong desire to play with their conflicts as though they were colors in a Rubik's cube. We find paradoxes and riddles and want to think our way through them, hoping that sufficiently complex abstractions will help us to explain them. But we cannot simply *think* our way through the difficulty of the dark lady sonnets. To expose ourselves to what we feel is often more difficult than thinking, which is why we are so often seduced in literature into pretending that our conflicted feelings are actually abstract riddles. To read these poems, in the harder sense of the word "reading," requires leaving behind the shelter of an emotional and moral clarity.

Sonnet 138 shows us why its paradoxes are not a mental puzzle but an uncomfortable delineation of conflicted passion:

When my love swears that she is made of truth
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust,
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be. (Sonnet 138)

The biggest problem in the sonnet above, for me, is not that the speaker pretends to feel something that he doesn't really feel, but rather that he actually has two contrary feelings. The speaker does not say that he seems to believe his lover even though he really does not. Rather, poet really believes his lover and really knows that she is lying. It is logically impossible to believe someone if you know that they are lying. But to insist that the impossibility is one of logic is to be emotionally disassociated: to point out that something is impossible to *think* ignores the fact that the speaker nevertheless *does* the impossible; he does the impossible by *feeling* it. What is the right emotional judgment to discovering that our lover has lied? If we love her, then, perhaps: rage, despair, sadness, or humiliation. If do not care for her at all, then perhaps: indifference or boredom. But the speaker's emotional response is not rage, humiliation, or even indifference, but rather to *believe* what he knows to be a lie. The second half of the quatrain says "that" she might think him "unlearned in the world's false subtleties." He believes her *so that* she might think him an untutored youth. And he believes her lying stance *that* he is an untutored youth. The speaker is able to feel the break between believing something and knowing it. And as if the disjunction between believing and knowing were not hard enough to feel, the sonnet forces us to feel how it is possible to think what we do not think: "Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young." Just as he believes her though he knows not to believe her, he thinks she is young though he knows he thinks so vainly.

The last line of the second quatrain begins with the word "simply," but nothing about the speaker's problem is simple. What is the difference between saying, "I simply credit her false speaking tongue," and "Simply I credit her false speaking tongue"? The difference is that the ambivalence of "simply" becomes the focus of our attention on the line. Is his crediting her false-speaking tongue a simple action, or the action of a simpleton? The emotion has already broken from the literal meaning of that line. The speaker claims to credit his lover "simply," but the energy of the dental and fricative consonants, and the vowels at the back of the throat, in the phrase "her false-speaking tongue," already break from the apparent lightness of the liquids and the "i" vowels, in "simply I credit." The break of the iamb in "simply" had already suggested that maybe he was protesting too much, trying too hard to achieve a false lightness; "her false-speaking tongue" reinforces what we suspected. It is impossible to know if the next line is one of condemnation or description: "On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed." "Suppression" is not a word of description but of condemnation. "Simple truth" recalls the rage of "simple truth miscalled simplicity" in Sonnet 66, and introduces a break between "simple" and "simply" that is emotional but not lexical: to behave "simply" is at odds with the truth that is "simple." The language of the speaker's moral condemnation continues in "unjust," "lie," "faults," and "flattered," words that cannot have a morally indifferent meaning. The moral condemnation in those words gives an edge to the "love" that the speaker insists he has. We want to see emotions as judgments.

But what is the *judgment* in Sonnet 138? That question has no direct answer. Shakespeare's dark lady sonnets are overwhelmed with human feelings that are incapable of becoming a univocal judgment, because they describe a world without the moral clarity and outline that an unambiguous judgment requires.¹

To be presented with contrary judgments is hard. The problem is that critics want to resolve the emotional complexity by turning to a category that will *explain* the emotions and, therefore, refuse to let them be judgments in themselves. One way not to see emotions as judgments in themselves is to insist instead that they are signs of something else. The critic Joel Fineman sees that something else as "language," or "subjectivity":

The dark lady sonnets differ from the young man sonnets because they articulate thematically the paradoxical duplicity of a language that is verbal, not visual, as when "when my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her, though I know she lies." ... In the dark lady sonnets we hear the 'linguageness' of language, as I have called it, belie the ideality of language ... (243)

... poets and readers who have heard the linguageness of language that is sounded in Shakespeare's sonnets, cannot afterwards forget the significance of the sounds they have heard. (287)

In contrast to the deictic and epideictic first-person "I" of the traditional sonnet, the speaking eye of a visionary poetics, the poet of Shakespeare's sonnets is instead the subject of a 'perjur'd eye,' a poet who, because he speaks, is poised between a visionary and a verbal self ... Shakespeare's sonnets record the difference between their vision and their speech. ... It is not too much to say, therefore, that the subject of Shakespeare's sonnets experiences himself *as* his difference from himself. His identity is an identity of ruptured identification, a broken identity that carves out in the poet's self a syn-copated hollowness that accounts for the deep personal interiority of the sonnet's poetic persona. This "hole" within the "whole" of the poet ... accounts for the personal interiority that, as many critics have remarked, is the most conspicuous and distinctive feature of Shakespeare's sonneteering mode. (25)²

So how do we believe someone when we know that they lie? How do we love someone even when they betray us? Fineman says that what we hear in these paradoxes is the "linguageness of language." When phrases are internally contradictory, we reflect, not upon what it would feel like to have such an experience, but rather upon problems of signification. By various references to Lacan, Fineman suggests that language, by calling attention to itself, through paradox, gives birth to a new kind of poetic "subjectivity." The continental philosophies most attractive to literary critics at their worst have a tendency reduce every human reality to language, discourse,

textuality, communicability, or communicative action. Perry Anderson once described this tendency as the “speculative aggrandizement of language.”³ As a “materialist Marxist,” he criticized that tendency for its evasion of realities like labor and production. I have a different problem. As a reader of the sonnets, I think that this white-collar elevation of language into the speculative key to every human relationship evades the problem of what it is actually like to have such contradictory feelings. If the self-laceration of the poet’s contrary emotional commitments has *always* been a problem of language and signification, then the emotional difficulty can be avoided and treated dispassionately as a *linguistic* difficulty.

We have said that an emotion is a judgment in which the *is* and the *ought* are connected. Your anger judges that something *is* a certain way, and it *ought* to be another way. *Othello* presents us with one way that these spheres can be disjoined: Othello knows the *ought*, but he does not know the *is*: he knows what his emotion will be if Desdemona turns out to have betrayed him, but he does not know whether she has betrayed him. Sonnet 138 reverses Othello’s problem: the speaker knows what *is*, but he does not know what *ought* to be. As we have said, the typical response to lying and betrayal is the emotion of rage or sadness. But Sonnet 138 provokes a harder question: how do you judge your mistress, to whom you have lied, and from whom you knowingly want lies, when she lies as you have expected and demanded? Sonnet 138 presents with tremendous feelings that frequently resemble emotions: feelings that at times look like angry condemnation, at times like indifference, and at times like knowing cynicism. But the feelings are unable to *become*, with any clarity, any of these emotions. An emotion can only become a claim upon the world if you believe you know the difference between the ideal and the actual. Timon of Athens thinks he knows what the world of human friendship should look like, and Coriolanus thinks knows what kind of a city Rome should be. These characters can, therefore, express their feelings as a rage whose clarity is free of ambivalence. But the speaker of Sonnet 138 does not know what the world of the dark lady sonnets should look like, and therefore his feelings become contrary claims.

Let me return again to an example that I quoted in the first chapter: a woman is crossing the street when she is pushed from behind. The push, we said, is not yet a judgment, but only a *sensation*. For the sensation to become an emotion, the woman will have to know why she was pushed. If she discovers she was pushed by someone trying to save her from an oncoming car, the sensation will become an emotion of gratitude. If she discovers that she was pushed because someone wanted to insult her, the sensation will become an emotion of anger. The emotion is a judgment about the intention of another, but also, about what ought to be the moral universe in which the woman was pushed. The world of the dark lady sonnets, however, is a world where the distinctions I have outlined are simply *impossible to make*. First, feelings are incapable of becoming clear judgments, because unlike the woman when she finds out why she was pushed, the speaker does not know how he *ought*

to feel. Second, as we'll see, in the dark lady sonnets, even the distinction between emotions and sensations breaks down. When the speaker does not know how to *feel*, he does not even properly know what he *senses*.

In the sonnets to the fair man, the clear outlines of what the speaker should feel also correspond to the clarity of the speaker's vision. The beloved is alluring both to the speaker's eye and to the beloved himself. In the sonnets to the dark lady the breakdown of vision and the other senses corresponds to a breakdown of clear feeling:

In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,
 For they in thee a thousand errors note;
 But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
 Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.
 Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted,
 Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,
 Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited
 To any sensual feat with thee alone:
 But my five wits, nor my five senses, can
 Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
 Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,
 Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be:
 Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
 That she that makes me sin, awards me pain. (Sonnet 141)

The sonnet opposes the world of the "senses" to the world of the "heart." It is tempting because of this opposition to identify the "senses" with mere sensual experience, and the "heart" with the realm of feeling or emotion. But the sonnet makes such identification impossible with the third line: "But 'tis my heart that *loves* what they *despise*." The contrast then is not between sensation and feeling, but between two different *feelings*. The eye too delivers an emotional judgment, by despising, while the heart renders a contrary judgment, by loving. The word "despite" following so quickly upon "despise" cannot help but bring out the notion of "spite" in "despite," suggesting that the heart does not simply happen to love what the senses despise, but loves out of a feeling of spite, a kind of hatred, for the eyes' hatred.⁴ The heart therefore not only loves, but loves as a way of *hating* the senses' hate.

The fact that feeling sees itself as "tender," even as it scorns touches as "base," indicates that the speaker directs his contrary feelings not just at the dark lady, but at one another, and at himself. The senses render an emotional judgment of hate against the heart, which in turn hatefully judges the senses. Booth is right to gloss "tender feeling" as "keen sense of touch": the feeling of the heart paradoxically finds the touch to be "base" by imagining itself in the language of touch. The heart, therefore, cannot separate itself from sensation except in the language of sensation. If "prone" suggests lying face downward, as Booth says, and, "base touches" imply a receptiveness to

buggery, then there's another problem: the heart claims not to degrade itself to sensual joy like a body that is bugged; yet the heart's feeling of superiority requires the body's degradation. The heart's love for the beloved is therefore also an aggressive desire to degrade the senses.⁵ In the equivocation of "thy proud heart's slave," the phrase can refer either to the heart of the dark lady or to the heart of the speaker, since "thy heart," often used as a *synecdoche* to refer to the lover, now might be the speaker's heart. The ambiguity is therefore not just that the speaker is the slave to his lover, but that the speaker is a slave to himself: the speaker that sees himself as "senses and wits" is a slave to the speaker that sees himself as "the heart." The rejection of the poetry of vision and the senses turns out to be a rejection of clarity of feeling. The speaker not only both despises and loves, but despises his love and loves out of a feeling of spite for his own despising. Therefore, if pleasure is spite, and spite is pleasure, then pleasure must be pleasure in pain.

The speaker expresses that pleasure in pain at the end: "That she that makes me sin awards me pain." Maybe the pain is a physical sensation, like venereal disease, or a feeling, like remorse and sadness. We cannot decide which way to read "pain" because of the ambiguity of the sonnet's argument, in which physical sensations are themselves emotional judgments (the eyes *despise*), and feelings render judgments *about* physical sensations (the lover seems to love out of hatred for the senses' judgments, and expresses that hatred in the language of sensation). Samuel Butler's gloss on the final lines is: "I shall suffer less for my sin hereafter, for I get some of the punishment coincidentally with the offense." That gloss puts its finger on the problem: a physical experience cannot be opposed to an emotional judgment, since a physical experience here is already a judgment. The bodily pain of venereal disease accomplishes the same thing as an emotional act of repentance and a spiritual act of purgation, which is why spiritual *sin* and bodily *pain* are connected. The distinction between sensations on the one hand, and feelings on the other – a distinction that is necessary in order for emotions to be seen as judgments – becomes impossibly confused, and boils over in the speaker's overheated inner dissension.⁶

That inner dissension is the source of the sonnets' vital, terrible energy. The speaker of the sonnets is drunk on the hot blood of a passionate enmity in which desire wars with disgust and love with shame, and where sensations and feelings are caught in the contention of contrary judgments. These contrary judgments make it impossible for the speaker to render a single emotion that would leave the place of feeling and sensation, and become a claim upon the world. The sonnet we have read gives us a speaker who cannot render an emotional judgment, because the speaker both loves and despises. The next sonnet has the same problem:

Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,
Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving;

O but with mine compare thou thine own state,
 And thou shalt find it merits not reproving,
 Or if it do, not from those lips of thine,
 That have profaned their scarlet ornaments,
 And sealed false bonds of love as oft as mine,
 Robbed others' beds' revenues of their rents.
 Be it lawful I love thee as thou lov'st those
 Whom thine eyes woo, as mine importune thee,
 Root pity in thy heart, that when it grows,
 Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.
 If thou dost seek to have what thou dost hide,
 By self-example mayst thou be denied. (Sonnet 142)

The first half of the first quatrain expresses right away the impossibility of rendering a single emotional judgment. Self-hatred and hatred of the mistress are impossible to distinguish. One reading the first two lines is: "My love for you is 'grounded on sinful loving,' and therefore I deserve your hate, which is virtuous." Another reading is: "You hate my sin, but are just as sinful yourself: your hate for me is grounded in your sinful loving [of me or others]." The ambiguity of the line shows us that the speaker does not know what judgment he ought to render. One judgment condemns the beloved for her sin, inconstancy, falsehood, and hate. Another judgment condemns himself for his own sin and therefore responds to hate by welcoming it. Booth points out two rhetorical figures in the lines: anadiplosis ("doubling back on"), in which the last word of the first line is the first word of the second; and chiasmus, where a syntactic order of a phrase is repeated and inverted. These rhetorical features match the emotional entanglement: a judgment finds itself judged, and a claim upon the world doubles back upon itself.

The rest of the sonnet confirms the impossibility of reading the first two lines as expressing only deserved self-reproof. My state merits reproving, says the speaker, but not from *you*. We read words like "profaned," "robbed," "false,": the speaker now judges and condemns, not the speaker, but the mistress. But the sonnet cannot rest there, because the speaker knows the offenses, but does not know what laws apply to the offenses. The sonnet, therefore, adjudicates by perverse laws: he says, it is lawful for me to love you in the same way that you love others. The speaker demands that the mistress pity him in order to deserve to be pitied by others. The sonnet impossibly uses words that describe a judgment that can be rooted in a clear standard – "merits," "lawful," "deserve" – but then turns out to demand the perverse violation that is already the case: the speaker demands what he nevertheless cannot endure, that the mistress betray his love. As with Sonnet 138, this sonnet would be less emotionally baffling if it were merely cynical and the lover had knowingly reconciled himself to the beloved's infidelity. But instead the sonnet chooses emotional *commitment* to a world of betrayal, hate, and falsehood that he nevertheless finds intolerable. He

wishes to judge, through feeling, that the falsehood that *is* is also what it *ought* to be. But the speaker is as incapable of doing this as he is of judging that it ought to be otherwise. Again, unlike Fineman and others, we are not treating these feelings as the things to be *explained* rather than the things doing the *explaining*. We are not avoiding the contrary judgments that these sonnets present us with by saying that the cause for the difficulties that we feel can be found somewhere else, like “subjectivity” or the “linguageness of language.” We are forced to confront without evasion the fact that these sonnets are overwhelmed with feeling that can never become a clear emotion, not because there are no judgments but because there is a profusion of too many contradictory ones.

The world of the dark lady sonnets is a world in which feelings can never resolve into clear emotions because the speaker is too ensnared in a world of moral compromise to make demands upon others or himself. The greatest of all of Shakespeare’s sonnets reveals how the instability of judgment is therefore a turbulent flux of emotion:

Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame
 Is lust in action, and till action lust
 Is perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
 Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
 Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
 Past reason hated as a swallowed bait
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
 Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
 A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe,
 Before a joy proposed, behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows yet none knows well
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell. (Sonnet 129)

Through the boiling over of contradictory and unsettled human feelings, the speaker quickly reveals that he is too implicated in his topic to tell us what lust is. The speaker calls a certain encounter “lust” as though he were making sense of a universal human condition, but the litany of particular human feelings is so idiosyncratic that we soon encounter a speaker whose judgments are unique to his experience and frequently opaque to our own. We might call the emotional judgment described here the judgment of “remorse.” But the aggressive hatred and rage that make up this remorse is too full of the *desire* for its regret: not because it desires the thing that it later regrets, but because what it desires is the feeling of regret itself.

The expense of spirit, of semen, and sexual desire does not eventually lead to shame. No, the expense of spirit happens *in* a “waste of shame”: lust gets off on shame. The problem is not that the anticipation of desire is seen

retroactively in a state of remorse. The problem is that the prospect of shame and remorse is the reason for the desire. The speaker says that “till action,” lust is “full of blame.” “Full of blame,” perhaps, means “blameworthy.” Perhaps, like “perjured,” blame might be only a retrospective assessment, after lust, of what lust was before it was consummated. But the other implication is that lust blames itself even before it is consummated; or better yet that its lust is inseparable from its blame. Whom does the lust blame? Perhaps lust blames its object. Or perhaps lust blames itself, and is animated by its own blame. Just as it becomes impossible to decide which qualities in the bloody inventory belong to “till action,” which to “in action,” and which to the reflection upon action, similarly it becomes impossible to decide what part of lust is desire, what part is sexual experience, and what part is reflection: lust is “Mad in pursuit and in possession so, / Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme.” We now see the possibility that the very prospect of remorse and shame is what makes lust act. The enjoyment of lust does not just precede its hatred in time. The first line of the second quatrain is, “Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight.” The actual moment of enjoyment is represented as a *non*-moment. If the poet had said, “enjoyed and at once despised straight,” we would at least have perceived that the enjoyment of lust was completed, before it gave way to hatred. But the phrase “no sooner” ensures that enjoying and despising converge at a vanishing point that is not in the poem. The poem does not show us the event that stands in between satisfaction and hatred. Enjoyment and hatred are not states at two different times, but rather two feelings that characterize the same experience.

Sonnet 129 is, therefore, not the portrayal of simple self-hatred and retrospective remorse. The speaker is not reflecting upon the fact that after the sexual act, lust seems a hell and a woe, whereas before the sexual act it seemed a bliss and a heaven. On the contrary, the poem portrays a speaker for whom lust is made possible by remorse; a speaker for whom self-hatred, self-blame, and murderous hatred of the mistress are all part of the enjoyment of lust itself. The speaker, in short, is shamefully exposing that his lust is deeply implicated in his own shame; he desires the very thing that he despises, though he never says “I” and never speaks about himself.

The world of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* is just such a world in which feelings cannot become judgments because the speaker has no clear sense of what the ideal world should look like by which this world is to be judged. Usually in the ideal world lust is either a bliss, which gratifies our desires, or else a shameful action that we should repent. If we desire either of these ideals, then the failure to attain them will provoke a traditional response: anger at being denied satisfaction, or anger at failing to achieve our ideal. But what if we feel lust and desire at our own shame? What if hatred is the thing that draws our enjoyment?

The speaker of the sonnet exposes how his desire colludes with his shame. The culmination of this emotional laceration is the maddeningly complex and baffling final sonnet of the dark lady sequence. The protean

and impossible syntax of the sonnet is headache-inducing, until we recognize that the headache is itself the intellect's swerve against an almost total sexual and moral confusion.

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,
 But thou art twice forsworn to me love swearing,
 In act thy bed-vow broke and new faith torn
 In vowing new hate after new love bearing.
 But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
 When I break twenty? I am perjured most,
 For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
 And all my honest faith in thee is lost.
 For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,
 Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy,
 And to enlighten thee gave eyes to blindness,
 Or made them swear against the thing they see,
 For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,
 To swear against the truth so foul a lie. (Sonnet 152)

This sonnet is hard to read. The repetition of gerunds (“loving,” “swearing,” “bearing”), and the opaque anaphora of “in” (“In act,” “In vowing”), tie syntax in knots and therefore make it impossible to know if the speaker accuses himself or his mistress. What does “in loving thee” mean? Does it mean, “in my loving you,” “in another loving you,” or “in you loving yourself”? How is the speaker forsworn? By cheating on his wife, by betraying his friend, or, as he suggests at the end of the sonnet, by betraying the evidence of his eye, and making them “swear against the thing they see”? The very things that are broken in this act of love are hard to set a value upon. Take the phrase: “in act thy bed-vow broke.” The “bed-vow” could be the vow of sexual fidelity between the mistress and her husband, or else between the mistress and the speaker, or the mistress and a new lover. We do not know which vow was broken, but we also do not know what to expect from a “bed vow.” A bed vow is not a marriage vow: it might only be the provisional expectation between the two lovers who have recently taken to bed. Maybe it is an expectation among lovers that they will be faithless only with each other. But what are the moral expectations of a “bed vow”?

The demands of a “bed vow” are not traditional longstanding demands but *new* ones. Hence the repetition of “new” – “new act,” “new faith,” “new hate,” “new love” – which, in its very newness, calls attention to the fickle and recent character of the love and makes any value upon the longstanding character of an “oath” seem absurd. In fact that “new love” necessarily entails “new hate”: if the mistress is newly swearing love for the speaker, then she must have newly come to hate her previous husband or lover; or if the mistress newly hates the speaker, why should the speaker be surprised, when the love itself is so new? The speaker does not

know how he or the mistress should be judged because the world of judgment is *new*. One does not know what to demand from a “new love” that is new not because it is young but because it forsworn, and accompanied by “new hate” for another. I feel that I am entering a world unlike any before, in a poetry that is truly new. But this newness is not felt simply as innovation and freshness but as deep moral confusion. In a world where the demands are so new, what do I have a right to feel? How ought such a world to be?

Even the form of swearing and forswearing is new: “For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness.” The form of the speaker’s swearing, “For I have *sworn*,” is a *tmesis* of “forsworn.” To forswear breaks with swearing, but to swear is already to break, since it breaks (through *tmesis*) with forswearing. Swearing need not have priority over forswearing: from the perspective of swearing, forswearing is a betrayal, but from the perspective of forswearing, swearing is a betrayal. And in a world where to love is *itself* to be forsworn, the way to keep faith might be to forswear, and to break faith might be to swear. We’re back to clever puzzles, but cleverness alone would be desiccated, if we did not see that the paradoxes are more than verbal, and the difficulty is more than a puzzle: the speaker does not know how to feel in a world where love colludes so completely with betrayal.

The meaning of line 8 is hard to settle because the moral world of the sonnet is hard to settle: “And all my honest faith in thee is lost.” The line can mean, “I have lost all faith in your honesty,” or “I have lost all capacity honestly to have faith in you,” or else: “When I am in you (when in the act of sex with you), I have lost my status as honest and faithful.” The line again, is either an accusation of the mistress or a self-accusation of the speaker. But to point out the competing implications of the line does not open us up simply to the radical polysemy of “language.” On the contrary, it forces us to recognize the impossibility clearly *feeling* one thing or another. The speaker cannot know what kind of faith to expect in a condition so *new*, where he is as forsworn and faithless as the mistress. He cannot wholly accuse her with new hate, or accept her with new love. Every judgment turns back and accuses judgment itself. Moral confusion is emotional confusion. These incompatible judgments do not lead us to a hidden cause that would then resolve the confusion for us, so that we could say, “it is these drives in the psyche, these features of signification, these problems of discourse, or these material conditions, that explain the emotions for us.” The emotional difficulty of the sonnet is in its patently incompatible judgments, not in some latent cause.

As in the previous sonnets, the speaker expresses his competing judgments through the synecdoche of eyes. It’s well known that “gave eyes to blindness” can mean either that he is blind or else can see: one may give eyes to blindness to make it see, or give up one’s eyes in order to attain blindness. This ambiguity is right in a world where the speaker does not know if he is

gaining something or losing something. In this incapacity of his feelings to become clear judgments, is the speaker failing to see with moral clarity, or is he able to see a new world of moral unclarity? Is he blind to what he ought to feel and do, or does he have a new vision of a world where no "ought" can determine our feeling? The impossibility of knowing whether his new way of seeing is a clearer vision or a greater blindness makes "enlighten thee" the right word. "Enlighten" may be moral, spiritual, and intellectual: the speaker may be illuminating to the mistress the moral difficulty of their love. Or else "enlighten" is mere deception: the speaker makes the dark lady falsely look "light." Or worse, the speaker actively promotes the mistress' promiscuity: by being deliberately blind to her betrayals, he makes her "light" in sense of sexually cheap. We do not know if the speaker is betraying his eyes, and his "I's," or if he is rather betraying his mistress. He claims that he has made his eyes "swear against the thing they see." This could mean that his eyes are swearing against the very evidence of their senses, and thus perjuring themselves to support the mistress despite the fact that the eyes judge otherwise. Or it could be that they swear against the mistress herself, since the mistress is the "thing they see."⁷ Although the speaker has said, "I am perjured most," again the speaker finds that he cannot know, in his forsworn love, if his feelings betray himself or his mistress. And he cannot know, in that "against," if his position is a proper rejection of false clarity, or a betrayal of real clarity.

The speaker finally refuses to help us see whether he or the mistress is more rightly accused, and whether he sees obscure matters with clarity, or merely sees matters obscurely. Finally he uses the synecdoche of eyes, but ambiguously enough not to show us just how he is divided from himself. "For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye." Because of the pun whereby each "eye" can mean "I" and each "I" can mean "eye," the line could mean that in swearing that the mistress is fair, his eye is more perjured than he is. In such a reading the speaker is right to reject the foulness and the betrayal that his eye sees. But the second half of the line could also mean: "more perjured am I than my eye." In that case the speaker lies to himself in denying the foulness of the beloved. Both of these readings assume that the speaker is divided from his eye, but the pun on "eye" and "I," by bringing them together, might suggest that they cannot be divided. However, the pun unites the eye and "I" only by turning away from the eye: only the voice can reveal a pun. The line therefore cannot tell us if the speaker perjures himself in denying his vision, but also cannot tell us just how the speaker relates to that vision of himself that he identifies with his eyes. Finally, however, "more perjured I" suggests an even more profound possibility, that the "I" is *more* perjured in swearing the foul lie that she is fair than he has been in being forsworn. In the midst of every ambiguity, something is still true. It is true that the dark lady is not fair, and it is a foul lie to swear against it. The sonnet thus emerges as concerned with an ultimate thing: *the truth*. But nothing in the sonnet leads us to a clear understanding of the emotional meaning of that truth.

Close reading Shakespeare's sonnets can easily become a fetish. We can luxuriate in the verbal texture of the sonnets, their ambiguity, and their formal features, as long as we are able to feel that the difficulty and complexity of the sonnets are more than verbal and formal. On the other hand, to find in the sonnets only theories about language and discourse is *also* a fetish. The impossibly difficult syntax of these sonnets delivers us not simply to language *itself*, or to a term like "subjectivity" that can be the explanation for the sonnets' unresolvable judgments. The pure delight in linguistic polysemy for its own sake can be another desiccated evasion of emotional exposure. On the contrary, what we hear in the dark lady speaker's vulnerability is not the power of language by itself, but rather what language reveals about human feeling and moral commitment.

The dark lady sonnets present us with brilliant paradoxes, but brilliance alone could not have produced the dark lady sonnets. Rarely have I ever encountered in a work of art such an uncompromising willingness to exhibit one's worst and most humiliating qualities. A Richard III who lies to gain absolute power, or an Edmund who lies to gain his father's land, at least has a villainous attraction. But to envision the speaker of the sonnets, who lies to himself about his beloved's unfaithfulness because he is old, and because he frankly shows us the full extent to which he is morally worthless, requires more than intellectual brilliance or a genius at creating charismatic personalities. The speaker of the dark lady sonnets is incapable of expressing his feelings in the clarity of emotional judgments because he reveals, with unbearable nakedness, how impossible it is for him to see or live up to a world where he knows how things ought to be. The searing feelings of the sonnets never become clear emotions because the speaker hides so much less from us than we hide from ourselves: he does not pretend to know whether his paradoxes are a sign of nuanced vision or else of shameful moral compromise. How many of us dare to see ourselves in such a light? Shakespeare has been praised for his intelligence, his linguistic power, and his glamorous characters, but we sometimes forget one of his best and most demanding gifts: he challenges us to an exposure of our most unflattering feelings.

Notes

1. I have said before that I decline to distinguish, as some might do, between "passions," "feelings," and "emotions," because I do not want to turn everyday words into technical terms. Most people, as I have said, use these words interchangeably. Nevertheless, in this chapter, I often provisionally use the term "feelings" to describe those passions in the sonnets that do not resolve themselves into unambiguous emotional judgments.
2. Fineman 1986.
3. Anderson 1984, 45.
4. Stephen Booth (1977, 485) says: "Both words have their usual modern English senses, but their conjunction in a discussion of seeing activates a substantively incidental play on their common Latin root, *despicere*, which in turn derives

from *de*, ‘down,’ and *specere*, ‘to look’; ‘to look at.’” So the conflation of sensation and emotion is already implicit in *despicere*, and the attempt to distinguish between the eye which looks, and therefore despises, and the heart which feels without looking, is confused by the common root of “despise” and “despite.” The common root reinforces my claim that an aggression in the heart’s loving colludes with the eyes’ despising.

5. Booth 1977, 486.
6. “Inner” here means that these emotions war with themselves rather than with anything else them.
7. Or they might swear against the visible penis (“the thing”), in favor of the vagina (“nothing”) which – since the female genitals are partly unseen, and the dark lady is “deep” and inscrutable – gives testimony for the womb and against the interest of the penis.

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