

SHAKESPEAREAN ARRIVALS:

THE IRRUPTION OF CHARACTER

Nicholas Luke
Linacre College, Oxford

Completed under the supervision of Professor Simon Palfrey (Brasenose College, Oxford), as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature, Trinity term, 2011.

ABSTRACT

SHAKESPEAREAN ARRIVALS: THE IRRUPTION OF CHARACTER

This thesis re-examines Shakespeare's creation of tragic character through the concept of 'arrivals'. What arrives is not an 'individual' but what I call a 'subject', which is a diffused dramatic process of arriving, rather than a self-contained entity that arrives in a final form. Not all characters are 'subjects'. A subject only arrives through dramatic 'events' that rupture the existing structures of the play-world and the play-text. The generators of these irruptions are found equally in the happenings of plot and in changes of poetic intensity and form. The 'subject' is thus a supra-individual irruption that configures new forms of language, structure, and action. Accordingly, I explain why scrupulous historicism's need for nameable continuums is incommensurate to the irruptive quality of Shakespearean character.

The concepts of 'process', 'subject' and 'event' are informed by a variety of thinkers, most notably the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou. Badiou develops an 'evental' model of subjectivity in which the subject emerges in fidelity to a 'truth-event', which breaks into a situation from its 'void'. Also important is the process-orientated philosophy of Bergson and Whitehead, which stresses that an entity is not a stable substance but a process of becoming. The underlying connection between the philosophers I embrace – also including the likes of Žižek, Kierkegaard, Latour, Benjamin, and Christian thinkers such as Saint Paul and Luther – is that they establish a creative alternative to the deadlock between treating the subject as either a stable substance (humanism) or a decentred product of its place in the world (postmodernism). The subject is not a pre-existing entity but something that *comes to be*. It is not reducible to its cultural and linguistic circumstances but is precisely what *exceeds* those circumstances. Such an excessive creativity is what gives rise to Shakespeare's subjects and, I argue, underpins the continuing force of his drama. But it also produces profound dangers. In Shakespeare, 'events' consistently expose subjects to uncertainty, catastrophe, and horror. And these dangers imperil both the subject and the relationship between Shakespeare and the affirmative philosophy of the event.

Nicholas Luke, Linacre College, Oxford

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

Trinity term 2011

Acknowledgements

Most of all I'd like to acknowledge and thank my supervisor, Dr Simon Palfrey, for all his help during this long process. He both gave me the freedom and encouragement to explore different ideas and approaches at the beginning of the process and ensured that I channelled them into something more concrete and cohesive at the end. Simon's thoughts and suggestions have been absolutely vital to my 'arrival' at the end and I'm particularly thankful for his time and effort in getting through many overlong and laborious early drafts.

I should also thank Dr Ruth Blair, my Honour's supervisor back at the University of Queensland, whose tremendous support helped convince me to take the plunge and pursue literary studies rather than the law. Without her encouragement I would never have applied for the Rhodes or made it over to Oxford.

Finally I'd like to thank my wife, Adelaide, who has moved countries and put up with my perpetual student status over the last ten and more years. She has been patient, kind, and generous throughout, even as things dragged on a little longer than expected. It's finally over!

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I: <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	67
Chapter II: <i>Othello</i>	108
Chapter III: <i>Hamlet</i> and the Ghost	160
Chapter IV: <i>Hamlet</i> and the Voyage	184
Chapter V: <i>Macbeth</i>	225
Chapter VI: <i>King Lear</i>	277
Conclusion	332
Bibliography	339

Introduction

Broadly stated, the aim of this thesis is to rethink Shakespeare's creation of character. It has long been observed that Shakespeare's "peculiar excellence" lies in his "splendid picture gallery" of characters, in which "we find individuality everywhere, mere portrait nowhere".¹ These characters remain at the heart of this Renaissance playwright's peculiar status as the pre-eminent dramatist of this, the twenty-first century. While focusing on 'character' is potentially a risky manoeuvre, given that 'character criticism' remains a pejorative term to many, in seeking out the dramatic and metaphysical origins of character I do not treat it as a single or unified thing, but as a broad label that covers all manner of dramatic creations and functions. My task is to pursue the process at work in forming one type of character – that of Shakespeare's great tragic figures – and to thereby reach a different idea of both what and where they are. Seen as a process of arrival as much as a product that arrives, the character's existence is not its own but is diffused throughout the play, reliant on its processes and events.

Through the notion of 'arrivals' I attempt to articulate more fully the dramatic process that, in a sense, *is* character. Although 'arrivals' focuses on Shakespeare's dramatic technique – on the moments and movements that give rise to a character – it also necessitates a different model of the human subject than that put forward by Romantic, historicist, or postmodern approaches to character. Whereas Romantic criticism often presupposed the human subject along with the characters it celebrated, and thereby obscured their dramatic origins in the structure and occasions

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*. R.A. Foakes. Ed. London: Athlone, 1989, pp.65-66.

manufactured by Shakespeare's plays, 'postmodern' criticism from the 1960s onwards has often dismissed 'character' as a category of critical analysis. It has done so as part of a broader reaction against essentialist humanism and its unified human subject. There are good reasons for this 'decentring' of the subject, but the often fiercely negative reaction against its humanist incarnation has tended to forestall efforts to think through a new, positive conception of the subject. Finding a way between the fullness of the humanist subject and the decentred or even non-existent subject of postmodernism is, therefore, at the heart of this thesis. It is for this reason that I turn to a range of thinkers, old and new, who establish a more nuanced and processual idea of the subject that will, in turn, give our understanding of character a new lease of life.

Before delving into theories of the subject, I will first briefly outline the concept of 'arrivals' that underlies this exploration and which I put into action in Part Three of this Introduction, which analyses *King Lear's* France. The core of this model is that Shakespeare's important tragic characters do not unfold smoothly as pre-supposed entities or personalities but burst excessively from fissures within the play-text and the play-world: from dramatic 'events' that rupture the pre-existing situation of both narrative and structure. They often arrive within the dramatic situation unexpectedly, almost unprepared for, but they can also fade away, or flicker uncertainly. The point is not simply that things happen to a character but that it is only through a particular kind of intrusive happening that they become the singularity, or 'personality', for which they are celebrated. They *become* something more than a role or a mouth for cultural and ideological discourses. In short, a character can become something over and above 'character' in its generic sense of functional *dramatis personae*. It may

become what I term a ‘subject’, which is not an ‘individual’ but a dynamic relationship between a character and the irruptive event(s) that found it. It is a supra-individual process that builds something that exceeds its words or deeds. As such, I will address both metaphysical questions about how subjectivity is bound up with events and action, and dramaturgical questions about the dynamics of arrivals, the techniques used to prepare for and facilitate their happening.

The irruptive and precarious subjectivity that I trace in Shakespeare’s drama does not fit easily within existing forms of Shakespeare criticism. It is certainly far removed from the dominant forms of historicism, which focus on historical progression and context rather than the exceptional moment that interrupts this linearity and establishes a new paradigm. Scrupulous historicism is necessarily involved with nameable continuums. It maps literature onto these continuums or nominated histories, which therefore come to structure and ‘explain’ the work. In no way do I argue that historical context is unnecessary. My argument is far less radical; it is, simply, that historicism is insufficient. Shakespeare’s drama produces configurations of happenings and characters that surpass context and, indeed, the very idea of causal progression. The love of Romeo and Juliet and the “Nothing” (F.I.i.85)² of Cordelia come from somewhere else, somewhere beyond the horizons of historicism, even as they arise in plays that are a part of our history and are conditioned by their historical moment. As T.S. Eliot puts it:

I am even prepared to suggest that there is, in all great poetry, something which must remain unaccountable however complete might be our knowledge of the poet, and that that is what matters most. When the poem has been made, something new has happened, something that cannot be wholly

² The Folio-text is used for the discussion of *King Lear* for reasons outlined in Chapter Six. All references are to *The Norton Shakespeare*. Greenblatt, S., et al. Eds. New York: Norton, 1997.

explained by anything that went before. That, I believe, is what we mean by ‘creation’.³

It is this creativity that gives rise to Shakespeare’s subjects and, I argue, underpins the continuing force and relevance of his drama. Rather than the “additive” method of historicism that fills “homogeneous, empty time”, I therefore look to dramatic moments that – to co-opt Benjamin’s words on the “revolutionary classes” – “make the continuum of history explode”.⁴ It is an approach diametrically opposed to the “message Foucault brought to America”, which, as Richard Wilson writes “in his history of New Historicism”, “was that there is no founding moment, because every utterance or event has to be understood as part of something else”.⁵

To some extent, Shakespeare’s plays remain explosive because they embody the passions in ways that often seem sudden and unfathomable from a realist perspective. Neither historicist nor postmodernist approaches tend to address such basic questions of passionate emotion and their centrality to early modern drama. These questions seem to lie outside contemporary criticism’s desire for objective scholarship and nameable continuums. They are perhaps closer to what drama does than what we are used to saying about it. It is for this reason that I turn to a philosophical tradition outside that of Locke’s empiricism: to a tradition that stresses the irruptive or processual nature of existence and subjectivity rather than their susceptibility to objective knowing. These thinkers’ focus on the excessive break is more commensurate with the constant newness and surprise in Shakespeare than the strict thinking of cause and effect; more commensurate with what Hazlitt describes as the “whirling rapidity” of Shakespeare’s “imagination” and “language”, with all its

³ T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber, 1957, p.112.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Harry Zohn. Trans. London: Fontana, 1992, p.253.

⁵ John Lee, *Shakespeare’s Hamlet and the Controversies of Self*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000, pp.21-22.

“sudden transitions and elliptical expressions”.⁶ It reflects Nietzsche’s claim that we “need history”, and literature, “for the sake of life and action”.⁷

Chief amongst the thinkers I use to articulate the explosive and foundational moments of Shakespeare’s subjects is the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou, whose rethinking of the subject is outlined in Part Two. Badiou is not alone however. He is part of a long tradition of thinkers, from Saint Paul to Luther, from Soren Kierkegaard to Slavoj Žižek, which stresses that, rather than being a point of origin, the genuine subject only comes to be through an excessive event. Taken in this light, the subject is not reducible to its cultural and linguistic circumstances but is precisely what *exceeds* these circumstances. Also influential in articulating the ongoing and creative nature of arrivals is the process-orientated philosophy of Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and more recently Bruno Latour, which stresses that both the universe and human consciousness are made up not of stable substances but of interrelationships and flux.

The result is the development of what Badiou calls a “post-Cartesian doctrine of the subject”.⁸ Although centuries of thinkers are obviously “post-Cartesian”, Descartes’ separation of the conscious mind from the material world entrenched an idea of stable substances – and particularly of mind and matter – that remains influential. Henri Bergson shows how the division between mind and matter has led to either a privileging of perception and thought in “idealism”, whereby the material world becomes a hazy foreign realm, or the privileging of material facts in “realism”,

⁶ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets. Characters of Shakespear’s Plays and Lectures on The English Poets*. William Hazlitt. London: Macmillan, 1903, p.281.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*. R.J. Hollingdale. Trans. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983, p.59.

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. Oliver Feltham. Trans. London: Continuum, 2005, p.1.

whereby the mind and conscious thought are determined by rigid physical laws.⁹ Although the names have changed, the philosophical and critical heritage of character, outlined in Part One, remains to some extent defined by the split outlined by Bergson. On one side lies A.C. Bradley's appropriation of Hegel, which privileges internal spirit or consciousness, and on the other lies postmodernism's and historicism's respective privileging of external discourse and context. Rather than a mutual to-and-fro between the subject and the world, the two camps retain Descartes' opposition but resolve it in opposite ways. Whereas the idealist subject tends to sublimate the world's difference from the subject, for many postmodern theorists the difference of the world negates the subject.

The underlying connection between the philosophers I embrace is that they establish a more creative and processual alternative to the deadlock between treating the subject as either a stable substance or a decentred product of its place in the world. In using these philosophers to engage with Shakespeare's plays, my method to some extent resembles that of Stanley Cavell in *Disowning Knowledge*.¹⁰ Cavell brings his philosophers to Shakespeare, particularly Wittgenstein and Freud, in order to better understand both the plays and life itself. In doing so, he takes character seriously, using Shakespeare's characters as test-cases for his thinking of the post-Cartesian, sceptical world. That said, I differ from Cavell in both the philosophers I bring to the plays and, relatedly, in the model of subjectivity I develop. Rather than following Cavell in universalising (intentionally) a particular psychological subject, almost treating the characters as 'patients', I address the emergence of a dispersed subject

⁹ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. Nancy Margaret Paul. Trans. New York: Zone, 1988, p.10.

¹⁰ Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Updated Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003

that only arrives through an event that exceeds individual psychology and disseminates throughout the drama's form and poetry.

Part One: The Critical and Philosophical Heritage of 'Character'

T.S. Eliot speaks of "los[ing] oneself in a maze of speculation" about "the process by which an imaginary character can become as real for us as people we have known".¹¹

While such a sense of mysterious sympathy recalls the Romantic appreciation of character, it is possible to get closer to Shakespeare's technology of character creation than Romantic references to his 'genius' allow. The Romantic approach to Shakespeare as the poet of 'nature' – Coleridge contends that "[i]n all his various characters, we still feel ourselves communing with the same human nature"¹² – at once celebrates and obfuscates Shakespeare's creation of character. The Romantic tradition's focus on a higher or universal nature effaces the foundational importance of rupturing events and thereby makes it peripheral to this thesis. Nevertheless, some Romantic critics, and particularly Hazlitt, offer insights that point in the direction of 'arrivals'.

Hazlitt writes that while "[i]n Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character", in Shakespeare "there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass".¹³ Hazlitt here gives a sense of a less unified character; of a character that is subject to what is *outside* it, both in the play-world and in the play-text. It is changing, mutating, not at one with itself. It is,

¹¹ Eliot, *On Poetry*, p.94.

¹² Coleridge, p.66.

¹³ Hazlitt, *Poets*, p.276.

moreover, a character that is unpredictable and irruptive: “Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances”.¹⁴ It is not a calculable result of its context but comes to be in the dramatic moment. “[E]very instant teems with fate”.¹⁵ It is the process of this teeming creation, decomposition, and recomposition that I focus on in ‘arrivals’.

(i) Character in Bradley and Hegel

More important for this thesis is A.C. Bradley’s 1904 work, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, which brought Shakespeare’s characters face to face with G.W.F. Hegel. Bradley takes up Hegel’s vision of tragedy as a “tragic conflict” between competing ethical obligations, but notes that while this model worked well for Greek tragedies such as *Antigone*, it “applies only imperfectly to the works of Shakespeare”.¹⁶ Hegel’s “conflict” needed to be turned inward. So, for instance, in *Hamlet*, what “engrosses our interest” is not simply the conflict between “Hamlet and the King” but “the conflict *within* one of them”.¹⁷ Bradley thus comes to the “more general idea...that tragedy portrays a self-division and self-waste of spirit, or a division of spirit involving conflict and waste”.¹⁸ Through his Hegelian model, Bradley articulates something valuable even amidst suffering and death: “pity and fear...seem to unite with, and even to merge in, a profound sense of sadness and mystery, which is due to [the] impression of waste”.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid., p.277.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. Second Edition. Macmillan: London. 1932, p.16.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁸ A.C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1926, p.86.

¹⁹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.23.

The sense of “mystery” here is important. It suggests how Bradley’s strategy of bringing “a vivid and intent imagination” to Shakespeare’s heroes (rather than approaching them through the prism of “literary history and the like”²⁰) is not a simple celebration or biographical sketch, but involves a deeper investigation of character’s difficult and mysterious relationship with the dramatic action. For Bradley, the mystery surrounds the fact that what is glorious and astounding is, at the same time, “perishing” and “devouring” itself.²¹ We are not dealing with “the close and unbroken connection of character, will, deed and catastrophe”, in which “the individual...fail[s] to conform to...the moral order and draw[s] his just doom on his own head”,²² but with a complex and retrograde connection between subject and action.

Bradley’s character here reflects how Hegel’s “spirit”, as the “absolute Idea”,²³ does not entail a withdrawal from materiality but, unlike Plato’s more conceptual forms, the “Idea” is “precisely the unity of the Concept with its *reality*”, for “the Idea is not genuinely Idea without and outside its actuality”.²⁴ Moreover, Hegel’s dialectic destabilises both substance and the subject because any entity is defined by its ‘other’. As Knox observes in his preface to Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, “the one essential route to man’s knowledge of himself as spirit is through his knowledge of what is *other* than his true self”.²⁵ Hegel therefore writes in *Phenomenology* that “[n]othing has spirit self-established and indwelling within it; rather, each is outside itself in what is alien

²⁰ Ibid., pp.1-2.

²¹ Ibid., p.23.

²² Ibid., p.26.

²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Volume 1. T.M. Knox. Trans. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988, p.92.

²⁴ Ibid., p.143.

²⁵ Ibid., p.x.

to it”.²⁶ It is an idea that underpins my focus on the formative power of “alien” and excessive events in establishing Shakespeare’s subjects.

In both Hegel and Bradley there is therefore a complex interrelationship between subject and action that is not reducible to essentialism. The mysterious coming together of character, action, and fate that Bradley traces in the tragic end of the hero entails a breakdown between thought and action that has explosive consequences:

Everywhere, in this tragic world, man’s thought, translated into act, is transformed into the opposite of itself. His act, the movement of a few ounces of matter in a moment of time, becomes a monstrous flood which spreads over a kingdom. And whatsoever he dreams of doing, he achieves that which he least dreamed of, his own destruction.²⁷

Although Bradley is talking about tragic ends, I take up his focus on the frighteningly gratuitous power of action and apply it to tragedy’s founding moments in which its characters arrive as subjects. Dramatic action is here a “monstrous flood” that precedes any intention or agent. It unleashes a violent but creative torrent that, in a sense, *is* the play and the character. However, Bradley’s view of tragedy as “pre-eminently the story of one person, the ‘hero’”,²⁸ tends to contain this explosive power *within* the individual. He fails to see how this “monstrous flood” may, in fact, *create* the “hero”; how this excess produces a hero that is more than “one person”.

In large part, this failure stems from Bradley’s Hegelian idea that tragedy entails a spiritual order that “casts” the tragic hero “out” in order to restore its unity, but thereby loses “a part of its own substance, – a part more dangerous and unquiet, but far more valuable and nearer to its heart, than that which remains, – a Fortinbras, a

²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*. J.B. Baillie. Trans. New York: Dover, 2003, p.285.

²⁷ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

Malcolm, an Octavius”.²⁹ Through the “heroism and love” that arise within “the very furnace of affliction”, we receive “faint and scattered intimations that the tragic world” is “but a fragment of a whole beyond our vision”.³⁰ Bradley here presupposes a non-divided “spirit” that exists above or behind the play and incorporates the tragic conflict within itself: “the tragic action portrays a self-division or intestinal conflict of spirit” but the “catastrophe” involves “the violent annulling of this division or conflict”.³¹

By positing the idea of an overarching spiritual unity that is reconciled at the end of the play, Bradley is forced to justify or explain the tragic conflict – the very driving force of the tragedy – as a corruption of this spirit. He thus moralises the source of the plays’ action, contending that “the main source of the convulsion which produces suffering and death is never good: good contributes to this convulsion only from its tragic implication with its opposite in one and the same character”.³² In stark contrast, the concept of ‘arrivals’ rests on the idea that the plays’ “convulsions” are not corruptions, let alone ‘evil’, but are creative events that give rise to the subject. So where Bradley concludes that “Iago is the main source of the convulsions in *Othello*”,³³ I show in Chapter Two that it is in fact Desdemona’s love that convulses Othello’s monumental self-sufficiency as he arrives in Cyprus. Iago comes in Desdemona’s wake. His power over Othello only arises because the event of Desdemona’s love has already shaken Othello from ‘himself’. The event may crack the stable foundations of the character but, far from being a corruption, this is what allows it to *arrive as a subject*.

²⁹ Ibid., p.37.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.38-9.

³¹ Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, p.91.

³² Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.34.

³³ Ibid.

Bradley's move to reconcile tragic conflict into a broader spiritual unity therefore contains the "alien" and electrifying dramatic happenings that enliven Shakespeare's characters. Bradley's mediation stems from the final movement of Hegel's dialectic, which seeks to negate the alien other that gave rise to spirit or consciousness.

Whereas the "ignorant man is not free" because he "confronts" an "alien world" that is "outside of him", the man of spirit "struggle[s] to cancel this situation of unfreedom and to make the world one's own".³⁴ So, despite the fact that self-consciousness is achieved by coming up against its other in the world (whereby consciousness "becom[es] an other to itself"),³⁵ there remains a Cartesian separation of the mind from its world. And, in so far as the opposition is sublated or mediated, the external world, the other, *ceases to be* by becoming a part of the subject itself. The final stage in the dialectic results in consciousness "transcending this otherness"³⁶ and thereby forming a "circle" that "reinstat[es] self-identity" by "reflecting into its own self in and from its other".³⁷ Otherness is thus not other at all as everything becomes spirit in this closing stage of the "self-closed circular process".³⁸ Nothing escapes the circle and nothing is alien.

Hegel's influence on an incredibly wide range of thought, from Marx to historicism, shows that this idealising move is far from exhaustive of his philosophy. It is, however, what leads Bradley to understand the "affirmative aspect" of tragedy's "catastrophe" as "the violent self-restitution of the divided spiritual unity".³⁹ In a

³⁴ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.98.

³⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p.20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.450.

³⁹ Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, p.91.

very Hegelian manner, spirit “restor[es] its unity through negation” .⁴⁰ It is also this aspect of Hegel’s thought, rather than the experience of the alien other, that dominates Hegel’s *Aesthetics*. It leads Hegel to the *inadequacy* or “defectiveness of immediate existence”, “which does not correspond with [the subject’s] inner essence”.⁴¹ Because “spirit cannot” find “enjoyment of its true freedom” in “the finitude of existence and its restrictedness”, “it is compelled to satisfy the need for this freedom” on the “higher ground” of “art”.⁴² The deficiency of external reality stems from the stark (Cartesian) divide between spirit and finitude: because the “spiritual realm, complete in itself,” is severed from the “purely empirical” “realm of the external”, which is “unworthy of the soul’s inner bliss”,⁴³ art “must point back to the inner, to the mind and feeling as the essential element”.⁴⁴ In stark contrast, the idea of ‘arrivals’ stresses that it is the moments and movements of finitude that provide the dramatic energy and impetus for the emergence of Shakespeare’s subjects.

Ultimately, the opposition of spirit and finitude leads to the idea that material action is an expression of the character’s inwardness. It is “characteristic of the living subject...to act...because this ideal has to carry out and bring to fruition what is implicit in it”.⁴⁵ For Hegel’s tragic hero, the dramatic action involves “*one* great situation and action, in the course of which” “the true kernel of his disposition and capacity...is revealed”.⁴⁶ “So, for example, Macbeth’s character is determined by his passion of ambition”.⁴⁷ Or, in Bradley’s terms, “[i]n the circumstances where we see

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.151.

⁴² Ibid., p.152.

⁴³ Ibid., p.527.

⁴⁴ Ibid..

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.179.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.218-19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.578.

the hero placed, his tragic trait, which is also his greatness, is fatal to him”.⁴⁸ We thus reach the derided notion of fixed character, albeit after a process that is far more fruitful than its result: “that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of men, and that the main source of these deeds is character”.⁴⁹ The deeds at the core of Bradley’s tragedy are “characteristic deeds”: “The centre of the tragedy, therefore, may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action”.⁵⁰ The movement here is all one-way: action issues “from” character, and character issues “in” action, but action does nothing to character.

So while Bradley describes “[t]he dictum that, with Shakespeare, ‘character is destiny’” as “an exaggeration” (albeit “the exaggeration of a vital truth”), his reasoning detaches these “personages” from the very plays – the action and events – *through which they arrive*: “for many of [Shakespeare’s] tragic personages, if they had not met with peculiar circumstances, would have escaped a tragic end, and might even have lived fairly untroubled lives”.⁵¹ Bradley’s idea of character as the plays’ ‘prime mover’ prevents him from getting at the dramatic origins of the mysterious and “monstrous” action that he rightly highlights. It causes him to apologise for events of insanity, the supernatural, or accident, as they threaten the agency or responsibility of character. He must treat them as “subordinate” to the “dominant factor” of the “deeds which issue from character”.⁵² It is, however, just these sorts of events that give rise to character as something extraordinary and rupturing. Bradley stresses that the

⁴⁸ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.16.

supernatural does not destroy agency,⁵³ and I agree, but he does not address how its intrusion may *impel* an emergent agency or subjectivity. Bradley stresses that too much “accident” may break “the causal connection of character, deed, and catastrophe”,⁵⁴ but he does not address how it may *cause* a new subject to leap into existence, as when Hamlet returns from his encounter with the pirates, or when Othello arrives belatedly in Cyprus after the storm.

(ii) The Reaction Against Character

Hegel’s tendency to halt explanation at the irreducible point of the character’s inner ‘spirit’ has, of course, led to many objections. Recent criticism has been harsh on both Hegel and Bradley. In a 2006 retrospective on Bradley, Alan Sinfield notes that “[a] hundred years after...*Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), the commonsense notion of our culture, among directors, actors, audiences, and readers, is still that the way to the inner meaning of the plays lies through imaginative critical insight into the characters”.⁵⁵ Sinfield then spends the rest of the article explaining that although “the plays are not entirely remote from a modern sensibility”, and while they do produce “partial and disparate *character effects*”, “‘character’ [is] a typical mystification of bourgeois ideology, tending to efface the realities of class, race, gender and sexuality, oppression, cooperation, history, and ideology”.⁵⁶ As such, “the category of ‘character’ has been justly disparaged by historicists and theorists of various persuasions”.⁵⁷ The “historicist objection to character...holds that early modern people did not have the same kinds of identity and consciousness as ourselves”: “they

⁵³ Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.15.

⁵⁵ Alan Sinfield, “From Bradley to Cultural Materialism”, *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006), 25-34, p.25.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.33.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

were moved more by social role rather than subjectivity and interiority”.⁵⁸ The “postmodern and post-structuralist” objection “holds that *no one* really has a consistent inner core of being; *any* identity is, and should be, decentered”.⁵⁹

It seems clear that these objections are directed against a very particular model of both ‘character’ and subjectivity (and that they do not really distinguish between the two). Sinfield opposes a character – and a human subject – that is essential and unchanging: “As Louis Althusser argues, there is no essential core of irrepressible humanity in the individual. Ideology is ultimately constitutive”.⁶⁰ But an unchanging subject is hardly the only or necessary subject. It certainly does not do justice to the divided and complex selves envisaged by either Bradley or Hegel. It flattens them into ‘essentialism’, against which the forces of theory and history are aligned. It blithely dismisses the “commonsense” notions of directors, actors, readers, and theatregoers. And it thereby fails to address the potential, the energy, and even the politics involved in the imaginative response to character.

It is because Sinfield focuses upon, and ironically universalises, a particular idea of (essentialist) character that he concludes that character is an “unsatisfactory category because it fails to meet crucial questions about power, ideology, agency, and social construction”.⁶¹ Sinfield, like many cultural materialist and postmodern critics, remains defined by the form of character he opposes: by “the fullness that is imagined by the character critic”.⁶² Sinfield’s disagreement with the past ideological appropriations of subjectivity and character causes him to deprive himself of them

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.27.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.30.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p.27.

altogether. The destructive absurdity of this logic has led Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek to try and reclaim the subject from the sterile opposition between humanist plenitude and postmodern nothingness. By treating the subject not as an essentialist source of meaning but as an action of becoming, they show that far from being opposed to political engagement, it is in fact the only way to achieve genuine political action.

That said, in stressing a decentred notion of subjectivity, this thesis has undeniably been influenced by the ‘postmodern’ tradition. Whether it is Roland Barthes declaring “the death of the Author”,⁶³ or Jacques Derrida puncturing the logocentric ‘centre’, and thus characterising Western metaphysics as “a series of substitutions of center for center”,⁶⁴ what is loosely labelled postmodernism has been preoccupied with breaking down the idea of the self-contained subject. The very word ‘deconstruction’ speaks to this preoccupation eloquently. The notion of ‘arrivals’ follows in these footsteps by rejecting the idea of a character that pre-exists and directs the play’s dramatic action. More importantly, the decentring of postmodern thought opens up new potentials for the subject. As Derrida concludes, the loss of the “impossible presence of the absent origin” need not lead to a “saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty” longing but can bring about a “Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming”.⁶⁵

⁶³ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, *The Book History Reader*. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery. Eds. London: Routledge, 2002, p.224.

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. Eds. London: Edward Arnold, 1989, p.151.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.164.

While Derrida is right to call for an affirmation that “*determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center*”,⁶⁶ we shall see in Chapter Four that he never fully grasps this opportunity of articulating a *new decentred subject*. Despite references to such new possibilities, postmodern theorists have tended to take the opposite stance to Hegel. There remains a chasm between the subject and its world, but now, insofar as the opposition is mediated, it is the subject that ceases to be. With the formidable forces of its linguistic system, social structure, prevailing culture, inherited ideology, and material conditions aligned against it, and thus outside of it, the subject’s reality wilts. The division between the subject and the object remains but, again, one of its terms is privileged so that it overcomes the other. Hence how “everything became discourse”.⁶⁷ And, as Lee observes, the influence of this idea spread to New Historicism, which takes it as one of its “central truths” that “everything may be considered discourse”.⁶⁸

The reaction against the subject is now well-known, well-worn, and has been renounced by many of its adherents. Derrida’s late-career attempt to articulate a more positive relationship between deconstruction and material action, evidenced in *Spectres of Marx*, is a sign that the originator of deconstruction ultimately recognised the need to escape its tendency to be defined by the centre that it rejects. Taking up Marx’s injunction to act, Derrida stresses that “*differance*...does not mean only (as some people have too often believed and so naively) deferral, lateness, delay, postponement”, rather, in this “irreducible *differance* the here-now unfurls”.⁶⁹ I address the potential significance of Derrida’s shift in relation to *Hamlet*, where I use

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.151.

⁶⁸ Lee, p.22.

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Peggy Kamuf. Trans. New York: Routledge, 1994, p.31.

his notion of the ‘messianic’ to challenge the simple definition of dramatic ‘immanence’. Derrida’s earlier decentring of the subject is included here, however, as both an important stage in the critical history of character and, more importantly, because it has left something of a vacuum. Derrida’s active subject never quite materialises but remains adrift in groundless discourse and floating play. There remains no generally accepted understanding of the subject “in a ‘postmodern’ era” in which, “although the ideological scene is fragmented into a panoply of positions which struggle for hegemony, there is an underlying consensus: the era of big explanations is over”.⁷⁰ In this vacuum, the language of decentring and discourse remains influential, even if many have retracted their support for its more extreme conclusions.

In early modern studies, the rejection of the subject reached its culmination in the Cultural Materialist works of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Catherine Belsey’s *The Subject of Tragedy*. Belsey adopts the idea of discourse’s dominance to take on the “human subject” of “liberal humanism”, which “depends on the belief that in its essence the subject does not change”.⁷¹ To counter this subject Belsey takes the Derridean (or Foucauldian) position that the subject is defined by the “signifying practice”, the “specific discourse” and “specific knowledge”, that “always precedes the individual”.⁷² That the subject is, to some extent, subjected to its place within language and culture seems undeniable. What *is* deniable is that that this is all, or even most, of what the subject is.

⁷⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso, 2008, p.1.

⁷¹ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London: Routledge, 1985, p.ix.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.5.

The constant juxtaposition of humanism and postmodernism that arises from the preoccupation with dismantling the humanist subject causes Belsey and other Cultural Materialist (and New Historicist) critics to miss other forms of subjectivity, both past and present. As Lee shows, the idea that “an individual” only arose as a concept “after the English Renaissance” became a “founding belief of both” the “Cultural Materialists and New Historicists”, leading them to ignore earlier forms of subjectivity.⁷³ Instead, the “interiority” that is “sought” (to show that it is absent) is “essentialist interiority; the Cartesian notion of interiority”.⁷⁴ Such critics therefore miss the later work of their founding inspiration, Michel Foucault, which focused “not on ‘the self’ as an externally produced product, but on ‘the self’ as an internally produced product of oneself”.⁷⁵ As Lee quotes Foucault:

‘The self, as ‘something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity’, is seen to be: ‘not a modern trait born of the Reformation or of romanticism [...but] one of the most ancient Western traditions. It was well established and deeply rooted when Augustine started his *Confessions*’.⁷⁶

I take up this idea in Part Two, showing how there is also an *evental* tradition of the subject that finds modern expression in the work of Badiou. Existing at least since the writings of Saint Paul, it views the subject as precisely what *exceeds* its place within the existing structures of culture and language. So while I join postmodernism in stressing the divided and uncertain nature of both subjectivity and early modern drama, particularly by exploring its moments of disorientating rupture, I also take a crucial second step, showing how it is precisely this instability that allows a provisional but creative subjectivity to emerge. Shakespeare’s characters are not merely discursive, they are also evental.

⁷³ Lee, p.36.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.153.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.83.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The fact that the subject is not a pre-existing or transcendent point of origin does not, therefore, make it nothing. The term ‘arrivals’ suggests both that something arrives and that, as a verb, there is an ongoing action of arriving that involves the movement of the situation as much as the movement of the thing. In short, a subject comes to be, and it does so through and as a process. In contrast, by “thinking that there was no center” but only “an infinite number of sign-substitutions” – so that “everything became discourse”⁷⁷ – Derrida came to “the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*”.⁷⁸ Needless to say, this reasoning has very little to say about a subject that is not a source but an outcome, not a beginning but a becoming. Rather than the idea that the self is “only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely”,⁷⁹ I argue that, through the event of Shakespeare’s drama, something emerges that is more than words and signs. In short, the Shakespearean subject arrives both dramatically and metaphysically.

(iii) Process and Creation

The idea of a processual subject helps us to bypass the fruitless opposition between the subject and its world that was instituted by Descartes. Put briefly, following the scientific breakthroughs of Galileo, a mechanistic view of the universe began to take shape, which, in the philosophy of Descartes, led to a division between a mechanical and calculable universe and its self-contained substances on the one hand, and thinking man and its consciousness on the other. The difficulty, then, was

⁷⁷ Derrida, “Structure”, p.151.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.158.

⁷⁹ Barthes, “Author”, p.223.

determining what, if anything, allows the connection between the mind's internal perceptions and the distant foreign object. The problem of the veracity of perception gave rise to "scepticism as manifested in Descartes's *Meditations*", which Stanley Cavell sees as "already in full existence in Shakespeare, from the time of the great tragedies in the first years of the seventeenth century".⁸⁰ Bruno Latour stresses that Descartes' division led him to search "for absolute certainty from a brain-in-a-vat, a certainty that was not needed when the brain (or the mind) was firmly attached to its body and the body thoroughly involved in its normal ecology".⁸¹

As we have seen, the subject-object divide continues in divergent ways in both Hegel and postmodernism. Despite Hegel's attempt to bridge this gap through the dialectic, he maintains a fundamental division between self-consciousness and the "alien world".⁸² Michael Inwood describes this as Hegel's "metaphysical (and aesthetic) xenophobia",⁸³ by which the alien other is annulled and made part of self-consciousness. Meanwhile, "[p]ostmodernism" has also "inherited" the "series of settlements that have defined modernity", including "the disconnected mind-in-the-vat's quest for absolute truth".⁸⁴ The difference is that "it has *stopped* believing it is possible to carry out this implausible program successfully".⁸⁵ There is no to-and-fro between the subject and object, word and world, and so, under its linguistic emphasis, it is the word that trumps the world and, indeed, the subject.

⁸⁰ Cavell, p.3.

⁸¹ Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999, p.4.

⁸² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.98.

⁸³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Bernard Bosanquet. Trans. London: Penguin, 1993, p.121, footnote 8.

⁸⁴ Latour, p.21.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

If the subject flows from what happens, however, the great divide between the subject and the world begins to break down. The result is not the death of the subject or its disintegration into linguistic superstructure but a subject that is fundamentally entangled in its world. The subject does not lose its reality in this entanglement but *gains* layers of reality. In contrast to the way the modern “settlement” attempts to construct “a tiny footbridge” over the “chasm” “between words and the world”,⁸⁶ Latour outlines “an entirely different phenomenon: circulating reference”.⁸⁷ Latour bases this idea on scientific practice, following researchers taking soil samples in the Amazon and tracing the way “the materiality of soil” is placed in a “cardboard cube”, given a “numbered code”, then “defined by a color”, and thus “becomes a sign”.⁸⁸ He focuses not on “the resulting abstraction” that graces the scientific report but on the *process* by which things become words, so that the “immense abyss separating things and words” is “distributed to many smaller gaps”.⁸⁹

The focus on the “*circulat[ion]*” of “truth-value”⁹⁰ rather than on absolute end products means that Latour can develop a “positive meaning of relativism”, which “define[s] existence not as an all-or-nothing concept but as a gradient”.⁹¹ The concept is important for analysing the ‘unreal’ world of drama because it is able to give its constructions and affects a reality, despite its fictionality. Moreover, when it comes to discussing character itself – these strangely real unreal people – they need not be labelled essence or illusion, everything or nothing, but may be given a reality that circulates elusively between the drama, its characters, and its spectators. They arrive

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.24.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.49.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.49-50.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.69.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.310.

not as Hegel's absolute spirit but as relative subjects: subject to the drama. And yet they do arrive. Such a sense of "relative existence" reveals the self-immolating absurdity of the postmodern dismissal of character as nothing in protest of its failure to be everything, like Lear banishing love from the kingdom because it is not his absolutely.

Latour is writing in the tradition of Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead, who stress that the basic building blocks of existence are not 'substances' – independent and static in the Cartesian sense – but processes and occasions. Similarly to Latour, Bergson refuses to divorce perception from the object that is perceived, but places it "in the material world".⁹² Bergson is here reacting against the likes of Locke, who sees "[o]ur observation[s], employed either about *external sensible objects*, or about *the internal operations of our minds*", as "the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the *ideas* we have...do spring".⁹³ Locke is part of a philosophical tradition that gives "*perception...a wholly speculative interest*", so that "to perceive means above all to know".⁹⁴ Bergson, however, brings together the mind and the alien world by treating perception as the animal's way of being "open to the influence of external stimulation" and, crucially, of thereby being able to *respond* "to it by mechanical, physical and chemical reactions".⁹⁵ Perception becomes a matter of action rather than knowledge.

The interconnection of perceiver and perceived ties into a broader idea that the world is not made up of substances but processes. Instead of "the 'neutral stuff' of certain

⁹² Bergson, *Matter*, p.23.

⁹³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: J.M. Dent, 1961, p.77.

⁹⁴ Bergson, *Matter*, p.28.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

realistic philosophers”, Whitehead writes that any “actual entity is a process”.⁹⁶ So, in “direct denial of the Cartesian doctrine, ‘...an existent thing which requires nothing but itself in order to exist’”, an object or “actual entity, in virtue of being *what* it is, is also *where* it is”.⁹⁷ “There is no halt in which the actuality is just its static self”, is just an independent substance, for its “very essence...is *process*”.⁹⁸ Being is therefore “immanent”: “the essence of being is to be implicated in causal action on other beings”.⁹⁹

Taking up this idea, Michael Witmore places Shakespeare in the company of Bergson and Whitehead (“each of whom is a significant critic of Cartesian metaphysics and the punctualist worldview”) because of “his refusal to make the being of a particular thing – whether we are talking about a thinking person, a perception, or a phenomenal attribute – a property of a single body and thus a purely local ‘possession’”.¹⁰⁰ The “identity” of things is, rather, “immanent to – or better, intertwined with – the situation or process in which they came to exist”.¹⁰¹ For Witmore, therefore, “events” are “the most basic units of any theatrical experience”.¹⁰² Such a conclusion is in stark contrast to Hegel’s idea that “romantic art” shows that “external reality” is “an existence inadequate” to “spirit”.¹⁰³ Not only is “occasion”, in all its corporeality and contingency, “the fundamental metaphysical building block” of theatre, it is what brings about “the immanence of theatrical personhood as it coalesces on stage”.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Whitehead, *Process*, p.55.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁹⁸ A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1933, p.354.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics*. London: Continuum, 2008, p.16.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁰³ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.518.

¹⁰⁴ Witmore, *Metaphysics*, p.19.

The theoretical underpinning for the breakdown of stable substance is the advance in physics made in the first half of the twentieth century. Whitehead uses wave theory and relativity to show how the old perception of existence founded on “Newtonian physics”, which was “based upon the independent individuality of each bit of matter”, has “dissolved”.¹⁰⁵ “Modern physics has abandoned the doctrine of Simple Location” with the result that while “physical things” have “a focal region, which in common speech is where the thing is”, “its influence streams away from it with finite velocity throughout the utmost recesses of space and time”.¹⁰⁶ The entity under observation, be it a planet or a star or a molecule, is not simply ‘here’ and ‘now’, it is “a state of agitation”¹⁰⁷ that spills beyond ‘itself’. Or, as Whitehead continues, “[f]or physics, the thing itself is what it does, and what it does is this divergent stream of influence”.¹⁰⁸ In contrast to much postmodern theory, which concludes with the breakdown of the subject, the modern physicist does not conclude that the star is an illusion because it is not self-sufficient, self-centred, or simply located. The fact that it is diffused and dispersed in a “stream of influence” does not negate its reality, it merely means that it exists differently, more interconnectedly, than had been thought.

So whereas the mechanical science of “Simple Location” regarded the entity as *already there* as a stable substance, we now see that events and actions are *creative* of entities. We thereby reach a different kind of existence and a different kind of character that recalls Hazlitt’s “continual composition and decomposition of its elements”.¹⁰⁹ Not that creativity is unbounded. Whitehead stresses that there is,

¹⁰⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures*, pp.200-1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.201-2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.202.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Hazlitt, *Poets*, p.276.

“relatively to any actual entity”, “a ‘given’ world of settled actual entities”.¹¹⁰

Location, time, and circumstances provide the “given” world in which an entity arises, and to some extent define that entity. They do not exhaust it, however, as “relatively to any actual entity” there is also “a ‘real’ potentiality, which is the datum for creativeness beyond that standpoint”.¹¹¹ The process of arrivals outlined in this thesis therefore suggests that, far from exhausting Shakespeare’s ‘subjects’, the “given” historical and linguistic context provides the conditions of possibility for the “creativity” of an event, of a dramatic process, that goes “beyond that standpoint”.

Similarly, Bergson uses the creativeness of evolution to oppose the “mechanical explanation” of nature, the “essence” of which “is to regard the future and the past as calculable functions of the present, and thus to claim that *all is given*”.¹¹² We have, here, a form of “finalism” which is “reluctant to see in the course of things generally, or even simply in the development of life, an unforeseeable creation of form”.¹¹³

Life, however, gives rise to something that did not previously exist. Bergson uses art as an example of this creativeness:

The finished portrait is explained by the features of the model, by the nature of the artist, by the colours spread out on the palette; but, even with the knowledge of what explains it, no one, not even the artist, could have foreseen exactly what the portrait would be... Even so with regard to the moments of our life, of which we are the artisans. Each of them is a kind of creation.¹¹⁴

The dramatic moment, the coalescence of various strands in one instant, the attachment of an audience’s energies, the combination of words and deeds, the happening of an event, work to produce something that cannot be foreseen. We may

¹¹⁰ Whitehead, *Process*, p.90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell. Trans. London: Macmillan, 1911 p.39-40.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.47.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

thus say of Shakespeare's drama, as Bergson "said of life", "that at every moment it is creating something".¹¹⁵ In contrast, the "intellect" attempts to explain the new as a "calculable...function" of its "definite antecedents", whether it be a particular historical context or a particular aspect of discourse, and therefore "lets what is *new* in each moment of a history escape".¹¹⁶

The creativeness of process ties in with the eventual understanding of the subject outlined in Part Two. From Kierkegaard to Badiou, Bergson to Latour, there is an emphasis on the fact that the world and the subject do not move in a simple, progressive chain of cause and effect. In my terms, Shakespeare's dramatic process creates new entities and new combinations that could not have been foreseen until they occurred. As with Latour's scientific "experiment", Shakespeare's drama is not a "zero-sum game" in which "every output has to be matched by an input" but "*an event*".¹¹⁷ Accordingly, a play cannot simply be "accounted for by a list of the elements that entered the situation *before* its conclusion", for it results in a "*gain*" of elements.¹¹⁸ As Hazlitt writes of Shakespearean character: "Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result".¹¹⁹

The understanding of the 'event' adopted in this thesis is, however, more specific than the ordinary idea of the 'occasions', or endless 'happenings', that make up immanent reality and subjectivity. It accepts that, but it goes further. It asks what *sort* of events can found the subject? It is not just any happening. It is only the event – and this is Badiou's event that is outlined in Part Two – that intrudes into the situation, breaking

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.30.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.172.

¹¹⁷ Latour, p.125.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.126.

¹¹⁹ Hazlitt, *Poets*, p.277.

its uniformity and historical flow, bringing in an unseen excess, that can found the subject.

(iv) A Return to Character

Character and Montaigne

The idea of a decentred self that nevertheless obtains some subjecthood may suggest the work of Montaigne, an early modern thinker of the self who anticipates significant aspects of the postmodern project. Montaigne's subject is dispersed by desire, appetite, discourse, custom, ideology, and circumstance, so that it is never one thing: "If I speake diversly of my selfe, it is because I looke diversly upon my selfe. All contrarieties are found in her, according to some turne or removing".¹²⁰ The multivalent model of subjectivity that Montaigne develops slowly through his wide-ranging essays certainly foreshadows something of the restless probing of the subject's diversity in Shakespeare's plays. But while Montaigne writes that "I have nothing to say entirely, simply, and with soliditie of my selfe, without confusion, disorder, blending, mingling",¹²¹ his book of this "selfe" nonetheless gains a sort of cohesion in its writing.

In his writing of himself Montaigne is relentlessly self-reflective: "I have presented my selfe unto my selfe for a subject to write".¹²² Although dispersed and contradictory, by bringing together the various strands in "this pourtraite" he *creates* a

¹²⁰ Michael Montaigne, *The Essays of Montaigne: Done into English by John Florio Anno 1603*. Volume 2. New York: AMS, 1967, p.10.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., p.66.

self: “I have drawne my selfe with purer and better colours, then were my first”.¹²³ He can therefore conclude that “I have no more made my booke, then my booke hath made me”.¹²⁴ Although his self-portraiture is novel and creative, Montaigne’s solitary, calm, and gradual self-assembly, his bricolage of self, must be contrasted to the social, dynamic, and often sudden irruptions of selfhood in Shakespeare’s plays. The more static self-reflection of Montaigne is manifestly *not* an adequate model for the dramatic energy of Shakespeare. We see this in Lee’s observation:

As his use of the image of the picture suggests, this is the equivalent of shifting perspectives on the same basic shape; it is always within the frame, and recognizable as a whole, though the proportion of every line has changed”.¹²⁵

The dialogue and action of drama do not permit such prolonged, self-constituting explorations. Lee contends that “Hamlet’s repetitions, his soliloquies, are essays which share in Montaigne’s techniques”, and are “his attempts to capture himself” as a form of “diary” or “self-portrait”.¹²⁶ But while Shakespeare’s soliloquy speaks of inward states, his characters do not sample the world from a withdrawn position, looking for analogies to a “basic shape” of the self. Rather, they are embroiled in and transformed by its tumult, constantly changing shapes. As I show in Chapter Three, Hamlet’s soliloquies do not attempt to “capture himself” or “search for the self”,¹²⁷ but burst, along with his consciousness itself, from the rupture of the ghost’s intrusion, and the division between its spectral excess and restrictive command. Whereas Montaigne ‘assays’ the subject by “tast[ing]” his self from all angles – “I

¹²³ Ibid., p.400.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Lee, pp.201-2.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp.202-3.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.203.

unceasingly consider, control and taste my self”¹²⁸ – Shakespeare’s assays the subject by putting his characters on *trial*, placing them in constant peril. There is no next essay for Shakespeare’s subjects, the play is their sole world and foundation, in which they arrive and perish. Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy may be solitary (though it may also be directed to the listening Claudius and Polonius) but, far from a “tast[ing]”, Hamlet is here gripped by the terrifying, almost debilitating, problem of not knowing the consequences of his subject-defining action.

So while Montaigne points to the self’s changing with circumstance, he does not address how the self can be irrevocably *made or unmade* by the intrusive event. As much as Hazlitt draws from Montaigne, his idea that the tragic action “depends upon the turn of a thought” – that “[a] word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano”¹²⁹ – captures an irruptive power that is foreign to Montaigne. Rather, Montaigne’s self is built from the slow accumulation of written reflections: “the variation within the personality that Montaigne found” entailed “a horizontal multiplicity of expression” but “precluded transformation”.¹³⁰ Transformation, however, is precisely how Shakespeare’s subjects come to be: they are taken from their old selves. Rather than Montaigne’s slow accretion of selfhood through a diary-like reflection on dispersed moments of inwardness, I therefore look to Shakespeare’s explosive and transformative dramatic events.

It is for this reason that I turn to the work of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. These thinkers give us the tools to start articulating the dynamic and eventual process of

¹²⁸ Montaigne, Volume 2, p.393.

¹²⁹ Hazlitt, *Poets*, pp.277-8.

¹³⁰ Lee, p.223.

Shakespeare's character creation in terms other than those of humanist centre and postmodern decentring, or of Montaigne's gradual self-framing. While such a tool is anachronistic, anachronism is, in a sense, how 'history' works. It is "untimely": "acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come".¹³¹ It is belated, coming after the fact. We see in Shakespeare's plays how events such as Hamlet's voyage strike after they are gone to transform the present and give rise to the subject. In short, different aspects of Shakespeare arrive at different times. As such, I use contemporary thinkers not as a rigid structure or a framework into which Shakespeare must be squeezed, but as an opening to another way of speaking about character that is not defined by the old opposition to humanism. And, to the extent that 'arrivals' does inevitably transform Shakespeare's plays, I accept Derrida's point, made in relation to Marx, that the "task" of assuming Shakespeare's "inheritance" requires an ongoing transformation of that inheritance, as "inheritance must be reaffirmed by transforming it as radically as will be necessary".¹³² Or, to return to Nietzsche, "[i]f you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present".¹³³

Character and Dramatic Structure

Despite being dismissed as an "unsatisfactory category",¹³⁴ character remains the inescapable fulcrum of Shakespeare's plays. Plays such as *Hamlet* are named after their characters, focus on their characters' fates, and all their words are spoken by characters. Critical embarrassment about the centrality of character, as expressed by

¹³¹ Nietzsche, *Untimely*, p.60.

¹³² Derrida, *Spectres*, p.54.

¹³³ Nietzsche, *Untimely*, p.94.

¹³⁴ Sinfield, "Bradley", p.30.

Sinfield, evades a fundamental reason behind Shakespeare's position as the pre-eminent dramatist of Western culture and, indeed, the fundamental point that character is a basic fact of all plays. Aristotle notes how the birth of Greek tragedy was the birth of character: "tragedy gradually grew to maturity" until it "attained full growth" after "the number of actors" was "raised from one to two by Aeschylus, who made the choral part less important and gave speech the leading role", and then "Sophocles add[ed] a third".¹³⁵ Tragedy grew to maturity by becoming a drama taking place through and between characters (however characterised). Dramatically, it is undeniable that "[t]here are no plays without characters. It is the most basic theatrical fact, the very first thing for actor and audience alike".¹³⁶

We need go no further than Aristotle to see that Bradley's theory that "character" is "the main source" of "the deeds of men" is not the only vision of tragic character. Aristotle writes in *Poetics* that "tragedy is a *mimesis* not of people but of their actions and life".¹³⁷ As Eagleton observes, "[c]haracters for Aristotle, in what not so long ago might have been dubbed 'theoretical anti-humanism', are a kind of ethical colouring on the action rather than its nub".¹³⁸ The notion of 'arrivals' stems from a similar recognition: action does not come from 'within' a character but instead produces character. As a construct of drama, there is no 'within' from which action can stem, even if the playwright produces effects of an interiority. In this sense, character is nothing but discourse as postmodernism suggests.

¹³⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics. Ancient Literary Criticism*. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom. Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972, p.95.

¹³⁶ Simon Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare*. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2005, p.171.

¹³⁷ Aristotle, p.98.

¹³⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p.77.

That characters *become* something more than discourse, however, is also suggested by basic dramatic facts. Keir Elam points out that by perceiving them “as *participants in speech events*” we project upon characters a number of “qualities and capacities”, including a “supposed *linguistic competence*” and a “set of intentions and purposes”.¹³⁹ The drama enlists us to “attribute to them the qualities...which allow *us* to participate in communicate exchanges”.¹⁴⁰ There are also more specific elements in early modern theatre that explain why character recalls human subjectivity. In their work on actors’ parts, Palfrey and Stern note that “[g]ood early modern actors were said to turn into the part they were given”.¹⁴¹ Part of the technology that facilitated this was the simple fact that Shakespeare’s actors were only given their own lines (or ‘part’) and not the whole play. The result was not only “[e]ach actor’s identification with his part”, but also that, “as in life, every subject assumes his own existence as the predicate of all else”.¹⁴² Moreover, Shakespeare used the division between the play-text and the part-text to make his actors feel something of what their characters ‘feel’, hence “Shakespeare’s long experimentation in making the actor’s ‘private’ mind and experience – his confusions and ignorance, his dependence upon guesswork and inference, his vulnerability to surprise or suddenness – furnish the character’s similar experiential peril”.¹⁴³

Character and Criticism

¹³⁹ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 2002, pp.124-5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹⁴¹ Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007, p.45.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.93.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.490.

Various critics in the past decade or two have sought to reassert the centrality of character and thereby declined to accept Sinfield's opposition between character and subjectivity on the one hand, and politics and materialism on the other. Rather than seeing "the nature of man in terms of a binary opposition", in which "either man is an essence and has agency, or he is a construct and does not", John Lee argues that "he may be 'constructive', possessing considerable agency, with which he builds himself".¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Hugh Grady accepts the postmodern insistence that "the self is not some eternal, unchanging spiritual substance",¹⁴⁵ while nonetheless affirming, "against the dreary Left tradition of anti-subjectivity", "the potential value of the libidinizing of subjective interiority".¹⁴⁶ In arguing that "the related categories of the subjective and the aesthetic need to be positively developed within contemporary critical and cultural theory",¹⁴⁷ Grady places himself within a broader trend of a "return with a difference" to concepts, such as the subject, that seemed to have been discredited by postmodern theory.¹⁴⁸

Other critics have also made headway in this direction. Ewan Fernie has noted the potential significance of Badiou and Žižek in *Spiritual Shakespeares*. In contrast to "poststructuralism", which "displaces spiritual realisation into an impossible future", "Badiou and Žižek advocate the spirituality of a real advent: a flash of lightning that may, at any point, strike and transfigure the world of history".¹⁴⁹ Fernie does not, however, develop his important connection of the eventual subject and the suddenly emerging action of Shakespeare's drama into a working model of character or drama.

¹⁴⁴ Lee, p.29.

¹⁴⁵ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996, p.9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.218.

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009, p.230.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.234.

¹⁴⁹ Ewan Fernie, ed., *Spiritual Shakespeares*. London: Routledge, 2005, p.16.

Rather, in his analysis of *Hamlet*, he builds it into an account of the “immanence” of the play’s fifth act which I challenge in Chapter Four. And, at the theoretical level, it is placed within the broader project of “presentism”, which is “a deliberate strategy of interpreting texts in relation to current affairs...[that] has emerged to challenge the dominant fashion of reading Shakespeare historically”.¹⁵⁰ In this sense, Fernie joins Grady in drawing “a symmetry between the Renaissance and our own late twentieth century”.¹⁵¹ Grady sees a parallel between Shakespeare’s “implicit critique” of the “enabling structures of Western modernity” and our present dismantling of “the myth of progress”.¹⁵² He therefore argues that “the present rush toward historicism” in “Shakespeare scholarship...is misplaced” as “we in the late twentieth century are the best-situated audience for several of these plays”.¹⁵³

The notion of ‘arrivals’ is part of this “return” to the subject “with a difference” but it entails a very different approach. The focus is not on drawing parallels between Shakespeare’s day and ours but in delving into the structure and metaphysics of Shakespeare’s works that were inscribed in a distant historical moment but continue to operate today. So, when Fernie writes that it is “easy to share Hawkes’ objection to Greenblatt that criticism should speak not to the dead but to the living; but the danger for presentist criticism is that, unless it’s exposed to difference, it will tell the living what they already know”,¹⁵⁴ I am in full agreement. But differences are not as simple as ‘then’ and ‘now’, ‘early modern’ and ‘present’. As much as Fernie rebels against historicism through “the deceptively simple manoeuvre of promoting...responsibility

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.186.

¹⁵¹ Grady, *Wolf*, p.9.

¹⁵² Ibid., p.33.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Fernie, *Spiritual*, p.187.

to the present above the historicist obligation to the past”,¹⁵⁵ he retains its strict distinction between past and present. Following Bergson, however, I argue that the past and present are far more intermingled than this distinction implies. There are, in other words, more differences than those between past events and “current events”. There are also differences in the dramatic and metaphysical foundations of character, as inscribed in Shakespeare’s plays, from those that currently dominate our critical thinking. And it is these differences, fundamental to how we even begin to think about difference, subjectivity, or history, that are my focus.

The point, then, is not that the irruptive subjectivity of Shakespeare’s plays is necessarily different from *our* day, for it shares something with the work of some current thinkers, such as Badiou. Moreover, Shakespeare’s approach to the subject is different from other approaches in *his* day. The characters of a playwright such as Ben Jonson, for instance, are either ‘here’ or they are not, and so there is no problem of determining when or how they arrive. Mosca in *Volpone* is a vital presence directing dramatic action, whereas Sir Politic is forever absent from the dramatic moment. History is not linear, then, but is made up of constellations of ideas and actions that link different times, different centuries, in different ways. It is “untimely”. Here Walter Benjamin is doubly relevant. First, because his focus on exceptional moments in which the past bursts into the present and reconfigures the relationship between the two – the “Messianic cessation of happening”¹⁵⁶ – shares something with the idea that the subject bursts from an event that reconfigures its relation to its history and culture. And second, because Benjamin develops an evental rather than a linear view of history itself:

¹⁵⁵ Ewan Fernie, “Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism”, *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 169-18, p.174.

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.254.

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.¹⁵⁷

Not that Shakespeare’s and Badiou’s (or Benjamin’s) conceptions of the subject are the same. They differ in countless and fundamental ways. However, they each have an irruptive and creative core that, strung together, forms a “constellation”: the idea of the arrival of a new man from an ‘event’. An event, in Benjamin’s terms, occurs when the “homogeneous, empty time” of historicism “suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions” and “gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad”.¹⁵⁸ Taken in this light, the thinkers I examine are “chips of Messianic time”, promising a new type of subject, that fleck through the chain of history.

Part Two: Arrivals and Events

In dramatic terms, character is produced by ‘events’ that are external to it in a double sense. In the first place, they are orchestrated by the often-obvious operation of dramatic technique. For instance, much of the excessive feeling of Hamlet’s (re)arrival in Act Five stems from Shakespeare’s centring his transformation on a mysterious voyage that is not shown on stage. Secondly, at the level of plot, characters are constructed by what lies outside of them. They are subjected to and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.255.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.254.

formed by happenings, whether it is love, the return of the past, or the intrusion of the spectral. Through these events they confront their changed selves, in the forms of asides, mid-line shifts, and soliloquies that produce the affect of an emerging subjectivity. Recognising that ‘character’ is produced by what happens to it as much as what the character says and does, or that these things are inseparable, forces us to recognise its provisional status. It relies on something that is other and alien. And it thereby connects with a long philosophical and religious tradition that sees the subject as being formed by its experience or embrace of an excessive happening.

(i) The Religious Event

An important part of this “constellation” of evental subjectivity is the Christian tradition, beginning with Saint Paul. I turn to this tradition for three main reasons. First, because it founds a model of the subject – the subject that is born anew through the irruptive event – that is taken up and adapted in various ways by thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Badiou, and Žižek. Second, because it was an important form of thinking about the subject in Shakespeare’s day that, as I will show, is manifested in his technology of character creation. And third, because it is an aspect of early modern thought that criticism has struggled to deal with. Jackson and Marotti note that early modern religion “resists our alterity criticism”, with the result that criticism “transform[s] religion into politics or culture, and ignor[es] its alterity”.¹⁵⁹ As we shall see, Badiou reveals that religion may speak to quite the opposite movement: a movement not to explain events by some pre-existing concept but to experience a transformative and inexplicable excess. The religious moment is not reducible to the

¹⁵⁹ Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies”, 46 *Criticism* (2004), 167-190, p.179.

history or culture in which it is placed but transforms its place *into* alterity by bringing in new ways of thinking and speaking about subjective experience.

As we shall see in Chapter One, Shakespeare draws parallels between the concept of conversion and his own creation of character. Following Saul's encounter on the road to Damascus, whereby he breaks out of the signifying practice of his inherited tradition and becomes Paul the Apostle, the founder of the Christian church, there is a tradition of Christian subjectivity that focuses on the birth of a new subject. As Paul commands: "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). Building on Paul's writings, Luther declares the utter centrality of man's transformation by God's grace as gift: "But the Spirit, the divine grace, grants strength and power to the heart; indeed, he creates a new man who takes pleasure [in obeying] God's commandments".¹⁶⁰ Grace comes to form part of the subject's interiority, manifest as faith, but it also remains unavoidably foreign, coming from the outside as "a divine work in us which changes us to be born anew of God".¹⁶¹ As Luther writes elsewhere, there is an "alien righteousness", a "righteousness of another, instilled from without" that comes from Christ and "works by grace alone" to change us.¹⁶²

We have, therefore, a distinctive motion or physics of the subject's emergence. It entails the sudden interruption and razing of the old self and its place in the existing codes of communication. The old self is unrecognisable, indeed dead, to the radically new creation that emerges from the event of grace. Žižek thus describes "the 'good

¹⁶⁰ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Second Edition. Timothy F. Lull. Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, p.81.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.101.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.135-6.

news' of Christianity: the miracle of faith is that it IS possible to traverse the fantasy, to undo this founding decision, to start one's life all over again, from zero point – in short, *to change Eternity itself (what we 'always-already are')*".¹⁶³ And this, as we shall soon see, connects to the way Badiou's 'events' reconfigure the subject:

So although St Paul's particular message is no longer operative for us, the very terms in which he formulates the operative mode of the Christian religion do possess a universal scope as relevant for every Truth-Event: every Truth-Event leads to a kind of 'Resurrection', – through fidelity to it and a labour of Love on its behalf, one enters another dimension...¹⁶⁴

We see, then, that the Christian idea of subjective transformation need not be limited to religious writings. Indeed, many early modern plays pivot on moments of passionate transformation without an explicit religious content. "Elizabethan drama", including that of Shakespeare, "was almost wholly secular",¹⁶⁵ and was certainly not 'Lutheran'. The similarity is not the salvational framework but the sense of the arresting event, ripping the subject from its old identity in a moment of transfiguring intensity.

Such a thinking of the subject flows into the proto-existentialist work of Soren Kierkegaard, who stresses how one can be dead, then alive, and then dead again; how life can be unlived. He writes in *Either/Or* of how "[m]any people who appear bodily in the real world" do not live there but inhabit "another world" that lies "[b]ehind the world we live".¹⁶⁶ Kierkegaard is an important thinker for the criticism of arrivals because he stresses how the subject is something that *comes to be*. And to become a

¹⁶³ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*. London: Routledge, 2001, pp.148-9.

¹⁶⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 1999, p.143.

¹⁶⁵ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.25.

¹⁶⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*. Alastair Hannay. Trans. London: Penguin, 1992, p.249.

subject requires a “leap”: “the new is brought about through the leap. If this is not maintained, the transition will have a quantitative preponderance over the elasticity of the leap”.¹⁶⁷ Subjectivity is, therefore, not something natural or essential, it is something to be attained through a great and hazardous movement. There are many that “take a hand in the game of life as it were, but...never have the experience of staking all upon one throw, never attain the conception of an infinite self-consistency”.¹⁶⁸ For Kierkegaard, of course, the nature of that “throw” is – like Pascal’s wager – rooted in the Christian religion. Kierkegaard’s seminal work, *Fear and Trembling*, celebrates Abraham’s suspension of the ethical in his faith that God would achieve the impossible. Greatness is determined “in proportion to the greatness of what *he loved*” and in “proportion to his *expectancy*”: “One became great through expecting the possible, another by expecting the eternal; but he who expected the impossible became greater than all”.¹⁶⁹

(ii) Badiou and the Event

In a non-salvational form that is applicable to Shakespeare’s secular drama, Badiou captures something of the creative grace of Paul and Luther, which emerges from ‘elsewhere’. He gets at how things come to be. And he thereby provides a language that allows me to get closer to the drama’s creativity and singularity than historicism’s search for explanatory origins. Central to Badiou’s project is the re-establishment of the subject, albeit decentred and divided, as a figure of truth and political action. For

¹⁶⁷ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson. Trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980, p.85.

¹⁶⁸ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death. Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*. Walter Lowrie. Trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970, p.238.

¹⁶⁹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*. Alastair Hannay. Trans. London: Penguin, 1985. p.50.

Badiou, the ‘subject’ is founded only through fidelity to a ‘truth-event’ that ruptures its inherited structures. In this sense, the subject is irruptive, breaking into the situation from the outside and fragmenting its pre-existing parameters:

Let us say that a *subject*, which goes beyond the animal (although the animal remains its sole foundation) needs something to have happened, something that cannot be reduced to its ordinary inscription in ‘what there is’. Let us call this *supplement* an *event*, and let us distinguish multiple-being, where it is not a matter of truth (but only of opinions), from the event, which compels us to decide a *new* way of being.¹⁷⁰

Unlike the Bradleian character, Badiou’s subject flows from what happens rather than transcending or directing it. And unlike the postmodern or historicist subject, Badiou’s subject exceeds its inherited position within culture, language, and circumstance. It does so because the event itself exceeds the situation, revealing what it has excluded. In short, rather than being constituted by the discourses and structures of the day – by “what there is” – the event “compels us to decide a *new* way of being”. The event compels us to *become* a subject. The enacting of this compulsion is what Badiou terms “fidelity”: “the decision to relate henceforth to the situation *from the perspective of its evental supplement*”.¹⁷¹

The event is not some mystical or miraculous happening, however, although it might appear as such within the situation. It is “an *immanent break*” within the situation, which means that the “truth proceeds *in* the situation, and nowhere else – there is no heaven of truths”.¹⁷² For Badiou there are four categories of such breaks: “political, loving, artistic or scientific”.¹⁷³ Within any given situation the “event is both *situated*

¹⁷⁰ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Peter Hallward. Trans. London: Verso, 2001, p.41.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp.42-3.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.42.

– it is the event of this or that situation – and *supplementary*; thus absolutely detached from, or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation”.¹⁷⁴ It therefore “enables [a] truth-process” that “meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation”.¹⁷⁵ As Badiou continues, “the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation”.¹⁷⁶ For example, “the emergence of the classical style, with Haydn”, was “an event” for the musical situation: it authorised “musical configurations” that were “not comprehensible within the plenitude achieved by the baroque style; it really was a matter of *something else*”.¹⁷⁷

The Evental Subject

The subject “in no way pre-exists the process” of fidelity to this event, rather, the event and its “process of truth *induces* a subject”.¹⁷⁸ As we shall see in Chapter One, Romeo and Juliet are induced by the event of love that breaks apart the old names of Montague and Capulet: it forms a new poetry, a new concept of love, and a new subject that break from “the rules of the situation”. The idea that the subject is a new creation that emerges from what happens is what leads Badiou to approach Saint Paul as a thinker of the event. The happening “on the road to Damascus” is here “a thunderbolt, a caesura”, “a conscription instituting a new subject”.¹⁷⁹ And that ultimate happening, “the Resurrection”, “is pure event, opening of an epoch,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁷⁹ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation for Universalism*. Ray Brassie. Trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003, p.17.

transformation of the relations between the possible and the impossible”.¹⁸⁰ Badiou is not treating the Resurrection as a material happening but as a means of thinking how the event fundamentally re-orientates the subject’s relationship to the world and its own past.

Badiou argues that because “[i]nfinite alterity” – or the “infinite and self-evident multiplicity of human kind” – is “quite simply *what there is*”, “differences hold no interest for thought”.¹⁸¹ The results are potentially profound given that “New Historicism criticism”, along with other forms of historicist and postmodern criticism, “organizes itself around a claim to respect alterity, otherness, and difference”.¹⁸² The point here is not that differences are either non-existent or unimportant but that they are not an *end* in themselves. What matters, rather, is what comes out of these cultural and circumstantial differences, what they create or become. So, for Badiou, “since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences are then precisely what truths depose”.¹⁸³

The result is a re-orientation of our approach to the subject. The subject is drawn not from the differences in which it is placed, but from the event that transforms its place. Or, as Badiou writes in *Saint Paul*, “the existence of any truth...requires the destitution of established differences and the initiation of a subject divided in itself by the challenge of having nothing but the vanished event to face up to”.¹⁸⁴ Division is not the end of the subject but its beginning:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁸¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, pp.25-6.

¹⁸² Jackson and Marotti, pp.175-6.

¹⁸³ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.27.

¹⁸⁴ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.58.

We shall maintain, in effect, that an evental rupture always constitutes its subject in the divided form of a ‘not...but’, and that *it is precisely this form that bears the universal*. For the ‘not’ is the potential dissolution of closed particularities (whose name is ‘law’), while the ‘but’ indicates the task, the faithful labor, in which the subjects of the process opened up by the event (whose name is ‘grace’) are the coworkers.¹⁸⁵

We are looking at a two-step process of which most postmodern theory takes only the first, that of rupturing and demystifying. The absence of the second term, the reconstructive “but”, is why Žižek argues that the “fundamental lesson of postmodernist politics is that *there is no Event*, that ‘nothing really happens’”.¹⁸⁶

Against “this structural scepticism”, Badiou “insist[s] that – to use the term with its full theological weight – *miracles do happen*”.¹⁸⁷ For Badiou, the subject comes as “grace”, which is to say that it “comes *without being due*”.¹⁸⁸ Rather than being drawn from its inherited culture or characteristics, the lesson Badiou draws from Saint Paul is that “[w]hat matters, man or woman, Jew or Greek, slave or free man, is that differences *carry the universal that happens to them like a grace*”.¹⁸⁹

The Void

The theoretical underpinning of the ‘event’ is set out in Badiou’s central work, *Being and Event*, which relies on a complex engagement with mathematical ‘set theory’. It is not possible to delve into the nuances of this engagement but a broad outline is necessary, not only to understand the foundations of Badiou’s event, but also because Shakespeare’s plays, like mathematical ‘sets’, establish structures on the edge of the ‘void’ (or of representation). It suggests how drama can, through the event, open

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.64.

¹⁸⁶ Žižek, *Ticklish*, p.135.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.76-77.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.106.

itself to what is ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’ its representational structure, to an emergence from the void.

The most basic fact that Badiou draws from Cantor’s ‘set theory’ is that being is made up of infinite multiplicities. Set theory is thus the “theory of the multiple”.¹⁹⁰ It posits that “all is multiple, everything is a set”, and that “[a]ny multiple is intrinsically multiple of multiples”.¹⁹¹ The multiple is not “composed of ones”, as “the one is only there as a result”.¹⁹² The ‘one’ comes about *afterwards* as a product of the mathematical structure that separates out some “consistent multiplicity” from the inconsistent multiplicities of being. Badiou describes such a “presented multiplicity” as a “*situation*”: the “situation...is the most general definition of a *structure*; it is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one”.¹⁹³ The “regime of the count-as-one”, which establishes the situation, “splits the multiple which is presented” into “consistency (the composition of ones) and inconsistency (the inertia of the domain)”.¹⁹⁴ Unlike set-theory itself, which deals with multiples of multiples, the structured situation therefore excludes infinite multiplicity in favour of the count of consistent ‘ones’. The inconsistent multiples are “not actually presented as such since all presentation is under the law of the count”: “Nothing is presentable in a situation otherwise than under the effect of structure, that is, under the form of the one and its consistent multiplicities”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Badiou, *Being*, pp.47-8.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.44-5.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.28.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Structure thus “leaves a remainder”.¹⁹⁶ The very fact that the structure is necessary to produce the “one” shows that something has not been counted and thereby falls outside the situation. Badiou calls this the “phantom remainder”: the situation effaces both the fact “that it was necessary that the operation of the count-as-one operate” to form its structure and the inconsistent multiples that it does not count or present.¹⁹⁷ It is by this double exclusion that the situation is “sutured to being”.¹⁹⁸ Here we reach a critical concept: “I term *void* of a situation this suture to its being. Moreover, I state that every structured presentation unrepresents ‘its’ void, in the mode of this non-one which is merely the subtractive face of the count”.¹⁹⁹ While the void – which is both the infinite multiplicity (“this non-one”) that is not counted and the necessity of the count itself – is not presented in the situation, it remains “sutured” to it. The “void” is thus “a subset of any set”.²⁰⁰ It is where the presented ‘ones’ meet the “non-one[s]” of unrepresented multiplicity. Presentation, the one, the situation, are all based upon a structure that is attached to, but never presents, the void of infinite multiplicity. The void is “outside situations, unrepresentable”, and therefore “in excess of being as a thinkable disposition”.²⁰¹ In Shakespearean terms it recalls the “fearful and mysterious”²⁰² aspect of tragedy, its “painful mystery”,²⁰³ stressed by Bradley.

There is always more to the situation than its structure presents or counts; always more non-ones than ones. The situation’s “void” exceeds the situation, and it is “literally impossible to assign a ‘measure’ to this superiority in size”.²⁰⁴ Badiou calls

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.53.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.55,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.86.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.74.

²⁰² Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.25.

²⁰³ Ibid., p.35.

²⁰⁴ Badiou, *Being*, p.84.

this “*the theorem of the point of excess*”.²⁰⁵ Any “reference to the void” within the situation therefore “produces an excess over the count-as-one, an irruption of inconsistency”.²⁰⁶ The word “excess” here hints at the connection between Badiou’s theoretical framework of the void and the notion of the ‘event’. There is always an “excess” of inconsistent multiples over the consistent multiples presented in the situation and, as we saw earlier, the event exceeds the existing situation. The event, then, is what causes this excess to irrupt *into* the situation’s presented structure: “for the void to become localizable at the level of presentation...a dysfunction of the count is required, which results from an excess-of-one. The event will be this ultra-one of a hazard, on the basis of which the void of a situation is retroactively discernible”.²⁰⁷ To clarify, the void is always ‘there’, always attached or sutured to the situation; it is in fact the condition of the situation. However, it is not *in* the situation, not presented within its structure. It can only enter the situation, and thus become presentable and effectual, through the rupture of the event. The event involves a breakdown of structure, an irruption of new multiples, and thus an opening to new possibilities.

Badiou’s model helps express how, in Shakespeare, the singular arrives through dramatic events that rupture a situation. From the love of *Romeo and Juliet*, to the ghost of *Hamlet*, the weird sisters of *Macbeth*, and the “Nothing” of *King Lear*, Shakespeare founds his plays around gaps, breaks, scandalous intrusions, that irrupt into an existing structure. The ‘structure’ here is multi-faceted. It can be a dramatic, poetic, narrative, or metaphysical structure. Most often these dramatic events serve to transform all these types of structure simultaneously. So, as we see in Chapter Five, *Macbeth*’s meeting with the weird sisters ruptures both the historical narrative and the

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.75.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.56.

stable dramaturgy and language of Duncan's Scotland, thereby releasing a new mode of being and speaking that is Macbeth's imaginative subjectivity. It is Macbeth's exposure to the dark imaginative excess, to the void of "what is not" (I.iii.141), that brings him to life.

We are thus in a very different dramatic realm to that of Hegel, who views the witches as "only the poetic reflection of [Macbeth's] own fixed will".²⁰⁸ Macbeth is already there as a haunted, excessive consciousness for Hegel, rather than emerging from the intrusive event of the witches. That this is inevitable for Hegel is indicated by Badiou's observation that "all of Hegel can be found in the following: the 'still-more' is immanent to the 'already'; everything that is, is already 'still-more'".²⁰⁹ So while externality still does something in Hegel, what it does is reveal the true inner reality of the thing, which is "already" in it. The excess is already in the thing, the subject is already in the character. But the void is not already *in* the situation even if it is attached to it. It is excluded by the situation and, when it enters via the event, it "proceeds 'explosively', or 'everywhere'".²¹⁰

The Subject's Wager

The subject is absolutely central to the theory of the event because it is only through a subjective "intervention" that the event, which is excluded from the situation's 'count' and language, comes to transform the situation:

²⁰⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.585.

²⁰⁹ Badiou, *Being*, p.162.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.74.

...if no intervention puts it into circulation within the situation on the basis of an extraction of elements from the [evental] site, then, lacking any being, radically subtracted from the count-as-one, the event does not exist.²¹¹

The movement between the situation and the unpresented event *is* the subject: “I will call *subject* the process itself of liaison between the event (thus the intervention) and the procedure of fidelity (thus its operator of connection)”.²¹² The subject here “is not a substance”²¹³ or a psychological entity. Rather, as a “generic procedure”, the subject exceeds the situation by striving towards “the incorporation of the event into the situation”.²¹⁴

Badiou’s “intervention” recalls Pascal’s famous ‘wager’: “As an un-founded multiple, as self-belonging, undivided signature of itself, the event can only be indicated beyond the situation, despite it being necessary to wager that it has manifested itself therein”.²¹⁵ Pascal is important for Badiou because he attempts to “renovate and maintain the evental kernel of the Christian conviction” by insisting upon the centrality of “the doctrine of miracles”.²¹⁶ Existing “in excess of proof”, the “miracle” is a “pure event” that breaks down the laws of cause and effect and establishes itself as “the symbol of an interruption of the law in which the interventional capacity is announced”.²¹⁷ It shows that the “heart of the truth is that the event in which it originates is undecidable” and that “choice, in regard to this

²¹¹ Ibid., p.209.

²¹² Ibid., p.239.

²¹³ Ibid., p.391.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.393.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.197.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp.214-215.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.216.

event, is ineluctable”,²¹⁸ which is to say that it must be chosen if there is any event whatsoever.

There is something mysterious here for what is it that ‘decides’ or ‘chooses’ before the subject comes to be? For Badiou, the event founds the subject without its ‘knowledge’ or rational choice – like Saul on the road to Damascus – but the subject only continues to exist through a subsequent and ongoing re-choosing to sustain the evental rupture. This is what Badiou calls “fidelity”: the ongoing decision to remain faithful to what has happened. The subject here is supra-individual: the event produces a subject that is not-yet, that continues to arrive in a wager on a happening that makes no sense within the existing situation and whose trajectory remains unseen. The “Truth-Event” is, as Žižek puts it, “undecidable from the standpoint of the System”.²¹⁹ From “within [the situation’s] horizon...the Event necessarily appears as *skandalon*, as an undecidable, chaotic intrusion that has no place in the State of the Situation”.²²⁰ Badiou’s “fidelity” is not a religious faith but “the apparatus which separates out, within the set of presented multiples, those which depend upon an event. To be faithful is to gather together and distinguish the becoming legal of a chance”.²²¹ What it shares with religious faith is the way that truth comes from a “chance”, a miracle, that requires a wager (not a knowledge).

Badiou’s fidelity also suggests why postmodernism’s focus on determining linguistic systems is inadequate. Belsey, for instance, writes: “Utterance – and action – outside the range of meanings in circulation in a society is psychotic. In this sense existing

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.221.

²¹⁹ Žižek, *Ticklish*, p.135.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.138.

²²¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.232.

discourses determine not only what can be said and understood, but the nature of subjectivity itself”.²²² But this does not hold up if subjectivity stems from the “undecidable”. Its emergence from “outside the range of meanings in circulation” may retain elements of the “psychotic” – it forms a break or scission that can be viewed as madness – but the wager on the undecidable is what enables new meanings and a new language to emerge. The excess that was excluded thereby *enters* the situation, ceasing to be unrepresentable or “psychotic”, and causing “the language of the situation” to be “radically transformed”.²²³

The path has been long but we are now able to grasp why Badiou can claim that we are “the contemporaries of a *second epoch* of the doctrine of the Subject”.²²⁴ It is “no longer the founding subject, centered and reflexive, whose theme runs from Descartes to Hegel and which remains legible in Marx and Freud (in fact, in Husserl and Sartre)”.²²⁵ Rather than the opposition between a unified essential subject and the death of the subject we have a processual subject, a void subject, and a divided subject. Its process is to incorporate an irruptive event into the situation. Its void is the excess of being – the infinite multiplicities – that the situation excluded. And its division is the division between the old situation and the new mode of being in fidelity to the event.

Recomposing the (Political) Subject

²²² Belsey, *Subject*, p.5.

²²³ Badiou, *Being*, p.342.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

The evental subject not only breaks with the old, interrupting and even shattering its count, the “subject is equally the process of recomposing, from the point of the interruption, another place and other rules”.²²⁶ It is this dual process of rupture and recomposition that “guarantees that the subjective process in part escapes repetition”.²²⁷ The subject is neither a repetition of its eternal essence nor of its linguistic or cultural context. Both repetitions, in their different ways, make all subjects structurally the same, even if in postmodernism it is the structure of cultural and linguistic difference. But, for Badiou’s subject, “[t]he effect of the Same is destroyed” under the power of an event, “and what this destruction institutes is an *other Same*” that transcends cultural difference.²²⁸ Badiou therefore stresses that we must “not giv[e] up on the subjective element”:

Even though the subject is neither a transparency, nor a centre, nor finally a substance, and even though nothing attests to its necessity for the organization of experience, it nevertheless remains the case that it is the key concept from which it turns out that we can think the decision, ethics, and politics.²²⁹

It is because it is an exception that transforms the existing situation and its structure that “[e]very subject is political. This is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics”.²³⁰ It is political because it opens a path of being in the world that did not previously exist. It is political because it reveals what the old situation, the old regime or structure, excluded from presentation. The subject is not an ideological illusion that shuts down political action, it is precisely what exceeds ideology and enables political action. Or, to return to Badiou’s writing on Saint Paul:

²²⁶ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*. Bruno Bosteels. Trans. London: Continuum, 2009, p.259

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., p.279.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.28

Far from fleeing from the century, one must live with it, but without letting oneself be shaped, conformed. It is the subject, rather than the century, who, under the injunction of his faith, must be transformed.²³¹

Because the event can only be part of the situation through the intervention of a subject, Badiou attacks the postmodern rejection of the subject as a retreat from the twentieth century's radical attempt to "confront History" through the "project of the new man", which "imposes the idea that History will be compelled, that it will be forced", rather than passively observed.²³² Badiou is here close to Benjamin's description of the revolutionary moments that "make the continuum of history explode".²³³ In contrast, late twentieth century thought has "returned to classicism", to the idea that "everything has always already begun, and it is vain to imagine that foundations are built on nothing, that one will create a new art, or a new man".²³⁴

Likewise, Badiou critiques the linguistic turn, which declared that "we had to be done with Man".²³⁵ Indeed, Badiou contends that such thinking has maintained its own idealism. Like Hegel, it presupposes something that is already there which is "constituent"²³⁶ of existence. For thinkers such as "Foucault and Lacan as well as Althusser", "[l]anguage is that of which experience is the effect".²³⁷ It mirrors the "great classical tradition of idealism" but makes language, and not self-consciousness or spirit, that point of being "through which all access to existence as such must pass".²³⁸ Indeed, it becomes a universal that structures all situations. "Language =

²³¹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.110.

²³² Alain Badiou, *The Century*. Alberto Toscano. Trans. Cambridge: Polity, 2007, p.15.

²³³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.253.

²³⁴ Badiou, *Century*, p.140.

²³⁵ Badiou, *Subject*, p.187.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., p.278.

structure”.²³⁹ Badiou calls this “linguistic idealism”, which, “[a]t its worst” (in the “idealinguistry” work “of Foucault”), describes “vast discursive configurations that characterize the entire mental and practical process of an era” and thereby “excludes any subject”.²⁴⁰

It is for this reason that Badiou writes that “[t]he choice here is between a structural recurrence...and a hypothesis of the rarity of the subject, which suspends its occurrence from the event, from the intervention, and from the generic paths of fidelity”.²⁴¹ While “[i]n neither case is the subject substance or consciousness”, the first option, the postmodern option, “preserves the Cartesian gesture in its excentred dependency with regard to language”.²⁴² It preserves also, even in the work of Lacan, another “debt” that is “owed to Descartes”, and that is “the idea that there were always some subjects”.²⁴³ But that is not the case if the subject is suspended “from the event”. For here the subject is rare. It comes from the void of the situation: “Every subject passes in force, at a point where language fails, and where the Idea is interrupted”.²⁴⁴ So whereas the linguistic subject reacts against, and is defined by, the classical idea of the subject as “the point of *departure*”,²⁴⁵ this thesis follows Badiou’s vital claim: “I hold that in reality we can only *arrive* at the subject”.²⁴⁶ And we arrive at it through the process of liaison, of fidelity, between the situation and its event.

Poetic Events

²³⁹ Ibid., p.188.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.432.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid., p.434.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p.430.

²⁴⁵ Badiou, *Subject*, p.279.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

From this account of Badiou it should be clear that not all characters arrive as ‘subjects’. Of course, at a basic dramatic level, all characters do arrive on stage, make an entrance, and come to be present before the audience through their actions, words, and movements. While such basic facts of arrival are fundamental to the exploration of how character is built, they do not necessitate the sort of ‘event’ that Badiou pinpoints, nor the type of dramatic events that found Shakespeare’s major tragic figures. Shakespeare’s characters do not necessarily arrive, and, when they do, it is not a matter of once-and-for-all arrivals; of characters coming to their destinies or final modes of being. We see this in Part Three with France, who arrives from nothing only to disappear. Character is not a given but is produced anew in specific dramatic moments. As such, character can be, and often is, born multiple times. It may arrive, like the transformed Othello in Cyprus, only to self-destruct or disintegrate. It may arrive only to arrive again, but differently, like Hamlet from his voyage to England. It is this perilous and eventual subjectivity that distinguishes Shakespeare. There is a non-reducible leap or wager in the arrivals of Shakespeare’s drama. As Badiou writes of poetry:

If poetry is an essential use of language, it is not because it is able to devote the latter to Presence; on the contrary, it is because it trains language to the paradoxical function of maintaining that which – radically singular, pure action – would otherwise fall back into the nullity of place. Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure undecidable, against a background of nothingness, that is an action of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth.²⁴⁷

In other words, at the very heart of poetry is a “radically singular” movement of “pure action” – of poetic creation – that rejects the idea that place or context is definitive.

²⁴⁷ Badiou, *Being*, p.192.

Its explosiveness, its difficulty, its density, and its novelty, are designed to produce something that did not before exist and which could not have been foreseen.

Something *arrives* through poetry. And, in Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, it is, in part at least, the subject that arrives. The "background", the context, the history, is, in this particular sense, a "background of nothingness". It is the deterministic repetition of circumstance, the idea that A leads to B. But poetry taps into the situation's void and harnesses its excessive powers. It "is the stellar assumption of that pure undecidable", of the unforeseen multiple that the event pulls from the void, and which requires a subjective "action" of fidelity – "one *bets* upon its truth" – that in this case is called "poetry".

Part Three: The Surprising Arrival of France

Perhaps the best way of setting out how the unexpected and unforeseen arrives in Shakespeare's drama is through a specific example. France in *King Lear* might not be an obvious candidate but this often neglected figure is not only crucial to my approach to *Lear* in Chapter Six, it is indicative of how Shakespeare's characters can both emerge suddenly from nothing and fade back into nothing. France, initially an empty and conventional suitor, arrives by taking up Cordelia's loving "Nothing", only to disappear, leaving only elusive traces in the play.

France enters the opening scene of *King Lear* in the context of Cordelia's refusal to participate in Lear's 'love test'. Lear's competition, with its predetermined division of the kingdom, establishes an apparatus for eliciting love in a predictable and calculable manner: an absolute expression of love brings "A third more opulent than

your sisters” (F.I.i.84), while “Nothing will come of nothing” (F.I.i.88). All this is, of course, shattered by Cordelia’s “Nothing, my lord” (F.I.i.85). Following Lear’s logic the consequences of this “Nothing” are inevitable: Cordelia loses her third of the kingdom and Burgundy refuses to marry her. But then something far from inevitable happens when France accepts Cordelia without her dowry. As Ewan Fernie mentions in the context of Badiou and Žižek’s insistence that “the impossible happens”: “The impossible happens, too, when France throws his lot in with the discarded and disgraced Cordelia”.²⁴⁸ Not only does France’s sudden love shatter the logic that equates love with material rewards, it is an event that is in no way prepared for by the ‘character’ of France. It is not just that no pre-existing relationship with Cordelia explains this decision, there is no France whatsoever.

France does not arrive all at once however. He enters with Burgundy and his initial speeches convey not an immediate expression of love but, like Lear’s courtiers, bewilderment at Lear’s sudden shift: it “is most strange” that she who was Lear’s “best object” should in a moment “Commit a thing so monstrous to dismantle / So many folds of favour” (F.I.i.210-215). France is not automatically ‘here’ in his mode but moves slowly towards a subjective position, as if awakening from a deep sleep. Although it articulates something that exceeds Lear’s structure, France’s initial defence of Cordelia is not impassioned and personal, but detached and philosophical: “Love’s not love / When it is mingled with regards that stands / Aloof from th’entire point” (F.I.i.236-8). Nevertheless, France begins to become something more than a stereotypical suitor, and he does so not least because he channels the audience’s sentiments and energies. He embodies and expresses our desire to defend Cordelia

²⁴⁸ Fernie, *Spiritual*, p.16.

and to embrace her true vision of love, even if he is not yet speaking *to* Cordelia:

“Will you have her? / She is herself a dowry” (F.I.i.238-9).

Meisel writes that an audience surrogate is often “a learner, open and vulnerable to experience, and typically suffering change”.²⁴⁹ Fundamentally, France shows how an openness to an unjustified and uncalled-for love (“Nothing”) can lead to the creation of a new subject. For a moment, the play-world mirrors the audience’s sympathies, and the play-text gives France a different mode of speaking. Stanley Cavell speaks of one’s “rush of gratitude toward France, one’s almost wild relief as he speaks his beautiful trust”.²⁵⁰ This pivotal moment occurs after Cordelia’s rejection of Burgundy: “Peace be with Burgundy; / Since that respect and fortune are his love, / I shall not be his wife” (F.I.i.245-7). France “seize[s] upon” these words of Cordelia, not in generalisations or primarily as our surrogate, but as his own most cherished possession:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised:
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon.
Be it lawful, I take up what’s cast away.
Gods, gods! ’Tis strange that from their cold’st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect. –
Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France.
Not all the dukes in wat’rish Burgundy
Shall buy this unprized precious maid of me. –
(F.I.i.248-257)

The speech builds and swells with its powerful oppositions – “most choice, forsaken; and most loved despised” – that culminate in the action of “seiz[ing]” and “tak[ing] up”. Here, France is doing. The first four lines of the speech thus mark the arrival of

²⁴⁹ Martin Meisel, *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007, p.110.

²⁵⁰ Cavell, p.65.

an *active* subject that seizes love. The next two lines, beginning with “Gods, gods!”, form an aside that marks the first sign of an inward regard. Taken aback, France’s speech turns to the fact that something “strange” has happened to him and stopped him in his tracks. The legal language of goods and seizure gives way to something more introspective as France, seeing himself as if from the outside, confronts his own transformation.

“Gods, gods!” speaks to the way in which the event of love – both Cordelia’s silent love and his seizure of it – emerges as an intrusive and almost divine force. The event, like Luther’s “alien righteousness”,²⁵¹ comes from beyond the subject. “’Tis strange” speaks to its newness and unaccountability. While the dubious legality of the happening – “Be it lawful” – shows how it is, in Badiou’s terms, “*supplementary*; thus absolutely detached from, or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation”.²⁵² It recalls the wondrous response to the ‘miracles’ at the end of the romances, such as Leontes’ “O, she’s warm! / If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating” (*TWT*, V.iii.109-11). Cordelia’s love, like Pascal’s miracle, is an “interruption of the law”,²⁵³ here that of Lear’s love-test. France is not quite able to comprehend what has hit him or what has transformed him but, unlike Othello, he takes it up.

France’s arrival is marked not only by his newly inward address but also by a change in the poetry. Gone is the stilted verse of his “Love’s not love / When it is mingled with regards that stands / Aloof from the entire point”, and instead we have the triumphant rhyme of his “Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance, / Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France”. The triumph here is, of course, short-lived.

²⁵¹ Luther, pp.135-6.

²⁵² Badiou, *Ethics*, p.68.

²⁵³ Badiou, *Being*, p.216.

France's old-fashioned, almost chivalric poetry cannot survive in Shakespeare's tragedy. His form of restitution is not possible and he soon disappears. However, where France differs from typical romance heroes is in his very discontinuity. He does not possess a stable mode of chivalric being but emerges from an initial emptiness by seizing upon the "Nothing" – the void – of the event. Even his archaic rhyme expresses how the givenness of the event comes unlooked for, "thrown" to him by "chance", as a sort of miracle or grace. It recalls Badiou's idea that "[t]o be faithful is to gather together and distinguish the becoming legal of a chance".²⁵⁴

The "chance" that is "thrown" from the event must *become* "lawful" because it comes from outside the existing laws, from the unrepresented "Nothing". Hence why, when France ponders that "from their colds't neglect / [His] love should kindle to inflamed respect", he is not suggesting that Cordelia is most rich *despite* being poor but that she is most loved *because* she is despised. In other words, it is because Cordelia is nothing within the existing structure that she becomes everything to France. As Fernie puts it, "Cordelia's disgrace is a revelation to France. His plunge into love for his abject bride discovers different values".²⁵⁵ The failure of Cordelia's love within the situation marks how the event involves "a dysfunction of the count...on the basis of which the void of a situation is retroactively discernible".²⁵⁶ Cordelia's abjectness names the situation's unseen void – the idea of love that is given not in exchange for kingdoms or dowries but comes as gift or grace, from "Nothing" – and so her valueless, abject quality is what is *most* valued and extraordinary. Cordelia's "Nothing, my lord" is, as we see in Chapter Six, the foundational, creative event of

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p.232.

²⁵⁵ Fernie, *Spiritual*, p.17.

²⁵⁶ Badiou, *Being*, p.56.

the play that brings Lear's ceremony to a shuddering halt and leads to the play's irruption or "convulsion".²⁵⁷

There is therefore something sublime in France's seizure, as the infinite value of Cordelia's love is revealed through its unaccountable and terrible failure. I here use "sublime" in Žižek's sense of one of the "magic ruptures which momentarily break the inexorable chain of tragic necessity".²⁵⁸ Žižek's articulation of the sublime is a poignant one for 'arrivals':

In schematised time, nothing really *new* can emerge – everything is always-already there, and merely deploys its inherent potential. The Sublime, on the contrary, marks the moment at which something emerges out of Nothing – something new that cannot be accounted for by reference to the pre-existing network of circumstances. We are dealing here with another temporality, the temporality of freedom, of a radical rupture in the chain of (natural and/or social) causality.²⁵⁹

Žižek's formulation points beyond the usual idea of the sublime as occurring when an "object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear",²⁶⁰ to the way that what is cut-off from the "pre-existing network of circumstances" enters the material world as an active force. France 'himself' is not sublime in his old-fashioned speech but, following Žižek, there is something sublime in the way that Shakespeare orchestrates France's union with Cordelia so that Cordelia's rejected love, like Badiou's event, "proceeds 'explosively', or 'everywhere'",²⁶¹ creating new formations and new subjects, creating France, so that "something emerges out of Nothing".

²⁵⁷ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.34.

²⁵⁸ Žižek, *Belief*, p.17.

²⁵⁹ Žižek, *Ticklish*, p.43.

²⁶⁰ Phillip Shaw, *The Sublime*. London: Routledge, 2006, p.2.

²⁶¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.74.

France emerges not merely as a form of opposition to Lear's reductionist vision of love but also a form of confluence and sharing with Cordelia. In Whitehead's terms we may say that "how an actual entity becomes constitutes *what* that actual entity is".²⁶² France "becomes" a loving subject because of "how" he takes up Cordelia's love. As such, France recalls the way "an eventual rupture always constitutes its subject in the divided form of a 'not...but'".²⁶³ For while he emerges in opposition to the feeble 'love' propounded by Lear and the "dukes in wat'rish Burgundy" (F.I.i.256), which forms the "not", his responses are also always a coming together with Cordelia, which form the "but" of a fidelity. France recuperates Cordelia's silent love – crushed into "Nothing" by the patriarchal situation – and makes it something. Almost all of France's speeches work by taking up the potential in Cordelia's speech that has been stymied by the situation. France picks up Cordelia's rejection of the "oily art" of flattery and "such a tongue / that [she is] glad [she has] not" (F.I.i.222-30) when he speaks of the "tardiness in nature" that "leaves the history unspoken / That it intends to do" (F.I.i.233-5). And he reiterates Cordelia's refusal of love as "respect and fortunes" when he embraces her as "most rich, being poor". France thus works almost as a *refrain* in which he takes up Cordelia's words by repeating them and *actualising them*. As against the stability of Lear's mechanistic view of love in which everything is given, the process of the refrain builds something in its movement, a dramatic presence or a moment, that was not there before.

Although I have resuscitated France from his disappearance in the play and its critical history, France is hardly a consummation of Shakespeare's technology of character creation. The play does not rest with France. Existing almost as a fleeting gift to the

²⁶² Whitehead, *Process*, p.233.

²⁶³ Badiou, *Ethics*, pp.63-4.

audience, his interiority is not made known to us and he disappears almost as soon as he arrives. *King Lear* is not a romance play and France is not adequate to its harsher world. The baton of arrivals is passed to other characters and it is also passed to us. Recuperating some of the potential crushed by the situation, France is almost a model for our response to the sublime failures of *Lear's* finale, an idea I take up in Chapter Six. It is we, at the play's end, who witness the destruction of love, but now it is in our hands to "take up what's cast away" and seize it in its failure.

France, then, is an opening to the events and the arrivals of this thesis. I begin my exploration of Shakespeare's irruptive subjects with an analysis of the relatively positive arrivals of *Romeo and Juliet*, which nonetheless involve a difficult struggle to develop a new way of speaking – a mutual poetry of giving, of the moment – that always threatens to be subsumed into the pre-existing social and linguistic structure. The second chapter addresses *Othello* as a dark twin to *Romeo and Juliet* that complicates the concept of arrivals. It shows the terrible and shattering uncertainty of the event as Othello trembles between Desdemona's love, which opens him to the dread of the unknown, and the stability of his romantic "visage in his mind" (I.iii.251). Othello arrives as a new, vulnerable subject as he lands on Cyprus only to retreat into the old situation and the old image. In this sense, the play is the tragedy of Desdemona, who breaks through the dead image only to be sacrificed and entombed in "monumental alabaster" (V.ii.5) so that Othello can restore his "count-as-one".

The arrivals that take place in Shakespeare's tragedies are thus far from being either final or necessarily positive. They are precarious and unstable; both always threatening and under threat. The third and fourth chapters analyse the way in which

Shakespeare calibrates Hamlet's interiority on the obscure borders of representation. Rather than one event of 'arrival', however, *Hamlet* has two: the intrusive ghost of Act One and the mysterious voyage of Act Five. The nebulosity of the second event in particular, with its multiple temporalities, its confluence of dramatic codes, challenges any simple application of Badiou's 'truth-event' along with critical notions of immanence. The fifth chapter turns further into the dark side of arrivals – and into the difficulties of Badiou's events – as we see how, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's dramaturgy can animate the most bloody and tortured subject. The spectral intrusion of the weird sisters founds Macbeth's imaginative consciousness so that "nothing is / But what is not" (I.iii.140-1). The imaginative, the void, here takes over the whole of the waking mind so that Macbeth is left cocooned in his search for a metaphysical be-all and end-all. Finally, the sixth chapter returns to Cordelia's "Nothing" as the play's point of emergence, which breaks down Lear's mechanistic 'love test' and unleashes the explosive energies of the situation's 'void'. Here, however, in a bridge to the late plays, the event does not lead to an electric arrival. France disappears with Cordelia and the play's old hero is left to a gradual recuperation of the event through suffering. We come to a more dispersed and yet interconnected world, which prefigures the diffused subjectivity of *The Tempest's* island.

Chapter One: *Romeo and Juliet*

We have seen with France how the Shakespearean subject can arrive through the staging of an irruptive happening of love, but we have seen it only on the periphery of the play. In *Romeo and Juliet* the arrival of the eponymous lovers takes centre stage. These characters that we know so well do not yet exist in the opening scenes of the play. Romeo is more right than he knows when he tells Benvolio: “I am not here. / This is not Romeo; he’s some other where” (I.i.190-1). And this emptiness, this non-arrival, is why we must reject the Hegelian notion that action is the “clearest *revelation* of the individual”¹ and its “real inner essence”.² Rather, the play deserves its status as the most cherished love story in the language because – as a matter of dramaturgy and metaphysics – Shakespeare’s lovers only become themselves through the event of their coming together in love: through becoming ‘Romeo and Juliet’.

(i) **The Situation: Waiting for an Arrival**

Through this “not here” Romeo, Shakespeare creates the feeling that we await transformation. Romeo loves the faceless Rosaline rather than the “star-crossed lover” invoked by the Prologue (6). In Levinas’ terms, we might say that Romeo has yet to experience the “astonishing or traumatizing” event of “facing the Other”, whereby the subject “awakens from the egological”.³ In our first report of him, Romeo himself is faceless as Benvolio describes how he “stole into the covert of the wood” (I.i.118). Unlike Hamlet, however, Romeo soon reveals the “heart of [his]

¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.219.

² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 2, p.1160.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. Trans. London: Continuum, 2006, pp.74-75.

mystery” (*Hamlet*, III.ii.336), and he does so through comically wordy paradox, which ends with Benvolio’s “laugh”:

Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
 O anything of nothing first create;
 O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
 Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
 Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
 Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
 This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
 Dost thou not laugh?
 (I.i.169-176)

Coleridge remarks that “Romeo became enamoured of the ideal he formed in his own mind, and then, as it were, christened the first real being as that which he desires. He appeared to be in love with Rosaline, but in truth he was in love only with his own idea”.⁴ We see this idealising in his response to Benvolio’s (soon fulfilled) promise that Rosaline will be outshone by the brighter lights at the Capulets’ feast: “I’ll go along, no such sight to be shown, / But to rejoice in splendour of mine own” (I.ii.100-1). The splendour of Rosaline is indeed his own; for it is nothing of Rosaline’s, who is never seen. Romeo’s “ideal” is, of course, not really even “his” at all. It is learned by “rote” (II.ii.88) from Petrarchan rhymes. Romeo’s extravagantly paradoxical description of love parodies *The Canzoniere*,⁵ in which Petrarch speaks to the simultaneous cruelty and delight of love, describing how he with “weeping delights” at “the savage sweetness in [his] heart” (XXXVII, 62-9). Love cuts the defenceless lover irrevocably, who nevertheless savours “the wounds that run to the depths of [his] heart” in solitary contemplation: “and blessed be the first sweet suffering / that I felt in being conjoined with Love” (*Canzoniere*, LXI, 5-8). Romeo follows in this

⁴ Coleridge, p.151.

⁵ Petrarch, *The Canzoniere*. Francesco Petrarch – Father of Humanism. <http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere/the-canzoniere.txt>. A.S. Kline. Trans. Visited 06 June 2011.

well-worn tradition of versifying for the unattainable lady as he walks alone in covert woods to cherish the idea of one who has “forsworn to love” (I.i.216).

However parodic, the waiting for stars and true loves, and the movement of passion from one lady to another, is not without its difficulties. Is the difference between Rosaline and Juliet a matter of fate? Is it a matter of language, of choosing the right kind of poetry? Or is it simply the fact that Juliet says ‘yes’? These questions raise a serious dilemma that has worried critics. Roland Knowles suggests that “it is difficult to understand how, if Shakespeare had intended to present only a poignant tragedy of ideal love, he chose to emphasize Romeo’s first love, Rosaline, who is swiftly passed over in the source”.⁶ While Jonathan Goldberg writes that “Juliet as replacement object is inserted within a seriality rather than as the locus of uniqueness and singularity”.⁷

The problem with the suggestion that Romeo’s first love undermines his second is that this ‘love’ is so obviously parodic. Romeo is manifestly not ‘Petrarchan’ in the opening scenes. Petrarch and Philip Sidney, whose *Astrophil and Stella* was the most influential Elizabethan model, were mature men assailed unexpectedly by love, and who learned from its long hardships. Romeo is a boy, a figure of fun that almost burlesques the literary language of older men. We know that his self-satisfied imitations cannot be sustained and we wait for them to be burst apart by love. In a sense, the non-seriousness of Romeo’s first love reflects Empson’s idea that double plots may “anticipate the parody a hearer might have in mind without losing its

⁶ Roland Knowles, “Carnival and Death in Romeo and Juliet: A Bakhtinian Reading”, *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 69-85, p.74.

⁷ Jonathan Goldberg, “Romeo and Juliet’s Open Rs”, *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*. R.S. White. Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, 194-212, p.197.

dignity”, giving the example of a “play of heroic swashbucklers which has a comic cowardly swashbuckler (Parolles), not at all to parody the heroes but to stop you from doing so: ‘If you want to laugh at this sort of thing laugh now and get it over’”.⁸

Romeo’s love for Rosaline is not a ‘double plot’ but it does act as a foil to the main plot. The youthful inadequacy of Romeo’s love for Rosaline, the obvious extravagance of his words – “One fairer than my love! the all-seeing sun / Ne’er saw her match since the world begun” (I.ii.92-3) – and our knowledge of what will happen, prepare for, rather than undermine, his arrival with Juliet.

That Romeo is yet to arrive is confirmed by the fact that, although he parodies Petrarchan poetry, his solitary idealising nonetheless operates according to its underlying assumptions and structures. It is a poetry that feeds on lack, projecting fantasies of wholeness and completion onto a never encountered figure. As Žižek writes:

In Lacanian terms, the difference here is the one between *idealization* and *sublimation*: false idolizing idealizes, it blinds itself to the other’s weaknesses – or, rather, it blinds itself to the other *as such*, using the beloved as a blank screen on to which it projects its own phantasmagorical constructions; while true love accepts the beloved the way she or he is, merely putting her/him into the place of the Thing, the unconditional Object.⁹

There is no event that breaks through to reorientate the subject, there is no dramatic interrelation with the beloved, but only projections onto a “blank screen”.

Shakespeare thus establishes a situation in which love does not arrive as we wait almost the entirety of the first act for Romeo and Juliet to meet. But while Romeo’s projection forecloses any encounter, we soon see Juliet promising to encounter her

⁸ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*. Third Impression. London: Chatto, 1968, p.30.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London: Verso, 2000, p. 128.

proposed love-match, while making no promise as to what it will bring. As Lady Capulet and the Nurse commend Paris, Juliet says she will “look to like, if looking liking move” (I.iii.99). Whether “looking liking move[s]” is an unknown, to be discovered in the moment of the event. It has us looking forward to the mysterious contingency of love’s happening.

(ii) The Event of Love

The situation therefore awaits a liking-upon-looking. It awaits the unaccountable and excessive event, the ‘falling’, that will found them as loving subjects. Needless to say, it happens at first sight. And yet it hardly comes unprepared. Shakespeare carefully shapes the site for the event’s arrival. We are made to anticipate it from the beginning and, in the fourth scene, there is a change in the play’s tone and poetry, triggered by the hyperactive originality of the Queen Mab speech. Mercutio’s tour de force, making “the whole world...subject to his law of association”,¹⁰ is almost despairing in its intensity, tearing us away from the simple language of the opening scenes, which were defined by Romeo’s Petrarchan imitations and the stable Montague/Capulet opposition. Queen Mab, this “fairies’ midwife” (I.iv.55), engenders monstrosities that far exceed its tiny size. Mercutio is drawn into a frantic imagining of her train in which his poetry runs wild through this “law of association”. It is endless, overflowing, far in excess of its ‘object’, which is “nothing” (I.iv.96). The imaginative superabundance, stemming from nothing and prompting a relentless associative game that leads nowhere, nevertheless does something: it creates the opening for the emergence of the excessive and new; of something other than

¹⁰ Coleridge, p.151.

Petrarchan cliché; something altogether different to Romeo's first 'love'. It releases what Badiou calls an "irremediable excess of sub-multiples over terms"¹¹ into the situation.

The fact that something different is coming is underscored as Mercutio's endless chain of descriptions – "This is she—" – is interrupted by Romeo: "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! / Thou talk'st of nothing" (I.iv.95-6). Mercutio's response speaks to a sort of gestating excess that soon erupts in the new poetry of Romeo and Juliet: "True. I talk of dreams, / Which are the children of an idle brain / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy" (I.iv.96-98). Their love, of course, is not simply "[b]egot of nothing", for even here Mercutio's poetry is incubating it, building the tension that will explode in their first meeting. Shaken by Mercutio's gratuitous poetry, Romeo's banter is suddenly changed to frightful premonition: "for my mind misgives / Some consequence yet hanging in the stars / Shall bitterly begin his fearful date / With this night's revels" (I.iv.106-9). Mercutio, seemingly counterproductive to the main plot, thus initiates a critical turn in the play's mood: a faint but important movement to the tragic and an enormous step toward the excessive and the rupturing: "This wind you talk of blows us from ourselves" (I.iv.104). It paves the way for a change that might otherwise have been laughably quick: "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! / It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear— / Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear" (I.v.41-44). Quite against his wishes, Mercutio facilitates the entry of Juliet. Henceforth she will take over his role as the play's poet-in-chief. For now though, it is Romeo's moment and his active intent to "make blessèd [his] rude hand" (I.v.48) by the touch of Juliet's marks a definitive

¹¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.97.

shift from his previous moody introspection: “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight, / For ne’er saw I true beauty till this night” (I.v.49-50).

When it comes, the explosive moment of love is not strictly locatable. It is in the “torches” speech but it is also beyond it, for Juliet remains distant: she “enrich[es] the hand / Of yonder knight” (I.v.39-40). The anticipated coming together of their bodies occurs, without clear stage directions, between the end of Romeo’s admiring speech (I.v.50) and Romeo’s touching of her hand (I.v.90), all while the enraged Tybalt asserts the dominance of the feud. So while the moment of love occurs as their hands touch and they speak their first words together, the multi-dimensional event of love also occurs before they have spoken: in this anticipated confluence, in the change in poetry, in the movement of their bodies together across the stage, and in their first exchange of a look that occurs somewhere amongst it all. It is during their movement together that there takes place the critical liking-on-looking that Juliet looked forward to in the previous scene. There is, however, no stage direction or speech that designates precisely when or where it takes place. The central event of the play is, in a sense, unlocatable, exceeding words and place. And yet, it is soon transforming structure, interrelations, and language at multiple levels.

The foundational liking-upon-looking is indicative of what Jean-Luc Marion calls “the crossing of gazes – thus, strictly speaking, love”.¹² For Marion, this moment, in which two invisible gazes cross is what distinguishes love from the image: “I see not the visible face of the other, an object still reducible to an image (as the social game and its makeup demands), but the invisible gaze that wells up through the obscurity of

¹² Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*. James K.A. Smith. Trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004, p.87.

the pupils”.¹³ We have, in this crossing, an exposure to what is other and unseen that was impossible with the faceless Rosaline. Its location may be uncertain but its force is central. So, in Zeffirelli’s 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*, love arrives in the crossing of their gazes while dancing, while in Luhrmann’s 1996 film, the full force of their falling into love hinges on their gazes crossing through a fish tank, which precedes Romeo’s declaration of her beauty, here reduced to only the “Did my heart love till now?” (I.v.49) portion of the speech. They look, and love has already burst into their hearts. To use Badiou’s words, “[t]he treasure [of their love] is nothing but the event as such, which is to say a completely precarious having-taken-place”.¹⁴

In this excessive, diffused event we are far from Shakespeare’s source in Arthur Broke’s poem, in which Romeus chooses Iuliet after “he wayd the bewty of eche dame”,¹⁵ signalling a comparative rather than irruptive moment:

And as out of a planke
 a nayle a nayle doth drive:
 So novell love out of the minde
 the auncient love doth rive.¹⁶

Further, when Broke’s Romeus and Iuliet do come together they are inarticulate: “vehement love” means that Romeo’s “tong dyd stay”, while likewise, in Juliet’s “mouth, her tong he glewed fast”.¹⁷ Any poetry resides not in the lovers but in the poem. In Shakespeare, however, their first words famously take the form of a sonnet, channelling the energy of their liking-upon-looking into a new mode of speaking and being that *is* their arrival. We see the effects of the event of love *afterwards*, in the

¹³ Ibid., pp. 56-7.

¹⁴ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.54.

¹⁵ Arthur Broke, *Romeus and Iuliet*. Amsterdam: Da Capo, 1969, Fo. 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., Fo. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., Fo. 9.

transformation of both the poetic tradition and the voices of these two characters. The Petrarchan sonnet, evoked and parodied in Romeo's opening scenes, fully enters the dialogue of the play only to be transformed: the poetry of inaccessibility and lack becomes the poetry of intimacy and touch. According to T.S. Eliot, "[o]ne of the surest of tests [of a poet] is the way" her or she "borrows": "The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn".¹⁸

Most obviously, Shakespeare's dramatic sonnet is welded into a mutual back and forth rather than a solitary lament. The lady, far from inaccessible, joins in the game. So while the language may declare her to be a "dear saint" (I.v.100), Juliet irrevocably steps off her pedestal, out of fantasy, and down to earth, where she can accept and return the kisses of this "unworthiest" of sinners (I.v.90). In doing so, Juliet alters the very shape of the sonnet. First of all, she transforms the usual *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g* rhyme scheme of the Shakespearean sonnet into an opportunity for sharing. Romeo obligingly begins with an *a-b-a-b* rhyme and we might expect Juliet to move to a *c-d-c-d* pattern as she takes up the sonnet's second quatrain. However, after beginning her quatrain with rhyme 'c' she returns to share Romeo's rhyme 'b'. Not only does Juliet share the 'b' rhyme, using words ending in 'is' or 'iss', she uses *exactly the same words* as Romeo, which just happen to be a sharing of 'this' and 'kiss'. There is an even deeper transformation of the usual Petrarchan rhyme scheme, the octave of which is an *a-b-b-a-a-b-b-a* pattern, and of its Elizabethan manifestation in Sidney, who either follows this model or uses an *a-b-a-b-a-b-a-b* pattern. Under these schemes Juliet's 'c' rhyme introduces a *new* term

¹⁸ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*. London: Faber, 1932, p.206.

her lips “have took”. In this sense Juliet does not “sabotage” the second sonnet but instead completes it by asserting her voice – insisting that *she* is to speak the ‘b’ rhyme to Romeo’s ‘a’ rhyme – and in doing so further transforms the sonnet form by breaking down the univocality of the line, just as she has broken down the univocality of the sonnet, the quatrain, and the couplet. We thus witness smaller and smaller units of shared language: sonnet, quatrain, couplet, line. It dramatises poetically the lovers’ movement together, almost becoming one joint-speaker.

Ultimately, the second sonnet does not move beyond its first quatrain as the nurse interrupts their experiments and pulls this joint poetry apart by bringing the names Capulet and Montague into play. Before the inevitable interruption, however, something creative has taken place. The lovers appropriate existing language to create new meanings for old words and, as we shall see, to create their new name, ‘Romeo and Juliet’. The creativity of this shared moment – the way it gives rise to the subject – is often missed amidst the critical preoccupation with discrediting the essentialist subject. Catherine Belsey, for example, inscribes Romeo’s initial love of lack onto the entirety of their relationship:

Lovers are prone to perceive the imaginary essence of the object of desire, to identify a ‘self’, a presence which subsists beyond the symbolic order, the ‘dear perfection’ of the loved one independent of the public and external name. This is the evidence of their idealising passion.²⁰

As the shared sonnet suggests, however, Romeo and Juliet do not attempt to escape the “symbolic order” but encounter each other, and arrive as lovers, through their shared linguistic creations. Further, in the balcony scene, Juliet instructs Romeo in a

²⁰ Catherine Belsey, “The Name of the Rose in Romeo and Juliet”, *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*. R.S. White. Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, 47-67, pp.55-56.

language of process and not “essence”. Indeed, we shall see how Juliet constantly battles to escape the idealising impulse of Petrarchan poetry, which misses the other as such and projects upon it what Belsey calls an “imaginary essence”. Belsey’s argument is, accordingly, more a critique of Petrarch than of Shakespeare: “But above all, it puts on display the hopeless longing to escape the confines of the signifier, to encounter directly, immediately, the rose that exists beyond its name”.²¹

Thus far we have witnessed the moment of these characters’ conception but not their birth. Because the prologue (present in the quartos of 1597 and 1599 though not the Folio) has told us the outcome of the play, the *how* of their love becomes all-important, and this ‘how’ moves beyond the metaphysics of essence imputed by Belsey. The remarkable feeling of their first encounter is not a consummation but a new beginning. However, it is only a beginning, a foundational event, *in and through what happens after*: through the process that inscribes the event into the dramatic existence of these emergent subjects. As with the almost recursive temporality of Badiou’s event, which is only real through the retrospective intervention of the subject, Romeo and Juliet’s love at first sight comes true after the fact in the balcony scene. The lightning strikes at their first meeting but its fire must strike again (and again) if it is to be more than “the lightening which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens” (II.i.161-2).

(iii) The Work of Love

²¹ Ibid., p.65.

It is only in response to the rupturing event of their 'liking-upon-looking' that the lovers begin to emerge from the rote learning of social conditioning. Their interiorities are born in their confrontation with the having-taken-place of the event. But the birth is as difficult as it is joyous. For one thing, it raises a linguistic problem. How is this new and singular happening to be described in the old language? It is also a dramatic and metaphysical problem. For them, metaphysical: how will they, as living beings, respond to the event? Will they be the same beings or new ones? For us, a dramatic question: are these dramatic creations passing through events or has this happening formed new creations? Is this a new Romeo or the old one? These interrelated questions find their responses in the way Shakespeare stages the aftermath of the event, which is, in the end, the main game of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Romeo begins the balcony scene speaking on the borderlands of the old and the new, in Juliet's presence but beyond her sight and hearing. Although Romeo retains some of his idealising tendencies, his desperate desire for communication is worlds away from his initial solitariness: "It is my lady, O, it is my love. / O that she knew she were!" (II.i.52-3). In a sense this is Romeo's moment of glory. His poetry builds his, and our, anticipation: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (II.i.44-45). He is on the threshold, about to take the defining leap, struggling to give adequate expression to the palpable excitement of this new feeling. T.S. Eliot notes somewhat humorously that "there is still some artificiality" here "[f]or it seems unlikely that a man standing below in the garden, even on a very bright moonlight night, would see the eyes of the lady above flashing so brilliantly as to justify such a comparison [to the stars]".²² However, his

²² Eliot, *On Poetry*, p.87.

empirically minded observations do not do justice to the way that Romeo is preparing us for the extraordinary, rather than trying to “justify” his love or language. Indeed, Romeo’s ‘artificial’ solar comparison is the first of the lovers’ numerous poetic attempts to reconfigure the heavens in response to the event of love.

Eliot writes that “one is aware, from the beginning of this scene, that there is a musical pattern coming”.²³ In a sense, Romeo’s speech is the opening verse of a duet, inviting the other and preparing for the moment of their union. He reaches out to Juliet – “Her eye discourses; I will answer it” (II.i.55) – and pulls back – “I am too bold” (II.i.56). But this is not the withdrawal of Petrarchan poetry. He makes a momentary, exuberant detour into the stars, placing Juliet’s eyes in the heavens where they “stream so bright / That birds would sing and think it were not night” (II.i.63-4). But while Romeo’s celestial foray harks back to his idealising past, it serves not to withdraw him from his love but to tantalise: “O, speak again, bright angel” (II.i.68). It almost teases out Juliet’s great speech on love and the name, and thus begins their “duet”:

The arrangement of voices – Juliet has three single lines, followed by Romeo’s three, four and five, followed by her longer speech – is very remarkable. In this pattern, one feels that it is Juliet’s voice that has the leading part: to her voice is assigned the dominant phrase of the whole duet...²⁴

Juliet has the “leading part” because, while Romeo skirts along the borders of the new event and the old idealising language, she confronts the old language head on. She is preoccupied, however joyous and naïve, with the serious dilemma of how to reconcile a love that breaks down existing orders – moving beyond essence, social determinism

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.87-88.

(family), and background (Rosaline) – with the orders that still exist and conspire against them through their names: “What’s Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!” (II.i.82-4). While Juliet is also exuberant and confident in this new love, unlike Romeo she recognises the extent to which they are hemmed in by their situation and its language. As Snyder points out, the contentless terms Montague and Capulet operate in an ideological fashion to define the situation and its subjects: “Capulets define who they are against Montagues, Montagues against Capulets”.²⁵

Belsey suggests that while “Juliet shows herself a Saussurean *avant la lettre*” in “recognising that the name of the rose is arbitrary”, “she simply affirms what her own desire dictates” when she draws “the inference that Romeo can arbitrarily cease to be a Montague”.²⁶ But as Derrida shows in his essay on the play, “Aphorism Countertime”, Juliet never quite draws this inference. The separateness of the lovers does not lead them to an illusory belief in essence but forms the very condition of love: “I love because the other is the other, because its time will never be mine”.²⁷ As such, although Romeo and Juliet “would like to separate themselves” from “this name, which separates them but will at the same time have tightened their desire with all its aphoristic force”, “the most vibrant declaration of their love still calls for the name that it denounces”.²⁸ Unlike Belsey, Derrida sees Juliet as being aware that the attempt to separate Romeo from his name is both “necessary and impossible”:

She knows it: detachable and dissociable, aphoristic though it be, his name is his essence. Inseparable from his being. And in asking him to abandon his

²⁵ Susan Snyder, “Ideology and the Feud in Romeo and Juliet”, *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 87-96, pp.90-1.

²⁶ Belsey, “Name”, p.54.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*. Derek Attridge. Ed. Routledge: New York, 1992, p.420.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.423.

name, she is no doubt asking him to live at last, and to live his love (for in order to live oneself truly, it is necessary to elude the law of the name, the familial law made for survival and constantly recalling me to death), but she is *just as much* asking him to die, since his life *is* his name.²⁹

If this seems like an eternal deadlock it is because we have missed what is little more than a suggestion in Derrida but which is the focus of this chapter: the idea that their separate desires are “held together...in the dislocated now of a love or a promise. A promise in their name, but across and beyond their given name, the promise of another name, its request rather: ‘O be some other name...’”.³⁰ Unlike Derrida’s almost Petrarchan deferral of this “promise”, however, I will show how Shakespeare in fact fulfils it, if only in the briefest dramatic moments.

Juliet’s solution to the deadlock of the name is in stark contrast to the refusals of the Petrarchan ladies. We have already seen Juliet freely give her kisses to Romeo, while in sonnet sequences such as *Astrophil and Stella*, kisses are stolen, not given.

Shakespeare also departs from Arthur Broke’s poem in which Juliet gives herself to Romeus “whole to...betake”, and forsakes her “father’s house”,³¹ but does so with reservations and conditions. Her gift comes after various ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ – “if you doe intende my honor to defile...But if your thought be chaste” – and is followed by further reservations, “But if by wanton love...”.³² In stark contrast, Romeo *overhears* Juliet’s gift of herself. Shakespeare’s use of this archetypal dramatic happening not only stresses its eventual nature – that love stems from what happens and not some quality in the loved-one – it ensures the unconditional nature of the gift. The fact that Juliet gives without knowing she gives bypasses brilliantly Marcel Mauss’ influential

²⁹ Ibid., pp.426-7.

³⁰ Ibid., p.419.

³¹ Broke, Fo. 16.

³² Ibid.

idea that gifts are not ‘free’: “in theory these [gifts] are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily”.³³

Dramatically, Juliet’s exposure is reflected by the actor’s part, which incorporates half-length cueing lines that “encapsulat[e] an existential risk that the actor too must partly share in”.³⁴ So, for instance, Juliet’s “Take all myself”, which concludes the “overheard soliloquy” below, is “a leap into the dark”, cueing another without knowing whether the ensuing speech “will be addressed to ‘Juliet’ or not”.³⁵ It is an example of how, in Juliet’s part, “[t]he actor is often forced to commit absolutely to the emotion, and to the passion and physicality of its expression...without quite knowing whether satisfaction will come immediately, soon, or not at all”.³⁶ In contrast, the cue that Romeo gives – “Romeo” – speaks to an altogether more self-contained world. Speaking her love without apprehending Romeo’s presence, Juliet expresses herself without coyness or courtly games. Love is *given* and Juliet is utterly exposed. Juliet’s leap is therefore removed from the ordinary economies of language and love, where vow is exchanged for vow. Romeo, longing for communication, gets it without asking, from Juliet, who gives it without knowing:

JULIET
 Romeo, doff thy name,
 And for thy name—which is no part of thee—
 Take all myself.
 ROMEO I take thee at thy word.
 Call me but love and I’ll be new baptized.
 Henceforth I never will be Romeo.
 JULIET What man art though, that thus can bescreen’d in night
 So stumblest on my counsel?
 (II.i.89-95).

³³ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. W.D. Halls. Trans. London: Routledge, 1990, p.3.

³⁴ Palfrey and Stern, p.148.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p.149.

If the result of this overhearing is a giving of herself, it is because Juliet *affirms* the accidental happening of the overheard declaration. She grasps this happening not as a violation of her private thoughts but as a foundation for their joint project of reconfiguring the name. Juliet sees that it is only by giving themselves freely and fully to the event of love that they will be able to keep going in the face of the name that seeks to conform them. She will give all of herself to replace his name. And Romeo will take it and be changed. Juliet does not seek to “encounter directly, immediately, the rose that exists beyond its name”,³⁷ for as Derrida observes, “[s]he does not tell [Romeo] to lose all names, rather just to change names: ‘O be some other name’”.³⁸ Indeed, Juliet incessantly speaks Romeo’s old name: her “tongue” is “hoarse” “[w]ith repetition of my Romeo’s name. Romeo!” (II.i.207-8). Ultimately, Juliet does not seek to undo or dissolve their old names, or their separateness from one another but, rather, through the action of giving, she seeks to re-work and re-formulate them into a *new name*.

Badiou is helpful here because his event, like the love of Romeo and Juliet, comes from beyond the existing situation to reconfigure the subject and its relation to the world. It comes almost as a “miracle”, which is “the symbol of an interruption of the law”.³⁹ But even as it comes from beyond the situation as the “undecidable, choice, in regard to this event, is ineluctable”.⁴⁰ And this choice, or wager, involves transforming the old laws and the old names. In the pre-existing situation there was, to adopt Badiou’s appropriation of set-theory, no ‘set’ in which Montague could

³⁷ Belsey, “Name”, p.65.

³⁸ Derrida, *Literature*, p.428.

³⁹ Badiou, *Being*, p.216.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.221.

belong to Capulet or vice versa. The love-event, which enters from the void, ruptures the situation by showing the inconsistency of its 'count'. It presents the (previously unthinkable) correspondence of Montague and Capulet, and, in being grasped by a 'subject' – this 'Romeo and Juliet' – it establishes a new 'set', or multiple, in which Montague belongs to Capulet, Capulet to Montague.

The subject's "intervention" therefore operates "to make a name out of an unrepresented element of the [evental] site".⁴¹ The new name is what connects the situation to the event. Whether it is the name "Saint Paul for the Church" or "Bernard or Claire, if they declare themselves to be in love", this involves "a designation, via the one of a proper name, of the subjectivizing split between the name of an event" (whether it is the Resurrection or the liking-upon-looking of love) and "the initiation of a generic procedure", such as the Church or the work of love.⁴² "What the proper name designates here is that the subject...is neither the intervention nor the operator of fidelity, but the advent of their Two, that is, the incorporation of the event into the situation in the mode of a generic procedure".⁴³ We do not have an idealist essence beyond names but a mutual process of working the unknown of the event into the situation through a new use of names and a new use of language.

If we take up Derrida's promise of "*another name*", but shift it from the deferred future to the present of the event, we can see how Romeo and Juliet re-work their dislocated names into a joint-name. Belsey is thus only right in a limited sense when she writes that "the signifier, however arbitrary, is not at the disposal of the subject".⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., p.204.

⁴² Ibid., p.393.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Belsey, "Name", p.55.

It is true that the old names are not erased, but this does not mean that something new does not arise from the event and that it is not named. Indeed, Romeo's idea that he is "new baptized" speaks eloquently to this new beginning. It implies both the washing away of the old and the creation of the new. Romeo's extravagant claim that "[h]enceforth [he] never will be Romeo" may be false semantically, for even now he uses his name, but it speaks to a truth. Their past relationship with the world – their family, their enemies, their names – is retrospectively changed. For while the old names may still operate in the world, and while they may still destroy them, they create the new name of 'Romeo and Juliet', and the old names never mean the same again.

The explicit reference to baptism calls attention to how this happening not only changes these characters, it *makes* them. It connects with Badiou's understanding of Saint Paul as a thinker of the event. As with Juliet's substitution of herself for Romeo's name, there is a real sense of overcoming circumstance, existing culture, and history in Paul's declaration: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28). The point is not that material differences – or names – are non-existent or irrelevant but that "[w]hat matters, man or woman, Jew or Greek, slave or free man, is that differences *carry the universal that happens to them like a grace*".⁴⁵ In Badiou's terms, this grace is nothing other than the event that comes from the situation's void to open up a new name and mode of being. Or, in Christian terms, "the divine

⁴⁵ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.106.

grace...creates a new man".⁴⁶ Hence why "[t]he Christian subject does not preexist the event he declares (Christ's resurrection)" and why it is not a product of the pre-existing "conditions of his existence or identity".⁴⁷ The idea is useful for drama because it articulates how something new – the character, the subject – is born from *what happens*. Just like Saint Paul, Romeo and Juliet do not pre-exist the event of love that they declare in their "generic procedure"⁴⁸ of joint poetic creation. They arrive in "the decision to relate henceforth to the situation *from the perspective of its eventual supplement*".⁴⁹

To some extent, it is obvious that the dramatic subject cannot pre-exist its actions and events. And yet, there are numerous reasons why the point is far from simple. For one, the relationship can easily become one of the chicken and the egg. For instance, Bradley argues that "the main source" of "the deeds of men...is character",⁵⁰ which is not a foolish suggestion if we imagine the author beginning with an idea of a flawed character and testing it in a number of situations. For another, we have been conditioned by realist art, which creates the impression that we are encountering pre-existing beings whose depths and histories will only be discovered slowly in the course of the narrative. And finally, when it comes to Shakespeare, it is very difficult to remove the character from its complex network of cultural associations. A mythology surrounds figures such as Romeo and Juliet. There is a constant temptation to think of the character without looking at the means of its production: Romeo and Juliet are 'lovers'. But how do they *become* lovers?

⁴⁶ Luther, p.81.

⁴⁷ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.14.

⁴⁸ Badiou, *Being*, p.393.

⁴⁹ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.41.

⁵⁰ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.13.

It is here worth comparing Shakespeare's dramatic arrival to the confessional tone of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, in which the poet's muse tells him to "look in thy heart, and write" (Sonnet I, 14).⁵¹ We do not witness Romeo and Juliet reveal their hearts: we watch their hearts and selves be born on stage. It is for this reason that Shakespeare stages a discrepancy between the post-evental attitudes of Romeo and Juliet: because the idea that the subject arrives through events is *not* an obvious one. The temptation is always to project from past experiences, to treat the new event as a continuation of the old. Hence the importance of the evental tradition: "Against the pagan and/or Gnostic Wisdom which celebrates the (re)discovery of one's true Self...Christianity calls upon us to thoroughly reinvent ourselves".⁵²

How, then, is this new creation sustained after the event? And how does it fit with the tragic end, in which the old names still kill and the new ones are encased in the cold dead weight of gold? In her influential reading of the play, Julia Kristeva contends that "Juliet's jouissance is often stated through the anticipation—the desire?—of Romeo's death".⁵³ Drawing on Freud, she links this with "the intrinsic presence of hatred in amatory feeling itself".⁵⁴ While, as we shall see, Kristeva's focus on the dark side of Romeo and Juliet's jouissance reveals something important about the play, in order to make hatred the play's hidden core, Kristeva must abandon the text and look forward speculatively to what might happen if the lovers "had escaped their persecutors" and "experienced" the "banal, humdrum, lackluster lassitude of...normal marriage".⁵⁵ Kristeva reduces an ending that is notoriously overdetermined – caused

⁵¹ Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Volume 1. Seventh Edition. M.H. Abrams et al. Eds. New York: Norton, 2000, 917-931.

⁵² Žižek, *Belief*, pp.148-9.

⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. New York: Columbia UP, 1987, p.221.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.222.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.217.

by missing letters, plague, banishment, blood feud, parental control, and simple bad timing – into the equation that desire equals death.

Kristeva is thereby caught within the metaphysics of finished states. The question of *what* love is underpins her approach. Kristeva writes of her attempts, throughout her life, “to decide if, when speaking of love, we spoke of the same thing”:

Beyond the revelation—yet another one—of the abyss separating the sexes, such questioning hints that love would, in any case, be solitary because incommunicable. As if, at the very moment when the individual discovered himself to be intensely true, powerfully subjective, but violently ethical because he would be generously ready to do anything for the other, he also discovered the confines of his condition and the powerlessness of his language.⁵⁶

Kristeva here raises an important aporia in the common conception of love as an almost mystical union: that we can never be certain in love, never sure we speak of the same thing. And yet, in many ways this is precisely Juliet’s lesson to Romeo. She, like Kristeva, recognises the “powerlessness of his language”, and yet she does not abandon language or remain “infinitely remote”⁵⁷ from her love. With no concept that can mediate the gulf between signifier and signified, name and essence, Kristeva, like Belsey, must declare the illusiveness of love, that love is ‘really’ something other than love: death, hatred, lack. Unlike this “tradition of seeing death as the secret content of desire”,⁵⁸ Juliet treats love not as a secret essence but as an open process. For Juliet understands the old model of desire all too well:

Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say ‘Ay’,
And I will take thy word. Yet if thou swear’st
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers’ perjuries,
They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.3.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p.203.

If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
 Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
 I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
 So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
 In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
 And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light.
 But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
 Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
 (II.i.132-143).

Juliet's speech raises two problems with Romeo's tendency to name their love using the old language: a problem of knowledge and a problem of desire. It is in response to these problems that Juliet develops a more specific language of fidelity that contrasts with the love of idealisation and lack. The first problem is that of knowledge: "Dost thou love me?". Juliet here acknowledges the impossibility of knowing the other's love (or the other). And yet, she will believe Romeo's affirmation even though he "mayst prove false". Juliet takes the plunge into love but with open eyes, *knowing the event of love is uncertain*.

The second problem with Romeo's language is the problem of desire. Juliet grasps how desire may function as lack, forever circling around its object. She shares with Cressida the realisation that "Woman are angels, wooing; / Things won are done" (*Troilus*, I.ii.264-5). Juliet thus wishes half-heartedly that she had remained distant and allowed his desire to circle her – "I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay, / So thou wilt woo" – but, instead, reaffirms her unreserved gift. Romeo soon interrupts her probing of love and desire with counterproductive attempts to prove the genuineness of his love through the swearing of oaths:

ROMEO Lady, by yonder blessèd moon I vow,
 That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—
 JULIET O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon
 That monthly changes in her circled orb,

Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.
 ROMEO What shall I swear by?
 JULIET Do not swear at all,
 Of if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
 And I'll believe thee.
 ROMEO If my heart's dear love—
 JULIET Well, do not swear....
 (II.i.149-158)

Romeo here reproduces the problem Juliet is trying to avoid by using the old language of courtly love to articulate the irruptive event. His swearing of oaths suggests an absolute “satisfaction” that is final and named. Juliet rejects this model of desire. Whereas Cressida ultimately accepts circling desire in her maxim that “Achievement is command; ungained, beseech. / Then though my heart's contents firm love doth bear, / Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear” (I.ii.271-3), Juliet is convinced that love is different. As Žižek writes, “desire is always caught in the logic of ‘this is not that’, it thrives in the gap that forever separates the *obtained* satisfaction from the *sought-for* satisfaction” but “love FULLY ACCEPTS that ‘this IS that’ – that the woman with all her weaknesses and common features IS the Thing I unconditionally love”.⁵⁹

By breaking up Romeo's conventional language, Juliet pre-empts Badiou's idea that poetry “extends the limit of the communicable” by “breaking up all ordinary prose”.⁶⁰ It is not that love is ‘unspeakable’, it is that it enters from the unspeakable void and must *then* be spoken, not as an oath or name that encapsulates this potential, but as a process of enacting it within the situation. It is spoken as a love of givenness that receives as it gives and gives forever:

⁵⁹ Žižek, *Belief*, p.90.

⁶⁰ Badiou, *Subject*, p.159.

ROMEO O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?
 JULIET What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?
 ROMEO Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.
 JULIET I gave thee mine before thou didst request it,
 And yet I would it were to give again.
 ROMEO Wouldst thou withdraw it? For what purpose love?
 JULIET But to be frank and give it thee again.
 And yet I wish but for the thing I have.
 My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
 My love as deep. The more I give to thee
 The more I have, for both are infinite.
 (II.i.167-177)

Juliet develops her process of boundless giving in response to her concern that their love is “[t]oo like the lightening which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens” (II.i.161-2). The event may strike like lightning, disappearing with its flash, but, as Badiou makes clear, “if I want to be *really* faithful to it, I must completely rework my ordinary way of ‘living’ my situation”.⁶¹ Juliet’s process of giving, the beautiful taking back of love only to give it again and go on giving forever, the rhythms that elongate and share the dramatic moment, are provided to Juliet by Shakespeare as the means of reworking the ordinary and thereby continuing to inscribe the event after the flash has gone.

The sense that love is an openness or exposure, and not a closed name, is expressed by Jean-Luc Nancy when he writes: “The heart... does not say ‘*I love,*’ which is the reflection or the speculation of an ego... but it says ‘I love you,’ a declaration where ‘I’ is posed only to be exposed to ‘you’”.⁶² We are, here, close to Levinas’ idea of exposure to “an Other”, which does not lead to “*satisfaction*” but, “because of its irreducible difference, refuses to give itself to a thematizing knowing”.⁶³ By contrast,

⁶¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.42.

⁶² Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*. Simon Sparks. Ed. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003, p.253.

⁶³ Levinas, *Entre*, p.62.

in attempting “to decide if, when speaking of love, we spoke of the same thing”,⁶⁴ Kristeva misses how love is not a “thing” but a process, an address, an offering, in which “[w]hat is offered is the offered being itself”.⁶⁵ Juliet’s offer – “And for thy name... Take all myself” (II.i.90-1) – is not an offer of a final transaction, a one-off gift or “satisfaction”, but of a continued re-giving of herself. Or, in Nancy’s terms, love is an “incessant coming-and-going” between the self and the other in which “the singular being is traversed by the alterity of the other, which does not stop or fix itself anywhere”.⁶⁶ The result is that “love’s name is not ‘love’, which would be a substance or a faculty, but it is this sentence, the ‘I love you’”, which, in the end, “is a promise” that “does not anticipate or assure the future”.⁶⁷

Juliet’s giving moves beyond the static name to something more alive and processual. In envisaging love as a perpetual motion of giving, Juliet foreshadows Florizel’s speech to Perdita in *The Winter’s Tale*: “When you speak, sweet, / I’d have you do it ever... When you dance, I wish you / A wave o’th’ sea, that you might ever do / Nothing but that” (IV.iv.136-142). There is a critical difference, however, for whereas Florizel describes the *other’s* motion, Juliet describes *her own*. Moreover, for Juliet, the “infinite” or the eternal is not the motion itself but the impulse for the motion – the “love”, fidelity, or “bounty” – that is “boundless” or “deep”. It is this infinite depth, welling up from the void’s excess that drives Juliet to *repeat* the motion – to “give it thee again” – in a constant re-choosing. So whereas Florizel’s perpetual wave has an automated quality, Juliet’s re-giving entails a repetition and not a continuation of the original gift of love. It has a different physics: a physics of

⁶⁴ Kristeva, p.3.

⁶⁵ Nancy, *Finite*, p.262.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.265.

distinct units rather than an elongated whole. Each gift is a conscious action or commission and a distinct dramatic moment.

Juliet's repeated giving recalls Kierkegaard's idea that repetition is essential to genuine subjecthood, else we would be either "a tablet upon which time writes every instant a new inscription", or "a mere memorial of the past".⁶⁸ Walter Lowrie quotes Kierkegaard from *Papirer* in his introduction to *Repetition*: "Now the highest interest of freedom is to bring about repetition, and it fears lest change might have the power to alter its eternal nature".⁶⁹ Juliet's repetition of her initial gift of herself forms a ceaseless "*work of love*":

As every true Christian knows, love is the *work of love* – the hard and arduous work of repeated 'uncoupling' in which, again and again, we have to disengage ourselves from the inertia that constrains us to identify with the particular order we were born into. ... Christian 'unplugging' is *not* an inner contemplative stance, but the *active* work of love which necessarily leads to the creation of an *alternative* community.⁷⁰

To remain uncoupled from the inertia of the old language and sustain their "*alternative* community" based on the having-taken-place of love, Juliet must *keep giving herself over and over*. Giving is the new law that replaces the old law of desire and allows them to "inscribe" the "truth's postevental universality...in the world".⁷¹ The initial event of love arrived like grace – unconditioned, undeserved, excessive – and Juliet's process of "*thinking...the situation 'according to' the event*"⁷² is a process of enshrining that grace by giving more than is due, and receiving more than she gives. Or, to return to the Christian origins of the evental subject, Luther articulates

⁶⁸ Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*. Walter Lowrie. Trans. London: Oxford UP, 1942, p.6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xvii.

⁷⁰ Žižek, *Fragile*, pp.128-130

⁷¹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.88.

⁷² Badiou, *Ethics*, 2001, p.41.

how grace intrudes from the outside and transforms the inner life. It is a creative force that works in an almost artistic manner to fashion the self into something new: “O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith”.⁷³

It is this possibility of grace that finally distinguishes *Romeo and Juliet* from the courtly love tradition. Brian Gibbons writes that “[a]mong sonnet-sequences of the period the first in quality and the closest in feeling to *Romeo and Juliet* is Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*”.⁷⁴ He points to the fourth song of the sequence “where Astrophil meets Stella in a garden by moonlight and seeks with his ‘whispering voyce’ to persuade her”.⁷⁵ The parallels with *Romeo and Juliet* are evident. Love is opposed to duty and social law. It lights up the darkness of stolen moments in night-time gardens. It creates a timeless feel even as time and contingency press the two lovers. For a moment at least, nature and desire seem twinned: “These sweet flowers on fine bed, too, / Us in their best language woo” (*Astrophil*, Fourth Song, 15-16). And yet, despite a shared sensibility, there is also a profound divide between the two gardens.

Most obviously, this is because Juliet gives rather than refuses love, but this ties into a more fundamental structural difference. All of Astrophil’s movements to consummation – “Take me to thee, and thee to me” – meet with Stella’s same response at the end of each stanza, which is the beautiful refusal of courtly love poetry: “No, no, no, no, my dear, let be” (*Astrophil*, Fourth Song). While there is a sort of togetherness and mutuality here that is missing in the yearning of the earlier

⁷³ Luther, p.101.

⁷⁴ Brian Gibbons, ed., *Romeo and Juliet*. Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1980. p.43.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44.

sonnets, it is ultimately a sharing of loss. Astrophil rejoices in a shared suffering over their failed encounter:

For me, I wept to see pearls scattered so,
I sighed her sighs, and wailed for her woe,
Yet swam in joy, such love in her was seen.
(LXXXVII, 9-11)

Shakespeare's young lovers also long for the night not to end, are hemmed in by iron laws, and share something beautiful in failure, but there is something altogether different in their garden scene and it is not simply the sharing of a kiss. The opposition between law and love is sublated rather than sustained in *Romeo and Juliet*. Whereas the love of Astrophil and Stella is thwarted by the "iron laws of duty" (*Astrophil*, LXXXVII, 4), Juliet institutes a new law of love that revokes the old law. Further, the nature of this 'new law' is fundamentally different to the forbidden and frustrated desire of Astrophil and Stella. Astrophil expresses his desire in the idea of 'taking': "Take me to thee, and thee to me". It builds to a moment of climax, only to be denied, and builds again, only to be denied once more. The structure of the song and its desire relies upon a vision of final consummation or unity, such as Romeo's "satisfaction", that is forever deferred. It is precisely this vision that Juliet's law of giving counteracts.

Not that all is positive and processual in *Romeo and Juliet*. As Kristeva suggests, there is, particularly in Juliet, a fierceness – almost an absolutism – that seems to call forth death, or at least declares the death of all other joys. To some extent, the notion of arrivals is able to rehabilitate this violence. It is not a structural 'desire as death' but the inherent violence of a new beginning:

Is not such love one of the greatest pulverizers of social hierarchy? When, in the balcony scene, Romeo and Juliet pathetically proclaim their renunciation and hatred of their own family names (Montague, Capulet), and thus ‘unplug’ themselves from their particular (family) social substance, do they not provide the supreme example of ‘hatred of one’s parents’ as the direct expression of love?⁷⁶

As Žižek goes on to state, the “term ‘new creation’” reveals “a terrifying *violence*” in the subject’s ‘arrival’: “that of the *death drive*, of the radical ‘wiping the slate clean’ as the condition of the New Beginning”.⁷⁷ Here we see, as Kristeva does, the centrality of violence and hatred to their love, but the direction of this violence is altogether different. It is not directed to Romeo but to the social structures and histories that constrain them. And, to the extent it is directed to Romeo, it is directed to “the dimension of his inscription into the socio-symbolic structure” – his name – “on behalf of my very love for him as a unique person”.⁷⁸

In this sense, their love’s fatal moment does not stem from its violence, but from not being violent enough. Shakespeare emphasises that Romeo’s killing of Tybalt and subsequent banishment, which kick starts the play’s tragic trajectory, is a retreat from this violent commitment into the passive violence of the name. In Broke’s poem, Romeo attempts to breakup a bloody fray but is attacked by Tybalt, who “at Romeus hed, a blow he strake so hard, / That might have clove him to the brayne”.⁷⁹

Shakespeare transforms the duel so that “Romeo is confronted with a highly personal dilemma of having to choose between his love for Juliet and his desire to revenge his friend’s death as well as his own slandered reputation”.⁸⁰ Holmer argues that, “[f]rom

⁷⁶ Žižek, *Fragile*, pp.125-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.126.

⁷⁹ Broke, Fo. 29.

⁸⁰ Joan Ozark Holmer, “The Poetics of Paradox: Shakespeare’s Versus Zeffirelli’s Cultures of Violence”, *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 163-179, p.163.

the Friar's perspective, Romeo's peaceful offers of conciliatory love to Tybalt would be viewed not as evidence of 'vile submission' or 'effeminate', rather, he "would approve Romeo's strength to turn the other cheek".⁸¹ While this may be true, it is hardly the point. In bemoaning how the "beauty" of "sweet Juliet" has "made [him] effeminate" (III.i.108-9) and instead embracing the logic of the name – revenging Mercutio to restore his "reputation stained / With Tybalt's slander" (III.i.106-7) – Romeo fails to continue in fidelity to the event. His "fire-eyed fury" (III.i.119) is not a failure because it is immoral or unchristian, neither of which has played a part in Romeo's arrival, but because it betrays, and ultimately destroys, their new name for the sake of the old.

(iv) **Being Some Other Name: Love and the Moment**

The promise of another name is granted in *Romeo and Juliet* not as a simple presence but through the creativity of the moment. As I noted in the Introduction, Whitehead stresses that "[m]odern physics has abandoned the doctrine of Simple Location",⁸² so that "the thing itself is what it does, and what it does is [a] divergent stream of influence".⁸³ Similarly, what arrives through the event of love is not a stable or fixed subject but a poetic process that inscribes the event. The arrival of Romeo and Juliet is not a once and for all happening but a linguistic "state of agitation".⁸⁴ As Fletcher points out, we remain fascinated by Shakespeare's characters, "whose presence in turns depends entirely upon the primacy of motion as the essential dramatic

⁸¹ Ibid., p.175.

⁸² Whitehead, *Adventures*, p.201.

⁸³ Ibid., p.202.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

component”.⁸⁵ The problem with Romeo’s static imagery, his attempt to define love through stable oaths sworn to eternal entities, is that it envisages the cessation of movement. But as Fletcher quotes Pascal: “Our nature consists in motion; complete rest is death”.⁸⁶ The pull towards stillness and fixed locality, evident in Romeo’s naming, is a temptation for thought that I seek to counteract through the idea of ‘arrivals’ as an ongoing process.

The play dramatises the creativity of the back-and-forth motion of Romeo and Juliet’s shared poetry. We see this towards the end of the balcony scene as Juliet forgets why she called Romeo back. They again use language not to endlessly defer an impossible consummation, but to create a shared moment:

JULIET I will not fail; ’tis twenty year till then.
 I have forgot why I did call thee back.
 ROMEO Let me stand here till thou remember it.
 JULIET I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
 Rememb’ring how I love thy company.
 ROMEO And I’ll still stay, to have thee still forget,
 Forgetting any other home but this.
 (II.i.214-220)

Language is now used in a non-idealist manner; without seeking any final name or satisfaction. Juliet forgets why she “did call [him] back” so that what is important is not the language’s content but what it *does*. Physically, Juliet’s words are used to elongate their time together: she has exited and she returns, he moves away and she calls him back close to her. The specific signified is forgotten as the lovers use words to take pleasure in each other’s presence. The work of love is revealed to be a game of forgetting everything but this moment. Language is used to actively extend their

⁸⁵ Angus Fletcher, *Time, Space, and Motion in the Age of Shakespeare*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007, p.42.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.51.

time together, by *repeating* farewells and leave-takings: “To lure this tassle-gentle back again” (II.i.204). As Jones writes, “the repeated terms – ‘stand here’, ‘still stand here’, ‘still stay’ – repudiate (or try to) all distracting thoughts of past and future” and thus convey the “feeling of a prolonged present moment”.⁸⁷ The mutual movement of Romeo and Juliet thus creates a “profound sense of occasion”; a sense of “something happening now” that is “unique, marvellous, and tragically unrepeatable”.⁸⁸

For a moment at least, Romeo and Juliet abide in a moment rather than long for *the* moment. They are able to love not through the prohibition of the name or the sublime failure of the tomb but, to repeat Kristeva’s words about “normal marriage”, through the seemingly “banal, humdrum”⁸⁹ back and forth that is occasioned by Juliet’s forgetting. Here Žižek’s idea of the “Sublime” in the everyday is apposite:

Let’s take a love relationship: ‘sublime’ is not the cold elevated figure of the Lady who had to remain beyond our reach – if she were to step down from her pedestal, she would turn into a repulsive hag. ‘Sublime’ is the magic *combination* of the two dimensions, when the sublime dimension transpires through the utmost common details of everyday shared life...⁹⁰

Romeo and Juliet are never as “everyday” or “common” as Žižek’s lovers, and yet, they do clear a small domestic space within the overarching violence. There are moments in which they call back, elongate, and repeat together rather than rush separately to their tragic ends. Whether it is Juliet’s almost banal forgetting why she called Romeo back, or their waking up together in Act Three, Shakespeare’s dramaturgy creates little shared moments of intensity in which they accept appearance at face value. It is this embrace of appearance that allows them to become ‘true

⁸⁷ Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971, p.35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.35-6.

⁸⁹ Kristeva, p.217.

⁹⁰ Žižek, *Belief*, p.41.

believers' in their event: "the cynic misses the efficiency/actuality of the appearance itself, however fleeting, fragile and elusive it is; while the true believer believes in appearances, in the magic dimension that 'shines through' an appearance".⁹¹

The process of Romeo and Juliet's creation shows us something fundamental about art's ability to enact the moment. As Hegel writes: "What in nature slips past, art ties down to permanence: a quickly vanishing smile, a sudden roguish expression in the mouth, a glance, a fleeting ray of light...anything and everything art wrests from momentary existence".⁹² It is the failure to recognise how drama makes the living moment present on the stage that leads Derrida to miss how "the promise of *another name*"⁹³ *is lived* through the shared poetry of Romeo and Juliet, and not deferred into the always-retreating future. And it is the critical tendency to superimpose prior, or higher, concepts over the processes of drama, over Juliet's movement of giving, that stifles its creativeness:

Precisely because it is always trying to reconstitute, and to reconstitute with what is given, the intellect lets what is *new* in each moment of a history escape. It does not admit the unforeseeable. It rejects all creation.⁹⁴

Whether it is the inescapable structure of language or the inescapable coupling of death and desire, criticism overlays analytic structures on the fluid and unstable movement of their becoming Romeo and Juliet. Such critics thereby miss how "each instant is a fresh endowment, that the new is every upspringing",⁹⁵ and, in particular, how the dramatic "moment" creates the "*new*" that is these subjects.

⁹¹ Žižek, *Fragile*, p.127-8.

⁹² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.163.

⁹³ Derrida, *Literature*, p.419.

⁹⁴ Bergson, *Creative*, p.172.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

One of the supreme examples of this creativeness occurs in Romeo and Juliet's shifting between the names of the lark and the nightingale. From classical times the nightingale's song was associated with lament, and in the Petrarchan tradition it comes to be a solitary lament over lost love: "and the nightingale that laments and weeps / all night long, sweetly, in the shadows, / fills the heart with thoughts of love" (*Canzoniere*, X, 10-12). In stark contrast, Romeo and Juliet use the nightingale as a tool for togetherness and play, and Shakespeare uses it to continue his anti-Petrarchan artistry of the moment. As the day breaks on their one night together Juliet tells Romeo: "It was the nightingale, and not the lark, / That pierced the fear-full hollow of thine ear" (III.v.2-3). In the comic and touching exchange that follows, the significance of the bird song is open, shifting back and forth to form something new.

The nightingale, signifier of loss, is used by Juliet to extend the togetherness of the night, to show it is "not yet near day" (III.v.1). Romeo, taking the literal approach as he points to the "envious streaks" that "lace the severing clouds in yonder east" (III.v.7-8), uses the contextual evidence of the light to name the singing bird as "the lark" (III.v.6). Juliet, fighting against the material necessity of the encroaching dawn, interprets these streaks not as the natural order but as the profoundly singular intrusion of "some meteor that the sun exhaled" (III.v.13), which will allow Romeo to "stay yet" (III.v.16). Romeo eventually assents before the prospect of his death causes the radical reversal of Juliet's position. Her rapid, inflamed shift to the lark contradicts Kristeva's idea that she desires Romeo's death, as she forgoes his presence to have him live: "It is the lark that sings so out of tune, / Straining harsh discords and unpleasing sharps" (III.v.27-8).

Juliet returns to the material: the bird song must be named as the lark's and the dawn must be acknowledged, while the nightingale fades like their hours of bliss. And yet, the *meanings have been changed*. The "us" continues to alter the conventional significance of names: the lark no longer "makes sweet division", "for she divideth us" (III.v.29-30). So while the "signifier" may not be "at the disposal of the subject",⁹⁶ and while the nightingale does still signify loss – just as Romeo is still 'Romeo' – through their action of words the nightingale also comes to signify something more: those blessed moments of the night in which killing names are suspended along with civil strife. The nightingale may sing of loss but it is a loss that is yet to come; a loss held off by this song of two and not of one.

The nightingale and the lark is, therefore, a dramatic moment that is neither idealistically free of names nor bound in their service, but exists in between names, not as an end but as a process. It is, as Geoffrey Hill puts it, a happening of grace in which "grammar and desire are miraculously at one".⁹⁷ It steals a moment from the coming of the dawn and the pressing of necessity. It is in such fluid moments, shifting between names, that the promise of a new name or a new signification *is* fulfilled. Like Latour's experimental trials, Romeo and Juliet's poetic experiments are not a "zero-sum game" but an event through which something new emerges, the situation is altered, and the past changed: "there is always *more* in the experiment than was put into it".⁹⁸

Instead of "wanting to make phenomena the meeting point between things-in-themselves and categories of human understanding", Latour shows how "phenomena

⁹⁶ Belsey, "Name", p.55.

⁹⁷ Geoffrey Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*. Kenneth Haynes. Ed. Oxford: OUP, 2008, p.349.

⁹⁸ Latour, p.125.

are what *circulates* all along the reversible chain of transformations” between objects and words.⁹⁹ Latour’s circulation suggests how the new name of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ is more than just Derrida’s “promise”. Romeo and Juliet *do* form a new name, and they do so through an active process of circulating in between names, between the nightingale and the lark, between the pressing materiality of the dawn and their dawning as new subjects. By adopting Latour’s notion of “circulating reference”¹⁰⁰ and focusing on the lovers’ linguistic interplay rather than its end result, or name, we see how their transformed use of language allows them to exist in the space between ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and ‘Montague and Capulet’. The result is not simply in-between-ness but creativeness. They do not escape the old names but they transform their signification. Romeo and Juliet make the promise actual, if only for the moment, and only through the moment. It is not that they ‘become one’ in a psychological sense, for their psychological difference remains dramatically manifest throughout. Rather, it is that through their difference and interplay, they come to form a single speaking unit *for us*. Or, in Badiou’s terms, as “the bearer of a fidelity” they “enter into the composition of *one* loving subject, who *exceeds* them both”.¹⁰¹

The moment is, by definition, momentary and soon has its end. But, paradoxically, the passing of the moment is not its end. Even as Romeo and Juliet lie dying in the dark tomb, the influence of the event of love continues to stream forth, changing the situation in Verona. Whitehead writes of the “individual immediacy of an occasion” in which “composite things” (be it an “individual” or an “atom”) attain an “absolute reality which their components lack”:

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.71-2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁰¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.43.

This immediacy is its moment of sheer individuality, bounded on either side by essential relativity. The occasion arises from relevant objects, and perishes into the status of an object for other occasions. But it enjoys its decisive moment of absolute self-attainment as emotional unity. . . . The term ‘monad’ also expresses this essential unity at the decisive moment, which stands between its birth and its perishing.¹⁰²

Romeo and Juliet experience their “decisive moment”, their “moment of absolute self-attainment as emotional unity”, before its “perishing”. But this perishing is not the end, for this moment of union “perishes into the status of an object for other occasions”. It is no longer living but it is not *gone*; it provides a basis for future moments and compositions. As Whitehead concludes, “the perishing is the initiation of becoming”: “How the past perishes is how the future becomes”.¹⁰³ The love of Romeo and Juliet passes into an afterlife. It is an afterlife encased in the gold of Verona’s patriarchy but it is, more fundamentally, an afterlife whose living is left to us. It becomes “an object for other occasions” and future playhouses; an opportunity for future “becoming” that must be grasped by us. And it is, indeed, this afterlife that justifies my project of grappling with Shakespeare’s arrivals in the present.

In fact, the “perishing” of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ begins well before the end. The motion of the characters is altered in the final two acts by what Fletcher calls “their fluxional grouping on stage”.¹⁰⁴ Whereas in their initial scenes Romeo and Juliet are grouped within their distinct social circles, these fast paced social interactions give way to the slowed time of their moments together; moments in which they call each other back and elongate their time together. Their re-attachment to their initial social groupings following Romeo’s banishment brings them back to the fast, and now tragic, pace of the early scenes. They are no longer grouped together but are scattered amongst the

¹⁰² Whitehead, *Adventures*, p.227.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.305.

¹⁰⁴ Fletcher, p.42.

social forces they attempted to escape. Juliet is now unable to call Romeo back as she did on the balcony, but can only call him indirectly, in a language that is not understood: “O, how my heart abhors / To hear him named and cannot come to him / To wreak the love I bore my cousin / Upon his body that hath slaughtered him!” (III.v.99-102). The influence of the event still streams forth but it is met with incomprehension in the old situation, so that their love is mistranslated and monumentalised. Their marriage “festival” becomes “black funeral” (IV.iv.111-12) and the lovers toast each other with poison across death: “Romeo, Romeo, Romeo! Here’s drink. I drink to thee.” (IV.iii.57) Juliet toasts as she takes the Friar’s drug, which is mirrored by Romeo’s final toast in the tomb: “Here’s to my love” (V.iii.119).

In contrast to Kristeva, who uses Juliet’s great epithalamium to illustrate “Juliet’s unconscious desire to break up Romeo's body”,¹⁰⁵ I see it as expressing the movement of both their arrival and their perishing:

Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-browed night,
Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.
(III.ii.20-25)

The speech not only looks to violent, tearing death, it foreshadows their separation in the final acts – the diffusion of their energy – through the image of Romeo strung out across the night sky and no longer centred on Juliet. But it is also, at the same time, a passage of intense erotic anticipation. The death is not merely Kristeva’s death but is a figure for orgasm. Unlike parodies such as Jonson’s *Poetaster*, erotic desire is not

¹⁰⁵ Kristeva, p.214.

separated from spiritual love and ridiculed,¹⁰⁶ but is inseparable from the poetic expression of romantic love's spiritual side. Juliet looks forward to a sexual encounter that will re-configure the heavens. And she also hints at the way their love has violently broken out of its constraints into a new cosmic order. As Badiou puts it, the subject's "courage" in fidelity to the event "is compensated by the supernumerary emergence of the constellation, which fixes in the sky of Ideas the event's excess-of-one".¹⁰⁷

So while there is something dark and violent in their exuberant love, death and absolutism are not the most important elements of the play, let alone its true, hidden content. What is most important is how their work of love creates them. In fidelity they are able to act, to be married, to experience joy, and, ultimately, to change the significance of names. The tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet may be socially determined by their warring families – a witness to the overarching power of the existing situation that to some extent renders them "star cross'd" – but what they *become*, a subject of love, a joint bearer of fidelity, is not. Their triumph is, of course – in direct opposition to *Othello* – that their becoming could *come to this*; that the treasure of their having-taken-place could be maintained.

¹⁰⁶ In Ovid's response to Julia's desire for sexual fulfilment on the balcony the erotic is separated from spiritual love: "But know, my princely love, when thou art dead, / Thou only must survive in perfect soul, / And in the soul are no affections" (IV.i.31-33): Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*. The Revels Plays. Tom Cain. Ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Badiou, *Being*, p.197.

Chapter Two: *Othello*

Although separated by around a decade, *Othello* follows *Romeo and Juliet* in centring upon a transgressive event of love. Desdemona's love creates a new Othello that transcends the opposition between Venice and Othello's romantic story of himself, just as *Romeo and Juliet's* event transcended the opposition between Montague and Capulet. *Othello* complicates the dramaturgy of arrivals, however, by upsetting the event's temporality. Despite already being married, the event of love only hits Othello after the fact. The play does not dramatise a joint arrival through love but the way Othello is afflicted by it, as if from the outside. Taken in this light, Othello is placed under threat by Desdemona's love, under erasure, as it ruptures his old mode of being. To some extent, *Othello* is Desdemona's tragedy. Desdemona is given the dramatic impetus to halt Othello's self-sustaining tale and propel a new, vulnerable subject into being upon his arrival in Cyprus. In this foreign land the foreignness of love strikes him belatedly and opens the disorientating doubt of the subsequent acts. In eventual terms, then, Iago's role is that of the 'situation'. He reinstates the foundational opposition between Othello and Venice, and the impossibility of the event that threatens to dismantle it.

(1) "Were it my cue to fight": Othello's non-arrival in Act One

The structure of Othello's arrival and retreat relies on the solid image of Othello created in the first act. Although later in narrative time, dramatically, Othello's early scenes happen before he experiences love or marriage. His marriage to Desdemona is thus made differently present throughout the drama. In his first scenes, Shakespeare

builds a stone-like statue of Othello as he was before the event. Whereas we awaited Romeo's arrival as he repeated poetry learned by rote, Othello appears to be present immediately, speaking a distinctive language. We are introduced to a being whose story has already been told, glorious and certain. One senses that Shakespeare is playing with the idea of bringing an epic hero to life. His first speech, with its military march of first person pronouns and tone of command, is unmistakably of the heroic mode:

Let him do his spite.
 My services which I have done the signory
 Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know –
 Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
 I shall promulgate – I fetch my life and being
 From men of royal siege, and my demerits
 May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
 As this that I have reached.
 (I.ii.17-24)

Unlike Romeo, Othello already possesses his voice: “Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust ’em” (I.ii.60). Othello's exceptionalism, his way of setting himself apart from Venice, both creates and is created by a peculiar way of speaking that G. Wilson Knight calls the “*Othello* music”, whose “dominant quality is separation”: “Its thought does not mesh with the reader's” and this “aloofness is the resultant of an inward aloofness of image from image, word from word”.¹ We see this, for instance, in Othello's use of “grand single words...with their sharp, clear, consonant sounds, constituting defined aural solids”.² The result is not only “the most Miltonic thing in Shakespeare”,³ it reflects Othello's self-sufficient, almost transcendent, idea of

¹ G. Wilson Knight, “The Othello Music”, *Shakespeare: Othello: A Casebook*. John Wain. Ed. Second Edition. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994, 72-95, p.73.

² *Ibid.*, p.75: Knight points to a host of such words, often proper names: “Anthropophagi, Ottomites, Arabian trees, ‘the base Indian’, the Egyptian, Palestine, Mauretania, the Sagittary, Olympus, Mandragora, Othello, Desdemona”.

³ *Ibid.*, p.79.

himself. He speaks with the cool self-assurance of the mighty, as if the world he strides upon is not that of other men.

Othello's "architectural stateliness of quarried speech"⁴ chimes with the "motionless tranquillity" of Hegel's early 'Symbolic' art.⁵ Like the "old temple structures at the beginnings of art", whose "absence of situation" gives them their "character of profound impassive seriousness", Othello's language possesses a "most peaceful, even motionless but grandiose, sublimity".⁶ As Othello continues in the separate block-like clauses of his music:

Not I. I must be found.
My parts, my title, and my perfect soul
Shall manifest me rightly.
(I.ii.30-32)

These solid bricks build a wall that insulates Othello from the outside. They do not reflect back on the speaker but establish it as a self-contained structure in which little compartments of speech form around "I", "me" and "my". Each clause centres upon and is defined by Othello's simple self-reference – "I", "I" / "My" "my" "my" / "me" – so there is nothing external to question the nature of this "I". It speaks neither to another nor to another voice within its self. We are far removed from Juliet who, from the start, is questioning, trying to get at something that is not quite within reach: "What's in a name?" (II.i.85). There is, in short, no exposure to the outside.

There is, of course, a bitter irony to Othello's lines in light of his ultimate fate, in which the exceptionalism of his "Not I" is ensnared by Iago. "Even I" might be more

⁴ Ibid., p.78.

⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.200.

⁶ Ibid.

appropriate final words for Othello as he joins the list of Iago's deceived. The nonchalant coolness of his "I must be found" is irrevocably lost: "That's he that was Othello. Here I am" (V.ii.290). Knight does not see a connection between the monolithic beauty of Othello's 'in control' speeches and his "ugly, idiotic" language when "enduring loss of control".⁷ I will show, however, that the "*Othello* music" not only provides the height from which he falls, it sets him on the course, sets him up if you will. It does so by establishing an opposition between the static monument of his self-image and the movement of life and love he must confront in Shakespeare's drama. Its architectural quality – Goethe calls architecture "frozen music" – entails a stasis and a separation that, in direct contrast to Bergson's "duration",⁸ loses the creative movement whereby "conscious states" and dramatic moments proceed like "notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another".⁹

Underpinning Othello's frozen music lies a paradox or even a contradiction: he draws his "unhousèd free condition" (I.ii.26) from the certainty of that condition. We see this paradox clearly at the end, as a firm selfhood re-emerges only with the certainty of his damnation and Desdemona's purity, but it is first introduced as Othello responds to Brabantio's abuses:

Hold your hands,
Both you of my inclining and the rest.
Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
Without a prompter.
(I.ii.82-85)

⁷ Knight, p.78.

⁸ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. F.L. Pogson. Trans. London: George Allen, 1912, p.104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.100.

Beyond the ‘tragic irony’ that Othello will spend much of the play being cued by Iago, Othello’s mistaken belief that he knows his cues implies a sort of automatism. Othello claims a oneness with his world that would, if granted, obliterate any possibility of confusion, doubt, or subjective decision making. The right course is simply “known”. The point here is not simply that Othello’s knowledge will be undermined, it is that knowing one’s cue to action is impossible. As *Hamlet* makes clear, knowledge of the facts does not entail knowing what, how, or when to *act* on them. To grasp this distinction in the context of theatrical practice in Shakespeare’s day, it is worth turning to actors’ cues themselves. Palfrey and Stern show how, in his use of cues:

...Shakespeare can be seen to be purposively scripting cross-purposes, lateral recognitions, and meta-performative surprises. In turn, his actors’ experience of these things helps to produce on-stage something that closely resembles self-sufficient existential identity. In the disjunction and discrepancies between play-text and part-text, in the false starts and mistaken attributions that ensue, Shakespeare is often scripting a battle for understanding, definition, and recognition that carefully reconstitutes the most elemental challenges of achieving sustainable selfhood.¹⁰

It seems fair to say that while an actor ‘knew their cues’ – putting the word(s) preceding their lines to memory – they did not *know* their cues. In part this is due to the fact that it was not known ‘where’ they were coming from. That is, they did not know in advance who was speaking them, which served to give “the event of performance...its own urgent immediacy”.¹¹ Moreover, it was not known where the speaker was ‘coming from’: the intention, the context, the desire, of this murkily perceived cuer could only ever have been reconstructed, speculated upon. The cue thus “lays extraordinary focus upon the separation of one mind from another: after all,

¹⁰ Palfrey and Stern, p.118.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.93.

the cue-phrase may well mean one thing to its speaker and something completely different to its recipient”.¹² So when Othello claims that he will know *his* cue, he is claiming absolute ownership of something that is only ever partially his to possess. The cue is not just the actor’s, it “belongs to both [the giver and the taker]...and is a locus of sharing and co-dependence”.¹³ Finally, rather than cueing a simple and specific action, as Othello implies, “[t]he cue can uniquely provoke – indeed, it can distil – fundamental questions about the relationship between thought and action”, and also between the cue and the cued action: “Am I being acted upon, or am I choosing an action?”.¹⁴

To Shakespeare’s actors, then, Othello’s claim must have seemed so impossible that it was asking for trouble. The actor was subject to Shakespeare’s cues – to being played with by Shakespeare – while the character was subjected, tricked, and destroyed by Iago’s cues. Moreover, if Othello was granted his wish the result would be a character that could not be touched by the events of drama; that would not be *subject* to the dramatic world. For the actor there would be no surprise or transition, only the portrayal of a smooth, unflappable surface. Similarly, Othello-the-character would somehow channel the world’s cues, would always know in advance what to do, and this would always be a confirmation and reiteration of his masterfulness. We are left with an extreme form of Hegel’s “metaphysical (and aesthetic) xenophobia”¹⁵ that wants to banish all foreignness from the subject’s world. There is nothing rupturing

¹² Ibid., p.94.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.134.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures*, footnote 8.

or creative, only a motionlessness that misses how, in drama, like in Bergson's evolution, "each instant is a fresh endowment, that the new is ever upspringing".¹⁶

Because what arrives was not there before and may not remain hereafter, the metaphysics of arrivals highlights the fragile *creation* of the subject. Ultimately, what Othello desires is an end to action and subjectivity. It is the desire to have always-already arrived fully and self-sufficiently in one's self. It cuts him off from the "actions, behaviors, deeds, [and] motions" that "are required if time and space are to become ethical concerns", rather than "empty mental categories...without human value".¹⁷ For Othello, the desire to be done – to have arrived – is bound up with his desire to see himself as his story:

I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
Of my whole course of love, what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration and what mighty magic—
For such proceeding I am charged withal—
I won his daughter.
(I.iii.90-94)

Othello's "love" is a story of the past, ending in the block-like "I won his daughter". The past tense of "won" suggests that love is not *present* for Othello. He is offering almost a scientific or legal report on the methodology of a completed act. Like the fantastical events of his story, the action of love is distanced from the dramatic moment. Further, the way that Desdemona's love follows his story like "magic", gives it an automated quality that detaches it from any subjective action or mutual process in the present.

¹⁶ Bergson, *Creative*, p.172.

¹⁷ Fletcher, p.113.

The centrality of Othello's story also raises deeper questions about the nature of their love. As Othello recounts their courtship: "And [Desdemona] bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story, / And that would woo her" (I.iii.163-5). Christopher Pye astutely observes that the tale "beguiles her of herself" not just "because of its exotic content" but because "it is a tale not for her; it is an overheard tale between men".¹⁸ The "elusiveness of that fragmentary overhearing" gives "weight" to "Desdemona's remark about" a third party "friend", almost summoning Cassio.¹⁹ It suggests that it is the overheard tale rather than the man that has won Desdemona, a suggestion reiterated by the Duke's comment: "I think this tale would win my daughter, too" (I.iii.170). It thereby breaks down our common conception of love as love for *someone*, hinting that what we love is a story or idea that we see as being embodied in the love object. For the self-certain Othello, the absolute centrality of story is not a problem as he *is* his story and there is no "friend" who could tell it. Needless to say, how Othello sees things is not the final word, and Desdemona soon breaches the unity of Othello's narrative.

Concentrating on Othello's account of their courtship, Pye concludes that Othello's tale is "[s]elf-consuming, self-producing", "inscrib[ing] teller and addressee alike".²⁰ Taken on its own, Othello's narrative does indeed seem dominating and all-consuming: "a scene of seduction without cause, without seducer or seduced".²¹ But while Pye rightly stresses the absence of any locatable agency in the beginning of their love, he ignores the fact that this is not where Shakespeare's scene ends. For this pre-history of their love is told by a flawed witness who is unable to distinguish

¹⁸ Christopher Pye, "'To throw out our eyes for brave Othello': Shakespeare and Aesthetic Ideology", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.4 (2009), 425-447, p.433.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.433-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.435.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.436.

between narrative and agency, story and subjectivity. Both Othello and Pye ignore what this desire becomes. As we saw in *Romeo and Juliet*, the initial scene of love only becomes something more than a momentary flash by *what comes after*. And what comes after in *Othello* comes through the agency and dramatic force of Desdemona.

We begin to see an alternative to the passivity of Othello's story-telling in Desdemona's more active role before the senate. Desdemona follows Juliet in reconstituting her relationship with the world in response to the event of love. Like Juliet, she breaks with her father. And like Juliet she openly expresses her sexual desire: "That I did love the Moor to live with him, / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world" (I.iii.247-9). While Desdemona is more subservient in the Quarto text,²² in both texts she formulates her love as an active commitment rather than as passive knowledge: "I saw Othello's visage in his mind, / And to his honours and his valiant parts / Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate" (I.iii.251-3). She sees, she admires, she chooses, and she *consecrates*. By existing as his story, Othello's position is altogether more passive: "My life upon her faith" (I.iii.293).

It is through Desdemona's consecration that the fragmentary, elusive desire of the "[s]elf-consuming" tale is transformed into an event of love. The OED defines 'consecrate' as: "1. make or declare sacred; dedicate formally to a religious or divine purpose. 2 (in Christian belief) make (bread and wine) into the body and blood of

²² I have used a Folio-based text based on the current thinking that it represents "a scribal copy of Shakespeare's own revised manuscript of the play": Wells, S., and Taylor, G., with Jowett, J., and Montgomery, W., eds., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987, p.477.

Christ. 3 (foll. by *to*) devote (one's life etc.) to (a purpose). 4 ordain (esp. a bishop) to a sacred office". The "sacred" element of consecration speaks to something extraordinary and unaccountable, something outside the narrative. Like Badiou's fidelity, consecration thereby forms a process of connecting the situation to its 'void'. Yet this excess is not transcendent, but centred on the "body and blood", the "valiant parts" (I.iii.252), of a living being. The rupturing excess is also coupled with the dedicatory element of consecration, which speaks to an ongoing commitment. It is, then, a sacred pledge to something more than one's self and one's surrounds.

Given the emphasis on Desdemona's activeness, it initially seems odd that Othello describes Desdemona's pity, rather than her consecration, as foundational to their love: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them" (I.iii.166-167). Pity seems a strangely inadequate foundation for such a transgressive love. 'I don't want your pity' is a common phrase in contemporary film and television, suggesting that something other than 'love' is being offered. And yet, perhaps pity requires a second look. What if the adverse reaction to pity is too modern and too secular? What if pity can be an active love as well as a passive sentimentality? It does seem that pity was far more closely associated with love in Shakespeare's day. Shawn Smith shows how pity was bound up with the idea of courtly love, stressing its role in the literary tradition from Chaucer, in which pity is a sign of nobility and love, to the Petrarchan poetry of Sidney.²³ Moreover, the Christian tradition closely associates God's pity for mankind with his love and grace. As the hymnist Isaac Watts wrote:

²³ Shawn Smith, "Love, Pity, and Deception in Othello", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 44.1 (2008), 3-51, pp.20-1.

Was it for crimes that I had done
 He groaned upon the tree?
 Amazing pity! grace unknown!
 And love beyond degree!²⁴

The New Testament confirms this confluence of love, pity, and grace. In Matthew, pity and compassion appear to be used interchangeably. For instance, when Jesus tells Peter the parable of the lord who forgives the debt of his servant, only for the servant not to forgive his own debtors, the lord asks: “Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Matthew 18:33). Pity and compassion are linked to forgiveness, which is the miracle of grace.

Accordingly, whenever Jesus performs miracles of healing they arise from his pity and compassion for the afflicted: “So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him” (Matthew 20:34).²⁵ Whatever we call it, compassion or pity, it is intimately linked with grace, the miraculous, and neighbourly love: “Finally, *be ye* all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be pitiful, be courteous*” (1 Peter 3: 8).

Pity is not a position of superiority or condescension, it is an openness of the heart, an empathetic attachment, a *recognition* of an individual or a group as “brethren”. Taken in this light, pity is an integral part of Paul’s “agape”, which is variously translated as charity and love. Paul’s charity is not our charity – for “though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*...and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3) – just as the Biblical pity is not our pity. Paul’s charity is the human love that inscribes

²⁴ Isaac Watts, “Alas! And Did My Saviour Bleed?”, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 1707-9.
<http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/a/l/a/alasand.htm>. Visited on 17 June 2011.

²⁵ All references are to the King James Bible. There are many similar occurrences: healing of the sick (Matthew 14:14); curing of the leper (Mark 1:41); exorcising a demon (Mark 5:19). The story of the Good Samaritan teaches all to heal through compassion (Luke 10:30-37).

the grace of Christ's compassionate gift into everyday life. It is a foundational force that transcends knowledge: "And though I have *the gift of* all prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). It is what sustains all else. Charity "[b]eareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). These words of bearing, believing, hoping and enduring, so apt for Desdemona,²⁶ reflect the way her initial pity (*agape*) for Othello leads to her consecration to him. Here we are not simply in the symbolic realm of the subject's self-constituting narrative, we are in the realm of a present action of fidelity.

It is worth distinguishing Desdemona's commitment from the general Venetian admiration of Othello, which is more a projection of fantasy than a recognition of mutuality. Lodovico is representative of Venetian society when he asks:

Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all-in-all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake, whose solid virtue
The shot of accident nor dart of chance
Could neither graze nor pierce?
(IV.i.261-4)

It is not Desdemona but Venice that equated Othello with his story of himself. It is for them that love attaches to the narrative. They bought into the legend, calling him "all-in-all sufficient". In other words, Othello's story fulfils a longing in Venice as it does in Othello: to be so in touch with the world as to know its cues and to enact them without fear or doubt. It suggests Bergson's idea that the intellect wants – like

²⁶ And so unapt for Othello: "Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Othello and his cues – to turn “perception” into “*pure knowledge*” of a “*scientific*” nature,²⁷ rather than being “directed toward action”.²⁸

Because it is based on an action of consecration and not on a dream of knowing, Desdemona’s love withstands the cracking of Othello’s myth of self-certainty, whereas Lodovico treats it as a failure of his knowledge: “I am sorry that I am deceived in him” (IV.i.279). More fundamentally, while both Othello and the Venetians treat him as synonymous with his tale, Desdemona’s pitying consecration produces a subject that exceeds the tale. Before Desdemona, the granite monolith of Othello’s story makes no distinction between the dangers passed through and the subject that experiences them, hence the awkwardness of his “She loved me for the dangers I had passed”. The result is that, as with his supposed knowledge of his cues, there is no space for agency or interrelation. To be synonymous with one’s tale is to be over and done with, to be already told. But pity implies something altogether different from the Venetian admiration and envy. It asserts not his “all-in-all sufficiency” but his weakness: that he is to be pitied. It does not even occur to anyone else that Othello should or could be pitied. Pity is not awed or envious, rather, it implies the recognition of another. Dramatically, Desdemona’s recognition creates the subject.

So while it may be too far of a stretch to think that Desdemona pities him *because* of his story – because it has dominated him and overcome his humanity – it is not a stretch to think that her pity produces the vulnerable human presence that Othello’s grand story forbids. Taken in this light, it is possible to rethink the meaning of

²⁷ Bergson, *Matter*, p.28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.31.

Desdemona's "I saw Othello's visage in his mind, / And to his honours and his valiant parts / Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate" (I.iii.251-3). Desdemona's pitying love is the central event of the play, opening up the space for an Othello subject – ruptured and shaken by love – that arrives in Cyprus. Desdemona's desire may indeed be enticed by his exotic story but, by seeing Othello as the *subject* of his story, she calls into being a new Othello, rather than the unchanging Othello that is desired by Venice.

Othello does not, therefore, arrive in and through his story, which is fanciful and far removed from the Othello that appears on stage. There are no "disastrous chances", "hair-breadth escapes", "cannibals" (I.iii.133-43), or other such pitiable and wondrous happenings in Act One, there is only a cool, deferential, but unwaveringly self-assured man with a propensity to romantic story-telling. The Othello of these tales never does arrive. That Othello is a bookend, a point of emergence and departure. Othello arises from these stories and departs back into them in his tale of smiting the "turbaned Turk" (V.ii.362). It is an Othello made impossible by Desdemona. And so it is a new Othello, vulnerable and uncertain, that arrives in Cyprus. Ultimately, however, it is an arrival he cannot bear and a loss he cannot take.

(2) "[I]t is too much of joy": The arrival in Cyprus

One of the striking things about Othello's arrival in Cyprus is its belatedness. On a simple narrative level Othello arrives after the fact of the Turkish threat, which has already drowned, but also after the arrival of his wife, who was meant to follow him. It is a deliberate departure from Cinthio's tale, in which Desdemona and the Moor

arrive together after plain sailing and no Turkish threat.²⁹ More significantly, the emotional rupture of his love for Desdemona arrives after the fact of their marriage, which again differs from Cinthio, in which they are passionately in love from the beginning. In Shakespeare's drama, Othello does not experience Desdemona's love as an emotional event in the first act. Indeed, Othello only addresses Desdemona once, in his typical tone of command: "Come, Desdemona. I have but an hour / Of love, of worldly matter and direction / To spend with thee. We must obey the time." (I.iii.297-9). There is no subjective experience of being transformed by love, no loss of rhetorical control. Taken in this light, Othello's arrival in Cyprus is a sort of embodied recognition of the event that has already taken place. We are not simply dealing with punctual happenings but with their retrospective inscription in the living subject.

Suddenly, Othello is in a new land, and the rapid shift in location is mirrored by a rapid shift in Othello. The cool self-assurance and closed language that made him seem mighty falters as he is almost overwhelmed by Desdemona's presence.

Othello's speeches here are hardly as simple as conveying "the harmonious marriage of true and noble minds".³⁰ Rather, Othello is amazed, almost overcome, by a contentedness of which he cannot speak enough:

OTHELLO O my fair warrior!
 DESDEMONA My dear Othello.
 OTHELLO It gives me wonder great as my content
 To see you here before me. O my soul's joy,
 If after every tempest come such calms,
 May the winds blow till they have wakened death,
 And let the labouring barque climb hills of seas
 Olympus-high, and duck again as low

²⁹ Giraldi Cinthio, *Hecatommithi*. J.E. Taylor. Trans. <http://shakespeare-navigators.com/othello/Osource.html>. Visited 14 June 2011.

³⁰ Knight, p.86.

As hell's from heaven. If it were now to die
 'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear
 My soul hath her content so absolute
 That not another comfort like to this
 Succeeds in unknown fate.
 (II.i.179-190)

Instead of solid blocks centred upon “I”, “me”, and “my”, the wondrous occasion of meeting his wife becomes the centre of everything. His language no longer suggests an “absence of situation” but the gripping presence of the moment. In processual terms, Othello is no longer following the “Cartesian doctrine” of being “an existing thing which requires nothing but itself in order to exist”,³¹ but is now *placed* by Desdemona and the occasion. Man is, as Gillies writes in regard to *Paradise Lost*, a “creature of place rather than the master of space”.³² Now in the foreign place of Cyprus, a new foreignness enters Othello. It is not the foreignness of culture or race but a metaphysical foreignness that intrudes into his very conception of himself. He is now exposed to the outside, as we see in the cue he gives out: “unknown fate”.

Othello is now looking outward to Desdemona, addressing *her* and not an audience. We are far from the inwardness of his “I must be found” (I.ii.30). And while this new emotion retains elements of the old grand language – the martial “barque” climbing “Olympus-high” – it is transformed by its new direction. Beginning with his seemingly involuntary exclamation, “O my fair warrior!”, Othello’s change in address coincides with a newfound “wonder”. As well as beginning to address Desdemona directly, Othello begins to address *himself* as he is taken aback by events: “It gives me wonder great as my content”. Othello here shares something with Levinas’ idea that

³¹ Whitehead, *Process*, pp.82-3.

³² John Gillies, “Space and Place in *Paradise Lost*”, *ELH* 74.1 (2007), 27-57, p.38.

“wonder” is what “ruptures biological consciousness” and marks “the *beginning* of thought”: “The possibility of thought is the consciousness of miracle, or wonder”.³³

Othello’s “wonder” expresses the excess and “exteriority” of the event. It irrupts from outside the normal parameters of the situation and the self. And it thus tips the subject from its stable axis. We saw this with France, who stopped mid-speech – “Gods, gods! ’Tis strange” (F.I.i.252) – to register his self-estrangement. While Othello may also be addressing Desdemona, his wonderment as he speaks “O my soul’s joy” or “for I fear / My soul hath her content so absolute” is just such an apprehension of his difference from himself. Othello’s first real self-address, which is drama’s method of representing self-consciousness, thus springs from the character’s sudden confrontation with the unaccountability of the event.

There is an absolute distinction between Othello’s certain knowledge of his cues and the foreign wonder that now intrudes upon his stable state. It is almost the reverse of the Hegelian negation of foreignness. Hegel writes that whereas the “ignorant man is not free” because he confronts “an alien world”, “the pressure for knowledge” drives him to make “this foreign world for himself” and therefore be “at home in it by himself as in something his own”.³⁴ This leads Levinas to critique “Hegel’s work” as “a philosophy of both absolute knowledge and the satisfied man”.³⁵ In short, for Hegel “the Same...rediscovers itself in the Other” and “thought *triumphs over* all otherness”.³⁶ Othello’s moment of arrival, however, like Romeo and Juliet’s, is not a triumph of knowing but an exposure to excess. Or, in Levinas’ words, it is “a

³³ Levinas, *Entre*, p.13.

³⁴ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.98.

³⁵ Levinas, *Entre*, p.108.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

relationship to an Other” that is not one of “*satisfaction*” or “positivity” but that, “precisely because of its irreducible difference, refuses to give itself to a thematizing knowing, and, thus, is always assimilative”.³⁷

By placing this moment of exposure and excess after the event that spawned it, Shakespeare extends “the minimal gap, the delay, which forever separates an event ‘in itself’ from its symbolic inscription/registration; this gap can be discerned in its different guises from quantum physics (according to which an event ‘becomes itself’, is fully actualized, only through its registration in its surroundings – that is, the moment its surroundings ‘take note’ of it) to the procedure of ‘double take’ in the classic Hollywood comedies”.³⁸ For Othello, it is only upon seeing Desdemona already in Cyprus that love hits him and prompts a sort of “double take”. Is this really happening? Could I be this lucky? That she has arrived before me, waiting for me? That she loves me? And this precipitates a further erosion of Othello’s self-possessed language:

OTHELLO Amen to that, sweet powers!
I cannot speak enough of this content.
It stops me here, it is too much of joy.
And this, and this, the greatest discords be
That e’er our hearts shall make.
(II.i.192-196)

Othello is being changed by what has already happened to him. For the first time he feels the excessiveness of the event of Desdemona’s love: he “cannot speak enough” of it, it is “too much”, “[i]t stops [him] here”. It arrests his musical flow and forces him into stilted repetition: “And this, and this”. He is stopped in his tracks because

³⁷ Ibid., p.62.

³⁸ Žižek, *Ticklish*, p.57.

his tracks are no longer his own to make. He never knew! He never knew what another could mean or what joy and love were. Love is here not just another adventure added to Othello's narrative, it is the beginning of a reconfiguration of that narrative. The turning wheel of his endless reiterations is knocked from its axis. We see, then, that it is not "Iago" who "make[s] discord of the *Othello* music",³⁹ it is love that cracks its architectural stability:

Come, let us to the castle.
 News, friends: our wars are done, the Turks are drowned.
 How does my old acquaintance of this isle?—
 Honey, you shall be well desired in Cyprus,
 I have found great love amongst them. O my sweet,
 I prattle out of fashion, and I dote
 In mine own comforts.
 (II.i.198-204)

Othello starts off trying to be martial and block-like. He commands ("Come") and talks in the third person ("let us to the castle") before steering his speech to the military business of the "Turks". But despite only coming to the military situation at the end of the scene, he is almost immediately distracted by the thought of Desdemona. His regard is unstable and jumpy. In the space of six lines it shifts abruptly between the castle, the Turks, old memories, present love, and his awareness of his changed language.

The puncturing of Othello's tranquil aloofness and self-control by this "prattl[ing]" also marks a deeper change. Present concerns segue easily enough into the history of his story, to his "old acquaintance" with the "isle", but Othello no longer possesses this memory in the same way. It is now turned toward Desdemona and how she will be "well desired in Cyprus". The meaning of his history is retroactively altered.

³⁹ Knight, p.93.

What now matters is how it relates *to her*. We see this in the change of tenses in the speech. Othello's attempt to move into the past tense of story – of things “done”, Turks “drowned”, and love “found” – is interrupted by Desdemona's presence so that the tale of “old acquaintance” looks to the future: Desdemona “shall be well desired”. No longer isolated and self-contained, his story and his language now flow into the presence of Desdemona and their future together. And it is the sudden apprehension of this foreignness within his story that forces Othello to stop and remark on his present prattling and doting, which take him away from himself: “O my sweet, / I prattle out of fashion”.

That the gap between the event and its conscious registration is protracted emphasises the difference between this new place and Othello's previous self. It indicates a kind of trauma. This thing that happened in the past, that is past, is still here with me. I keep re-experiencing it. It is part of me but foreign. It prevents me from returning to myself. And this, perhaps, is why *Othello's* notorious ‘double time’ arises. As Žižek writes, “[t]rauma is ‘eternal’; it can never be properly temporalized/historicized, it is the point of ‘eternity’ around which time circulates”.⁴⁰ The narrative progression of time and events is thrown out of kilter. Othello can no longer simply pass through events in chronological order; they keep hitting him after they have gone.

Desdemona's foreignness thus prevents Othello from treating time as an “unbounded” and “homogeneous medium” that is “given all at once”.⁴¹ She keeps breaking into time and memory, transforming it and turning it to the present. No longer autonomous, his conscious states now “permeate one another” like the flow of

⁴⁰ Žižek, *Fragile*, p.96.

⁴¹ Bergson, *Time*, p.98.

music.⁴² More specifically, the *event* permeates all else. Or, in Benjamin's words, rather than a "progression through a homogeneous, empty time" we have a revolutionary moment in which a moment of the past is "blasted out of the continuum of history".⁴³ Following the event, time for Othello is "filled by the presence of the now".⁴⁴

The belatedness of Othello's love marks a significant departure from *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the gap between the intrusive event of love and the action of fidelity, although not nothing – we could discern it in the difficult process of creating a new name – was minimal. The event seemed to flow naturally into their new mode of being and speaking. The mature tragedies shatter this inevitability. The gap between the event and the subject's action opens into an abyss. But how is there an abyss? How is it "too much of joy"? It is frightening for the very reason its joy is overwhelming: because Othello is *subjected* to it. He is taking his cues from a new source and he no longer knows them. Cassio observes that Desdemona is now "our great captain's captain" (II.i.75). She is taking him away from the self he knows. As Kristeva notes, the fact "that in love 'I' has been an *other*" precipitates a "state of instability" that leads to both "the zenith of subjectivity" and "a degree of psychic as much as physical pain".⁴⁵

The utter lack of self-possession in Othello's new being makes the fragile and undecidable 'event' a far more useful means of articulating its arrival than Hegel's idea that self-consciousness must cancel the world's foreignness and "make the world

⁴² Ibid., p.100.

⁴³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.252-3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kristeva, pp.4-5.

one's own".⁴⁶ As Luther puts it, through the event of Christ an "alien righteousness" is "instilled from without".⁴⁷ Here I depart from Christopher's Pye's recent reading of the play, which focuses on Montano's words as we await Othello's arrival in Cyprus:

Let's to the sea-side, ho!—
As well to see the vessel that's come in
As to throw out our eyes for brave Othello,
Even till we make the main and th'aerial blue
An indistinct regard.
(II.i.37-41)

Pye argues convincingly that Montano's "indistinct regard" suggests that "[y]ou can lose the object by being too fastened on it, as Othello will do in his killing desire for 'the ocular proof' (III.iii.60) and lose yourself—'throw out [one's] eyes'—in the process".⁴⁸ The play's movement to the "indistinct" limits of representation – to the void – is an important idea for this thesis, and one that I address in detail with regard to *Hamlet*. As Pye notes, "Montano's enjoining our gaze at a point where Othello momentarily disappears recalls the interval during which Hamlet also disappears in the midst of his drama—his transformative sea journey to England—drawing all eyes to him on his return".⁴⁹ Pye draws this into a broader point: "Shakespearean tragedy[']s...ability to incorporate its own formal limit and vanishing point" – this "indistinct regard" – "correspond[s] to the aesthetic work's capacity to figure its own illimitability as representational form".⁵⁰ The "vanishing point" here points to the "self-grounding" and "autochthonic character of the work".⁵¹ Pye therefore contends

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.98.

⁴⁷ Luther, p.135.

⁴⁸ Pye, pp.426-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.428.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

that “*Othello* exemplifies the emergence of the aesthetic as such”,⁵² which recasts “subjectivity” itself “as an explicitly aesthetic formation, a function of the reflexive, self-encompassing, and illimitable work”.⁵³

Whereas Pye’s subject is purely “aesthetic” – an “autonomous, self-constituting form”⁵⁴ with no grounding but itself – this is not true of the evental subject. Drama need not travel with Montano’s eyes *toward* vanishing, but may emerge, like Othello’s ship, *from* the “vanishing point”. Taken in this way, the moment of “indistinct regard” is both a vanishing *and* an emergence, a to-and-fro between drama and its limit, rather than a bleeding into a limitless realm of indistinct aesthetics. In Badiou’s terms, the indistinction of multiplicity is both the point where the structure of a situation vanishes and from which the excess of the event proceeds: “The striking paradox of our undertaking is that we are going to try to *name* the very thing which is impossible to *discern*”.⁵⁵ Taken in this light, Othello’s journey through the indistinction of the “high-wrought flood” (II.i.2) is a marker of how the event comes from “*the edge of the void*” and is thus “*foundational*”.⁵⁶

Coming from the unseen of the void, outside the existing structure and language, and directed toward an unseen future, the “intrinsic indiscernibility” of the “generic procedure”⁵⁷ severs the self from the situation and forms the subject *on new ground*. The “vanishing point” is thus not the beginning of a purely aesthetic or self-grounded subject but the emergence, from the indiscernible void, of a subject grounded by the

⁵² Ibid., p.425.

⁵³ Ibid., p.428.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.430.

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Being*, p.376.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.175.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.391.

event. Hamlet returns transformed from his voyage beyond representation to a more solid (and actable) sense of *place* in the graveyard. The event somehow teaches him that, to return to Gillies, “what matters to man concerns his own being, his own place, and, indeed, place rather than space”.⁵⁸ Similarly, Othello returns from the limitless sea as a living subject that is irrevocably placed in relation to his wife. It is, however, an unstable place that both stems from the indiscernible of the void and is directed to the undiscerned future of his fidelity.

The indistinct event of love thus opens the fearless Othello to fear: fear of the unknown, of what will come, of the unknown other, and of what the other will make of him and make him into. As Badiou writes, if “‘some-one’ enters into the composition of a subject of truth only by exposing himself ‘entirely’ to a post-evental fidelity, then there remains the problem of knowing what he, this ‘some-one’, will *become* through this testing experience”.⁵⁹ The person that was is no more, and yet, the person to come is only glimpsed indistinctly in shadows. In this obscure space terror resides and with it the possibility of one of Badiou’s three forms of evil: “to fail to live up to a fidelity is Evil in the sense of *betrayal*, betrayal in oneself of the Immortal that you are”.⁶⁰ The “difficult new demands...of fidelity” cause “a breakdown of the fiction I use to maintain, as an image of myself”, and this means that the subject is “confronted with a pure choice between the ‘Keep going!’ proposed by the ethic of this truth, and the logic of the ‘perseverance in being’ of the mere mortal that I am”.⁶¹ Othello is caught between the terrifying destruction of the old and the terrifying uncertainty of the new. As Badiou writes elsewhere, “for the

⁵⁸ Gillies, p.37.

⁵⁹ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

individual to become a subject it is necessary that he overcome...the fear of losing all identity”.⁶²

The great difficulty is that it is only in division and uncertainty that the subject arrives. As we have seen, the “evental rupture always constitutes its subject in the divided form of a ‘not...but’”.⁶³ It is the fact that “the subjective process occurs from the point of the interruption...as the dialectical division of destruction and recomposition” that “guarantees that the subjective process in part escapes repetition”.⁶⁴ So while the joyous arrival in Cyprus allows Othello to escape the repetition of his story, as he enters the unknown, it thereby opens the self-division that will force him to choose what he will become. For the moment, in Desdemona’s unexpected presence, Othello attains a strength in division and weakness. He can now look outward and love. The notion of pity shows that weakness is the *condition* of love. As Paul writes: “And he said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Corinthians 12:9). The challenge for Othello, the man of strong and stable substance, is to admit, for the first time, not only that he is someone to be pitied but also that he is not “all-in-all sufficient”, that he *needs someone else*. As Žižek explains:

In other words, the point of the claim that even if I were to possess all knowledge, without love I would be nothing, is not simply that *with* love, I am ‘something’ – in love, *I am also nothing* but, as it were, a Nothing humbly aware of itself, a Nothing paradoxically made rich through the very awareness of its lack. Only a lacking, vulnerable being is capable of love: the ultimate mystery of love is therefore that incompleteness is in a way *higher than completion*. On the one hand, only an imperfect, lacking being loves: we love because we do *not* know all.⁶⁵

⁶² Badiou, *Century*, p.124.

⁶³ Badiou, *Saint*, p.64.

⁶⁴ Badiou, *Subject*, p.259.

⁶⁵ Žižek, *Fragile*, pp.146-7.

The need to embrace weakness and incompleteness is tied to a basic processual point: it is by interrelating with, and being altered by, other entities than an entity obtains “real existence”.⁶⁶ So while Othello seems embarrassed and diminished by his ‘prattling’ at this newfound interrelation, he thereby obtains a real existence as a subject. In Levinas’ terms we might say that exposure to “the Other Person” reveals “the ultimate meaning of my ‘mineness’” by “tear[ing] me away from my hypostasis, from the *here*, at the heart of being or the center of the world in which, privileged, and in this sense primordial, I place myself”.⁶⁷ His prattling marks an arrival because his monumental separateness is punctured. Othello becomes a *dramatic* figure and not an epic or architectural figure as the “*Othello* music” breaks down through his exposure to Desdemona. He emerges from his self-unity to become the conflicted Othello who will heartbreakingly tear himself apart. He is conflicted not by Iago but by love.

(3) “I am not what I am”: The non-arrival of Iago

It is sometimes tempting to think of *Othello* as Iago’s play. The play’s first lines are given to Roderigo, who openly admits to having given Iago his purse strings. What arrives in advance of Iago is one of his puppets. Iago seems to be pulling the strings as chief director, prompter, and puppet master. There is, however, a fundamental distinction between Iago’s drama and Shakespeare’s: Iago does not believe in the possibility of arrivals. And yet, none of his plotting could come to anything unless Othello was already shaken by Desdemona. Iago thus comes in Desdemona’s wake. Desdemona’s love is not some “utopian possibility” (which is what Grady sees as

⁶⁶ Whitehead, *Adventures*, p.153.

⁶⁷ Levinas, *Entre*, p.74.

“missing” from Pye’s reading),⁶⁸ but the play’s central event, the source of its dramatic force. Indeed, the potency of Iago’s project relies entirely on this event. It relies on making the event seem impossible and grotesque to Othello; on channelling its energies in a poisoned and inverted form.

Iago operates as a determinist when it comes to the human subject: the subject is a product of its history, circumstance, and innate quality rather than of any exceptional moment or defining decision. As such, Iago is a force of the ‘situation’.

Metaphysically, he seeks to reinscribe its structure or count-as-one. In dramatic terms he seeks to reinscribe Othello’s self-sufficient language. And culturally he reasserts the opposition between Venice and foreign Othello. All of this, of course, involves destroying Desdemona, whose excessive love threatens the situation’s foundational structures. Ultimately, Iago trusts in what is due rather than what comes as grace. Taken in this way, the obscure “Were I the Moor I would not be Iago” (I.i.57) suggests a sort of non-arrival. Each is what they must be.

For all of Iago’s distancing cynicism and theatrical plotting, he does not stand over the play-world like a director. Iago is also transformed by the event in strange ways. Desdemona’s love for Othello happens to him as much as it happens to Othello, for the reason that it threatens the very foundations of his cynical worldview. Iago arrives in his mode of being – his supposedly “motiveless malignity”⁶⁹ – through his attempt to destroy this threat. To understand this we must grasp Iago’s metaphysics and how they relate to those of Desdemona and Othello. Iago insists upon a fundamental divide between his outward action and his inward self: “For when my

⁶⁸ Hugh Grady, “Theory ‘After Theory’: Christopher Pye’s Reading of *Othello*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.4 (2009), 453-459, p.457.

⁶⁹ Coleridge, p.113.

outward action doth demonstrate / The native act and figure of my heart / In
compliment 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.” (I.i.61-65). It is immediately apparent that Iago
opposes Desdemona’s eventual metaphysics, which draws subjective reality from the
action of consecration. Iago’s is a tormented position, for if “outward action” never
demonstrates the “native act and figure of [the] heart”, there is no possible location
for the self in the material world.

Iago here bears more than a passing resemblance to Kierkegaard’s notion of the
“demonic”, which is a refusal to accept that “truth is for the particular individual only
as he himself produces it in action”.⁷⁰ The necessary consequence is that the demonic
subject locates its truth or essence *inside* itself. “’Tis in ourselves that we are thus or
thus” (I.iii.316) Iago tells us. And this inner essence is secretive; it will not be
brought into the open “[f]or daws to peck at”. According to Kierkegaard this
“hiddenness is precisely something spiritual and is one of the safety-devices for
assuring oneself of having as it were behind reality an enclosure”.⁷¹ Because the real
is what is inner and secret, the outer world is always a disappointment for Iago.
“Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul” (I.i.87) is almost his summary of
the human condition. Unlike the event’s superabundance, Iago’s world always gives
less than what one hopes. The demonic is thereby a form of despairing that “keep[s]
despair shut up in close reserve” while setting “the outward appearance at the level of
indifference, to make it as unrevealing and indifferent as possible”.⁷²

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Anxiety*, p.138.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, pp.206-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.206.

Iago's metaphysical stance is almost the direct opposite of Othello's "Were it my cue to fight". Whereas Othello harbours an impossible desire for his outward action to *be* his self without any need for interiority – the cues are somehow just given by the world – Iago harbours an impossible desire for an interiority that does not manifest itself in outward action. Whereas Othello wants unreflective oneness, Iago wants reflective severance. The irony is that these opposites unite in desiring a detachment from the demands of others and, ultimately, from the event. They both exclude Desdemona's consecration.

We see Iago's severance from action in the effect that his suggestion has upon his victims. Brabantio, for instance, asserts that Othello has used spells and medicines to separate Desdemona's action from her self. From the start, Iago is thus intent on Desdemona's destruction. Desdemona's action is made alien to her self and it therefore effaces that self:

Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That weakens motion. I'll have't disputed on.
'Tis probable, and palpable to thinking.
(I.ii.73-77)

Such a disconnect between essence and action becomes "palpable to thinking" both because it confirms Brabantio's desire that *Desdemona* does not love Othello and because it confirms the ordinary expectations of society. Hence Brabantio's disbelief that "If she in chains of magic were not bound," she would "Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight" (I.ii.66-72).

According to Iago's worldview, whatever lies outside the situation – including the

subject and its desire – is impossible, unnatural, a deception. There is no event. Here Kierkegaard’s description of how one can defraud oneself of love is apposite:

If it were true, as a conceited cleverness believes, proud of not being imposed upon, that one should believe nothing that one does not see with the sensual eye, then must one first and foremost cease to believe in love. And if one did this and did it for fear of being deceived, would one then not be deceived? One may be deceived in many ways; one may be deceived by believing the false, but one may also be deceived by not believing the true; one may be deceived by appearances, but one may also be deceived by the appearance of shrewdness, by the flattering conceit which is absolutely certain it cannot be deceived. ... To defraud oneself of love is the most terrible deception of all.⁷³

Something similar occurs in postmodern thought, which wants to avoid being ‘caught out’ by ideology or belief. As Žižek writes, the “fundamental lesson of postmodernist politics is that there is no Event, that ‘nothing really happens’”.⁷⁴ If we examine Iago in this light we see that, rather than following the ‘not...but’ model of Badiou’s fidelity, Iago ruptures existing culture – he personifies the ‘not’ – without the positive content of the ‘but’. This is not the ideologically neutral outlook it might seem.

Žižek writes that “[c]ynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*”.⁷⁵

Iago, similarly, continues to do what he does not believe. At a basic level, while Iago highlights the rhetorical emptiness of reputation, he nonetheless desires it. But there is also a deeper layer of repetition. Iago dismantles Badiou’s “dialectical division of destruction and recomposition”⁷⁶ and is therefore bound to endlessly repeat the “destruction” of its first term. Iago must not only repeat the ‘not’, he must repeat

⁷³ Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*. David F. Swenson. Trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1946, p.5.

⁷⁴ Žižek, *Ticklish*, p.135.

⁷⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989, p.33.

⁷⁶ Badiou, *Subject*, p.259.

‘what is not’: he must continually repeat what he does *not* believe – dismissing it over and over – and he is thereby defined by what he opposes: “Virtue? A fig!” (I.iii.316).

Despite his puncturing of illusions and beliefs, Iago needs to defend his ideology as much as the next man. As Žižek stresses, escaping ideology is never a matter of “opening our eyes and trying to see reality as it is”, rather, we must “confront the Real of our desire”.⁷⁷ It is something Iago fails to do when it comes to Desdemona. While Othello poses a problem to Iago’s ideology insofar as his commanding presence and remarkable story can be seen as positive possessions that contradict Iago’s cynical emptiness, Othello’s threat is surmountable. Iago can exist alongside Othello, seemingly for years, because Othello’s grand separateness can be pierced by Iago’s scepticism and mocked as simple, romantic, and foreign. The rupturing event of Desdemona’s love is an altogether more serious problem. A Venetian, an insider, has broken the rules of the situation. Her consecration takes the form of a “not...but”: breaking free from her father and social circumstances, Desdemona institutes a new truth and a new subject. From inside the situation, there is no discernible reason why her love refuses to follow the traditional path. Excessive and unheralded, it is more than simpleness or foreignness. It speaks to a different metaphysics, a different world, in which “THE IMPOSSIBLE DOES HAPPEN”⁷⁸; to a superabundance that threatens Iago’s worldview of disillusionment and false appearances.

If we examine Iago through this threat, Kierkegaard’s idea of the demonic is again suggestive. Because “the demonic...is in the evil and is in anxiety about the good”, it

⁷⁷ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p.48.

⁷⁸ Žižek, *Belief*, p.84.

“manifests itself clearly only when it is in contact with the good”.⁷⁹ The threat of Desdemona’s consecration is what forces Iago into the open. Unless Iago’s metaphysics is to collapse, such a happening must be destroyed. Iago must reduce it to his belief that love “is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will” (I.iii.329). For as Kierkegaard points out, “the demoniac is consistent in himself and in the consistency of evil”, and “just for this cause he also has a totality to lose”.⁸⁰ It does not matter that Desdemona and Othello’s love is a one off, for even “[t]he least inconsistency is a prodigious loss”: “that same instant the charm is perhaps broken, the mysterious power which bound all powers in harmony is enfeebled”.⁸¹

Shakespeare provides strange hints that Desdemona’s threat is so great because Iago desires her love for himself. Here Shakespeare implies something that is explicit in Cinthio’s tale, in which the Ensign loves Desdemona and unsuccessfully attempts to seduce her (before murdering her in revenge). To turn again to Kierkegaard, for the demonic, “one single dietetic imprudence, one single instant when the whole thing, or at least a part thereof, is seen and understood in a different way – and with that, he would never more be himself, he says”.⁸² Hence the importance of these hints:

Now I do love her too,
 Not out of absolute lust – though peradventure
 I stand accountant for as great a sin—
 But partly led to diet my revenge
 For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
 Hath leapt into my seat, the thought whereof
 Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw me inwards
 (II.i.278-84)

⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, *Anxiety*, p.119.

⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.239.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.238.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.239.

What is this “love”? It hardly seems explicable by the emotionally underwhelming claim that Othello has “leapt into [his] seat”. Rather, it seems to be related to Iago’s strange digression about his “as great a sin”. What sin, as great as absolute lust, commensurate to his general disappointment, and connected to his attempt to destroy Othello, might help explain this curious “love” for Desdemona? The answer is surely envy. He envies Othello not only for his potency but above all for Desdemona’s love. “Envy”, as Kierkegaard notes, “is concealed admiration”: because he “cannot be happy by surrendering himself” the admirer “speaks another language” whereby “the thing which he really admired is called a stupid, insipid and queer sort of thing”.⁸³ He must crush his own admiration and his own love.

Desdemona is the central object of projected desires. Because Brabantio, Iago, and Othello all in some way desire Desdemona, her extraordinary love and desire for Othello is unbearable. For a father it suggests a usurpation of his authority by one he invited into his house. For an envious lieutenant it suggests a usurpation of his superior worldview by a rupturing love. For a husband it suggests a usurpation of his old self by a wife who leaves him a prattling dependent. Like his dupes, Iago clings to the most tenuous proof to escape the implications of this inexplicable desire of a perfect young woman for a dark and unmerited thing. Just as Brabantio half-believes in magic, or Othello half-believes in Desdemona’s infidelity, Iago half-believes in Desdemona’s love for Cassio. For as Cavell points out, the question ““Why does Othello believe Iago?” is badly formed. It is not conceivable that Othello believes Iago and *not* Desdemona. Iago, we might say, offers Othello an opportunity to

⁸³ Ibid., p.217.

believe something, something to oppose to something else he knows".⁸⁴ In short, Iago follows his victims in clinging to a falsehood that is "palpable to thinking" (I.ii.77) as a defence against something more terrible. He desperately needs to believe that Desdemona will tire of Othello, realise her mistake, rediscover her origins and culture, and thereby fall for the likes of Cassio: "That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it. That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit" (II.i.273-4).

It is "apt and of great credit" because it follows the rules of the old situation. It would mean that nothing has happened; that the rupture was a mere illusion. It would thus confirm Iago's claim that Desdemona's love "was a violent commencement in her" and will meet "an answerable sequestration" (I.iii.337-8). Moreover, it would explain both the "commencement" and the "sequestration", indeed the whole affair, by the fact of Othello's foundational foreignness from Venice: "When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be again to inflame it, and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties, all which the Moor is defective in" (II.i.221-225). We are again close to the postmodern lesson "that there is no Event".⁸⁵ And yet, in this at least, Iago fails, for Desdemona continues her consecration and refuses to return to the fold.

We see the rules of the old situation when Emilia reveals Iago's belief in her dalliance with Othello: "Some such squire he was / That turned your wit the seamy side without, / And made you to suspect me with the Moor" (IV.ii.149-51). He envies Othello's position, self-assurance, and prowess. He therefore concludes that his wife's sexual desire should follow his reluctant admiration. It is palpable to thinking

⁸⁴ Cavell, p.129.

⁸⁵ Žižek, *Ticklish*, p.135.

and must be revenged: “I know not if’t be true, / But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, / Will do as if for surety” (I.iii.370-2). So while Emilia’s “squire” – the “eternal villain”, the “insinuating rogue”, the “villainous knave” (IV.ii.134-143) – is obviously Iago, it is more than Iago. For Iago too is one of the “credulous fools [who] are caught” by “medicine” (IV.i.42). The “medicine” here is a sort of “mimetic” rivalry that makes him “jealous of both Cassio, his successful professional rival, and of Othello, whom he suspects of having been involved erotically with his wife”.⁸⁶ In short, Iago must be understood in light of the play’s overarching structures of desire. He is not some outside-sitting devilish facilitator, playing on players, but a player in this same process.

Iago’s self-assurance and superiority wobble in the face of Othello’s exceptionalism and then crumble in the face of Desdemona. Ultimately, her love cannot be accounted for by Iago’s philosophy. “Unkindness may do much, / And his unkindness may defeat my life, / But never taint my love” (IV.ii.163-5). In the end it is what destroys him. It pushes him beyond the safe confines of self-interest (the scheme to replace Cassio) into the desperate attempt to annihilate its challenge (the scheme to destroy Othello and Desdemona for no apparent benefit to himself). In this sense Bradley was wrong when he contended that Iago’s “creed...is that absolute egoism is the only rational and proper attitude”.⁸⁷ Iago might begin in a self-interested attempt to procure position and rank but he does not stop at the end of II.iii when he has achieved these goals. Rather, “out of [Desdemona’s] goodness” he plots to “make the net / That shall enmesh them all” (II.iii.335-6). In this he is protecting his own hollow ideology – that of puncturing all other ideologies rather than simply

⁸⁶ René Girard, *A Theater of Envy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991, p.291.

⁸⁷ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.219.

living self-interestedly – because it is what sets him apart and sustains him. He, like Othello, is mounting a self-annihilating counteroffensive against the excessive and inexplicable nature of Desdemona’s love.

(4) “My life upon her faith”: Othello’s retreat

Iago, as we have seen, comes in Desdemona’s wake. He practices his arts of deception upon Othello’s fear and uncertainty, which arise from Desdemona’s extraordinary love. She makes the impossible happen but, when she turns her back for a moment, Othello is gone. Iago makes the impossible *seem* impossible. He questions whether it has, in fact, happened; whether such a love could, in fact, be possible. As late as the beginning of III.iii Othello is still ‘with’ Desdemona. Here we see them immediately after Iago opens his gambit with “Ha! I like not that” (III.iii.33), as Desdemona sues for Cassio. They exchange loving banter that is as yet untouched by Iago, ending with Othello’s “Farewell, my Desdemona. I’ll come to thee straight” (III.iii.88). Othello, of course, will never come back to this place again.

It is here, after Othello utters his ominous words – “Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee, and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again” (III.iii.91-3) – that Iago steps in front of Desdemona. He does so, as we shall see, by reasserting the rules of the situation: “Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, / Know of your love?” (III.iii.96-7). When she returns soon after, Othello is changed and Desdemona is tragically cut off, unable to reach him. Iago has infected Othello’s relation to the event of love. Most obviously, Iago uses Desdemona’s suit for Cassio to throw Desdemona’s perfection into question and thus raise doubts about the

foundation of Othello's new life: "My life upon her faith" (I.iii.293). In analysing how this foundational statement – and with it Othello's embryonic fidelity – breaks down, it is worth unpacking the elements of the phrase.

The "My life" part of Othello's formulation sets up the stakes of his wager. Cavell explains the philosophical need to establish a "best case" for knowledge: "the sense, as in the case of Descartes's wax or of C.I. Lewis's apple, that 'if I cannot know this then I cannot know anything'".⁸⁸ Scepticism, then, involves the "collapse of the 'best case'".⁸⁹ In Othello's formulation "we have the logic, the emotion, and the scene of skepticism epitomized. The logic: 'My life upon her faith' (I, iii, 294) and '...when I love thee not / Chaos is come again' (III, iii, 91-2) set up the stake necessary to best cases".⁹⁰ Desdemona is the "object" that "stands for...the world as such".⁹¹ She is where he has "garnered up [his] heart" (IV.ii.59). The risk, of course, is that the slightest doubt can bring the whole wager down.

More particularly, the wager is a risk to Othello because his demand to know absolutely – to know his cues – is in no way conducive to maintaining a 'best case' for knowledge. Iago, therefore, does not need to do much to create an annihilating doubt. Indeed, just by raising the question of Desdemona's faith – that it *could* be questioned – Iago precipitates what Cavell calls "the most extraordinary representation known to me of the 'astonishment' of skeptical doubt".⁹² The

⁸⁸ Cavell, p.19.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.128.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.19.

⁹² Ibid., p.128.

“precipitous” unravelling of his ‘knowledge’ of Desdemona’s “faith” is “just the rhythm of skepticism; all that is necessary is the stake”.⁹³

Furthermore, “My life *upon*” suggests a transaction in which his life is given over, once and for all, to Desdemona’s perfection. Othello’s role is over. It is not him, but her and her faith, that carries the weight of their love. Uncomfortably helpless, Othello is left watching her rather than acting with her. By viewing his own wager as a finished product rather than as a “*work of love*”,⁹⁴ Othello thus has no way to comprehend his own suspicion except as (her) corruption. And this problem is exacerbated not only by the stakes but *what* he stakes them on. What he is attempting to seize is not Desdemona as such but some hidden essence within her: “her faith”. Here Othello pre-empts a fundamental problem with Descartes’ wager of a ‘best case’. Whitehead observes that “Descartes’ notion of ‘substance’” – with its attendant “phrase ‘requiring nothing but itself in order to exist’” – treats the object of perception “in complete disconnection from any other such existent”.⁹⁵ By severing Desdemona’s faith from the action of consecration that *constitutes it*, Othello, like Descartes, makes the wager artificially difficult. As Latour writes, “absolute certainty is the sort of neurotic fantasy that only a surgically removed mind would look for”.⁹⁶

The result of the enormous stakes placed on Desdemona’s unverifiable “faith” is that Iago need only raise the spectre of something terrible for it to collapse. We see this occur almost immediately after Desdemona leaves Othello: “Think, my lord? By heaven, thou echo’st me / As if there were some monster in thy thought / Too hideous

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Žižek, *Fragile*, p.128.

⁹⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures*, pp.144-5.

⁹⁶ Latour, p.4.

to be shown!” (III.iii.110-12). The unseen monster is then transferred to Desdemona: “She that so young could give out such a seeming, / To seal her father’s eyes up close as oak, / He thought ’twas witchcraft!” (III.iii.213-15). Iago has Othello watching her from the outside, peering in like a voyeur: “Look to your wife” (III.iii.201), “Look to’t” (III.iii.204). He has Othello searching for something unknowable and terrible at her core, the possibility of which arises from the very fact of her separateness: “O curse of marriage, / That we can call these delicate creatures ours / And not their appetites!” (III.iii.272-274). What Othello “seeks”, according to Cavell, is “an absolute or inalienable bonding to himself, to which no claim or desire could be opposed, could conceivably count; as if the jealousy is directed to the sheer existence of the other, its separateness from him”.⁹⁷

By treating Desdemona’s “faith” as her essential substance, Othello dismantles Desdemona from her action of faith: “I’ll tear her all to pieces” (III.iii.436). He also fatally misunderstands his own relation to the event and, indeed, the nature of “faith”. He misses how both love and fidelity are made up of an everyday labour rather than a transcendent quality. As Badiou stresses: “Fidelity must not be understood in any way as a capacity, a subjective quality, or a virtue”, rather, it “is a functional relation to the event”.⁹⁸ Othello’s abdication thus misses the foundational need for *his* intervention on behalf of the event: “love”, like the event, “founds itself upon an intervention...near a void summoned by an encounter”.⁹⁹ He turns what should have been a liaison between the subject and the event into an unfathomable gap.

⁹⁷ Cavell, p.9.

⁹⁸ Badiou, *Being*, p.233.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.232.

Badiou stresses that the event is “in excess of proof”.¹⁰⁰ It necessitates the sort of wager or fidelity that we see in Juliet’s giving or Desdemona’s consecration. It is to be at the service of a vulnerable happening whose meaning is undecidable within the inherited logic of the situation. Here Badiou’s eventual perspective chimes with the idea of strength in weakness:

Pascal is concerned to save the vulnerability of the event, its quasi-obscurity, since it is precisely on this basis that the Christian subject is the one who decides from the standpoint of undecidability ... rather than the one who is crushed by the power of either a demonstration ... or some prodigious occurrence...¹⁰¹

In direct contrast to the popular song ‘To Know You (Is To Love You)’, Shakespeare shows that loving is antecedent to knowing. It is only through the action and course of love that one may begin to ‘know’. *Romeo and Juliet*, for all its iconic status as the classic of fated love, shows that ‘to love you is to know you’. The leap of faith precedes, and indeed founds, the ‘being’ which is to be known. Othello’s tragedy is that he does not have faith in that vulnerable flight into the unknown. The opposite is true of Desdemona, who, even when she is cut-off from Othello, unable to know his mind, maintains her consecration. “I would you had never seen him”, Emilia tells Desdemona, “So would not I” Desdemona replies (IV.iii.17-18).

Iago reinscribes the rules of the situation in the short time that Desdemona is away from Othello by playing on Othello’s underlying insecurity: “Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw / The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt, / For she had eyes and chose me” (III.iii.191-3). While Desdemona’s choice is an amazing grace, it may become an insufferable burden. Othello’s “weak merits” raise problems for a man of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.216.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.218.

self-sufficiency. Without deserving love on the “merits”, everything rests on a choice that seems manifestly unlikely. It is unlikely because, as Iago stresses, it makes no sense according to the rules of the situation, under which Othello’s “weak merits” led him to employ Cassio as his emissary in love:

Ay, there’s the point; as, to be bold with you,
Not to affect many proposèd matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends.
Foh, one may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural!
(III.iii.233-238).

What Iago is really doing here is denying love. Carving out one’s own little area of self-interest is reasonable; consecrating one’s self to another is not. Iago thus undermines the concept of love as something that comes “*without being due*”¹⁰² by portraying its unjustified, excessive nature as unnatural and grotesque. And so, when Desdemona returns to Othello, less than 200 lines after she left him, he is gone:

DESDEMONA Why do you speak so faintly? Are you not well?
OTHELLO I have a pain upon my forehead here.
DESDEMONA Faith, that’s with watching. ’Twill away again.
Let me but bind it hard, within this hour
It will be well.
OTHELLO Your napkin is too little.
(III.iii.287-291)

His voice has changed. He speaks “so faintly”. Desdemona no longer knows where he is coming from or understands his language. He avoids her words and intent. And he avoids her pity. She ministers to his pained forehead – the product of his perverse play on cuckold’s horns – but her pity is not enough: “Your napkin is too little”. He rejects her napkin, along with her love, and it falls fatefully to the ground.

¹⁰² Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.77.

Othello is unreachable because fantasy has rushed in to take the place of the event's excess. Because there is no rule or reason to explain Desdemona's love, Othello is left stranded, unable to discover why Desdemona loves him. Beyond sight and knowledge, a sort of void within her, Desdemona's "faith" becomes the terrible unknown of the "*Che vuoi?*": "What does the Other want?".¹⁰³ The result is "fantasy", which is "an answer to this '*Che vuoi?*'" through "an imaginary scenario filling out the void" that was opened by "the *desire of the Other*"¹⁰⁴: Desdemona "with Cassio has the act of shame / A thousand times committed" (V.ii.217-19). It is in this way that I understand Cavell's point that Othello is "trying, against his knowledge, to believe [Iago]" because of his "devouring need of it", because "it is a thing he would rather believe than something yet more terrible to his mind...her faithfulness"¹⁰⁵: this unbearable unknown. The fantasy of her whorish guilt relieves him of this consuming uncertainty. It is, therefore, the direct opposite of Žižek's idea that "love FULLY ACCEPTS that 'this IS that' – that the woman with all her weaknesses and common features IS the Thing I unconditionally love".¹⁰⁶ Othello dismisses the woman in front of him – of whom he can say "For she had eyes and chose me" (III.iii.193) – and asserts the overarching importance of what is hidden.

The endpoint of Othello's torturous and self-annihilating language is the demand for proof: "Villain, be sure thou prove / my love a whore. / Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof" (III.iii.363-5). Othello demands proof that his love is "a whore" because it is only proof of her guilt that will end his uncertainty and restore his old

¹⁰³ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p.114.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Cavell, p.133.

¹⁰⁶ Žižek, *Belief*, p.90.

self. Even if her innocence was certain in this instance, this certainty could only be temporary, it could only defer fear to a later occasion. He must, therefore, uproot the event at its source. As Badiou astutely observes, betrayal of a truth-event “is something quite different from an abandonment”: “I must always convince myself that the Immortal in question *never existed*, and thus rally to opinion’s perception of this point”.¹⁰⁷ Because it is unseen, Desdemona’s innocence is *always* under threat. As such, what Othello desires is not so much that Desdemona is guilty, that she has committed adultery, but the certainty this would bring. “I’ll not endure it. Would I were satisfied!” (III.iii.395).

By setting up the parameters of proof so that he can equate “imputation, and strong circumstances” (III.iii.411) with certainty, Iago thus allows him to become Othello once more by blowing away the unknowable desire of the other: “All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven – ’tis gone. / Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell” (III.iii.450-1). Othello excommunicates uncertainty and reaches what Cavell calls the “irretrievable outsideness” of “scepticism” as “a power that all who possess language possess and may desire: to dissociate one-self, excommunicate oneself from the community in whose agreement, mutual attunement, words exist”.¹⁰⁸ Certain and stony, it is no surprise that, as Leavis notes, when Othello “kneels to take a formal vow of revenge” he returns to “the heroic strain of the ‘Othello music’”¹⁰⁹:

Never, Iago. Like to the Pontiac Sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne’er knows retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace

¹⁰⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.79.

¹⁰⁸ Cavell, p.92.

¹⁰⁹ F. R. Leavis, “Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero”, *Shakespeare: Othello: A Casebook*. John Wain. Ed. Second Edition. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994, 120-140, p.131.

Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
 Till that a capable and wide revenge
 Swallow them up. Now, by yon marble heaven,
 In the due reverence of a sacred vow
 I here engage my words.
 (III.iii.456-464)

As Leavis continues: "At this climax of the play, as he sets himself irrevocably in his vindictive resolution, he reassumes formally his heroic self-dramatization".¹¹⁰ The vulnerable Othello that arrived in Cyprus is gone forever.

The result of this return to the separateness of the "*Othello* music" is the utter breakdown of all connection and communication between him and Desdemona. We need only look at her words in their next exchange to grasp her tragic inability to reach Othello: "Is't possible?" (III.iv.66); "I' faith, is't true?" (III.iv.73); "What do you speak so startingly and rash?" (III.iv.77); "Heaven bless us!" (III.iv.79); "I' faith, you are to blame" (III.iv.94). Throughout this escalating incomprehension Othello presses her relentlessly on the now monumentally significant handkerchief, culminating in five requests to see it, the last three of which simply cue Desdemona with "The handkerchief" (III.iv.89-93). Excluded from this now all-consuming signifier, Desdemona can only cling to Cassio's suit as a means of communicating, unaware that its meaning has also been radically altered. She simply has no language with which to reach Othello.

In stark contrast to *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lovers work together to change the meaning of names, here it is Iago and Othello that join to transform meanings. They do so not in a mutual process but in a deceptive demand for knowledge and finality,

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

those very things that Juliet's refusal of oaths attempted to avoid. Perhaps most notably, Iago has stolen the word "pity" from Desdemona. Iago has replaced Desdemona and the result is that Othello's deformed mind jerks uncontrollably between Iago and pity: "But yet the pity of it, Iago. O, Iago, / the pity of it, Iago!" (IV.i.186-7). It is a gruesome deforming of Desdemona's beautiful and foundational pity by a mind in the tightening noose of a compulsion to kill, yet spasming with regret. Pity was for love, now it is for death.

Again and again, Desdemona is severed from any possibility of agency or speech: "Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?" (IV.ii.33). Palfrey and Stern show how the "unbridgeable chasm between the two lovers" is built into the actors' parts themselves, in particular through Othello's use of the "repeated cue", which invites Desdemona to speak, only to shut her down.¹¹¹ In the following speech the Folio has Othello repeat his cue at least two, and possibly three, times before it finally allows Desdemona to speak:

OTHELLO Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
 Made to write 'whore' upon? *What committed?*
Committed? O thou public commoner,
 I should make very forges of my cheeks,
 That would to cinders burn up modesty,
 Did I but speak thy deeds. *What committed?*
 Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks;
 The bawdy wind, that kisses all it meets,
 Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth
 And will not hear't. *What committed?*
 DESDEMONA By heaven, you do me wrong.
 (IV.ii.73-83, emphasis added)

¹¹¹ Palfrey and Stern, p.232.

As Palfrey and Stern suggest, “[i]t is the *impossibility* of Desdemona getting a word in that marks the tragedy”.¹¹² And, even when she does speak, she cannot speak to the issue as she is shut out by the rolling of Othello’s foreign language. We have the extreme end of what Levinas describes as the “act of violence and of negation” that is the attempt to grasp the other as an object of “understanding”: to grasp it as a “[p]ossession” and make it “mine”.¹¹³ The tragedy of *Othello* is, in this sense, the tragedy of Desdemona, the ‘other’ who opens Othello to wonder and life only to be turned to stone.

(5) “It is the cause”: The (re)arrival of the old

In the final scene, Desdemona remains fatally cut-off from Othello’s mind and language until the very last moment. Indeed, it is even hard for us, the audience, to follow Othello’s death march. “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul” (V.ii.1) marks a shift in Othello from enraged uncertainty to calm surety. But what is the “cause”? Can it be named? There is at once a chilling metaphysical import and an utter emptiness to these words. One wants to leave them alone, free from analysis or content. Othello does not do so, however, for he goes on to give a cause: “Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men” (V.ii.6). These words fail to match the foreboding of the opening and seem almost facile and evasive. Leavis is surely right that “the accent is so clearly unrelated to any effectual motive in Othello that the concern for justice, the self-bracing to noble sacrifice, appears as self-deception”.¹¹⁴ However, while it is easy to dismiss them as self-deceiving, it pays to suspend disbelief for a moment.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Levinas, *Entre*, p.8.

¹¹⁴ Leavis, p.134.

That said, even if we presume Desdemona's guilt, Othello's thought seems outlandish. How would a shamed and exposed Desdemona be able to betray more men? Who else can she betray after her father and husband? The answer, I think, is everyone. And the answer to the first question is that she *cannot* be exposed. No exposure would be believable. Soon after concluding that she will betray more men, Othello declares: "O balmy breath, that does almost persuade / Justice to break her sword!" (V.ii.16-17). If Othello, who 'knows' her dreadful crime, can barely bring her to "Justice", what chance has anyone else? Desdemona is the ultimate danger in the world: the corruption that cannot be faced or seen. Othello earlier expresses this when he rails: "Had it pleased God / To try me with affliction...I should have found in some place of my soul / A drop of patience" (IV.ii.49-55). But as Othello goes on to say, he cannot endure the corruption of that place where he has "garnered up [his] heart" (IV.ii.59); cannot endure that the "fountain" from which his "current runs" has become a "cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in!" (IV.ii.61-4). That he will save the world by ridding it of this corruption becomes the chilling public duty of the final scene. Desdemona becomes a monument to the world's treachery, a sign of foulness dressed in fairness; she becomes, in effect, the sacrificial substitute for "honest Iago", foul seeming fair.

Given this clear-sighted mission of sacrifice, it is no surprise that Othello's "cause" heralds the full return of the "*Othello* music". Indeed, Knight writes that "[d]uring the last scene Othello is a nobly tragic figure" who "utters the grandest of his poetry".¹¹⁵ Knight gives particular emphasis to the "It is the cause" speech: "This is

¹¹⁵ Knight, p.94.

the noble *Othello* music: highly-coloured, rich in sound and phrase, stately. Each word solidifies as it takes its place in the pattern”.¹¹⁶ What Knight fails to see is that the solemn march of this music is precipitated by the violent and deluded return to certainty, rather than any inner ‘nobility’. Othello can return to his noble solidity because he is ‘certain’ that Desdemona is guilty and that she will soon be dead. Violent self-deception is the “cause” and precondition of Othello’s calm, block-like speech in the final scene. Similarly, it is too simplistic to contend that the “exaggerated, false rhetoric”¹¹⁷ following his discovery of Desdemona’s innocence is simply the result of “[t]he Iago-spirit” that “never finally envelops him”¹¹⁸:

O cursèd, cursèd slave!
Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight
Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!
Oh! Oh! Oh!
(V.ii.283-9).

Although there is an unmistakable and intense feeling of pain, of self-torture, in these lines, it is a pain that allows Othello to expel his uncertainty and thereby to recover his old form of speech. The painful ugliness of Othello’s violent speech is, like his actual violence towards Desdemona, the very *condition* of the “architectural stateliness”¹¹⁹ that surrounds it. It recalls his longing that God “try [him] with affliction” rather than with the corruption of his heart. Alone and afflicted, Othello can now return to his self-contained language.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.79.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.77

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.94.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.78.

It is in this sense that Leavis is right that “he remains the same Othello” even when “he discovers his mistake”.¹²⁰ But Leavis is wrong to suggest he remained the same throughout, for the violence is necessary to *restore* the “*Othello* music”. It needs restoring because the trauma of love has taken him away from his old self. He cannot love and be this Othello. Except, of course, that he can when Desdemona is dead and her purity assured: “Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee / And love thee after” (V.ii.18-19). For while she is alive and without a “formal criterion...to distinguish the real from semblance”, Othello is caught in “the realm of suspicion”.¹²¹ Drawing on Hegel’s writing on the French Revolution, Badiou argues that because “corruption is the ‘natural’ state of affairs” and “everyone is *suspect*”, “[o]nly nothing is not suspect”, and, according to the “logic of purification”, the solution is thus the “bringing about the nothing”, which is death.¹²² Following the logic of purification, Othello discovers that he, through Iago, is the corruption he was searching for, and that Desdemona’s perfection may be loved once more. It can be loved because it is pure image; “monumental alabaster” (V.i.5). Hence Cavell’s argument that “the failure to acknowledge a best case of the other is a denial of the other, presaging the death of the other, say by stoning...and the death of our capacity to acknowledge as such, the turning of our hearts to stone”.¹²³

With Desdemona’s purity assured Othello can finally retreat from Cyprus into the certain tale of his past where he is most at home. The “quarried speech”¹²⁴ returns, and along with it the effortless mastery of command:

¹²⁰ Leavis, p.135.

¹²¹ Badiou, *Century*, p.54.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Cavell, p.138.

¹²⁴ Knight, p.78.

Behold, I have a weapon;
 A better never did sustain
 Upon a soldier's thigh. I have seen the day
 That, with this little arm and this good sword,
 I have made my way through more impediments
 Than twenty times your stop.
 (V.ii.266-271)

He has rediscovered the Othello he knows how to be. Now he really does know his cue, and it is to stillness and death: "Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed. / Here is my journey's end" (V.ii.273-4). He speaks words of retreat and diminishment but in the tone of command: "Do you go back dismayed? 'Tis a lost fear. / Man but a rush against Othello's breast / And he retires" (V.ii.276-8). The use of the third person, the description of another's fear and the power to pacify it, all denote his utter mastery of the situation, recalling his night-time confrontation with Brabantio.

A storyteller first and last, Othello seems to compulsively perpetuate his own myth in his final lines. The almost studied irrelevance of this farewell speaks to a continuing avoidance. First, his notorious claim that he is "one that loved not wisely but too well" (V.ii.353) is manifestly a poor reflection of events or of Othello. Second, his suggestion that he is "one whose hand, / Like the base Indian,¹²⁵ threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (V.ii.355-7) grossly misrepresents his tale. Knowing or not knowing something was never Othello's problem. He was well aware of Desdemona's value, for it meant everything. Meisel quotes Pinter to show how "a torrent of language" can be "employed" as a form of "silence", designed as a "stratagem to cover [the] nakedness" of "true silence".¹²⁶ By cloaking himself in the grand language of his story, Othello follows Iago's demonic trick of "inclosing

¹²⁵ Or "Judean" in the Folio.

¹²⁶ Meisel, p.169.

reserve”, which “is ingenious enough to transform the disclosure itself into a mystification”.¹²⁷ It is, in the end, an avoidance of the naked and vulnerable self that is capable of love. It is an avoidance of the only cue that mattered: that of Desdemona’s consecration. That he failed to consecrate himself in return, to give himself in weakness, to endureth all things and believeth all things for her, is smothered, like Desdemona herself, by Othello’s all-encompassing music.

The end of *Othello* almost parodies Hegel’s tragic affirmation, in which “the heart of the hero recoils into simple unity with itself, when it says: ‘It is so’”.¹²⁸ For Othello, this return to himself is a re-immersion in his self-contained symbolic realm. In Badiou’s terms, Othello retreats from “[c]ourage as insubordination to the symbolic order” which “turns the radical absence of any security into its force”.¹²⁹ What should have been the basis of the subject – “the junction of an intervention and a rule of faithful connection”¹³⁰ to the event – becomes the abyss in which it drowns. The motion of life is entombed in his architectural stillness. Othello’s final speech – the glorious piece of confusion that is his story of the “turbaned Turk” (V.ii.362) – thus makes a mockery of Hegel’s idea that the tragic hero “remains true to himself” and “manifest[s] the cheerfulness and serenity of tranquillity”.¹³¹ In the cutting words of Eliot, we witness a “terrible exposure of human weakness”: “What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is *cheering himself up*. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself”.¹³²

¹²⁷ Kiekegaard, *Anxiety*, p.128.

¹²⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p.158.

¹²⁹ Badiou, *Subject*, p.160.

¹³⁰ Badiou, *Being*, p.239.

¹³¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.158.

¹³² Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p.130.

Othello is at once the Turk and the slayer of the Turk. He both revels in and hates himself. He both protects and ravages Venice. There is great scope for cultural analysis in this ending: of Othello seeing himself through Venetian eyes, hating himself for being an outsider, wanting to paint himself as a Venetian even in his alienness.¹³³ But his confused self-immolating also marks the final destination of the “*Othello* music” as he is consumed by himself, becoming everything. Othello is all in this tale, the proud Venetian, the cruel Turk, and the protective warrior. He accuses himself and he punishes himself. He possesses all roles. That they also possess him is no concern for Othello, nor has it ever been. From the start he was possessed by his story. Only Desdemona, the one cue he could neither read nor grasp, broke this totality. But now he knows. He is to play his own executioner and possess himself in full. Action and knowledge and self are united at last.

¹³³ See Pye, pp.436-7; Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989, p.48.

Chapter Three: *Hamlet* and the Ghost

The following two chapters trace Hamlet's arrival in two distinct but interrelated stages. This chapter examines his emergence from the event of the ghost's appearance. Rather than treating Hamlet's interiority as the central source of the drama or, indeed, of 'Hamlet', I explore how it is produced by the divided nature of the ghost, which is at once an excessive spectral intrusion and the bearer of a restrictive command. Chapter Four explores Hamlet's (re)arrival in the graveyard following the mysterious event of his voyage to England, which takes place offstage, between Acts Four and Five. Ewan Fernie stresses how this second Hamlet emerges in the materiality of the graveyard, where the ghost is gone and meaning and action emerge immanently from events.¹ In contrast, I argue that Hamlet's (re)arrival does not mark the end of the ghost but Hamlet's acceptance of its spectral excess. The nebulosity of *Hamlet's* second event, which takes place beyond the borders of the play, and which is dramatised through an unstable movement between the material graveyard and the unseen voyage, and between temporalities, refuses any simple application of Badiou's event or of the concept of 'immanence'. Drawing on Derrida's engagement with the play, I show how both Hamlet and *Hamlet* exist at the crossroads of immanence and deferral, action and possibility, sameness and difference, and, as such, suggest a potential point of confluence between the widely different philosophies of Badiou and Derrida.

The previous chapters have highlighted the inscrutable energy of the dramatic events that found Shakespeare's characters. In *Hamlet* this energy and excess is almost

¹ Ewan Fernie, "The Last Act: Presentism, Spirituality and the Politics of Hamlet", *Spiritual Shakespeares*. Ewan Fernie. Ed. London: Routledge, 2005, 186-211.

dispersed throughout the play-world, refusing any stable location. We are thrown into the midst of a ‘happening’ of porous borders. And this is true from the play’s first scene. In contrast to the fairly stable social worlds of *Romeo and Juliet’s* Verona or *Othello’s* Venice, or at least the fairly stable dichotomies of Montague and Capulet, Venetian and outsider, *Hamlet* begins with disorientation and confusion. Their identities obscured, the guards challenge each other on dark midnight ramparts. Shakespeare disorients his speakers, as the relief mistakenly challenges the watch, and then that ultimate figure of the excessive and the unnatural, the ghost, interrupts Bernardo’s attempt to “speak of this” (I.i.32). We are thrust into a world coming apart at the seams. Unnatural beings creep through the gaps of its stitching. The return of “the King that’s dead” (I.i.39) marks a world of “fear and wonder” (I.i.42) that is utterly alien to the concrete social orders of Venice and Verona. “By heaven”, Horatio “charge[s]” it to “speak” (I.i.47), but it “stalks away” (I.i.48), awaiting another.

But even the coming of this other, which promises to reveal all mysteries, notoriously fails to penetrate the play’s diffused and ungraspable happening. While the force infiltrating Denmark from beyond the grave speaks to some ‘event’ – it “bodes some strange eruption to our state” (I.i.68) – it is an event of radical uncertainty. We are always struggling to grasp quite what happens to Hamlet. When Hamlet enters unheralded, dressed in black amongst the coloured court, and waiting 64 lines to speak, we have a hero that, like the ghostly event, is not fully present or stably located. Hamlet, as with his first line – “A little more than kin and less than kind” (I.ii.65) – awaits some future moment for his full significance. A part of this waiting stems from the way Hamlet’s “I know not ‘seems’” (I.ii.76) opens a chasm between outward

“actions that a man might play” and “that within which passeth show” (I.ii.84-5). The gap between inner being and outward act speaks to a refusal to be placed that is reminiscent of Iago’s impossible desire to sever “[t]he native act and figure of [his] heart” from any “outward action” (*Othello*, I.i.61-2). Hamlet’s isolation is soon confirmed in his first soliloquy, “O that this too solid flesh would melt” (I.ii.129), in which he shrinks in disgust from the world’s “unweeded garden”, full of “things rank and gross in nature” (I.ii.135-6). Although such disgust is a mainstay of Hamlet’s speech it is not his defining principle, for Hamlet’s melting also calls us back to the ghost, melting between worlds, fleshless, waiting.

Ghostly arrivals

The shifting ghost opens a world, and a Hamlet, beyond the Iago-like disillusionment that severs inner and outer being. It comes from beyond this world. As the ghost itself describes, it is “confined to fast in [the] fires” of an unseen “prison-house” whose harrowing “secrets” it is “forbid [t]o tell” (I.v.11-14). Moreover, theatrically, the ghost emerges from the unseen realm lying under the stage. “When the ghost first appeared in the original staging he climbed out of the trapdoor in the middle of the Globe’s stage”, coming from an “understage area” that, as Gurr and Ichikawa write, “had a symbolic function as hell”.² Whether it is hell or purgatory, the ghost’s entrance from the dark recesses below the stage marks an intrusion from another world both dramatically and metaphysically. Everything surrounding the ghost, the “fear and wonder” of its observers and interlocutors, its movement under their feet, its coming from the unseen, creates the sense of something singular and excessive

² Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000, p.49.

entering the frame. And this happening, this event, is what pushes Hamlet into another dimension, despite sharing Iago's detached cynicism.

The intrusive quality of *Hamlet's* ghost is neither necessary nor typical for early modern stage ghosts. A brief comparison with *The Spanish Tragedy*³ reveals Shakespeare's distinctive spectrality. In Kyd's play, not only is the ghost of Andrea a mere spectator to events, he quickly fades from the memories of the living. Indeed, Andrea calls attention to his own irrelevance by claiming that his former lover, Bel-imperia, "loved [him] more than all the world" (II.v.3-6), while the play shows her falling in love with his former best friend, Horatio. Although Bel-Imperia often refers to Andrea, it is constantly stressed that Horatio now "sit[s] in Bel -imperia's thoughts", has found "harbour in her breast", and is her "second love" (I.iv.61-4), vibrant and alive. Andrea is barely real; he is a deflated presence into whom Horatio and Bel-imperia blow hollow words, he half-rises for the barest moment before shrinking into nothingness. So whereas the ghost of Old Hamlet continues to speak with passion and desire, expressing his disgust at the "shameful lust" (I.v.45) of his brother and his Queen – indeed, almost imposing his desire on Hamlet – Andrea's ghost is unfazed by his speedy replacement in Bel-imperia's affections. What is more, following Horatio's death in II.iv, the play's entire focus shifts to Hieronimo's subject-altering grief for the murdered Horatio. The battle-slain Andrea is less than an afterthought. Unlike *Hamlet's* ghost, Andrea's ghost has no afterlife in the world of the living.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the unchanging insignificance of the deflated ghost hangs heavy in the air, not "promise-crammed" (III.ii.86) but promise-parched. In *Hamlet*,

³ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy. Four Revenge Tragedies*. K.E. Maus. Ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

however, we are not dealing with a spectral spectator but a radical spectral intrusion. While Fernie is right to point to the “uncanny *sameness* that is a main source of [the ghost’s] terrifying power”, it seems a stretch to argue that sameness is its characteristic feature, or that “[w]hat ‘harrows’ Horatio is that the ghost is ‘most like’ Old Hamlet”.⁴ What is so unsettling is not simply its similarity to “the King that’s dead”, it is that what appears to be similar is also so manifestly in excess of the old King. What is the same is also inexplicably, harrowingly, different. It is from beyond (the grave, if nothing else).

In a strange way, the ghost emerges as a singularity in a similar way to Hamlet: in and as an excess of its surrounds. For both Hamlet and his ghostly father, it is their undefined *difference* from their surrounds that makes them compelling singularities. While I will be addressing this point in detail later, it is worth noting that this marks a confluence of divergent philosophies. As Gallagher notes in *Spiritual Shakespeares*:

Badiou and Levinas share with Paul (as do Derrida and Marion) the conviction that subjectivity is not, as it is for cultural historicism, socially determined: it is exactly what exceeds social determination.⁵

The ghost, which returns when it shouldn’t, and which shatters cultural forms of grieving, is the play’s dark and conflicted form of the “sheer excessiveness of grace [that] disrupts and alters the entire field of the given”⁶ and gives rise to the excessive subject. Rather than being a cultural determinist like Iago, Hamlet longs for what is unique and unconditioned when he reaches for the ghost. The ghost almost arises out of Hamlet’s longing to preserve the inimitability of his father:

⁴ Fernie, “Last Act”, p.196.

⁵ Lowell Gallagher, “Waiting for Gobbo”, *Spiritual Shakespeares*. Ewan Fernie. Ed. London: Routledge, 2005, 73-93, p.81.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
 Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
 Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
 That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane. O answer me!
 (I.iv.21-26)

To some extent, Hamlet's reckless disregard for spiritual consequences mirrors Laertes' "Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit! / I dare damnation" (IV.v.128-9). And yet, its direction is altogether different, for it does not yet focus on revenge, but on the desire to re-experience his loved one, to encounter him again. It is for this reason that he views his mother as something bestial. She has forgotten his father, which is to say that she has forgotten him as an irreplaceable singularity: "O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer!" (I.ii.150-1). Indeed, she becomes less than a beast: she becomes an automated role, a name, 'Queen', an act "that a [wo]man might play". The Queen thereby shares the logic of her new king, who defines grief by custom: "But you must know your father lost a father; / That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound / In filial obligation for some term / To do obsequious sorrow" (I.ii.89-92). Here one's loss is automatically equated with that of others – one's father, one's father's father – and is thus prescribed by "filial obligation".

The divided ghost

If the ghost is a sudden spectral emergence of the singular, its *command* is of an altogether different nature. It binds and restricts, tying Hamlet down to a formulaic task and tying the loss of his father to the killing of his uncle. Ironically, the ghost's

call for vengeance follows the same automated logic as Claudius' mourning. It bears no relation to the singularity of his loss but sets up an equivalence that must be enacted on the basis of "filial obligation" (I.ii.91). The wretched uncle has stolen the beloved father's life and wife, and now the father wants Hamlet to act as if they were the same after all by slaying Claudius to "set things right" (I.v.190). The singularity of memory thus becomes entangled with an imposed duty based upon equivalence. The ghost's command both binds Hamlet's memory of his father to Claudius and binds Hamlet to the role of 'revenger':

HAMLET: Speak, I am bound to hear.
 GHOST: So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.
 HAMLET: What?
 GHOST: I am thy father's spirit,
 Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
 And for the day confined to fast in fires
 Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
 Are burnt and purged away.
 ...
 If thou didst ever thy dear father love—
 HAMLET: O God!
 GHOST: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
 (I.v.6-25)

Hamlet is "bound" to hear and, according to the ghost, "to revenge". It is worth taking this language seriously. Both the ghost and the play do bind Hamlet to revenge. The very genre demands it. But if Hamlet is bound to perform his defining act what makes Hamlet Hamlet? What distinguishes him from his ghostly forefathers, from revenging heroes such as Hieronimo? It is the *division* between this binding to revenge and the unlocatable but foundational energy of the ghost's appearance: a division that is foundational to Hamlet.

Despite being “bound” to revenge, Hamlet’s responses, “What?” and “O God!”, speak to an immediate unbinding. Not that the injunction to revenge dissipates; rather, Hamlet is jarred and taken-aback by the injunction. “What?” is both a questioning of what he is bound to revenge and a sort of double take; a surprised reaction to a non sequitur. And this jolting opens a gap between the preordained task of revenge and Shakespeare’s representation of Hamlet’s interiority. According to Cavell, this gap indicates how “revenge” is what “debars Hamlet from existence”.⁷ Cavell contends that while the ghost “asks initially for revenge for his murder”, he goes on to ask “Hamlet ‘not to bear’ ...that ‘the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest’”, and thereby “asks the son to take the father’s place, to make his life come out even for him”, which ultimately “deprives the son of his identity”.⁸ There is an unmistakable sense that Hamlet is being weighed down by this duty when he cries: “Haste, haste me to know it, that with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love / May sweep to my revenge” (I.v.29-31). The ghost may “find” Hamlet’s swift initial response “apt” (I.v.31) but, as Greenblatt observes, “[i]t is as if the desire for haste is so intense that it erases the very person who does the desiring: the subject of the wish has literally vanished from the sentence”.⁹

Hamlet cannot, however, be defined by a simple opposition between obligation and subjectivity, duty and consciousness. Something subtler is at play. For the ghost embodies (or disembodies) not only the duty to revenge – which threatens to subsume subjectivity – but also the intrusive jolt that precipitates subjectivity’s arrival. As Greenblatt goes on to note, even Hamlet’s words of “swift” vengeance, in which he

⁷ Cavell, p.188.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001, pp.207-8.

seeks to achieve a oneness with the task, establish a gap between the task and the subject:

Yet the metaphors Hamlet uses have the strange effect of inadvertently introducing some subjective resistance into the desired immediacy, since meditation and love are experiences that are inward, extended, and prolonged, experiences at a far remove from the sudden, decisive, murderous action that he wishes to invoke. . . . This corrosive inwardness – the hallmark of the entire play and the principal cause of its astonishing, worldwide renown – is glimpsed even in his first frantic response to the Ghost...¹⁰

Here we begin to see the significance of the gap that was opened by Hamlet's "What?" and "O God!". The ghost's push toward revenge not only threatens to erase the subject, it *gives rise to the subject*. Here I go further than Greenblatt, for it is not "even in his first frantic response to the ghost" [emphasis added] that Hamlet's "corrosive inwardness" is "glimpsed", it is *born here*. The ghost, in its contradictory combination of remembrance and revenge, opens a division in the subject that establishes it as something multiply-located, self-questioning, turbulent, and multi-sourced.

What Cavell misses, therefore, is the uneasy duality of the ghost. It combines a spectral appearance that ruptures the existing order and stresses singularity, excess, and memory, with an automated command that stresses equivalence, repetition and confining duty. Taken in this light, Hamlet's swift movement to embrace the ghost's command – to fully identify with it – is not simply a threat to subjectivity, it is what makes the necessarily divided consciousness so intense in Hamlet:

Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?

¹⁰ Ibid., p.208.

Yea, from the table of my memory
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pleasures past,
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain
 Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, yes, by heaven.
 O most pernicious woman!
 (I.v.95-105)

Hamlet is here represented as feeling a pull toward full-identification with the ghost's command. It is of kindred spirit to Othello's claim to know his cues. Unlike Othello, however, Hamlet never achieves even a temporary 'oneness' with his task. Rather, this pull is what makes his incomplete identification, his manifest severance from this duty or role, so unbearable to Hamlet. It throws the spectral, shifting, nature of the ghost – and indeed of Hamlet's subjectivity – into stark relief. It establishes the peculiar force of the division that constitutes Hamlet's subjectivity. We see this division almost immediately as he veers from the declaration that the ghost's "commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of [his] brain", to his conclusion: "O most pernicious woman!". The flow of his language, its marching progress toward committed revenge, is stopped in its tracks. It is another of the jolts that maintains the excessive (here existing as disgust) in the midst of the automated and thereby makes a mockery of his promise to remember nothing but revenge.

Moving forward, this divided regard creates the impression of a consciousness in turmoil that flows through his classic soliloquies and antic speech. It is expressed famously in Hamlet's declaration that "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!" (I.v.189-90). His interiority emerges, and he arrives as 'Hamlet', through becoming other than his old self. The Hamlet that we know is divided from the "noble mind", "[t]he glass of fashion and the mould of form", that

Ophelia describes as being “o’erthrown” (III.i.149-152). Claudius expresses something similar in his typically functional address: “Something have you heard / Of Hamlet’s transformation – so I call it, / Since not th’ exterior nor the inward man / Resembles that it was” (II.ii.4-7); while the Queen speaks of her “too-much changed son” (II.ii.36). All this should tell us not that Hamlet possesses something inward and deep, but that he has been transformed by what has happened. Indeed, Claudius has Rosencrantz and Guildenstern search for some external event that, “More than his father’s death,” has “put him / So much from th’ understanding of himself” (II.ii.8-9). It tells us that his inwardness is *new* and that it *comes from without*.

Hamlet’s ‘delay’

Hamlet’s division, prompted by the division between the excessiveness of the ghost and the restrictiveness of its command, sheds light on his so-called ‘delay’. Speaking of Hamlet’s ‘delay’ of course has its risks. As De Grazia stresses, “[w]hen organized around” Hamlet’s delay, “the play lends itself to infinite reprogrammings: any theory of what makes a subject, however construed, tick (or stop ticking) can be fed into the machinery of the play”.¹¹ The openness of Hamlet’s delay is perhaps one reason why “Hamlet remains proleptically in tune with the latest present. Since 1800, he has proven capable of accommodating each new modification of inwardness”.¹² Rather than offering a new diagnosis or account of this “inwardness”, however, I approach Hamlet’s delay as the product of *outwardness*. This is in stark contrast to the Romantic account of Hamlet, which made him “modern” through the “possession of

¹¹ Margreta De Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007, p.170.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.22.

interiority or subjectivity, whether imagined in terms of Coleridge's psychology or Hegel's consciousness".¹³

So, for instance, Coleridge writes that Shakespeare "meant to portray a person in whose view the external world and all its incidents and objects were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves".¹⁴ "Shakespeare places him in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in" and the "result" is "[e]ndless reasoning and urging".¹⁵ Apart from the obvious objection that the "external world" and its ghost *are* of intense "interest" to Hamlet, the very concept of "interest" indicates how Coleridge's analysis rests on imaginative surmise about Hamlet's posited inner state. By ignoring Hamlet's tumultuous relation with the outside world, and how it forms his interiority, we are left with the conclusion that he fails to act "merely from that aversion to action which prevails among such as have a world within themselves".¹⁶

Similarly, Hegel points to Hamlet's "deep tranquil heart... which does not give itself outward form".¹⁷ Hamlet's delay is again defined by a presupposed inner nature: "he persists in the inactivity of a beautiful inner soul which cannot make itself actual or engage in the relationships of his present world".¹⁸ What is startling when one considers the diffused energy of the play's opening scenes, is that such readings ignore what *happens* to Hamlet, including the appearance of the ghost that prepares for his arrival. The tearing apart of the old world, the disorientation on the ramparts,

¹³ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁴ Coleridge, pp.67.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.583.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.584.

the undead figure coming from the void, are all normalised as some sort of effect of Hamlet's inner being or psychology. He has a "deep tranquil heart". Consciousness becomes the source of all mysterious happenings rather than their effect.

Ultimately, all such readings place the play's (and the character's) driving force in an assumed and unverifiable prior existence. In doing so, they follow a basic Hegelian pattern that is rejected by the concept of 'arrivals': the idea that "the 'still-more' is immanent to the 'already'; everything that is, is already 'still-more'".¹⁹ They suggest that the subject that arrives is already 'in' the character. We come here to the old, discredited account of 'character'. Hegel contends that the "collision" in *Hamlet*, in contrast to Greek tragedy, "turns strictly here not on a son's pursuing an ethically justified revenge and being forced in the process to violate the ethical order, but on Hamlet's personal character. His noble soul is not made for this kind of energetic activity".²⁰ However, as the cases of France, Romeo, and Othello have already shown, this is not how Shakespearean character works. Hamlet, like these characters, arrives by being *changed* from his old mode of being. His "personal character" is not pre-existing. The "still-more" is not "already" in Hamlet; it is, as with Badiou's event, something that *happens to* Hamlet.

The severe reaction against 'character' has not stopped critics from trying to find something "already" in Hamlet to explain his delay. De Grazia notes that there is "now a long tradition in which critics identify Hamlet's delay as the play's problem and propose a new disorder to account for it, often drawing upon the latest theories in

¹⁹ Badiou, *Being*, p.162.

²⁰ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 2, pp.1225-6.

philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis”.²¹ Perhaps the most typical postmodern reprogramming has been to point to the *absence* of Hamlet’s inner essence; to show how Hamlet slides between roles without ever residing in one. As Belsey sums up:

Francis Barker has written of Hamlet’s assertion of an authentic inner reality defined by its difference from an inauthentic exterior... ‘That within’ is here distinguished from ‘actions that a man might play’, and this interiority, this essence, the heart of Hamlet’s mystery, has been the quarry not only of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, agents of the king’s surveillance, but of liberal-humanist criticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ... The quest is, of course, endless, because the object of it is not there. As Barker goes on to argue, ‘this interiority remains, in Hamlet, gestural At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing’. ... Alternately mad, rational, vengeful, inert, determined, the Hamlet of the first four acts of the play is above all not an agent.²²

While it is true that it is not “possible to locate the true, the essential Hamlet”,²³ the problem with this approach is evident: it does not account for how Hamlet *is* produced through the drama. By focusing on the absent “centre” Belsey and Barker are still defined by the concept of “centre”. They are still looking for something “already” in Hamlet, only now it is a typically postmodern absence: Hamlet revolves around the empty core of postmodern subjectivity, sliding endlessly between roles and names. He becomes the “ready-formed dictionary” of “words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely”.²⁴ So while there is no unified or essential “centre” of Hamlet, the focus on its absence misses how something *does arrive*, and how this exceeds the shifting of the signifier.

Delayed consciousness

²¹ De Grazia, p.170.

²² Belsey, *Subject*, pp.41-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.42.

²⁴ Barthes, “Author”, p.223.

What arrives is not a “centre” but something altogether more dispersed. The ghost is the originating ‘generator’ of Hamlet’s consciousness, but its scattered, shifting, and excessive nature spills into the play. If the ghost’s divided nature jolts Hamlet into being, his ‘delay’ is the ongoing process that preserves the excess and the division of the ghost after it slides away. Hamlet’s delay is not a stumbling block but a creative process that allows us to see the positive opportunities offered by the absence of a “centre” of the subject. In what follows I examine how the play, through events or occasions that are the capsules of Hamlet’s consciousness, forms a diffused field of consciousness. The idea that Hamlet’s consciousness is dispersed throughout the play-text and the play-world rather than being centred ‘in’ him reflects, at the level of character, Evelyn Tribble’s point that the early modern repertory system was one of “distributed cognition”, in which agency was shared between diverse elements such as “the playhouse, the plots, actors’ roles, the plays’ verbal structures, and...the organizational practices of the companies”.²⁵

Important here is Bergson’s understanding of “life”, and indeed of “consciousness”, as something “that at every moment...is creating something”.²⁶ The intellect, in contrast, struggles to comprehend “an original situation, which imparts something of its own originality to its elements”.²⁷ This is true of both Romantic and Postmodern criticism, which, in attributing Hamlet’s delay to either a deep interiority or a contentless, gestural interiority, miss how Hamlet’s interiority is a novel effect of the “original situation” created by Shakespeare’s dramaturgy. Rather than pre-existing as either an essential self or as the linguistic system and its endless chain of signifiers –

²⁵ Evelyn Tribble, “Distributing Cognition in the Globe”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56.2 (2005), 135-155, p.142.

²⁶ Bergson, *Creative*, p.30.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

rather, in other words, than being “already” there – Bergson’s writing on consciousness hints at how Hamlet’s delay *produces* the effect of interiority:

When we mechanically perform an habitual action, when the somnambulist automatically acts his dream, unconsciousness may be absolute; but this is merely due to the fact that the representation of the act is held in check by the performance of the act itself, which resembles the ideas so perfectly, and fits it so exactly, that consciousness is unable to find room between them. *Representation is stopped up by action.* The proof of this is, that if the accomplishment of the act is arrested or thwarted by an obstacle, consciousness may reappear. . . . The obstacle creates nothing positive; it simply makes a void, removes a stopper. This inadequacy of act to representation is precisely what we here call consciousness.²⁸

Both Hamlet’s unfulfilled desire to “wipe away” all but the ghost “from the table of [his] memory” (I.v.96-7), and Laertes’ fusion of action and nature when he cries that the “drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard” (IV.v.114), reflect the idea of a mechanical action whose effect is that “[r]epresentation is stopped up by action”. There is no “room” for consciousness to operate. Everything else is “wipe[d] away” (I.v.99) by the act of vengeance. Consciousness only emerges “if the accomplishment of the act is arrested or thwarted by an obstacle”. The obstacle – the delay – in Hamlet is notoriously difficult. But whereas the Romantics suggested that this obstacle was inward, was *in* Hamlet’s consciousness, Bergson confirms my concentration on the *outward*: consciousness only emerges through coming up against the obstacle; through the delay. That the obstacle “creates nothing positive”, that it “simply makes a void”, may seem to support the postmodern idea of a gestural Hamlet. Consciousness does not denote any inner essence but is a gap. However, as Bergson makes clear, the gap is the very place for creation and novelty:

If we examine this point more closely, we shall find that consciousness is the light that plays around the zone of possible actions or potential activity which

²⁸ Ibid., pp.151-2.

surrounds the action really performed by the living being. It signifies hesitation or choice. Where many equally possible actions are indicated without there being any real action (as in a deliberation that has not come to an end), consciousness is intense. Where the action performed is the only action possible (as in activity of the somnambulistic or more generally automatic kind), consciousness is reduced to nothing.²⁹

The division between the ghost's spectral singularity and its command creates the "zone of possible actions", the "hesitation or choice", that enlivens and intensifies consciousness. It "makes a void, removes a stopper", creating "room" for the "light" of consciousness and the emergence of the subject. 'Hamlet', like the ghost, emerges from the void.

Although the process of delay is creative, it nonetheless remains torturous. In his analysis of the "rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy, Greenblatt notes that Hamlet's "self-accusations...do not correspond to what the play actually depicts" as "we do not see Hamlet dicing, wrenching, or otherwise behaving as if he has forgotten his father's death".³⁰ Rather, his "antic disposition" is "consistent with an excess of remembrance".³¹ Hamlet's self-accusations – that he, "A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak[s] / Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of [his] cause" (II.ii.544-5) – express his desire to escape the "excess of remembrance" that is born of the ghost's excess. Hamlet longs, in part, to follow the player who, "in a dream of passion / Could force his soul so to his whole conceit" (II.ii.529-30). The soul is forced wholly within its role, smoothing over the spectral division that founds Hamlet's consciousness and avoiding the abyss of consciousness. Similarly, Pyrrhus, the model of the bloody revenger, is unaffected by Hamlet's self-division. Pyrrhus may, in miniature, resemble Hamlet by inexplicably stopping before the act when "his sword...seemed

²⁹ Ibid., p.152.

³⁰ Greenblatt, *Purgatory*, p.218.

³¹ Ibid.

i'th' air to stick" and he, "like a neutral to his will and matter, [d]id nothing", but this 'delay' never reflects back into his consciousness, never divides him from himself, but soon dissipates as he strikes Priam with "[a] rousèd vengeance" (II.ii.457-468). To become Pyrrhus is, therefore, to settle the ghost's division and to come down on the side of automated duty. Hamlet is both enticed by the bloody serenity of full interpolation by the command and tortured by its impossibility:

Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
Tweaks me by th' nose, gives me the lie i'th' throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
(II.ii.549-552)

Whereas this conflicted voicing of ghostly duty, which is both inward and outward, reflects a mind at work, full identification with the duty to revenge would be the end of consciousness itself. The "somnambulist"³² type of action embodied by Pyrrhus cannot do justice to the diffused event of the ghost's appearance. The event's excess spreads outwards, and, shifting under the characters' feet, is distributed throughout the play-world and through Hamlet himself, his interiority now broken into antic faces, wild word-play, and contemplative soliloquy. These are markers of what Weimann, speaking of Hamlet's "antic disposition", describes as the "release from representivity", which is "at the center of a nonrepresentational dramaturgy as manifested in the achieved strategy of dissociating Hamlet from the courtly world of dramatic illusion and aristocratic decorum".³³ It is this dramaturgy – and particularly the obscurity and diffusion of the play's foundational event – rather than Hamlet's

³² Bergson, *Creative*, p.151.

³³ Robert Weimann, "Mimesis in Hamlet", *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. Eds. New York: Routledge, 1990, 275-291, p.284.

inner being, which establishes the “inadequacy of [the] act” of automated revenge “to [Shakespeare’s] representation”.³⁴

In this sense, revenge in *Hamlet* plays a similar role to animal instinct for Bergson: “Where consciousness appears, it does not so much light up the instinct itself as the thwartings to which instinct is subject; it is the *deficit* of instinct, the distance between the act and the idea, that becomes consciousness”.³⁵ It is therefore possible to reverse the traditional reading that sees Hamlet’s deep consciousness as being trapped by the duty of revenge. Revenge is not what “debars Hamlet from existence”,³⁶ rather, the cultural and familial duty of revenge induces consciousness by revealing the “*deficit*” of this customary response, its distance from Hamlet’s singular memory of his father. As Levinas puts it, “[t]hought begins the very moment consciousness...conceives of the exteriority, beyond its nature as a living being, that encloses it”.³⁷ It is the deadlock between automated duty and the excess that spills from the unseen that creates the impression of Hamlet’s ‘depth’ and, in dramatic terms, produces the opposing voices that form the basis of soliloquy.

Self-regard comes – as it did with France and Romeo and Othello – from the confrontation with the event. But with Hamlet this self-regard is heightened by the fact that the event is so obscure and divided that it does not give rise to either a positive fidelity (France and Romeo) or a negative retreat (Othello). The event of the ghost, which both demands the closure of an automated action and prompts the opening of another dimension, leaves Hamlet betwixt and between. And that, as

³⁴ Bergson, *Creative*, p.152.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.152-3.

³⁶ Cavell, p.188.

³⁷ Levinas, *Entre*, p.12.

Bergson stresses, is the very place of consciousness. Because “perception” and the “nervous system” are “entirely directed toward action, and not toward pure knowledge”, “the growing richness of this perception” leads to a “wider range of indetermination left to the choice of the living being”.³⁸ Accordingly, the level of consciousness is the same as “the zone of indetermination which surrounds its activity”.³⁹ The “imprisoned consciousness” only “set[s] itself free” by “the complicating of action with action”.⁴⁰ Betwixt and between is, in my terms, the (non)place of Hamlet’s unstable arrival.

While it is tempting to ask, with Grady, whether “Hamlet’s memory of the Ghost’s injunction to revenge [will] remain external to his sense of self, or [whether he will] incorporate it permanently within a new consciousness of self and situation”,⁴¹ there is no possibility of simply internalising the injunction, because the division is what founds Hamlet’s dramatic being. It opens Bergson’s void of consciousness. It marks the rupture by which Hamlet emerges *as an exception* to what is and to what he was. Here there is a synergy between Bergson and Badiou, for whom the subject is exceptional and not structural. Badiou “excludes all attempts to put the subject back into the saddle as simple centre, as point of origin”; instead, “the subject-process essentially touches upon scission”.⁴² For Badiou, “the subjective effect takes hold” through “occurrences of ‘or else’, ‘unless’...‘except that’”, which are “signifiers” of “a caesura between two orders”.⁴³ The void that gives rise to consciousness cannot be expelled, because “without this infamous and total gap, without this grammar of

³⁸ Bergson, *Matter*, p.31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁴⁰ Bergson, *Creative*, p.189.

⁴¹ Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p.168.

⁴² Badiou, *Subject*, p.180.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.88.

exception, there would only be the monotonous and infinite efficacy of the grinding of being under the law of an absence”.⁴⁴ There would be no subject without the void, no arrival. We would be left with Pyrrhus.

As we saw in the Introduction, Badiou’s concept of the void is based on set-theory’s conclusion that being is made up of “a multiple of multiples”.⁴⁵ Mathematical “structure”, which is “the form of the one and its consistent multiplicities”, separates out a “situation” by splitting multiplicity into “consistency”, which is presented, and “inconsistency”, which is not.⁴⁶ Badiou terms the invisible point at which a “situation is sutured to being”, so as to exclude the inconsistent multiplicity of being – the unrepresentable – as the “void”.⁴⁷ The void is, of course, from where the event proceeds:

I will term *evental site* an entirely abnormal multiple; that is, a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation. The site, itself, is presented, but ‘beneath’ it nothing from which it is composed is presented. I will also say of such a multiple that it is *on the edge of the void*, or *foundational*...⁴⁸

Because the subject stems from the “abnormal multiple” that arises from the situation’s void, Badiou opposes what he calls “structural recurrence”, “which thinks the subject-effect...as identifiable within the uniform networks of experience”, with “a hypothesis of the rarity of the subject, which suspends its occurrence from the event, from the intervention, and from the generic paths of fidelity”.⁴⁹ Unlike the postmodern criticism that reduces Hamlet’s interiority to the structure of language, I

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.89.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.48.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.52.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.55.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.175.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.432.

follow Badiou in stressing that Hamlet only arrives through the event of the ghost, which rests “*on the edge of the void*”. It is through this “abnormal multiple”, “beneath” which we cannot see, that Hamlet can emerge from the unseen as something new and excessive.

That said, during his delay Hamlet is a subject that is never quite here, that is somehow yet to come, as he floats in the void of consciousness without channelling its energy to any clear end. There is, as yet, no “fidelity”, no “intervention”, by Hamlet in the situation. We see this diffusion of consciousness away from action and into the unknown in his most famous soliloquy. In his fears of “what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil” (III.i.68-9), his “dread of something after death” (III.i.80), Hamlet fears not so much physical death as the uncertainty of what death will do to consciousness. Furthermore, the fact that taking “arms against a sea of troubles, / And, by opposing, end them” (III.i.61-2) may refer to opposing Claudius, as much as to opposing his own life, suggests that Hamlet’s “undiscovered country” that “puzzles the will” and “makes cowards of us all” (III.i.81-85) has a resonance beyond the question of what awaits after death. It also raises the uncertain consequences an *act* may have on consciousness, plunging it into unknown seas.

Put otherwise, there is a synonymy between the act and death. Hamlet’s language stretches away from either death or the particular act of killing Claudius into the obscurity of what comes after any act. At first this is envisaged as the nothingness of sleep. The act is a “consummation” (III.i.65) of a life of troubles; “tak[ing] arms” will “end them” (III.i.62). But this sleep of death is not the end at all. It raises the

spectre of what happens to consciousness afterward; of a consciousness *after* death or after the act. And it is this doubt of “what dreams may come” that “makes us rather bear those ills we have / Than fly to others that we know not of” (III.i.83-4). Hamlet envisages a further, perhaps more terrible zone of consciousness or choice, of indeterminacy, after the act is done. As with Othello, there is a terrifying uncertainty about what the subject will become through the act.

In stark contrast to Hamlet’s trailing into the unknown consequences for consciousness, for Bergson, consciousness remains “relative to the needs of action”,⁵⁰ despite its origin in the ghost-like “*interval between representation and action*”.⁵¹ Hamlet’s move into the generality of “To be, or not to be” removes this relation and stares into the “undiscovered country” of the gap itself. The “void”⁵² that creates consciousness – and thus permits genuine subjective action – becomes consciousness’ central concern, detached from any particular action. Hamlet tells Ophelia that he is “indifferent honest” but nevertheless could accuse himself “of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me” (III.i.124-6). Hamlet is looking into himself and viewing the array of offences he *might* commit. These are not enacted offences, or necessarily even future offences, but possible offences. He sees the capacity for even an “indifferent honest” man to have “more / offences at [his] beck than [he has] thoughts to put them in, imagination to / give them shape, or time to act them in” (III.i.127-9). Far from being a solid or graspable thing, the subject is envisaged as mutating with its action, stretching into an unknown future, and an unknown self.

⁵⁰ Bergson, *Creative*, p.161.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.151.

Whether it is the possibility of dreams after death, or of his possible offences, the Hamlet that arrives through ‘delay’ is unbound, not tied to any one spot. Here Kierkegaard’s writing on possibility and necessity is instructive:

Now if possibility outruns necessity, the self runs away from itself, so that it has no necessity whereto it is bound to return – then this is the despair of possibility. The self becomes an abstract possibility which tries itself out with floundering in the possible, but does not budge from the spot, nor get to any spot, for precisely the necessary is the spot; to become oneself is precisely a movement at the spot. . . . At last it is as if everything were possible – but this is precisely when the abyss has swallowed up the self.⁵³

Hamlet is “swallowed” by the void opened between the event and the subject, between the ghost’s intrusive singularity and its automated command. So while the void between the event and the subject’s action creates the space for thought, while it is the very condition for the possibility of consciousness, thinking itself becomes a trap for Hamlet: “Denmark’s a prison” (II.ii.239). For Kierkegaard, however, there is a “spot” for the subject and “the necessary is the spot”. Whereas “anxiety is the dizziness of freedom” in which “[f]reedom succumbs”,⁵⁴ freedom is restored by “submit[ting] to the necessary”.⁵⁵ In contrast to the postmodern view of Hamlet’s gestural emptiness, I will show in Chapter Four that Hamlet’s (re)arrival in Act Five marks the coming of necessity, through which Hamlet gains a “spot”, however unstable or dispersed it might be. In binding himself to the material, if still obscure, happening of the voyage, Hamlet escapes the dizzying abyss of the “undiscovered country” and comes to act.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.169.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Anxiety*, p.61.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.169.

Chapter Four: *Hamlet* and the Voyage

According to Aristotle, every good tragedy has a recognition scene in which there is “a change from ignorance to knowledge”, and “[t]he best sort of recognition is that accompanied by *peripeteia*”.¹ But what happens when the moment of recognition is itself obscure and difficult? It is clear that Hamlet recognises something in his sudden regard for “providence” (V.ii.157-8) in Act Five, that there has been a ‘reversal’ that reveals a “divinity that shapes our ends” (V.ii.10), but *what* exactly this entails and *how* Hamlet reaches this point is far from settled:

All Hamlet’s soliloquies occur before the interval; when he returns from his sea voyage (the observation is of course a commonplace) he is a changed man – although what precisely constitutes the change may not be agreed.²

Just as I examined Hamlet’s ‘delay’ as a creative process stemming from the event of the ghost, I will investigate Hamlet’s return in Act Five as a (re)arrival prompted by a second obscure event: the never present voyage to England. Whereas Hamlet’s delay teased us inward, Shakespeare now foregrounds the outward. Although “many have felt” that the “key” to his transformation “lies somewhere in Hamlet’s inner life”, Levaio observes that “Shakespeare seems wilfully to have blocked that mastery; once Hamlet returns to Denmark, there is an abrupt cessation of soliloquy”.³ When one adds Hamlet’s confrontation with the material ends of death, the non-represented voyage taking place between acts, the sudden assertion of providence, and the extravagant foregrounding of chance in Hamlet’s encounter with pirates – which in turn raises the overseeing influence of Shakespeare’s hand – we have a series of

¹ Aristotle, p.104.

² Jones, *Scenic*, p.80.

³ Ronald Levaio, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985, p.356.

pointers to what lies outside “Hamlet’s inner life”. It all speaks to a reconfigured relation between the subject and the event. In the Q2-text Hamlet departs for England while continuing to consider, however obliquely, his relation to the event of the ghost:

Examples gross as earth exhort me,
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell.
(Q2.IV.iv.45-52)

What is interesting here is how he imputes upon Fortinbras, who has been held up as a figure of immediate action, an awareness of the gap between action and the subject, which is constitutive of consciousness. According to his fantasy, Fortinbras’ ambitious “spirit...[m]akes mouths at the invisible event”. While Hamlet is hardly speaking of the event in Badiou’s terms, the phrase marks his continued obsession with the unforeseen and uncontrolled consequences of action; the way the subject’s action takes the subject away from itself and its will, “[e]xposing what is mortal and unsure / To all that fortune, death, and danger dare”. And this is a concern that circulates throughout the play’s later stages. The play has us, like Hamlet, straining to see the “invisible event”.

(i) The Graveyard

When Hamlet enters the graveyard, he has himself journeyed into the “invisible” – has experienced a second unnatural happening – and his relation to the event has been transformed. After his inflamed experience of “rashness” (V.ii.7) on the voyage,

Hamlet no longer circles compulsively around the “undiscovered country” of the void. Rather, the void has been externalised as “providence”. Ewan Fernie, who has tackled the fifth act in light of Badiou and Žižek’s thought, suggests that Hamlet is finally able to act because he embraces the material:

... [through] the novel spirituality of immanence that *Hamlet* develops in its last act. Such spirituality is not only compatible with the graveyard where it is revealed, it is a spirituality *of* the graveyard – of time, mortality and the event. I propose that the graveyard scene, and the confrontation with human finitude it represents, snuffs out the ghost, but that at the same time spirituality is transfused into material life, being absorbed into becoming.⁴

Whereas Hamlet confronted the unknown, spiritual ends of death in his “To be, or not to be” soliloquy, pushing him into the void, in the graveyard Hamlet confronts the material ends of death, pushing him into the earth. And whereas speculative thought on the “undiscovered country...puzzles the will” and “makes cowards of us all” (III.i.81-85), Hamlet’s consideration of the grave – “To what base uses we may return, Horatio!” (V.i.187) – is somehow liberating. It recalls Montaigne’s thinking on death: “It is uncertaine where death looks for us; let us expect her everie where: the premeditation of death, is a forethinking of libertie”.⁵ It is liberating, perhaps, because it is not puzzling. We return to dust. All of the endless possibilities of life come to this one destination. No longer perplexed and powerless before the great unknown, Hamlet looks to the material rather than the spiritual consequences of action. It is no longer to risk damnation “to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And, by opposing, end them” (III.i.61-2), it is now “to be damned / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil” (V.ii.69-71)

⁴ Fernie, “Last”, p.201.

⁵ Montaigne, Volume 1, p.78.

Central to Fernie's analysis of 'spirituality' in *Hamlet* is "the spirituality of a real advent"⁶ advocated by Badiou and Žižek, and its opposition to "the fact that, for Greenblatt and especially for Derrida, spirituality breaches the present from beyond".⁷ While I will challenge Fernie's assessment of Derrida, his account of the way Hamlet's "mystical experience" reveals "that 'divinity' irradiates and operates through the very imperfections of existence", and thereby turns him "into an activist who says, 'The readiness is all'",⁸ shares much with my account of Hamlet's changed relation to the event. To some extent, the materiality of the graveyard does seem to put time back into joint. Earlier, time seemed infinite and abstract in Hamlet's soliloquy on death, mirroring Claudio's speech in *Measure for Measure* in which he is appalled by the thought of what it would mean "to die, and go we know not where" (III.i.118). "I knew him, Horatio" (V.i.171) marks the fifth act's more immediate and concrete register of time, tied to the body and mortal remains. Rather than "abstract time",⁹ which "speak[s] of a...static moment",¹⁰ Hamlet's confrontation with the grave brings him more in line with Bergson's duration, which "implies a real persistence of the past in the present, a duration which is, as it were, a hyphen, a connecting link".¹¹ In this light there are good reasons for Fernie's emphasis on immanence and the present:

And yet, in the startling fifth act of *Hamlet* what is spiritually other and ultimate is not beyond but *immanent* in events (such as 'the fall of a sparrow' (5.2.157-8)) and action or 'rashness' (5.2.7). Shakespeare's most famous play ultimately dramatises a kind of eschatological presentism that suggests that our present is the place – the only and, therefore, the absolute place – of

⁶ Fernie, *Spiritual*, p.16.

⁷ Fernie, "Last", p.187.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.202-3

⁹ Bergson, *Creative*, p.22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

agency and decision where all time may and perhaps must be consummated.”¹²

However, while “immanence” is a useful way of approaching Hamlet’s transformation, it tends to obscure the complexity of the scene’s dramatic structure. Fernie’s touchstones of “agency” and “presentism” do not do justice to the difficulty of the event or its criss-crossing of temporalities. Fernie almost mystifies or romanticises ‘action’. But if we look to the dramaturgy of Hamlet’s event we see that, rather than resting in the “present” as the “absolute place”, we are tossed back and forth between the material present of the graveyard, the mysterious past of the offstage voyage, and the unknown future evoked by Hamlet’s readiness. The event that transforms Hamlet is no one of these but is spread through them all. The diffusion between temporalities (and speakers) suggests a sense of give and take between Hamlet and the voyage and, indeed, between Hamlet and the world in his apprehension of providence, which is in stark contrast to his earlier lonely prison of thought. While this newfound intermingling may be ‘immanent’, the complex dramaturgy of Hamlet’s second coming stages a confluence of present, past, and future, as well as of the material and the “beyond”, that unsettles Fernie’s distinctions.

Something has happened to Hamlet, but where and when it happened is difficult to discern. It is in the material graveyard but also the unseen voyage. To some extent the graveyard is the aftermath, or embodiment, of what has taken place between Acts Four and Five. But Hamlet does not here arrive all at once or as a finished product. The fifth act establishes an increasingly porous Hamlet. Before his entrance, we have learned of his return to Denmark and his encounter with the pirates, but we have done

¹² Fernie, “Last”, p.188.

so only through “Horatio reading a letter”, with the result that Hamlet’s “offstage heroics” are “elaborately distanced from us”.¹³ In what is in some ways a repetition of the first scene, we are made to wait for Hamlet himself. Instead of his anticipated return we are first given clowns in a graveyard.

The gravediggers remind us not only of the bloodshed Hamlet’s actions have caused, but also of the underlying problem of the relationship between action and the subject, as they equivocate over the nature of Ophelia’s death: “if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act; / and an act hath three branches: it is to act, to do, and to per- / form” (V.i.10-12). The gravediggers are not offering a ‘definition’ of action, they are exposing what has been missing all along: the act itself. The gravediggers’ talk of action points to a non-doing, to the non-killing of Claudius, to action that is yet-to-come. The dramatic meanings created by these clowns in the present of the graveyard flow into what is absent (Hamlet), what is past (Old Hamlet and Ophelia), what has been deferred (action), and what remains to be done (killing Claudius). The impossibility of resting in the present is what complicates Fernie’s view that the fifth act dramatises “a kind of eschatological presentism”¹⁴ in which the present is the “absolute place” for action and agency.

Even when Hamlet does finally re-enter, we are made to wait and Hamlet is made to share the stage. In the Folio-text, Hamlet re-emerges in the graveyard through what Gurr and Ichikawa call a “broken entrance”: “the stage direction reading ‘Enter Hamlet and Horatio a farre off’ is marked nine lines earlier [than in the Q2-text], i.e.

¹³ Levaio, p.355.

¹⁴ Fernie, “Last”, p.188.

five lines before the First Clown begins to sing”.¹⁵ And, even in Q2, “Hamlet’s first remark” – “Has this fellow no feeling of his business? A sings in grave-making” (V.i.61-2) – “implies that he and Horatio have been watching and listening to the First Gravedigger”.¹⁶ The gravediggers are thus an intimate part of Hamlet’s (re)arrival. They both tee it up and are part of it, sharing the stage as Hamlet returns and speaking as he enters. The broken, shared, and elongated entrance, while only a small dramaturgical point, shows how despite the materiality and immanence of the graveyard, Hamlet is not simply immanent in *his* action and speech. We begin to see that dramatic immanence is heterogeneous, layered, broken up, and that Hamlet is never fully his own. We again have something analogous to Tribble’s idea that “cognition is distributed across the entire [repertory] system” rather than being a property of “each individual within it”.¹⁷ The result is not that “individual agency has no place”, rather, the “cognitively rich” “environment” is “calculated to maximize individual contributions”.¹⁸ Hamlet becomes *more* through the richness of this sharing with the gravediggers and the “distanced” event.

Elam points out that “it is not possible to talk of a single theatrical message: the performance is, rather, made...of ‘multiple messages in which several channels [of communication]...are used simultaneously’”.¹⁹ So although the dramatic world arises immanently – through here-and-now events, actions, dialogue – this immanence is fragmented into multiple messages rather than existing as a smooth, single present. The gravediggers almost become the play’s form of ‘readiness’: readiness for Hamlet, readiness for change, and readiness for the end. A readiness that, like Hamlet’s, is

¹⁵ Gurr and Ichikawa, pp.76-7.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.77.

¹⁷ Tribble, p.135.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Elam, p.33.

never fully present. Much of what we think of as ‘Hamlet’ is thus projected from outside of him, but what is projected from the world also returns to Hamlet. The gravediggers speak of action only as deed, divorced from intention, and suddenly Hamlet re-emerges, having just acted as if without intention in the swapping of the commissions. It is an interweaving of dramatic codes that Elam calls “*transcodification*”.²⁰

It is the dramaturgy, then, that fills out the ‘meaning’ of Hamlet’s (re)arrival. To a great extent the shared codes, broken entrances, non-unified character, and mingled temporalities *are* Hamlet’s transformation. This overdetermined ‘Hamlet’ now shares porously with his environs rather than divorcing himself from them through speculative soliloquy. In contrast to Fernie, who contends “that the graveyard scene...snuffs out the ghost”,²¹ I argue that it is in the graveyard that Hamlet finally arrives as the spectral dimension of the ghost. Emerging from the unseen as an alien singularity, Hamlet no longer seeks unity with the ghost’s restrictive command but assumes its spectral excess in his embrace of the ungraspable “divinity that shapes our ends” (V.ii.10). Through this “divinity” Hamlet himself becomes a shifting, ghost-like being, moving through others’ voices and other places. He achieves a ghostly openness to what is outside of him.

Shakespeare’s dramaturgy here mirrors Latour’s notion of “mediation”: as opposed to strict historicism or determinism, or even postmodernism’s absence of centre, “a mediation always exceeds its condition”.²² Hamlet, the symbol of independent self-consciousness, just like Othello, the figure of self-contained heroism, only arrives as a

²⁰ Ibid., p.76.

²¹ Fernie, “Last”, p.201.

²² Latour, p.307.

subject by becoming open to his location in the play-world and the play-text.

Shakespeare again seems to pre-empt “[m]odern physics” in developing character not as a stable entity but as a “focal region” whose “influence streams away from it with finite velocity throughout the utmost recesses of space and time”.²³ From the staggered not-yet-here entrance in which the gravediggers speak to and for him, to the neither present nor past voyage, Hamlet is never a “Simple Location”²⁴ but moves ‘everywhere’.

(ii) The Voyage

Thus far my focus has been the *result* of the diffused event of the voyage, on how its “stream of influence”²⁵ builds a dispersed Hamlet who is not simply present. The multiple codes and temporalities of the graveyard are, in a sense, ripples from this nebulous occurrence which we never see. I will now get closer to its *origins*. The task is difficult because, as in Act One, the ‘event’ of Act Five is excessive and spectral, not resting in one spot, but shifting like a ghost.

The submerged source of these ripples, the off-stage voyage that takes place between Acts Four and Five, is not represented directly but recounted after the fact. While Hamlet-the-character may experience “rashness” as a “fighting” “in [his] heart” (V.ii.4-7) that arises immanently from the action of the voyage, this is not true for either Hamlet-the-actor or the audience. For us, while it may acquire a sort of presence after the fact, through Hamlet’s account of its strangeness, it is also absent, pointing beyond the present. We need, therefore, a more complex and layered picture

²³ Whitehead, *Adventures*, pp.201-2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.200-1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.202.

of the play's 'immanence'. The way in which the 'beyond' of the unseen voyage flows into the 'immanent' action of the graveyard undermines Fernie's central distinction that "what is spiritually other and ultimate is not beyond but *immanent* in events...and action".²⁶ In fact, the energies of the "beyond" are channelled and released as action both in the play-world, inspiring Hamlet's rash action, and in the theatrical happening of his (re)arrival, which reorients Hamlet and his relationship to the event.

Using the voyage, Shakespeare constructs a present around and *through* the "beyond", thereby dissolving Fernie's strict distinctions. Fernie contends that Derrida's "spirituality" of a "direct experience of otherness, alterity, etc", "falls short of fully manifesting spirituality as what is not just other but also ultimately significant and valuable".²⁷ Fernie's distinction here prejudges the issue. What, other than rhetoric, is the basis of this opposition between Derrida's "otherness" and what is "ultimately significant and valuable"? For Fernie, the basis rests on a further distinction between Derrida's spirituality of "difference" and what he sees as *Hamlet's* "'divinity' [that] is immanently present in the present".²⁸ "The Prince is called", according to Fernie, "not to relate fastidiously to the beyond but to the 'rashness' of a spontaneous intervention".²⁹ But where does Derrida say that one must relate to the beyond "fastidiously"? Certainly not in *Spectres of Marx*, where he refuses to read Marx as a "great philosopher" but stresses "Marx's injunction not just to decipher but to act and to make the deciphering into a transformation that 'changes the world'".³⁰ By insisting on these dichotomies, Fernie misses how the fifth act does not oppose a

²⁶ Fernie, "Last", p.188.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p.194.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.32.

vacuous beyond to a “valuable” present but ties the beyond and the present together in the strangeness of Hamlet’s transformation. Both dramatically and metaphysically, the “spiritually other and ultimate” only becomes “*immanent* in events” by touching upon the “beyond”; by touching upon the void of the voyage.

The divinity that transforms Hamlet is not just “immanently present in the present”, it is recounted, after the fact, as Hamlet looks back on a voyage that was never dramatically present for the audience. Hamlet’s transformation, then, stems from a cross-pollinating combination of his journey across the seas, his experience of the graveyard, his movement to final action, and above all, his recounting of the rashness that overcame him and secured his return. It is here, if anywhere, that we have Aristotle’s recognition and *peripeteia*. Again, it is not just what Hamlet says here – a divinity shaping our ends perhaps does not tell us much – but how it is orchestrated. We are primed by Hamlet’s sustained absence and the lack of soliloquy for this sudden flash of Hamlet-related information given by Hamlet; asked to give it some privileged importance. It is, in short, the theatrical event that brings Hamlet’s (re)arrival to a head. But Hamlet’s recounting of the event not only produces a new Hamlet in the graveyard, it also throws us backwards and forwards: backwards into a non-represented past of the voyage and forwards to the yet to be represented future of the act.

That the moment we have waited for is not represented directly as action unfolding in the present but as a recounting of the past is a crucial dramatic fact. Combined with Hamlet’s tone of wonder, it suggests that what happened was *beyond* ordinary, and expressible, experience; that it is not capable of being staged directly. In contrast, the

direct representation of the pirates in Laurence Olivier’s film version implies an objective veracity rather than a mysterious emergence from the beyond. Through the use of the midline shift, Shakespeare highlights how Hamlet’s recalling of the voyage causes a reorientation of his regard:

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. *Rashly*—
And praised be rashness for it: let us know
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our dear plots do pall, and that should teach us
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—
...
Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me in the dark,
Groped I to find out them...
(V.ii.4-15, emphasis added)

There are a number of potential shifts in Hamlet’s regard during this speech. The first comes with “Rashly”, but this is best viewed as an adjective describing the action of coming “Up from [his] cabin” that Hamlet narrates seven lines later. The second potential shift is “And praised be rashness for it”. However, this is more of a gloss on his adjective and the action – highlighting the remarkable, positive ends of his rashness – than a marked break in narration. And the third, which indeed occurs midline, is the rather clunky “let us know”. Here we witness an obvious break from the narration, which is far more than an adjective or a gloss: it is a thought that is separated in time and space from the narrated action.

Palfrey and Stern state that, “[a]bove all, the midline shift becomes the location for *thinking*: for an effectively invisible process of coming to terms with the world”.³¹

³¹ Palfrey and Stern, p.389.

Hamlet's narration is interrupted by the conspicuous movement from retelling events to reflecting on their significance. It produces an effect of consciousness pushing up against its world, struggling to understand it. The sudden shift from specific events to the general conclusion of "let us know" encourages us to infer that a critical realisation is taking place. First, Hamlet's language expresses a sort of awe at his own experience – "in my heart", "a kind of fighting", "Rashly", "praised", "rashness" – which suggests that something wondrous and foreign has taken place. Second, it takes on a distinctly 'preachy' feel: "let us know", "serves us well", "should teach us", "divinity that shapes our ends". It is an almost religious experience: a personal experience of the unknown brings Hamlet into a state of confusion and awe, but through this disorientation he discerns the divine and attempts to draw general principles.

Witmore thus concludes that Hamlet's "digression...serves as audible evidence that he has paused to recognize something, that he has responded to some sign of God's presence in the world".³² It is a "spontaneous recognition" of "divine power",³³ of the beyond, intruding into the material. Of course the divine comes *into* Hamlet's experience and thus becomes immanent in the drama, but it nevertheless retains an otherworldly quality. As Witmore goes on to write, "[w]onder in the face of an accident...marks the moment when an individual's attention or 'regard' is suddenly detached from the concerns of the world and turned elsewhere".³⁴ Or, in Levinas' terms, "[t]he possibility of thought is the consciousness of miracle, or wonder".³⁵ The

³² Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001, p.96.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.97.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.148.

³⁵ Levinas, *Entre*, p.13.

apprehension of the beyond breaks into and reorientates the subject, shifting its regard from the narrow view to the wide, from interiority to the divine.

Witmore's notion of "accident" captures the way in which immanence is bound up with the sublime beyond, or providential scheme, which is discerned through "wonder".³⁶ Hamlet's account of the voyage thus brings together an experience of otherness and the philosophy (and drama) of immanence. Difference, otherness, and the beyond are not banished by immanence, they are the very gateway to immanence. Far from being easily achieved, Hamlet only recognises a divinity that is immanent in events by first going through the disorienting experience of the "fighting" in his heart, the spiritual wonder of apprehending the material accident of the pirates, and the sudden "rashness" of acting before thinking. He thereby follows a religious pattern not far removed from Paul's event on the road to Damascus. Or, as Levaio writes of Nicholas of Cusa: "Cusanus's transition from relative to absolute vision requires a vertiginous moment, a disorientating of the individual from the point of view he was initially asked to assume".³⁷

Existing on the borders of representation, only glimpsed through a retelling, the event that occurs between Acts Four and Five points to that which is cut off from drama. We are close to the idea of the "sacred", which, as Nancy writes, "signifies the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off".³⁸ For all its bloody and messy immanence, there remains something of the mystery of the religious – of the unseen – in Hamlet's (re)arrival, something Hamlet himself describes as "divinity". The central point here is that the religious feeling, the sense of awe, the apprehension of

³⁶ Witmore, *Accidents*, p.136.

³⁷ Levaio, pp.77-78.

³⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*. Jeff Fort. Trans. New York: Fordham UP, 2005, p.1.

deep consciousness, do not belong to Hamlet-the-character but are drawn from all that he is cut off from. Shakespeare founds Hamlet's interiority at the very borders of the show. For Nancy, the "sublime" is "not a matter of the presentation or nonpresentation of the infinite", rather, it is a matter of a "movement" – seen in Hamlet's recounting – along "*the border of the limit, and thus on the border of presentation*".³⁹ The "limit" is where "*everything comes to pass*"⁴⁰: it is an "unlimited beginning of the delimitation of a form".⁴¹ The transformed Hamlet passes into existence at the limit of drama. Along "the border of art", though "not going beyond the border", we see the "sublime", as form takes shape and "imagination touches the limit".⁴²

The very notion of divine providence suggests that while divinity enters the world, it remains somehow different to ordinary reality. It shares with Badiou's thinking the "paradox" of "try[ing] to *name* the very thing which is impossible to *discern*".⁴³ Here it is worth returning to Badiou's foundational concept of the void that I have traced from the ghost's initial appearance from the unseen, opening the void of consciousness, to Hamlet's voyage. Unlike Pye, who, as we saw in the *Othello* chapter, sees the "vanishing point" of the voyage as a marker of "the aesthetic as autonomous, self-constituting form",⁴⁴ I see it as a point of irruptive emergence. The result is not groundlessness but a new movement between the ground and its void, which forms the new Hamlet. Hamlet's recounting of the offshore and offstage voyage is an "evental site", although "beneath" it, "nothing from which it is

³⁹ Nancy, *Finite*, pp.222-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.229.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.224.

⁴² *Ibid.* pp.232-3.

⁴³ Badiou, *Being*, p.376.

⁴⁴ Pye, p.430.

composed is presented”.⁴⁵ The event ‘itself’ remains outside the presented situation, while its “site” of Hamlet’s recounting is “the *minimal* effect of structure”; “it belongs to the situation, whilst what belongs to it in turn does not”.⁴⁶ Hamlet’s pivotal moment of recognition – in which he embraces the material present – thus draws its energy and impetus from *outside* the dramatic frame; it “is *on the edge of the void*, or *foundational*”.⁴⁷

The void is critical for Badiou because it contradicts the standard historicist notion that nothing comes of nothing. As Greenblatt writes, “I believe that nothing comes of nothing, even in Shakespeare”.⁴⁸ A similar attitude, albeit in a very different form, underpins Eliot’s concept of the “objective correlative”: “[t]he only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion”.⁴⁹ Hamlet is defective for Eliot because he is “dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear”.⁵⁰ For Badiou, however, although the event enters the situation, it comes from its void, which is outside the situation’s presentation and is thus ‘nothing’ within the situation. The “void”, for Badiou, is “intrinsically infinite”, which is to say “that it is outside situations, unrepresentable”, and “in excess of being as a thinkable disposition”.⁵¹ The new thus always comes from ‘nothing’. Hamlet only (re)arrives as an active subject by touching the void on his voyage. And, crucially, he returns with a changed relation to the void in the concept of “readiness”, which accepts rather than obsesses over its unknown possibilities.

⁴⁵ Badiou, *Being*, p.175.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Greenblatt, *Purgatory*, p.4.

⁴⁹ Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p.145.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.74.

To some extent this chimes with the processual idea that “the future of the Universe, though conditioned by the immanence of its past, awaits for its complete determination the spontaneity of the novel individual occasions”.⁵² Badiou’s void is, however, more radical in its irruptive effects:

It is the case – and politics in particular shows this – that the void, once named ‘in situation’, exceeds the situation according to its own infinity; it is also the case that its eventual occurrence proceeds ‘explosively’, or ‘everywhere’, within a situation... Evidently, we must therefore conclude with Aristotle that the void *is not*; if by ‘being’ we understand the limited order of presentation, and in particular what is natural of such order.⁵³

Badiou’s idea of the void’s explosive excess in the situation is particularly useful for considering how Hamlet’s voyage not only goes beyond the “situation”, but transforms it. Hamlet moves outside presentation into what “*is not*” and yet this what “*is not*” enters the situation. The void comes to Denmark, after the fact, as Hamlet re-enters “a farre off”.⁵⁴ That the force of the void bursts “explosively...within [the] situation”, spreading like shrapnel so that it is “everywhere”, is why I insist that the spectral excess of the ghost is not snuffed out in the graveyard but is at the centre of the new Hamlet. Hamlet and all his effects, affects, and significances swirl around the situation’s unrepresented void. The void enters the material, not as presence but as an excess that remains unlocatable and ghost-like. And Hamlet, after touching this void, is everywhere dramatically in a dispersed existence which creates the unlocatable quality that has haunted critics. It permits the obscure Hamlet that is changed, “although what precisely constitutes the change may not be agreed”.⁵⁵ As Badiou continues, “every reference to the void produces an excess over the count-as-

⁵² Whitehead, *Adventures*, p.328.

⁵³ Badiou, *Being*, pp.74-5.

⁵⁴ Gurr and Ichikawa, p.77.

⁵⁵ Jones, *Scenic*, p.80.

one, an irruption of inconsistency, which propagates – metaphysically – within the situation at infinite speed”.⁵⁶

(iii) “The Readiness is All”

The voyage repeats the ghost in emerging from the unseen void, existing in excess of its material conditions, shifting through space and time, exposing the gap between act and representation, and in striking Hamlet with a wonder that transforms his interiority. There is, however, a critical difference in the second coming of this void. For while both events are creative – of consciousness and of Hamlet – the creative force of the first event was stunted by Hamlet’s preoccupation with the void of action, with its unknown consequences for consciousness. In contrast, Hamlet’s “readiness” connects the void’s explosive excess to the material and leads to the bloody action of the play’s finale.

From Rashness to Readiness

After his voyage, Hamlet is no longer debilitated by the abyss of action. His “readiness”, which must be distinguished from his “rashness”, both distances the void, placing it outside the subject’s interiority and within the province of providence, and accepts its necessity to his subjective action by waiting on its fruition. Hamlet no longer sees an enervating lack of correspondence between inner subject and outer world but a strange correspondence. Not that the two are one in some mystic unity, which was the dream of full identification with the ghost’s command. Whereas

⁵⁶ Badiou, *Being*, p.75.

Othello claims to know his cues, Hamlet never claims to know what providence has in store. For Hamlet, the outer world remains jarringly different from his interiority, as witnessed by his sudden, alien experience of the fighting in his heart. Providence, however, enmeshes the subject and its world in an interdependence that does not efface their difference.

That the voyage is not directly represented also suggests that the event and its attendant action was not fully realised at the time. Hamlet's rashness was not "divinity" or "providence" when it happened, it was just rashness. It is only in retrospect, on second glance, that there is a "divinity that shapes our ends". As Benjamin puts it, "[t]o articulate the past... does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'" but to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger".⁵⁷ Hamlet's midline shift to recognise providence thus bends dramatic time. As with Othello's disorientating arrival in Cyprus, it is a dramatic action in the present that reconfigures the past. It recalls Badiou's account of how, in "certain ruptures", the event "comes to inscribe itself two times".⁵⁸ Badiou explains how "Christianity", like Communism with Marx and Lenin, "begins with two times: with Christ and with Saint Paul."⁵⁹ "The political time of the universal Church, of which Saint Paul is the brilliant and ill-humoured Lenin, retroactively grounds the Incarnation as fact".⁶⁰ Hamlet's initial event of coming up from his cabin and swapping the commissions is only "retroactively grounded" as genuine action in the graveyard. What was not strictly subjective action – coming from the outside as a divine "rashness" – is *recuperated* as action after the fact as "readiness".

⁵⁷ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.247.

⁵⁸ Badiou, *Subject*, p.125.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.125-6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

It is through Hamlet's midline shift that the unthinking rashness of the voyage enters the present and reorients Hamlet. He leaves the present and shifts back to his feeling of that earlier time ("rashness"), but then returns again to the present to try to find some meaning or structure for that feeling ("let us know"). As Palfrey and Stern suggest, the midline shift shows "how neither consciousness nor communication is ever simply linear: both go backwards and forwards all the time, between one moment and another".⁶¹ Hamlet's regard wavers, fluctuating between the pre-voyage Hamlet, the Hamlet experiencing rashness, the present Hamlet reconstituting rashness as providence, and the unseen Hamlet who will fulfil providence through "readiness". In Bergson's terms we might say that while "[p]ractically, we perceive only the past", the past is "[s]olely preoccupied in thus determining an undetermined future".⁶² Or as Nietzsche writes, history is only valuable "for the sake of life and action".⁶³

The figure of providence is instructive for it arises in the past, presses upon the present, and promises the future. Moreover, in dramatic terms, Jones notes that "[d]uring a performance of a play... what most concerns us is the immediate future, what is going to develop out of the present moment".⁶⁴ The shift between Hamlet's recounting and the realisation of "let us know" therefore opens up multiple times and multiple Hamlets directed toward an unseen future. It is an example of how "the lacunae of Shakespeare's syntax teems with ghostly others and 'virtual' lives, at once remembered and anticipated. It is of course we, the hearers or readers, who have to

⁶¹ Palfrey and Stern, p.389.

⁶² Bergson, *Matter*, p.150.

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Untimely*, p.59.

⁶⁴ Jones, *Scenic*, p.52.

intuit or animate these presences”.⁶⁵ Dramatic immanence is not, therefore, reducible to presence. A part of our attachment to the drama is always future orientated. It is only by characterising Hamlet’s “divinity” solely as a “god of ‘rashness’”⁶⁶ that Fernie concludes that the fifth act “epitomises a metaphysics of rashness – an absolute now”.⁶⁷ Ultimately, however, Hamlet’s “rashness” is not his mode of being or action in Act Five; it is never ‘here’ in the present but remains in the unrepresented and unthinking past of his voyage into the beyond. Readiness, which is Hamlet’s ultimate method of moving from the voyage to material action, is born of rashness but is distinct from it.

So while there is an unthinking rashness in his actions on the voyage – “Ere I could make a prologue to my brains, / They had begun the play” (V.ii.31-2) – in the presented action of Act Five even Hamlet’s ‘rashest’ acts are mediated by thought. For instance, he determines to enter the duel not with passionate rashness but with a detached, philosophic objectivity:

Not a whit. We defy augury. There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is’t to leave betimes?
(V.ii.157-161).

Part of the translation from rashness to readiness arises from the movement from private to public verse, which reverses the private orientation of Hamlet’s earlier thought. No longer demanding to know final consequences of action – there “are no

⁶⁵ Palfrey and Stern, p.389.

⁶⁶ Fernie, “Last”, pp.198, 203.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.209.

fantasies of poetic omnipotence⁶⁸ in Act Five, such as demanding to damn Claudius – Hamlet seems committed to accepting each fight as it comes.

“Is’t not perfect conscience?”

Not that the movement to readiness is easy or unqualified. Particularly problematic is the way in which the rapid and gratuitous death sentence meted out to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lies at the very birth of this new Hamlet:

HORATIO So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to’t.
 HAMLET Why, man, they did make love to this employment.
 They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
 Doth by their own insinuation grow.
 ’Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
 Between the pass and fell incensèd points
 Of mighty opposites.
 HORATIO Why, what a king is this!
 HAMLET Does it not, think’st thee, stand me now upon—
 He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
 Popped in between th’ election and my hopes,
 Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
 And with such coz’nage – is’t not perfect conscience
 To quit him with this arm? And is’t not to be damned
 To let this canker of our nature come
 In further evil?
 (V.ii.57-71)

Hamlet’s evasive explanation of his killing makes “conscience” begin to look a little like bad conscience. We are left to wonder how the first dubious use of conscience – or indeed the absence of conscience in his “[t]hey are not near my conscience” – infects the second: “is’t not perfect conscience / To quit him with this arm?”.

Although the connection is troubling, the distinction between rashness and readiness suggests that there is something different about Hamlet’s second conscience. Violent

⁶⁸ Levaio, p.356.

rashness is not the mode of being that Hamlet ultimately draws from his experience of the beyond. Readiness does not condemn Laertes as rashness did Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The first “conscience” retrospectively (and not a little guiltily) excuses the deadly act of rashness. The second “conscience” establishes an ongoing readiness that invokes conscience positively rather than evading it. Rashness, then, is the unthinking, unknowable ‘beyond conscience’. Readiness is the mediated and attached ‘active conscience’. In other words, readiness is a fidelity. The distinction is critical because it establishes two very different stages of Hamlet’s (re)arrival: its origin in the rashness that lies beyond, and its inscription in the world through readiness.

Readiness suggests that Hamlet paradoxically achieves agency – an active “conscience” – by submitting to providence. It is not a conclusion that critics have necessarily shared. Belsey, for instance, contends that Act Five “presents a second Hamlet who no longer struggles towards identity and agency”.⁶⁹ Although it is technically correct that “Hamlet utters no soliloquies”⁷⁰ in Act Five, Belsey fails to see how Hamlet nonetheless continues to speak to himself within speeches that are ostensibly addressed to Horatio, and which continue to probe his relation to the event of the voyage. Belsey thus oversimplifies when she writes: “This Hamlet is an inhabitant of a much older cosmos, no more than the consenting instrument of God, received into heaven at his death by flights of angels”.⁷¹ Hamlet’s newfound providentialism does not merely evoke some simplistic “older cosmos” of divine law, it involves an understanding – following Shakespeare’s dramaturgy of multiple codes – of the interconnectedness and diffusion of existence. In a sense, Hamlet is here

⁶⁹ Belsey, *Subject*, p.42.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

following Shakespeare's dramaturgy rather than rebelling against it. Whereas Hamlet was trapped in a proto-existentialist prison of the mind in which the whole world became a reflection of his own thoughts ("Denmark's a prison"), "readiness" implies a certain subjectedness, both to the divine rashness that precipitated it and to the material circumstances it acts within. Hamlet clears some space for action by creating an outside space that is not Hamlet.

Such subjectedness to one's location within "providence" recalls Kierkegaard's work on possibility and necessity. Hamlet was floating adrift in the possible, but he has now found his "spot" by "submit[ting] to the necessary".⁷² It is only the necessity of the event, intruding from outside this groundless world, that *enables possibility* as a real and material fact. Hamlet here mirrors, albeit metaphysically and not religiously, Kierkegaard's central paradox: that it is only through submission to the necessity of God that "all things are possible".⁷³ Far from being a retreat into dogmatic certainty, this strange sense of agency "is fraught and provisional".⁷⁴ As Eagleton explains, Kierkegaard's "process of endless becoming" is more than "aesthetic self-fashioning", not only because of its "radical one-sidedness" but because of "its openness" to what is "sheerly given".⁷⁵ The subject's "origin lies beyond its own mastery" and its "end is nowhere in view".⁷⁶ So while Kierkegaard's subjectedness to what is "sheerly given" may be founded on an "older cosmos", the abandonment of one's self to providence is not an abandonment of the "struggles towards identity and agency" but their paradoxical and provisional culmination.

⁷² Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.169.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁷⁴ Eagleton, *Aesthetic*, p.180.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

The idea that freedom stems from being subjected to something higher has a long heritage that exceeds Belsey's view of Hamlet as "no more than the consenting instrument of God". We saw in relation to *Othello* how Paul posited a strength in weakness, whereby the subject reaches its apotheosis only in subjecting itself to Christ. Similarly, "[f]or Augustine", "liberation depends on a...keenly felt sense of self-limitation", for, as Levaio continues, "[t]he soul is ultimately helpless without grace and illumination".⁷⁷ While for Luther, "*man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ*".⁷⁸ Levaio notes how such thinking also influenced the more mystical writings of Nicholas of Cusa, who continued the tradition of 'learned ignorance' with his belief that "the goal of our knowledge is the realization of non-knowledge".⁷⁹ For the more sceptically minded Montaigne the idea was translated into one's subjectedness to chance and circumstance: "I cannot well containe my selfe in mine own possession and disposition, chance hath more interest in it than my selfe".⁸⁰ And Nietzsche comes to a similar conclusion, writing that "a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centred to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end".⁸¹

All of these thinkers suggest how Hamlet's recognition of the "horizon" of providence is far more than an unthinking embrace of fate. Hamlet's "rashness" may not be a product of agency but his move to "readiness" draws a new form of agency from that rashness: "The interim's mine" (V.ii.74). Readiness is a highly political

⁷⁷ Levaio, pp.9-10.

⁷⁸ Luther, p.57.

⁷⁹ Levaio, p.20.

⁸⁰ Montaigne, Volume 1, p.48.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Untimely*, p.63.

mode of being despite its references to supra-historical notions of fate and providence. It leads Hamlet to feel a public duty to remove the cankerous growth from the Denmark. Sublime feeling is only momentary and, consequently, if it is to have any lasting effect it must take some form of material action in the world. Hamlet's readiness thereby reflects a broader Renaissance championing of practical action, from Bacon's applied knowledge to Milton's refusal to "praise a fugitive and cloister'd verture, unexercis'd and unbreath'd".⁸²

Providence can therefore be understood in metaphysical and dramatic ways that are not reducible to a dogmatic Christian order. Michael Witmore suggests the dramatic significance of this line of thinking, writing that the subject's reliance on its location or occasion stems from a "metaphysical outlook...that assumes the world or environment is always 'doing' something and that the individual's plan of action – even crucial aspects of her identity – are themselves conditioned by that action".⁸³ By relying "on the power of 'occasion'...to produce or give birth to something that did not exist before" the subject must *wait* for such an occasion.⁸⁴ "The readiness is all".

Not that waiting involves a movement toward a final unity or consummation. Rather, Harold Schweizer writes that the "deeper experience of waiting"⁸⁵ calls attention to the self's duration in the world. To again co-opt Bergson, by seeing his "progress in pure duration" rather than final ends, Hamlet's "life and action are [finally] free" as he begins to "feel the different parts of [his] being enter into each other, and [his] whole personality concentrate itself in a point, or rather a sharp edge, pressed against

⁸² John Milton, *Areopagitica*. London: Oxford UP, 1954, p.18.

⁸³ Witmore, *Metaphysics*, p.43.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁸⁵ Harold Schweizer, *On Waiting*. London: Routledge, 2008, p.23.

the future”.⁸⁶ Waiting is a recognition that being and consciousness relies on “an interruption of time, a stopping, a waiting, a lingering”.⁸⁷ Hamlet’s distributed subjecthood takes place through moments of interruption and waiting that, while not setting into final forms, form *occasions* where things come to be. Amidst the play’s flow, we reach nodal points that retain a reality even though time moves on: the ghost’s appearance, the great soliloquies, and the recounting of the voyage, linger on in our minds and build a diverse and layered Hamlet. The waiting implied by Hamlet’s readiness is almost the opposite of Hegel’s tragic action: “the true kernel of his disposition and capacity, is revealed...in *one* great situation and action”.⁸⁸ Nothing is “revealed” at one instant in *Hamlet*, rather, something is built that exceeds any one moment.

(iv) Readiness and the Future-to-Come

Waiting allows Hamlet to act in the present and seize the “interim”, and yet, as much as it leads to agency, it still *waits*. Having experienced the unseen on the voyage, Hamlet now trusts the unseen future. The result is that Hamlet’s “readiness” not only stems from the beyond, *it flows into the beyond*. Three statements about painting by Marion provide some illumination as to what it means to arrive through the unseen:

The unseen that the painter will look for thus remains, up to the point of its final appearance, unforeseen [*imprévu*] – unseen, the unforeseen.⁸⁹

He is trying to let burst onto the scene much more than what is predelineated [*prévu*], more than what is seen, more than what he desires or wills.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Bergson, *Creative*, p.212.

⁸⁷ Schweizer, p.125.

⁸⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.218.

⁸⁹ Marion, *Visible*, p.28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.32.

The authentic painting fulfils the expectation of the painter and the visitor, strictly speaking, by surprising it, disorientating it, and flooding it.⁹¹

The event of painting here is bizarrely non-situated. It is both before and after the physical act of painting; it has happened but is still to come. The painter must have glimpses of the painting in order to paint but what, precisely, will come remains to be seen. It requires a sort of faith that something will come and that it will exceed expectation; that it will be more than just paint on a canvas. There is a similar faith in Hamlet, and in us for Hamlet. Something will come and it will involve killing Claudius but it will also exceed expectation; it will be more than just blood on a floor. There is a method, therefore, in Hamlet's readiness: it is located on *the edge of the void* we glimpsed in the voyage. It is both a movement from and into the "invisible event" (Q2.IV.iv.49).

The Undecidable

The idea that action is possible because it is not fully present lies at the heart of Badiou's understanding of poetry:

If poetry is an essential use of language, it is not because it is able to devote the latter to Presence; on the contrary, it is because it trains language to the paradoxical function of maintaining that which – radically singular, pure action – would otherwise fall back into the nullity of place. Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure undecidable, against a background of nothingness, that is an action of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth.⁹²

Even if immanent, poetry does not bring about "Presence". Rather, as Badiou goes on to note, "[a]s an un-founded multiple", "the event can only be indicated beyond the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Badiou, *Being*, p.192.

situation, despite it being necessary to wager that it has manifested itself therein”.⁹³ The “wager” is necessary because the poetic event is not ‘here’ in any simple sense; is never encapsulated or grasped; else it would not be poetry. Like Hamlet’s transformational voyage, it is “indicated beyond the situation”. It is simultaneously here, in the play’s words, and beyond them, in meanings that are not simply accessible, in evocations and feelings that may or may not come. The event fluctuates like an apparition between the text(s) and our responses to it in the past, present, and future. And this non-presence, this undecidableness, requires a sort of ‘faith’ that the poetic event arrives nonetheless.

It is in moving beyond “Presence” that poetry escapes the “nullity of place” and becomes something “radically singular”. The singularity here is multiple: it is Hamlet’s dramatic and metaphysical arrival as a subject, the event of the voyage, and our own experience of the two in the theatrical happening. Similarly the “nullity of place” is both the automated customary roles imposed by the situation, which the excess of the ghost ruptures, and the critical tendency to explain character by something that is ‘already’ there, by its pre-existing spirit or context or place. The “stellar assumption of the pure undecidable” is thus opposed to the scholarly desire to “*know*”; to draw character from its “place” in language and history; from its determinate origins and sources. Hamlet comes not to clear-sighted knowledge in Act Five but to “courage”, which, for Badiou, “effectuates the interruption of the dead law in favour of the excess.”⁹⁴ And this is the opposite of “what patient knowledge desires and seeks”, which “is that nothing be undecidable”.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid., p.197.

⁹⁴ Badiou, *Subject*, p.294.

⁹⁵ Badiou, *Being*, p.314

Hamlet and we remain unsure of *what* has happened to him, and he and we remain unsure of *where* it will take him. There is no knowledge, no structure or rule, to determine the event. Rather, what is required is that “one *bets* upon its truth”. The ‘bet’ here is, in narrative terms, Hamlet’s “readiness” or “Providence”. But it also suggests that *we* must bet on Hamlet’s arrival against “a background of nothingness”. We do so through a triangulation of the “pure undecidable”, which is at once Hamlet himself, forever eluding us, the unseen voyage in the past, and the event’s unseen future. The coming together of these undecidables as the play draws to a climax is the energising dramatic confluence that brings Hamlet before us, not as full “Presence”, but as a diffused subject that is singular and excessive precisely because its presence is always deferred and flickering.

We are far from the events of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, whose trajectories we see materialise into fidelities or betrayals that are identifiable, and nameable, as ‘love’. In *Hamlet* we are always in the event’s *midst*, remaining undecidable. Shakespeare’s drama therefore complicates Badiou’s suggestion that, “[d]espite being unknown”, the “generic parts” that arise from an event must be “named”.⁹⁶ Hamlet attempts to name what has happened but always stops short: “Had I but time – as this fell sergeant Death / Is strict in his arrest – O, I could tell you – / But let it be” (V.ii.278-80). The impossibility of pinning down what happens to Hamlet therefore challenges Badiou’s attempts to classify ‘truth-events’ as belonging to the categories of love, art, science, or politics. *Hamlet* perhaps suggests that, in drama at least, the event may not be locatable or nameable in these terms but may spread out, incorporating multiple strands, temporalities, subjects, and modes of speech. This diffusion debars Hamlet

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.427.

from a nameable identity or position. He remains in the midst of a happening he cannot quite explain.

The Event and the ‘Future-to-Come’

It is the way in which *Hamlet*'s event refuses to pass into a nameable “Presence” that opens the door to Derrida’s engagement with the play in *Spectres of Marx*. It offers an opportunity for a coming together of Derrida’s ‘to-come’ and Badiou’s advent that is both more interesting and useful than Fernie’s strict opposition between them. In effect, I am here co-opting Derrida’s messianic, and placing it within the process of arrivals, in order to get at the obscurity and difficulty of the event. Derrida may “neglect the last act of the play”⁹⁷ but this does not mean that Derrida’s work *cannot* be applied to the last act and to Hamlet’s readiness. Fernie summarises Derrida’s messianic turn as follows:

Whereas the ghost arrives and is recognised, Derrida’s Messiah is absolutely, unimaginably other because it is always absent or ‘to come’. ... But, far from being hopeless, this unrealisable dream [of a perfect democracy] – ‘life beyond life, life against life, but always in life and for life’ – elevates human beings above mere biology, supplying the ecstatic, aspirational energy of human history.⁹⁸

Strangely, however, Fernie does not consider how this “ecstatic, aspirational energy” might flow into Hamlet’s transformational voyage and his newfound agency. In this context, Derrida’s focus on otherness and the messianic “to come” offers a way of thinking about the necessary conditions for encountering or experiencing the rupturing event:

⁹⁷ Fernie, “Last”, p.192.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.194.

Guaranteed translatability, given homogeneity, systematic coherence in their *absolute forms*, this is surely (certainly, *a priori* and not probably) what renders the injunction, the inheritance, and the future – in a word the other – *impossible*. *There must be* disjunction, interruption, the heterogeneous if at least *there must be*, if *there must be* a chance given to any ‘there must be’ whatsoever, be it beyond duty.⁹⁹

Such “disjunction” may not be ‘action’, but it is what enables the possibility of the genuine action of a commitment (a “there must be”). Hence why it is misleading to suggest that, “[f]or Derrida”, the “excess” of life is “the messianic expectation...that defers and displaces life into the future”.¹⁰⁰ For, in *Specters of Marx*, the focus on the exorbitant “future-to-come...does not mean only (as some people have too often believed and so naively) deferral, lateness, delay, postponement”, rather, “the irreducible *differance* the here-now unfurls”.¹⁰¹

Fernie claims that, in *Hamlet*, “justice is *not* achieved by exposure to difference as in Derrida’s prescription for it” but by “Hamlet’s engagement with the absolute”.¹⁰² But this begs the question of what is meant by “difference” and the “absolute”. For Fernie, “difference” entails “the system of differences (of individuality, of gender, of class) that constitutes social life”, and which Hamlet was “stuck in” before Act Five.¹⁰³ But Derrida offers a more nuanced concept of difference and its relationship to the absolute of justice. Derrida begins *Spectres* with a question of justice: of how “[t]o live otherwise, and better...[n]o, not better, but more justly”.¹⁰⁴ The question arrives not through cultural differences but something more metaphysical: “The question *arrives*, if it arrives, it questions with regard to what will come in the future-to-come.

⁹⁹ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.35.

¹⁰⁰ Fernie, “Last”, pp.202-3.

¹⁰¹ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.31.

¹⁰² Fernie, “Last”, p.204.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.xvii.

Turned toward the future, going toward it, it also comes from it, it proceeds *from* the future. It must therefore exceed any presence as presence to itself”.¹⁰⁵ Justice requires a “movement of some disjoining, disjunction, or disproportion” to rupture “the self” and its self-presence and turn it to the “future-to-come”.¹⁰⁶

In this sense, Derrida is not far removed from Hamlet’s “readiness” for an unseen future, which sprung from the “disjoining” of the event. Derrida’s difference or disjunction suggests the sort of “vertiginous moment” through which Nicholas of Cusa “transition[ed] from relative to absolute vision”.¹⁰⁷ The “absolute” is never something that is simply ‘here’, ‘present’ before us. It creeps in from the edges and through the cracks. And while this may be ‘immanence’, it is an immanence intimately bound up with difference and the beyond. Indeed, Badiou’s theory of the event involves at least a significant element of ‘transcendence’:

Being the local moment of the truth, the subject falls short of supporting the latter’s global sum. Every truth is transcendent to the subject, precisely because the latter’s entire being resides in supporting the realization of truth.¹⁰⁸

Truth may not be transcendent in the old Platonic sense but, as “an un-presented part of the situation”,¹⁰⁹ it is far from being simply ‘here’. Like Hamlet’s providence, the ‘truth’ of Badiou’s event remains transcendent in the sense that its trajectory and influence is always ‘beyond’ the subject. Or, in Levinas’ terms, one can only “dominate the totality and arise to consciousness of justice...by encountering a being who is not in the system, a transcendent being”; which, for Levinas, is always “the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.xix.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Levaio, pp.77-78.

¹⁰⁸ Badiou, *Being*, pp.396-7

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.396.

face” of the other that “breaks the system”.¹¹⁰ As with Derrida’s justice, Badiou’s truth is “to come”:

By means of finite enquiries, the operator of fidelity locally discerns the connections and disconnections between multiples of the situation and the name of the event. This discernment is an *approximative truth*, because the positively investigated terms are to come in a truth. This ‘to come’ is the distinctive feature of the subject who judges. Here, belief is what-is-to-come, or the future, under the *name* of truth.¹¹¹

The beyond of ‘divinity’ may become immanent in action, and the impossible may happen in Hamlet’s fifth act, but it is also filled with the feeling of action yet to be done and events yet to come. Hamlet’s “readiness” is his response to the mystical ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ of the voyage – to its unspeakable rashness – and is directed to “what-is-to-come”. It is, in a sense, a foreshadowing of Derrida’s “pledge”, which is “given here and now”, responding “without delay to the demand of justice”,¹¹² but which is nonetheless directed toward an unseen future and energised by a promise that is yet to come. The “pledge”, like Hamlet’s “readiness”, breaks down the simple dichotomies between the here-now and the future-to-come.

Derrida’s messianism is, of course, far from synonymous with Badiou’s truth-events. Derrida himself seems to delay, wait, reiterate, and circle. He writes of action and commitment and inheritance but delights in endlessly pushing them into an unknown future. Derrida speaks of being “[o]pen, waiting for the event *as* justice”; of the messianic as “urgency, imminence but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation”.¹¹³ But while we have indeed seen that waiting is integral to action and becoming, in Shakespeare, as in Badiou, this is always a waiting *for* something.

¹¹⁰ Levinas, *Entre*, pp.29-30.

¹¹¹ Badiou, *Being*, pp.397-8.

¹¹² Derrida, *Spectres*, p.31.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.211.

It is not “waiting without horizon of expectation” but waiting with intense expectation. Or as Kierkegaard puts it, “everyone became great in proportion to his *expectancy*” and “he who expected the impossible became greater than all”.¹¹⁴ Hamlet does not see a clear path, he does not know how his wait will end, but he *expects* to kill the cankerous Claudius.

And yet, while Derrida does not give another iteration of Badiou’s event, his focus on the future-to-come helps to expose something about the event that is crucial for Hamlet’s arrival. It points us to the event’s opening from what is other and beyond; to its unknown trajectory; to the subject’s confrontation with the alien; and how this *energises* the commitment or pledge. Such a focus is important because it helps explain *how* we get to the point where the fidelity, or pledge, is possible. And, in doing so, it suggests how the event may remain unknown and unclassifiable; a point that escapes Badiou’s concept of “nomination” but is crucial to Hamlet, who always remains in the midst of its happening. As a theatrical event that stages an unprecedented coming together of evental immanence and messianic promise, *Hamlet* therefore suggests a rare confluence, or mutual augmentation, between the widely different philosophies of Badiou and Derrida.

The Messianic and Justice in *Hamlet*

Despite the fact that Hamlet is caught, ensnared, killed, forced into an action that takes everyone else down with him, and thus completes a cycle of vengeance, there is a contradictory and unlocatable rush of hope and justice. The play’s finale hints at a

¹¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear*, p.50.

justice “to come”. Where can this be found amidst the slaughter? It must be on the edges and in the cracks. There is a strange moment in their duel, in which Laertes accepts Hamlet’s apology and peace-offering in “nature” but cannot accept it in “honour”, which offers no precedent that would allow him to save face:

I am satisfied in nature,
 Whose motive in this case should stir me most
 To my revenge. But in my terms of honour
 I stand aloof, and will no reconciliation
 Till by some elder masters of known honour
 I have a voice and precedent of peace
 To keep my name ungor’d; but till that time
 I do receive your offered love like love,
 And will not wrong it.
 (V.ii.181-189)

Here we see what Hamlet has in part escaped and what Laertes remains caught within: the law of the father, the automated desire of the other that directs one’s action. What perhaps offers some hope for the future, some sense of another kind of justice, is the way in which Hamlet’s and Laertes’ exchange of forgiveness provides a “precedent” that may end the overarching cycle of violence. As Badiou puts it, “[a]ll courage amounts to passing through there where previously it was not visible that anyone could find a passage.”¹¹⁵ The new path is opened too late to save Hamlet; it, like Badiou’s truth or Derrida’s justice, awaits the future.

The sense of justice somehow survives the bloody mess of the finale and even the somewhat farcical nature of Hamlet’s apology, in which he absolves himself by “proclaim[ing] [it] was madness” and “[n]ever Hamlet” that “wronged Laertes” (V.ii.169-70). It is as if, within the existing framework of familial violence, or the dramatic framework of revenge tragedy, there is no room to think justice. It is not

¹¹⁵ Badiou, *Subject*, p.294.

within, but outside, the situation. Hence why it only slips through the cracks; why we see only glimpses of another order. It should be no surprise, therefore, that this ‘justice’ is sustained not by the plot but by traces of the void that filter through the last act from the voyage. Rather than the “causal connection between various moments in [Hamlet’s] history”, we have a “present” that “is shot through with chips of Messianic time”.¹¹⁶

Following Whitehead’s idea of a “stream of influence”,¹¹⁷ these chips of future justice need not be dismissed as merely hovering in the ether but can be seen as part of Hamlet’s dramatic existence. Just as Hamlet’s (re)arrival was staged through a layering of dramatic codes, his death incorporates a layering of divergent images and strands that produces an excess over what Hamlet says or does:

Hamlet dies, as Benjamin notes, contingently – ‘as the fateful stage-properties gather around him, as around their lord and master’. He is referring to those images of poisoned honor, sexuality, and stagecraft – the poisoned sword and chalice, this last enhanced with a ‘union’ or pearl that, when Hamlet alludes to it in the act of pouring the poisoned wine down Claudius’ throat, seems to symbolize both death and sex. But he is also pictured by Horatio, after all this darkness, as a soul ascending to heaven with an angelic squadron leading him on. In short, in the event-packed concluding moments of Hamlet, there is a careful balance between a motif of continuing emptiness and another, contradictory one of redemption and even triumph...¹¹⁸

It is the excess produced by this clustering of the here-now and future-to-come that is able to sustain the contradictory ideas of revenge and forgiveness, hope and waste, accident and redemption, that filter through Hamlet’s farewell. Even here, at the end, the to-come is envisaged by Horatio’s winged flight. Rather than being absolute or essential, we have a Hamlet, and a justice, that fluctuate through their connection and

¹¹⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.255.

¹¹⁷ Whitehead, *Adventures*, pp.201-2.

¹¹⁸ Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p.185.

interrelation with the strands of the drama. Arrivals are not final but are moments of dramatic confluence that may easily dissipate. Before they do, however, the diffused images create an excess that, in Benjamin's words, "points, before its extinction, to the Christian providence in whose bosom his mournful images are transformed into a blessed existence".¹¹⁹ There is, then, something unique in *Hamlet*: "Only Shakespeare was capable of striking Christian sparks from the baroque rigidity of the melancholic, un-stoic as it is un-Christian, pseudo-antique as it is pseudo-pietistic".¹²⁰

We are able, then, to give Derrida's messianic future some ballast in the present. 'Justice' in *Hamlet* is not purely 'to come'. It is never fully here, never present, and yet it exists. Latour's "positive meaning of relativism", which makes it "possible to define existence not as an all-or-nothing concept but as a gradient",¹²¹ helps to reconcile, in part, the sense in which *Hamlet's* fifth act forces us simultaneously into the present moment of action and the feeling of the beyond. The idea of "relative existence"¹²² frees up justice, allowing it to exist like a ghost, both there and not there, its presence spectral but real. As Derrida writes, "the logic of the ghost...points towards a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary...logic that distinguishes or opposes *effectivity or actuality* (either present, empirical, living – or not) and *ideality* (regulating or absolute non-presence)".¹²³ The ghost is not snuffed out but comes to exist as a spectral Hamlet and a spectral justice. Here Badiou's own writing on 'justice' finds a potential connection with Derrida's: "*Justice*...amounts to relativizing the law", a "*blurring of the places*, the opposite, therefore, of the right

¹¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. John Osborne. Trans. London: NLB, 1977, p.158.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Latour, p.310.

¹²² Ibid., p.156.

¹²³ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.63.

place”.¹²⁴ The “blurring” here suggests the importance of registering the diffusion and obscurity of Hamlet’s re-arrival in Act Five; of not treating Hamlet as ‘present’ in the graveyard.

Ultimately, of course, the hints of justice and the messianic occur amid the ruins of Hamlet and the Danish state: “In the ruins of great buildings the idea of the plan speaks more impressively than in lesser buildings, however well preserved they are”.¹²⁵ The finale of *Hamlet* is almost a becoming-ruin of its hero. He becomes an object for us, is handed over to our possession, and becomes *our* subject. From the point that Laertes tells him, “Hamlet, thou art slain” (V.ii.256), Hamlet, like Romeo and Juliet, becomes dead whilst alive, the walking dead, no longer an agent but a (ruined) monument for us. Hamlet himself declares this transition as he passes over his self and his agency to Horatio:

I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu!
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,
 Had I but time – as this fell sergeant Death
 Is strict in his arrest – O, I could tell you –
 But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
 Thou liv’st. Report me and my cause aright
 To the unsatisfied.
 (V.ii.275-282)

Hamlet here passes over to the survivors. He passes over to Horatio, who has always been Hamlet’s audience, been our onstage representative, but he most of all passes on to us, who “liv’st”. In what is almost a direct address to the audience – “You that look pale and tremble at this chance” – Hamlet makes us part of the play. He hands over his energies and powers of articulation so that *we* must speak of what he “could

¹²⁴ Badiou, *Subject*, 296.

¹²⁵ Benjamin, *German*, p.235.

tell” us. Action becomes ours in the present. Through this shift of agency, Hamlet stops being *the* subject or actor of the play and lies silent. “The rest is silence” (V.ii.300). All we are left with are the voices of survivors and the dying Os of a voice that will speak no more words. As Frank Kermode notes of *King Lear’s* catastrophe: although “tragedy assumes the figurations of apocalypse, of death and judgment, heaven and hell...the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors”.¹²⁶ And so, “when the end comes it is not an end”.¹²⁷

It is here, as agency passes over, that the ruins and bloodshed of this finale begin to give way to something else. As Benjamin stresses, it is precisely at the point of death and destruction that the “allegory” of “baroque” drama “returns”, in “the second part of its wide arc”, “to redeem”.¹²⁸ The vision of death “does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection”.¹²⁹ It leaps, in *Hamlet*, through the voices of those to whom Hamlet has passed his voice. Laertes asks “noble Hamlet” to “[e]xchange forgiveness” (V.ii.271). Horatio, the play’s spectator, declares that here “cracks a noble heart”, and wishes that “flights of angels sing [him] to [his] rest” (V.ii.302-3). And Fortinbras, who has Hamlet’s “dying voice” (V.ii.298), orders “four captains” to “Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, / For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal” (V.ii.339-42). These voices begin our speculation about Hamlet and about what is “likely”. And, in doing so, they build a monument of hope and expectation for Hamlet, setting him up for his afterlife that continues in these words. They build an alternative vision of Hamlet and an alternative end from Fortinbras’ speculative “had he...”; an end that

¹²⁶ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1967, p.82.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Benjamin, *German*, p.232.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.233.

exists in parallel to, is intermingled with, the bloody end we see. The speculations and hopes of the survivors thereby reflect Žižek's point that:

... the past itself is not simply 'what there was,' it contains hidden, non-realized potentials, and the authentic future is the repetition/retrieval of *this* past, not of the past as it was, but of those elements in the past which the past itself, in its reality, betrayed, stifled, failed to realize.¹³⁰

Again, Hamlet is more than his own words and deeds. The 'subject' that arrives in Shakespeare's drama is broader than any 'individual' but flows into the theatrical event and its spectators. Death is, therefore, not the end of tragedy. Action and the subject pass over. Some of the play's 'action' is not recuperated as action but remains to be grasped by us; to be collected in the future. There is a sense in which we are always left waiting for the 'event' in Hamlet. That which will break apart the old corrupt order and found the new never really arrives. It is, however, disseminated throughout the play. Our faith in Hamlet is disappointed and yet somehow bolstered in the failure, transferred into a hope for the future. This latency suggests that while something is deferred, it is also always potential, always possible. As André Breton, founder of surrealism, says of the action of rebellion: "It's a spark in the wind, but a spark in search of a powder keg".¹³¹

¹³⁰ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, p.141.

¹³¹ Badiou, *Century*, pp.140-1.

Chapter Five: *Macbeth*

The obscurity of the event in *Hamlet* turns to horror in *Macbeth*. For much of the play we are dealing with the ghastly afterlife of the event. What arrives is dead, stillborn. Nevertheless, unlike almost every other character in the play, Macbeth *does* arrive as a subject and he does so *through* his embrace of the dark and mysterious realm opened by the weird sisters. Something more than historical narrative is going on in *Macbeth*, something that makes normative readings about ambition or usurpation inadequate to our imaginative responses. They are true as far as they go, but they do not go as far as the weird sisters who, from the very start of the play, puncture the circularity of Holinshed's history.

(i) “Thunder and lightning” – The Weird Sisters

The play opens with the strange and unnatural. “*Thunder and lightning*” cues the entrance of three mysterious figures that chant and rhyme, their purposes unknown, except that they go to “meet with Macbeth” (I.ii.7). We are not within ‘history’, or, at least not merely within history. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the tale of Makbeth begins not with supernatural happenings but political and military intrigue. Under threat from Makdowald, Duncane calls on the nobles for advice due to his “small skill in warlike affaires”.¹ Makbeth, after “speaking much against the kings softnes, and ouermuch slacknesse in punishing offenders”, declares that “if the charge were committed vnto him and vnto Banquho” then “the rebels should be shortly

¹ Ralph Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. Text of 1587. <http://www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/>. Visited 16 February 2011. The Holinshed Project, 2008-2010, p.169.

vanquished”.² Amidst this overarching situation the weird sisters are both a secondary and subsidiary concern, almost an interlude in the serious business. So while “thréе women in strange and wild apparel” meet Makbeth and Banquho as they “iournied towards Fores”, and “haile Makbeth” as “Glammiss”, “Cawder”, then “king of Scotland”,³ that is the end of their influence. They make no further intrusions into the tale, they do not infect its language or alter its structure, and they do not infect Makbeth’s mind. In fact, Makbeth appears to take the event lightly:

This was reputed at the first but some vaine fantasticall illusion by Mackbeth and Banquho, insomuch that Banquho would call Mackbeth in iest, king of Scotland; and Mackbeth againe would call him in sport likewise, the father of manie kings. But afterwards the common opinion was, that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destinie, or else some nymphs or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromanticall science...⁴

While Shakespeare’s representation of Scotland’s upheavals recalls Holinshed’s form of narrative, his representation of the weird sisters – now irruptive and darkly influential – departs distinctly from Holinshed, making them central to the play. Shakespeare recalibrates the relation between the weird sisters, Macbeth, and the narrative of Scottish history to establish two distinct worlds in the play: the historical world of Holinshed, and the mysterious, excessive world of the weird sisters. The worlds overlap, but they do so marginally and weirdly. In terms of character, they fuse almost solely in Macbeth.

In some ways, *Macbeth’s* supernatural opening is reminiscent of *Hamlet*, which opens with a spectral intrusion that founds the hero. Something is arising or returning when it should be still, dead, or non-existent. The atmospherics are very different however.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p.170.

⁴ Ibid., p.171.

In *Hamlet*, the intrusion of the ghost is registered by the characters onstage. It is upsetting things, putting them out of joint. Nervous expectation, dread, and confusion gripped those that walked Elsinore's midnight ramparts. In *Macbeth*, there is nobody and nothing there to be upset. Whereas tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *Othello* "open with conversations which lead into the action", Bradley observes that in *Macbeth* "the action bursts into wild life amidst the sounds of a thunderstorm and the echoes of a distant battle".⁵ Unlike the ghost of *Hamlet*, which disturbs a world that is already there, the weird sisters of *Macbeth* are in some way foreign to the world they precede, calling forth something new, calling forth Macbeth:

FIRST WITCH When shall we three meet again?
 In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
 SECOND WITCH When the hurly-burly's done,
 When the battle's lost and won.
 THIRD WITCH That will be ere the set of sun.
 FIRST WITCH Where the place?
 SECOND WITCH Upon the heath.
 THIRD WITCH There to meet with Macbeth.
 FIRST WITCH I come, Grimalkin.
 SECOND WITCH Paddock calls.
 THIRD WITCH Anon.
 ALL Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
 Hover through the fog and air.
 (I.i.1-11)

Macbeth is the object, the target, of the weird sisters' weirdness and conjurings. They *name* him, which has its own peculiar power. They are without history and origin, but they are somehow entering the historical world, altering it, and calling forth Macbeth in language that is almost comic. Not that they are 'comic' in either the usual Shakespearean or modern sense; rather the 'comic' here is language's excessive and shifting quality. It does not stay where it should but breaks the rules and inverts things. Describing the "weird sisters" as "the heroines of the piece", Eagleton writes

⁵ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.332.

that “[t]heir riddling, ambiguous speech... promises to subvert” the existing hierarchal “structure” and reveal “the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare”.⁶ The almost childlike rhyme of their speech, its playful word-choice (“hurly-burly”), its reference to legendary tales (“Grimalkin” the Scottish faery cat), and its characteristic inversions (“[f]air is foul, and foul is fair”), speaks to a sort of superabundant playfulness.

Their origin-less, over-spilling quality defies teleology and relates to the historical world of Duncan’s Scotland in a manner that recalls Badiou’s “*evental site*”, which is “an entirely abnormal multiple... such that none of its elements are presented in the situation”.⁷ While the “site, itself, is presented”, “‘beneath’ it nothing from which it is composed is presented”: it is “a multiple that is *on the edge of the void*”.⁸ Although the weird sisters are presented to the audience, with the exception of Macbeth (I distinguish Banquo later) these weird sisters are not presented to those *within* the old situation. They, like Hamlet’s voyage, exist along the borders of the play-world, coming from ‘beyond’. And, even for the audience, the weird sisters come from an unknown dimension. We cannot see “beneath” them. We cannot discern their origins or desires.

(ii) “What bloody man is that?” – The Situation

The world of history and narrative into which the weird sisters irrupt is established in the second scene. Whereas in *Hamlet* the prior, unconscious, unity of the situation is only hinted at, as when Ophelia mourns the loss of “[t]he glass of fashion and the

⁶ Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p.2.

⁷ Badiou, *Being*, p.175.

⁸ *Ibid.*

mould of form” that was “o’erthrown” (III.i.149-152) by the event, in *Macbeth* this unconscious unity is embodied immediately following the supernatural intrusion. The spectral vanishes, and Duncan’s feudal Scotland is established as the situation from which Macbeth is conjured by the weird sisters, as well as the historical world from which *Macbeth* is conjured by Shakespeare. Duncan’s world is thus a sort of pre-history or canvas for conjured arrivals. Or, in Badiou’s terms, the implacable surface of Duncan’s world is the “situation” that is ruptured by the appearance of the “void”, of the weird sisters, which “produces an excess over the count-as-one, an irruption of inconsistency”.⁹ It is, as we shall see, a situation that to some extent returns to force at the play’s end.

The fundamental disconnect between the two words is established by the “*Thunder and lightning*” that opens the play and serves as “an aural mark of [the weird sisters’] separation”¹⁰ from the situation. Their weirdness then dissolves as a martial “Alarum” (I.ii) cues the entrance of Duncan’s starkly different world. The King and his followers have not seen the weird sisters but are embroiled in a bloody upheaval. The first line of this world’s more prosaic and utilitarian dialogue has the King asking, “What bloody man is that?” (I.ii.1). Soon we hear an account of the battle in which Macbeth turns the tide by “unseam[ing]” the rebel Macdonald “from the navel to th’ chops” (I.ii.22). There is a gleeful barbarism to the account, and to the reaction of the King, who praises Macbeth as his “valiant cousin” and “worthy gentleman” (I.ii.24) for this unseaming. It is far more grotesque and explicit than the weird sisters’ opening. And it has its own gory economy: through his bloody deeds “noble Macbeth hath won” what Cawdor “hath lost” (I.ii.66).

⁹ Ibid., p.75.

¹⁰ Palfrey and Stern, p.276.

We know, of course, that the ultimate result of this economy is the unseaming of Macbeth's head from his shoulders. Current roles will be inverted and current fortunes will be reversed. We have a situation of cyclical violence and undifferentiated subjects whose singularities are lost (or precluded) by the slaughter. Duncan's "What bloody man is that?" here takes on a deeper meaning, hinting at the indistinction of all individuals in his realm. Duncan's world here resembles the cyclical instability of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in which Scotland veers between destruction and renewal under the influence of its kings. The cyclical pattern also defines Holinshed's rulers themselves. Like Macdonald who, without explanation, moves from commanding the King's "absolute trust" (I.iv.14) to being "merciless Macdonald – / Worthy to be a rebel, for that / The multiplying villainies of nature / Do swarm upon him" (I.ii.9-12), Holinshed's cast of rulers undergo sudden and inexplicable changes between seemingly absolute states. The individual subject seems inseparable from the broader oscillation between crisis and restoration. So, for instance, King "Culenes reigne" was "begun with righteous execution of iustice" but then, "shortlie after", he ends up "loosing the rains of lasciuious wantonnesse" and governing with "negligence".¹¹ While King "Grime", "at length of a chast & liberall prince, long slouth and increase of riches, became a most couetous ty [...]ant".¹²

Despite the perpetual upheaval, nothing new emerges in Holinshed. There is only a tidal movement of blood, now more and now less. Such a perpetual crisis recalls Benjamin's idea that in the "tradition of the oppressed...the 'state of emergency' in

¹¹ Holinshed, p.152.

¹² Ibid., p.161.

which we live is not the exception but the rule”.¹³ In other words, the tumult that begins *Macbeth* and mirrors Holinshed’s history is not an “emergency” but an expression of the very structure of this world and this history. It is the weird sisters, then, who follow Benjamin’s “task” of “bring[ing] about a real state of emergency”,¹⁴ rather than the entrenched quasi-emergency embodied in Holinshed. They interrupt the cyclical model of history, which is soon overrun by Macbeth’s presence and vitality. We almost have a dramatisation of Nietzsche’s belief that we do not “need history” for “knowledge” but “for the sake of life and action”.¹⁵ The weird sisters are what turn dead history into something that is alive: into dramatic history. It is only the weirdness of the disembodied, or not fully embodied, that can get under the surface of this feudal merry-go-round, and give rise to the divisions and imaginings of a subject.

The serene surface of this subject-less world is established by the unproblematic unity of words and events. There is no gap between act and representation, which, as we saw with *Hamlet*, opens the space for consciousness. The seemingly straightforward ability to name events is evident as the characters report their “knowledge of the broil” (I.ii.6): for a moment “fortune” smiles on its “damnèd quarry” (I.ii.14), Macdonald, but “justice” (I.ii.29) soon destroys him. Justice comes in the form of Macbeth who is justly rewarded. Not only are events capable of simple narration, they are susceptible to clear judgement, such as Duncan’s “Great happiness” (I.ii.58) or the Captain’s “justice” (I.ii.29). Justice here is a motionless absolute that sublates everything local, vaporising all difference and singularity. Soon “noble Macbeth” (I.ii.66) will be unseaming enemies not for “justice” but for evil, and so ‘justice’ and

¹³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.248.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Untimely*, p.59.

‘rebel’ become hollowed out and static concepts. Within the language of the situation – the language of Duncan and Macduff – these terms are overlaid on any and all circumstances, so that Macbeth can replace Macdonald and Macduff can replace Macbeth without any change in language or structure. But this language of measurement and nominality is, like Romeo’s oaths, utterly inadequate to our experience of the poetic event. Macbeth’s arrival is simply not expressible in the proper names or instrumental political language of Duncan’s Scotland, which remains untouched by the play’s convulsions and transformations.

As chief representative of the situation, Duncan uses language that cocoons him from the scandalous intrusion of evil. Duncan is hermetically sealed in his language. There is an utter lack of the normal lifeblood of Shakespearean speech: of metaphor, puns, and physicality. He alternates between questioning others about events, “Dismayed not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?” (I.ii.34), and dealing out praise and courtesies, “O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!” (I.ii.24). Duncan’s almost contentless language does not touch the outside or connect images to the material, or does so only ironically and unintentionally: “I have begun to plant thee, and will labour / To make thee full of growing” (I.iv.28-9). Sealed from the vital and the irruptive, the only value expressed by Duncan’s language seems to be a formal courtesy: “O worthiest cousin, / The sin of my ingratitude even now / Was heavy on me!” (I.iv.14-16).

Whereas the “situation” of Duncan’s Scotland attempts to make everything nameable and presentable, the weird sisters’ riddling play suggests Badiou’s “theorem of the

point of excess”,¹⁶ which “establishes that...it is formally impossible, whatever the situation be, for *everything* which is included (every subset) to belong to the situation”.¹⁷ Such belonging is precisely what Duncan’s sealed language seeks to establish: an eternal state – this ‘justice’ – with nothing outside it. It recalls Badiou’s idea that “the State pursues...the one-effect beyond the terms which belong to the situation, to the point of the mastery...of *included* multiples”.¹⁸ In other words, “the State” attempts to expand its count-as-one to *all* multiples: to the excess of the weird sisters and the event. It attempts to shut down “the void and the gap between the count and the counted”, along with any “inconsistency” with the count.¹⁹ As Badiou continues:

It is not for nothing that governments, when an emblem of their void wanders about – generally, an inconsistent or rioting crowd – prohibit ‘gatherings of more than three people’, which is to say they explicitly declare their non-tolerance of the one of such ‘parts’, thus proclaiming that the function of the State is to number inclusions such that consistent belongings be preserved.²⁰

The closed language of Duncan and his followers necessarily excludes the excess and the void, labelling it rebellion, traitorousness, or villainy. With the only possibilities the complete belonging of the established order or complete chaos, Duncan’s Scotland recalls Holinshed’s oscillation between destructive vice and restorative virtue, which shuts down all movement between the situation and the void, and hence all subjectivity and politics. There is, as Benjamin stresses, no revolutionary impulse in the endless crisis. The speeches condemning the “damned” and “merciless” “rebel” (I.ii.9-14) Macdonald offer a foresight of how Macbeth will be viewed within the situation: “this dread butcher and his fiend-like queen” (V.xi.35). For the ‘good’

¹⁶ Badiou, *Being*, p.97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.109.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

characters, there is no possibility of a rupture of the situation, no excess, there is only corruption and rebellion which are fated to annihilation. All that is singular and alive is therefore lost.

With the exception of Lady Macbeth, who is in many ways a part of Macbeth himself, the play's other characters are half-asleep, awash in the flow of narrated action but fundamentally removed from the dramatic present. They lie outside the linguistic excess of its imaginative conjuring, with its relentless visions and metaphors, and are shut away in their linguistic completeness. The result is the odd situation in which the 'good' characters are detached from our experience of the drama. They form only the base register of the play, from which Macbeth soon bursts into life. In this sense, it is Macduff and the forces of Duncan's cyclical Scotland, and not the weird sisters, that play the role of 'fate'. Theirs is the situation that will be reinstated at the end of the play's action by Macbeth's destruction.

(iii) "I have almost slipped the hour": Macduff's Non-Arrival

The strangely undramatic nature of the other characters is best seen in Macbeth's nemesis Macduff. The Porter, who does not open the door to Macduff's knocking but allows his own imaginings of hell to run wild, embodies the spiritual closure of the 'good' characters. Palfrey and Stern explain how the Macduff role is structured upon a "curious belatedness":

... the play is almost half over by the time Macduff speaks his first words; he arrives after the most dilated 'entrance cue' in all of Shakespeare, with his 'knocking' first interrupting the Macbeths' guilty terror, and then sustained

throughout the Porter's long soliloquy; Macduff's purpose upon arriving is to waken Duncan, but of course Duncan is already dead.²¹

Macduff may be the figure of historical and narrative progression that ends Macbeth's imaginings and restores the episodic world of I.ii but, working almost as a surrogate for Macbeth, the Porter's dark imaginings keep Macduff and this progress at bay. Macduff's ironic reference to his already failed task of waking Duncan – "He did command me to call timely on him. / I have almost slipped the hour" (II.iii.45-6) – becomes "the calling card of the part".²² Macduff is pushed off time and out of key. He is never *with* the play's dramatic moment. He is always too late for something; trying to catch up with what has already happened.

Even when he acts with forthright passion after discovering Duncan's murder, crying "O horror, horror, horror!" (II.iii.62), it confirms Macduff's non-presence. He is again too late. That is, his "horror" is too late for us, who have already sat through an entire scene dedicated to the horribleness of the murder (II.ii). For us, it has been registered by Macbeth's ghastly visions and voices. Furthermore, the declarative style of his wordy "[c]onfusion now hath made his masterpiece" (II.iii.65) does not stand up to the spooky invasiveness of what went before. If anything, it is comparable to Macbeth's feigned grief: "There's nothing serious in mortality" (II.iii.92). After Macbeth's trancelike account of his inability to "say Amen" (II.ii.26) it seems withdrawn or journalistic; it is never quite felt, it never quite hits Macduff as a subject. Macduff, in other words, never quite arrives. He is shocked by events, but there is no psychic tumult or recognition of being transformed. That is not to say we condemn him, or 'dislike' him, or are aloof from his plight, rather, it is that he and his

²¹ Palfrey and Stern, pp.125-6.

²² *Ibid.*, p.126.

sufferings happen in the half-light that characterised Duncan's world. They are not gripping in the manner of Macbeth's haunted interiority. They are not, in the end, what the play is about.

Macduff's chief involvement comes directly after Macbeth settles upon slaughtering his family and promises that "[t]he very firstlings of [his] heart shall be / The firstlings of [his] hand" (IV.i.163-4). As sympathy for Macbeth is smothered by the rising tide of cruelty it might seem apt that our attachments would shift to the good and patriotic Macduff. Shakespeare prevents any deep investment in Macduff, however, treating him somewhat brutally. While his opening speech, calling for Malcolm to join him and "Hold fast the mortal sword, and like good men / Bestride our downfall birthdom" (IV.iii.3-4), is defiant and notionally inspiring, it is undercut by the bitter irony of his talk about "widows" and "orphans" (IV.iii.5): Macduff was not there with "mortal sword" to defend his own wife and child. While their murder also takes place in Holinshed, Shakespeare makes a critical change in not giving Macduff *knowledge* of his family's murder when he speaks to Malcolm.²³ It allows Shakespeare to exploit his actor, who shares the character's helplessness: "Macduff knows nothing, his actor knows it all: but neither of them can *do* anything".²⁴ There is an undermining of Macduff's heroism inscribed in the part, showing how "the part-script can embed in the actor a continuity of attitude (Macduff is throughout the passionate patriot) *and* make this continuity itself a form of accusation (here of blameworthy evasiveness or belatedness)".²⁵

²³ See Holinshed, p.174: "Makduffe was alreadie escaped out of danger, and gotten into England vnto Malcolme Cammore, to trie what purchase hee might make by means of his support, to reuenge the slaughter so cruellie executed on his wife, his children, and other friends".

²⁴ Palfrey and Stern, p.129.

²⁵ Ibid.

The result is that Macduff never knows what we know or feels what we feel. Macbeth may be cut off from every other character in the play, but Macduff is cut off from us. The embarrassment of both actor and audience only builds as Malcolm torturously asks, “Why in that rawness left you wife and child...without leave-taking?” (IV.iii.28-9), to which Macduff is not permitted to respond. For over 200 lines the news of his family’s death is withheld, and cannot be acted. Even when Ross enters bearing the news, Macduff is made to wait 45 lines before he is given a straight answer. First Ross tells him that his wife and children are “well at peace” (IV.iii.180), true only in the most evasive religious sense. And then, even when Macduff commands Ross “If it be mine, / Keep it not from me; quickly let me have it” (IV.iii.200-1), Ross delays further. Shakespeare never lets him fully “have it”, never fully gives him what is ‘his’. As such, Shakespeare never lets us, or his actor, fully have Macduff. Nothing is given to Macduff straight, so that in his longest scene he ends up despairing over the wrong things (Malcolm’s “voluptuousness” (IV.iii.62) and “avarice” (IV.iii.79)), and not despairing over the right things (his murdered his family). We see a deliberate strategy of stalling and tormenting this ‘good’ character, of refusing him dramatic presence. Macduff may belatedly catch up with dramatic moment as he settles on revenge but we then leave him immediately. His role is all but over at the moment he catches up with the play.

(iv) “Speak, if you can” : Macbeth’s Openness to Darkness

From the stillness of I.ii to the belatedness of Macduff, Shakespeare establishes a base world of history and narrative that does not contain the play’s hero. It seems designed to prepare for, and stress, the arrival of something utterly different. I must therefore

reject Hegel's characteristic argument that although the weird sisters "appear as external powers determining Macbeth's fate" they really "declare...his most secret and private wish".²⁶ It is the weird sisters, rather, that are given the dramatic and imaginative force to convulse the dead world and conjure Macbeth. There is no "wish", no Macbeth, before the weird sisters' appearance. It is pure fantasy to imagine, with Bradley, that "when Macbeth heard [the weird sisters] he was not an innocent man",²⁷ as it is through their invocation of the imagination that Macbeth is called into being. Indeed, 'innocence' and 'guilt' do not seem to exist in the Scotland that pre-exists their intrusion. Bradley's focus on individual agency leads him to treat them as "dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has to deal",²⁸ rather than as a foundational force. He therefore fails to follow through on how the play's "action bursts into wild life"²⁹ with the weird sisters.

Again the weird sisters' entrance is marked by "*Thunder*", which brings to an end the one-dimensional battle talk and prompts the arrival of another dimension. They mirror their martial counterparts by giving an account of their endeavours, here the "tempest-toss[ing]" of a hapless sailor (I.iii.3-24). But while the military talk was functional and enclosing, the weird sisters' account is non-functional and excessive. There is again something almost comic about their speech and its irrelevance to the main plot, something absurd in the idea of these profound forces' pre-occupation with a sailor's wife's refusal to hand over the "chestnuts in her lap", which she "munched, and munched, and munched" (I.iii.3-4). The comic specificity of the "chestnuts" speaks to a different form of history than that of Duncan's world, in which overlying

²⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.231.

²⁷ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.344.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.343.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.332.

concepts of justice and providence determine action in advance and override particularity. Rather than the mass movements and faceless cycles of the situation, in which subjects are indistinct – “What bloody man is that?” – we have significance and action at the lowest level of detail. Spirits can come anywhere at anytime to transform lives and fates. Creativeness creeps in from the outside, from the unseen and the obscure, into the gaps and cracks of the situation. It speaks to the almost unavoidable potentiality of arrivals, attaching itself to the smallest details so that nothing is inconsequential or insignificant.

Macbeth enters on the back of the weird sisters’ account and his speech is immediately different to Duncan’s battle talk. There the King was forced to make simple, unambiguous pronouncements – “Great happiness” (I.ii.58) – on events he was not present at. As with Macduff, Duncan speaks after the event. Macbeth, in contrast, is evidently a part of the day: “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (I.iii.36). These opening lines not only establish a clear link between Macbeth and the originating “foul is fair” inversions of the weird sisters, they also establish that Macbeth is present *in* the day and the play. He has “seen” it. He is disorientated by the day’s weirdness and he is conscious of his own disorientation. We are no longer in the historical mode of narrative. Rather, strange things are happening right now and right before us. In a sense, Macbeth exits the historical tale – in which his deeds are recounted in I.ii – and becomes something else in his very first line. He enters as the only character that perceives the full register of the play, apprehending both the world of Duncan and of the weird sisters. He alone experiences the play as we experience it: not merely as a normative account of revolt and revenge but also as the spectral emergence of a mind.

We realise soon enough that the weird sisters of *Macbeth* are the weird sisters of Macbeth. From the very beginning he is what they conjure: they go to “meet with Macbeth” (I.i.7). What happens – the spectral that invades the structural violence – happens to him. Indeed, the fact that Macbeth’s difference, his consciousness, and his consciousness of difference, are revealed in precisely the same “fair is foul” language as the weird sisters, suggests that something has already happened before his arrival on stage; that he has already been conjured. As Palfrey and Stern note, Macbeth’s first line is cued by the weird sisters’ charm:

----- [Charme’s] [wound] up. *Enter...*
So foule and faire a day I have not seene.³⁰

Shakespeare’s cue raises questions about the relation “between the wound-up ‘charm’ and [the actor’s] own entrance”: “Has his character been conjured up by black magic?”³¹ It highlights the character’s indebtedness to a weirdness that lies outside of it; that has already made it different.

Banquo’s mundane and functional first words, “How far is’t to Forres” (I.iii.37), immediately tell us that he is not a twin to Macbeth. He may see and hear the weird sisters but his mind is not operating in the same dual sense. And this is reflected in his long-winded questioning:

How far is’t called to Forres? – What are these,
So withered, and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th’inhabitants o’th’earth
And yet are on’t? – Live you, or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me

³⁰ Palfrey and Stern, p.98.

³¹ *Ibid.*

By each at once her choppy finger laying
 Upon her skinny lips. You should be women
 And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
 That you are so.
 (I.iii.37-45)

Banquo's language is plainly inadequate to this strange happening. The gap, or hyphen, between his mundane first question and his "What are these" marks the convergence of two worlds that were hereto separated. The explosiveness of the moment is lost on Banquo, however, who tries to place the weird sisters in a nameable and material context through a series of dichotomies: on the earth or not; alive or not; questionable or not; women or not. In this sense he is Duncan's heir, demanding that existence fits within simple categories. Although his speech does attempt to get at the strangeness of the happening, the "not" in the second half of each equation suggests a bewildering beyondness that his language cannot deal with. In Latour's terms, Banquo "define[s] existence...as an all-or-nothing concept" rather than "as a gradient".³² The event is not nameable in the situation's language of rigid binaries, and so Banquo's mouth and his questions run away from him. (Hence why the weird sisters raise their fingers to the lips, signalling him to silence and permitting Macbeth to speak).

Macbeth is similarly eager to know what these figures are and what they want but, as a man who is already somehow in their realm, he is not trapped by the obsessive attempt to name events as here or not (or as justice or rebellion). Whereas Banquo creates a wall of sound to insulate himself, Macbeth would have these intruders speak: "Speak, if you can. What are you?" (I.iii.45). After Banquo's flailing attempts to answer his own questions, Macbeth's command to speak (with its qualifying "if"

³² Latour, p.310.

that recognises the inhuman quality of the addressees) and his short question, indicate a radical openness. Rather than walling himself up, Macbeth exposes himself to them and their answers. It is this sense of risk and exposure that blunts Bradley's claims, in comparing Macbeth to Banquo, that "no innocent man would have started, as he did, with a start of *fear* at the mere prophecy of a crown, or have conceived thereupon *immediately* the thought of murder".³³

Rather, what is stressed in their differing responses to the weird sisters is Macbeth's openness to a dimension beyond Duncan's self-contained language. It is precisely the sort of opening that the situation's language represses. In evental terms, "every structured presentation" – or in other words any 'situation' – "unpresents 'its' void".³⁴ The "'Void' entails the failure of the one",³⁵ of the situation's "count-as-one". We see such a failure in the metaphysical inadequacy of Banquo's questioning, ending in the weird sisters' signal to hush. Language's failure marks the "dysfunction of the count" and thereby permits "the void to become localizable at the level of presentation".³⁶ It marks, in other words, the inability of the count-as-one to account for this "excess-of-one" of the "event".³⁷ Macbeth, in contrast, turns to face the void from whence the weird sisters come. As such, while Macbeth may share elements with vice-characters like Iago, he is not 'closed' to the event's excess like Iago. Rather, in *Macbeth*, it is the old world that is closed. It is Macbeth's openness to the unaccountable entrance of another dimension – the only event that happens in this self-contained world – that founds the play. *It is the play. It brings Macbeth to life.*

³³ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.344.

³⁴ Badiou, *Being*, p.55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.56.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

(v) **The Event of Evil**

The fact that Macbeth comes to life through an openness that ultimately closes him from life raises difficult questions for Badiou's philosophy of truth-events however. Unlike the obscure event that founds the subject in *Hamlet*, in *Macbeth* the event is in league with 'evil'. The distinction between a truth-event and an evil is a difficulty often posed to Badiou. As Žižek states in the context of Foucault's political writings on Iran: "Foucault ends up at a point at which one should effectively raise the question usually addressed to Badiou: why, then, is Hitler's Nazi 'revolution' not also an Event?"³⁸ Or as Oliver Feltham, translator of Badiou's *Being and Event*, puts it:

...inasmuch as a subject retroactively assigns sense to the event, and there are no objective criteria determining whether the procedure the subject is involved in is generic or not, there is no distinction between subjectivization in a truth procedure and ideological interpellation. In fact, Badiou has built in one safeguard to prevent the confusion of truth procedures and ideologies, and that is that the former is initiated by the occurrence of an event *at an evental site*.³⁹

So what, precisely, does Badiou's "safeguard" entail? In *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou establishes a definition of Evil that is the necessary flipside of his idea that the subject arises from "the singular truths of which he is capable".⁴⁰ If the subject arises in fidelity to an event (the Good), then Evil is what destroys this event or this fidelity.

Badiou identifies three types of Evil. The one that Feltham is pointing to is the "simulacrum" of a truth-event.⁴¹ The Nazi movement is Badiou's prime example: it

³⁸ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, p.113.

³⁹ Badiou, *Being*, p.xxix-xxx.

⁴⁰ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

is “formally indistinguishable from an event”⁴² as it uses “borrowed names – ‘revolution’, ‘socialism’ – justified by the great modern political events (the Revolution of 1792, or the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917)” to legitimise “the break with the older order”.⁴³ It is fundamentally different however: “When a radical break in a situation...convokes not the void but the ‘full’ particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a *simulacrum of truth*”.⁴⁴ So, rather than naming “the void of the earlier situation”, the Nazi movement sought to carry “the absolute particularity” of “a particular community, the German people, toward its true destiny, which is a destiny of universal domination”.⁴⁵ The result of “[f]idelity to a simulacrum” is the “unending construction” of “the closed particularity of an abstract set”, “and it has no other means of doing this than that of ‘voiding’ what surrounds it”.⁴⁶ Death, in other words, is directed to all that lies outside this “set”.

There is certainly something of Badiou’s “simulacrum” in Macbeth’s action of usurpation, which involves “‘voiding’ what surrounds it”. Here the “closed particularity” is Macbeth-as-King, based on a prophecy addressed only to him, with death addressed to all. But while the particularity of Macbeth dominates all politics, there is also a dramatic creativity or vitality that does not conform to Badiou’s philosophical categories. Macbeth’s event may be closed to others in its specifics, but it is genuinely new and irruptive, giving rise to an imaginative subjectivity and language that was impossible in Duncan’s situation. That said, the fact that this newness is ultimately closed off in Macbeth’s isolation and voiding violence suggests that the event’s excess is blocked by the paralysis of the existing political structure. It

⁴² Ibid., p.73.

⁴³ Ibid., p.72.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.72-3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.74.

is as if it has nowhere to go; it has no way out in language or thought. It does not summon the “‘full’ particularity” of the old situation, in the manner of the “simulacrum”, and yet neither does it fully summon that situation’s void. Indeed, Macbeth in many ways repeats the structural violence of Duncan’s world, both in his unending murders and in his violent severance from the world of the living.

The difficulty of this bind in *Macbeth* – of his arrival to darkness – perhaps suggests that artistic arrivals need not fit neatly within Badiou’s categories. As Marion writes, art such as painting is not “a matter of inscribing upon a neutral surface... a complex of foreseen objects”, but “of representing the dark opening from which the unseen nevertheless expels the unforeseen, to the great horror of the gaze,” so that it “surprises, overwhelms, and subverts the painting”.⁴⁷ Here we get at why the weird sisters’ conjuring of Macbeth is not simply a “simulacrum”, even if it challenges the positive interpretation of arrivals put forward by this thesis. The weird sisters do not close the situation but are an *opening* to the unforeseen and the creative, both dramatically and within the play-world. Žižek stresses the importance of the event as an “opening” in his discussion of how the Iranian Revolution, however briefly, produced “something new... beyond the existing options of Western liberal democracy or a return to pre-modern tradition”:

Foucault’s blunder in no way implies that the Iranian revolution was a pseudo-Event (in a Badiouian sense) comparable to the Nazi ‘revolution’: it was an authentic Event, a momentary *opening* that unleashed unprecedented forces of social transformation, a moment in which ‘everything seemed possible.’ ... The Nazi ‘revolution’ was *never* ‘open’ in this authentic sense.⁴⁸

Given the darkness, the deadness, of what arrives in *Macbeth*, perhaps what we are

⁴⁷ Marion, *Crossing*, p.40.

⁴⁸ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, p.114.

left with is a bleeding between the openness of the void, the stolidness of the situation, and the irruption of the event, so that we *cannot distinguish* adequately between them. It is very difficult to draw a line between the undeniable openness of Macbeth's conjuring from the void and the undeniable closure of his return to the cyclical situation, in which he assumes Macdonald's role of the heroically resigned rebel and by which conjurings of the mind fade into nothingness. Macbeth thus slides between the instrumental and the supernatural, the situation and the void. We are at once left with a world that has been transformed completely by Macbeth, and a world that has returned to the old situation as Malcolm restores "measure, time, and place" (V.xi.39). The world is the same, but different; different, but the same.

In narrative terms the old order of I.ii is resumed, but, in dramatic terms, it is not resumed for us, for it never was *our* situation. Macbeth dominated our imaginative experience of the play and we depart the play-world once Macbeth dies. Moreover, our view of Duncan's Scotland is changed, for it is only through the dark and riddling agency of the weird sisters that the old regime is restored. Its supposed 'naturalness' and 'self-unity' are now infiltrated by the unnatural. It, like Macbeth, ends up unwittingly in league with the weird sisters – who are given the dramatic agency to bring the wood to Dunsinane and whose prophecies come true – so that the once separate worlds end up blurring together indistinctly. The weird sisters at once provide the means of the return to the old world of linear prophecy and instrumental language with Malcolm's restoration, and produce an excess that waits in the wings. Their prophecies are not yet fulfilled completely but wait with Banquo and his heirs. There is, therefore, no possibility that Malcolm is the end of the story or that the weird sisters' world is finished. And yet, of course, Malcolm is the end of the story.

(vi) **“But what is not” – Horrible Imaginings**

Insofar as Macbeth’s openness to darkness continues to rupture the old order it is not reducible to a “simulacrum” but bears a partial resemblance to Badiou’s “void”, which is “outside situations, unrepresentable”, and therefore “in excess of being as a thinkable disposition, and especially as natural disposition”.⁴⁹ Breaking down the seemingly “natural” order, Macbeth releases the explosive force of imagination into the situation as a transformed and inescapably metaphoric language. The centrality of Macbeth’s imagination has long been recognised. Bradley articulates the divided nature of that imagination in his essay on Hegel, where he writes that “Macbeth’s imagination deters him from murder, but it also makes the vision of a crown irresistibly bright”.⁵⁰ Bradley pursues this thought in *Shakespearean Tragedy*:

This bold ambitious man of action has, within certain limits, the imagination of a poet ... Macbeth’s better nature – to put the matter for clearness’ sake too broadly – instead of speaking to him in the overt language of moral ideas, commands, and prohibitions, incorporates itself in images which alarm and horrify. His imagination is thus the best of him, something usually deeper and higher than his conscious thoughts; and if he obeyed it he would have been safe.⁵¹

Bradley’s analysis shows how Macbeth’s conscience is a linguistic surplus or remainder, working in poetic images rather than functional speech. It infiltrates Macbeth as “images which alarm and horrify”, making the simple self-presence and hollowed out language of the other characters impossible. Rather, Macbeth’s language, and mind, teems with metaphors and imaginings. Although Bradley attempts to distinguish between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ aspects of this imagining, trying

⁴⁹ Badiou, *Being*, p.74.

⁵⁰ Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, p.89.

⁵¹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.352.

to limit Macbeth's imagination to "moral" conscience, the play does no such thing. Macbeth's imagination is not the "best" of him in a moral sense, as Bradley suggests, even if it is in a dramatic sense. Morally, it is the worst of him as much as the best of him, and it stems not from within but from his relation to the event. His entire consciousness, and not just his "better nature", works through the imagination.

After asking them to speak, Macbeth says nothing when the weird sisters hail him as Cawdor and as King. His silence is far from dumb, however, as Banquo indicates when he asks "why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (I.iii.49-50). While Banquo is outwardly eager to know his prophecy, his mind is not gripped by its vision and his language remains functional. Macbeth, on the other hand, has been transported elsewhere. He is imagining something different from his ordained future within the situation; something different, that is, to life as Glamis. In other words, the originating event of the weird sisters opens the possibility of an imaginative and poetic Macbeth. That he is possessed by the vision of this future is confirmed twice more in the scene. First, Banquo is again forced to take up the questioning of the weird sisters because Macbeth "seems rapt withal" (I.iii.55), indicating that Macbeth's consciousness is still elsewhere. Second, after Ross and Angus confirm him to be Cawdor, Macbeth barely speaks to these messengers of the King's world but is again rapt: "Look how our partner's rapt" (I.iii.141).

Even amidst Macbeth's initial scepticism there is a smothered but urgent desire for his imagining to come true: "The Thane of Cawdor lives, / A prosperous gentleman, and to be king / Stands not within the prospect of belief, / No more than to be Cawdor" (I.iii.24-27). The role of the prophecy is not just to entice Macbeth's imaginings, it is

also to establish their *reality*. From their arrival as fantastical figures suddenly present on the road, the weird sisters make the imaginary seem real to Macbeth, but what radically shifts Macbeth's "prospect of belief" is the revelation that he has been made Thane of Cawdor. That Macbeth is subjected to a trick here – the sort of trick usually foisted upon Macduff – is suggested by the fact that we know that Macbeth is Cawdor *already*, after the King announced it in I.ii. That is not the case in Holinshed, where it is "shortlie after" the prophecy that Cawdor was "condemned at Fores" and "his lands, liuings, and offices were giuen of the kings liberalitie to Mackbeth".⁵² The fact that, in Shakespeare, this is not really a prophecy at all, sheds some light on what the weird sisters are doing: they are causing Macbeth to imagine an event that has already happened, to invest in it, so that it will seem miraculous when it is confirmed.

We have, perhaps, a bitter echo of Hamlet's assertion of providence. As Witmore suggests, "a latent knowledge of God's providential presence is uncovered in encounters with accidents".⁵³ But accident can also foreground an evil or dramatic providence if we "understand [accidents] as occasions for storytelling and the expression of immanent forms of value".⁵⁴ So, for instance, for "[a] man who is plowing a field [and] stumbles upon buried treasure", it is "as if" he were doing the plowing to find the treasure".⁵⁵ The accident fuses with or activates a narrative that inspires the imagination: in the farmer's case the narrative of buried treasure. More profoundly, we saw in relation to Hamlet's voyage how such an accident may strike the individual with "wonder", which "marks the moment when an individual's attention or 'regard' is suddenly detached from the concerns of the world and turned

⁵² Holinshed, p.171.

⁵³ Witmore, *Accidents*, 2001, p.10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.36.

elsewhere”.⁵⁶ Macbeth, then, is not only ‘hailed’ by the weird sisters, he is hailed by the ‘accident’ of becoming Cawdor and transported “elsewhere”.

Once Macbeth’s imagination is gripped by this narrative of his path to greater glory, in which becoming Cawdor is the critical first step, the confirmation of its happening is incredible and energising. Hence Macbeth declares that “[t]he greatest is behind” (I.iii.114). It shows that the world of imagining can enter the world of materiality.

Dreams can come true. Life can be transformed. “Because they represent[...] a lapse of intelligible order in the world”,⁵⁷ accidents can challenge the seemingly unalterable facts of the world in which Glamis is Glamis, Cawdor is Cawdor, and Duncan King. Material facts certainly lose their inevitability for Macbeth: “what seemed corporal / Melted as breath into the wind” (I.iii.79-80). Imaginings are becoming his reality while the world’s reality fades. The remarkable revelation that dreams and visions can enter the waking world triggers Macbeth’s pivotal speech:

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.
(I.iii.133-141).

Contrary to the old idea that “Macbeth’s character is determined by his passion of ambition”,⁵⁸ ‘ambition’ is not a substance or stable trait but only becomes a meaningful and powerful concept insofar as it is a fantastical vision whose realisation

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.148.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.43.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.578.

is suddenly believable. Macbeth arrives not through already being an “ambitious man”,⁵⁹ but because he becomes conscious of and committed to the fact that something has happened to him. He becomes strikingly aware that the exhilarating vision enticed by the weird sisters has *changed* him. In the passage above he is conscious that he is “unfix[ed]” “knock[ed]”, “shake[n]”, and “smothered” by this “horrid image”. His “single state of man” is so shaken that “[p]resent fears” are smothered by “horrible imaginings”. It is by this convulsion that he gains “the imagination of a poet”. Unlike in Holinshed, where Makbeth is established as a “valiant gentleman” but “somewhat cruell of nature” at the very beginning of the narrative (while Duncane is “soft and gentle of nature”⁶⁰), there is no Macbeth before the weird sisters. And, even if we can infer a pre-existing Macbeth, it can only be in terms of the sort of characters we saw in I.ii, which is to say a flat and immediate Macbeth whose unified “single state” and “seated heart” allowed no “surmise”, contradiction, or difference.

Macbeth’s imagination – the imaginings that constitute his so-called “ambition” – spills from the void opened by this “surmise”. He is invigorated by the realisation that dreams and visions can be made real. As such, his ‘ambition’ is described repeatedly by Macbeth in the language of the imagination: “suggestion”, “horrid image”, “horrible imaginings”, “thought”, “fantastical”, “surmise”, “what is not”. There are, of course, clear signs of conscience here in the horribleness of the imagining, but the overwhelming feeling is of an irresistible, albeit awful, allure that “make[s] [his] seated heart knock at [his] ribs”. It usurps and supersedes the material so that “nothing is / But what is not”. Fittingly, it is here that Banquo observes to

⁵⁹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.352.

⁶⁰ Holinshed, p.168.

Ross and Angus, “Look how our partner's rapt” (I.iii.141). Macbeth is possessed by an imagining whose electricity is far more than conscience: it is the opening of a new horizon of possibility.

Macbeth therefore arrives as a mind committed to the obscure power of “what is not”. Badiou’s idea of courage as the “insubordination to the symbolic order” is here fitting: “Courage positively carries out the disorder of the symbolic, the breakdown of communication, whereas anxiety calls for its death”.⁶¹ Whereas Banquo was caught in an anxious series of dichotomies between what is and what is not, caught by the dead law of the “symbolic”, Macbeth plunges fearlessly into “what is not”, into “the disorder of the symbolic”. Although we may glimpse “anxiety” in Macbeth’s subsequent paranoia – ultimately suggesting how *Macbeth* blurs philosophical categories such as courage and anxiety – in comparison to Banquo’s and Duncan’s rigid “subordination” to their closed language, Macbeth is surely courageous here: “Courage effectuates the interruption of the dead law in favour of the excess”.⁶²

The energising power of this excess recalls “Nietzsche’s view” that “we are most ourselves when we are in this destructive, dangerous and suffering state of freedom, violating the restraints of the very history which has produced us”.⁶³ As Dollimore continues, in this regard “*Macbeth* does not warn against hubris and ambition; on the contrary it affirms their attraction.”⁶⁴ *Macbeth* also rebuffs the historicist impulse, deadening the world of historical happenings and figures whilst animating the passionate, brutal action of one man. In discussing the limitations of history,

⁶¹ Badiou, *Subject*, p.160.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Third Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p.xxxi.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.xxxii.

Nietzsche asks us to “imagine a man seized by a vehement passion, for a woman or for a great idea: how different the world has become to him!”⁶⁵ The seizure, like Macbeth’s imagining, transforms the existing world so that “all is so palpable, close, highly coloured, resounding, as though he apprehended it with all his senses at once”.⁶⁶ Far from being unproblematically liberating, however, Nietzsche’s description of this experience could easily apply to Macbeth:

It is the condition in which one is least capable of being just; narrow-minded, ungrateful to the past, blind to dangers, deaf of warnings, one is a little vortex of life in a dead sea of darkness and oblivion: and yet this condition – unhistorical, anti-historical through and through – is the womb not only of the unjust but of every just deed too...⁶⁷

In a manner that links with Badiou’s event, St Paul’s conversion, and Benjamin’s messianic, Nietzsche affirms that transfiguring action requires a dangerous break with history in which the present bursts with irreducible life and urgency. We are far from the empiricist and common-sense thinking of Locke, who urges us to be satisfied with understanding in “proportion” to “our faculties”, and not to “demand certainty, where probability only is to be had”.⁶⁸ As Nietzsche and Badiou suggest, however, the drive for more is what is enlivening and creative. Such electric arrivals are central to Shakespeare’s drama and they certainly make the historical world unreal in *Macbeth*. Within the “dead seas” and “oblivion” of the Holinshedean realm, Macbeth becomes “a little vortex of life”. We *know* Macbeth will take-up Duncan’s enticing words – “More is thy due than more than all can pay” (I.iv.21) – and adopt the role of Cawdor and traitor. And yet, although I.ii effectively sets up the pattern that will be repeated by Macbeth, the narrative is quite simply “less than [Macbeth’s] horrible imaginings”.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Untimely*, p.64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Locke, p.7.

(vii) “The eye wink at the hand” – The Act

While Macbeth’s openness to “what is not” brings him to life, it soon closes him off from “what is”. For not only are his imaginings black, Macbeth envisages shrouding his act of realising them in darkness:

Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
(I.iv.50-53)

Macbeth is attempting to separate what is imagined from the action that will realise it; to insulate the mind from the act. It is an ambivalence toward action that Lady Macbeth appears to expect: “Thou’dst have, great Glamis, / That which cries ‘Thus thou must do’ if thou have it, / And that which rather thou dost fear to do / Than wishest should be undone” (I.v.21-24). In contrast, Lady Macbeth’s “unsex me here” (I.v.39) speech is a brutal commitment to enacting desire at any price. She, in a way, supplies the willpower Macbeth needs to enact his visions. They combine to form one agent, he supplying the imagination and she the will to power, before she fades from view once the act is done. Her critical contribution comes after Macbeth’s most sustained speech on the relationship between the imagination and the act:

If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well
It were done quickly. If th’assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success: that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all, here,
But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
We’d jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgement here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions which, being taught, return

To plague th'inventor.
(I.vii.1-10)

The "If" of this speech is notoriously problematic. Macbeth addresses it by pre-
visioning how the murder of Duncan will play in the minds of others, reaching two
conclusions. First, that it will "teach / Bloody instructions" that will "return / To
plague" him. Second, that inspired by Duncan's "meek[ness]", "pity" will "blow the
horrid deed in every eye" (I.vii.17-24). That is, the image of the deed will repulse
others. The explicit focus on the outward consequences of the act gives some
credence to Bradley's conclusion that Macbeth's "conscious or reflective
mind...moves chiefly among considerations of outward success and failure, while his
inner being is convulsed by conscience".⁶⁹ The conclusion is further bolstered by
Macbeth's wavering that follows the speech, culminating in his tremulous: "If we
should fail?" (I.vii.59).

Bradley is surely right that the way Lady Macbeth "overcomes his opposition to the
murder...shows us how little he understands himself".⁷⁰ For Bradley this is because
Macbeth "has never...accepted as the principle of his conduct the morality which
takes shape in his imaginative fears".⁷¹ But there is also a deeper misunderstanding
and a deeper division than Bradley's idea that Macbeth's imagination is 'good' and
his conscious thought 'bad'. There is a split between the subject and the act. To
grasp this we must return to Bradley's basic point that Macbeth's imagination both
"deters" Macbeth from the act and makes its outcome "irresistibly bright".⁷²

⁶⁹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.353.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.357.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, p.89.

Taken in this light, Macbeth's pre-visioning of how others will apprehend the murder mirrors how *he* envisions the act. He somewhat contradictorily foresees that others will be both inspired to repeat the action – it will “teach / Bloody instructions” – and will be repulsed by the “horrid deed”. Here Macbeth *does* consciously consider the moral horror of the act when he describes “pity...blow[ing] the horrid deed in every eye”. He is picturing it as others will, which is surely a typical form of shamed conscience. The trouble is – and this is the critical point Bradley misses – that Macbeth separates the “horrid deed” from the allure of “what is not”. As we saw in his “[s]tars, hide your fires”, he divorces the vision of the future that the weird sisters entice from the act that will consummate it. Hence the imagined act can be at once imaginatively inspiring and imaginatively horrid. What is ‘horrible’ about his imaginings is attributed to the act, while what is ‘enticing’ about them is attributed to the state or vision that the act will bring about.

We see this separation from the very beginning of Macbeth's long soliloquy. “If it were done when 'tis done” speaks to the end of doing, to a doing that brings about a settled state. It seeks an achievement of desires without further “consequence” by way of a blow that is “the be-all and the end-all”. As Cavell writes, “I hear Macbeth's speculation of deeds done in the doing, without consequence, when surcease is success, to be a wish for there to be no human action, no separation of consequence from intention, no gratification of desire, no showing of one's hand in what happens”.⁷³ Macbeth seeks a done-ness, a realisation of a final and finished vision, which entails a dimension of subjectless transcendence: “in wishing for the success of his act to be a surcease of the need for action, for a need that undoes doing, [he] must

⁷³ Cavell, p.233.

(logically) wish for an end to time”.⁷⁴ Broken off from the process of material action, the time envisaged by Macbeth is far from Bergson’s “duration”, which is registered by the living, and closer to “*abstract time*”, which is “always speaking of a given moment – a static moment, that is – and not of flowing time”.⁷⁵ Macbeth desires that time’s flow be grounded “upon this bank and shoal of time”.

Macbeth’s attempted separation of the mind from the act reveals a fault-line between him and his wife. Although Macbeth understands that the murder will lead to more bloodshed by instructing others, he fails to imagine what the act will make him *become*. In contrast, Lady Macbeth does apprehend that the act will change her. The brutal imagery of her “unsex me now” seeks to pre-empt what it will make her, to pre-empt its psychic violence. But, as Bradley notes, Lady Macbeth’s “want of imagination” means that “she hardly imagines the act, or at most imagines its outward show”.⁷⁶ She lacks Macbeth’s vision of the act’s *horror*. What they might know, if they were not divided, is that they will be *changed into horror*. It is not possible to bypass the horrific act and arrive at its result by having the “eye wink at the hand” (I.iv.52). Nor is it possible to pre-empt the act by calling on spirits to “fill [one] from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty” (I.v.39-41).

Metaphysically, Macbeth’s done-ness entails a desire to reach a transcendent world. In Badiou’s terms, Macbeth seeks a ‘truth’ that is outside or beyond any particular situation. Macbeth does not envisage a relation between the situation and its void but a future that is wholly within the void of “what is not”. We must contrast this longing with Hamlet’s “readiness”, which brought the force of the ‘beyond’ into the situation

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.234.

⁷⁵ Bergson, *Creative*, pp.22-24.

⁷⁶ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.373.

of contingency and action. In *Macbeth* the beyond instead annihilates the material world. We must ask how this fits with Badiou's philosophy. Apart from the "simulacrum", Badiou establishes two other types of Evil. First, "to fail to live up to a fidelity is Evil in the sense of *betrayal*".⁷⁷ And second, "to identify a truth with total power is Evil in the sense of *disaster*".⁷⁸ While Macbeth may 'betray' Duncan, there was no 'positive' truth-event (such as Othello's love) that he could "betray". Indeed, there is no possible fidelity within Duncan's uneventful world. We see, perhaps, why Shakespeare makes the language of obedience and honour seem so empty and insincere. The instrumental language of the situation has no fidelity to the imagination or its metaphor, which touches the void of language.

The evil of "disaster" is potentially more helpful. Macbeth's desire of a final vision of "what is not" suggests how disaster involves an "absolutization of [the event's] power".⁷⁹ For Badiou, while an event "*changes the names* of elements in the situation",⁸⁰ it "does not have the power to name all the elements of a situation".⁸¹ That would imply "the *total* power of a truth": "Rigid and dogmatic (or 'blinded'), the subject-language would claim the power, based on its own axioms, to name the whole of the real, and thus to change the world".⁸² Badiou's category of "disaster" is far from capturing either the full allure or complexity of Macbeth's position however. To some extent, Macbeth does *not* want to make the event of the weird sisters, or the prophecy, or his own murderous act, "total". The conflicted movements of his consciousness – the eye winking at the hand, the deeds shrouded in darkness – are

⁷⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.71.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.83.

attempts to insulate himself from these happenings, to arrive at the result without transforming his self. Indeed, this vacillating doubt and guilt is the source of much of the play's power and pathos. We begin to sense, then, that *Macbeth* represents an opening that is mixed with a closing: a subject is opened to the new at the same time as it seems to re-assert the closure of the old.

Nevertheless, if we bring it back to its evental core, rather than treating it as a strict category of "Evil", Badiou's "disaster" is helpful in articulating one aspect of *Macbeth*. While *Macbeth*'s wavering guilt does not totalise in the way Badiou sets out, *Macbeth*'s insistence on finality does seek to wipe out the very situation that gave rise to and sustains the event. To return to the fundamentals of Badiou's event, while an evental truth is "*supplementary*" to the situation, the subject's "fidelity is inside the situation".⁸³ As such, the truth is "the truth *of* the situation, and not the absolute commencement of another".⁸⁴ It is, in other words, not "the be-all and the end-all". The "subject, which is the forcing production of an indiscernible included in the situation, cannot ruin the situation".⁸⁵ The ruining of the situation is precisely what *Macbeth* envisages when he speaks of an act that is "done", a word repeated three times in two lines. Done-ness, "surcease", "trammel[ing] up the consequence", all end in "here, / But here upon this bank and shoal of time". The double 'heres' form an impossibly absolute present that, ironically, recalls the tautological language of Duncan's situation.

By seeking the "absolute commencement of another" situation in which "what is not" is "done", *Macbeth* attempts to sever himself from ongoing action and thereby ruin

⁸³ Badiou, *Being*, p.417.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

the subject itself. For as Badiou stresses, the subject is not a “simple centre” and its attributes are not “[i]mmediacy and self-presence”, rather, “the subject-process essentially touches upon scission”.⁸⁶ Macbeth’s division from the dead unity of Duncan’s world and from himself are the very means of his arrival. It establishes “the divided form of a ‘not...but’” that “constitutes [the] subject” of “an evental rupture”.⁸⁷ But this foundational division is what Macbeth’s done-ness seeks to end. He seeks to wipe out all opposition, literal and metaphysical, to unify the subject and its world, or situation, and thus to remove the very basis of his imaginings. The attempt to close the division shuts down the relation between subject and situation and renders the “but” impossible.

Hence there is a subjective abyss to Macbeth as king. If we consider what he wants to *do* as king, we can find no answer. He has no plans or politics, only more imaginings and murders. It reveals the ultimate voiding that takes place when the void is detached from the situation and turned into an absolute. The result is remarkably similar to Duncan’s situation: Macbeth’s story slides into the on-going cycle of Holinshed’s murderous usurpation and restoration. For Badiou, however, “[a] subject is equally the process of recomposing, from the point of interruption, another place and other rules”, and this “guarantees that the subjective process in part escapes repetition”.⁸⁸ While Macbeth envisages “another place” that lies beyond the existing situation, he absolutises this “place”, evacuating it of reality, and separating it from his acts within the existing situation. These acts serve to repeat or reinstitute the “rules” of cyclical violence that already dominate the situation. So although Macbeth’s openness to darkness may be a form of “courage”, it is also a form of

⁸⁶ Badiou, *Subject*, p.180.

⁸⁷ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.64.

⁸⁸ Badiou, *Subject*, p.259.

“anxiety”. It stops short of Badiou’s idea that “[a]ll courage amounts to passing through there where previously it was not visible that anyone could find a passage”,⁸⁹ for Macbeth returns to old, well-worn paths. Further, Macbeth ultimately follows anxiety by “designat[ing] the moment when the real *kills* the symbolical, rather than splitting it”.⁹⁰ The world is “full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” (V.v.26-7).

(viii) “Renown and Grace is Dead” – Isolation and Horror

In the lead up to the murder, it is not simply that Macbeth ignores his conscience, or is too caught up with success and failure, it is that his imagination fails him. Macbeth may know that, materially, the blow is not “the be-all and the end-all”, but he cannot imagine that the repulsiveness of the act does not end with the act; that its awful imaginative power will live on, infecting him, separating him from himself, and poisoning his alluring vision. The act keeps returning and repeating in different shapes and voices that obliterate the present and the future: “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” (V.v.18). Bradley writes that “the image of his own guilty heart or bloody deed...hold[s] him spell-bound and possess[es] him wholly, like a hypnotic trance which is at the same time the ecstasy of a poet”.⁹¹ The “horrible imaginings” that overtook “present fears” now overtake his mind as the supernatural excess introduced by the weird sisters bleeds into the solid world.

So although Macbeth does attempt to weigh the spoils against the moral cost, he cannot see that there will be no-one, no Macbeth, to enjoy these spoils. As Kierkegaard writes, while Macbeth has “become king”, “he has also lost

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.294.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.291.

⁹¹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.354.

himself...and he is precisely as far from being able to enjoy his own self in ambition as he is from grasping grace".⁹² Much of the play and Macbeth's 'guilt' therefore involves Macbeth's marooning from himself and others: "After the murder it becomes clear that Macbeth is *not* responding to the cue words, that he is ignoring the speech of others (Lady Macbeth), and focusing on his own mind and remembrance (of the grooms, of the inability to say Amen)".⁹³ For instance, Macbeth ignores Lady Macbeth's prosaic advice – "These deeds must not be thought / After these ways. So, it will make us mad" (II.ii.31-2) – and, like us, stares in appalled fascination at his own nightmare:

Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more,
Macbeth does murder sleep' – the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast –
(II.ii.33-38).

Now, so quickly, he is aware that the act cannot be separated from its imagined result. In fact, for Macbeth an act is apprehended and experienced *as* an imagining. What might conventionally be described as conscience comes to his consciousness as the uninvited trespass of a foreign voice: "Sleep no more". At one level this is a brilliant way of dramatising how conscience encroaches as an external force: "Of such marvailous-working power is the sting of conscience: which often induceth us to betray, to accuse, and to combat our selves".⁹⁴ It is also more fundamental to Macbeth: it is not only conscience that is apprehended in this manner, Macbeth apprehends all ideas and actions as imaginings or traumatic visions.

⁹² Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.241.

⁹³ Palfrey and Stern, pp.468-9.

⁹⁴ Montaigne, pp.44-5.

Macbeth speaks to a gut-wrenching awareness of being cut-off. He is cut-off from sleep, from rest, from innocence, from nature, and from prayer. His intense consciousness of this alienation is what is present before us and what moves us. Fittingly, Duncan's murder, the central action of the play, is never seen. It is not that sort of play. It disappears, along with the rest of the material situation. We do not see it directly, as we see Desdemona's murder, but apprehend the act as Macbeth does: as a haunting. Dramatically, it only happens in imagined visions. Whereas in *Othello* the fear and violent repudiation of "what is not" swells relentlessly into furious action, in *Macbeth* the mind shrinks from the material act and *into* "what is not" as both the promise of the imagination and the desolation of utter disconnection. Macbeth hears a voice crying that he "does murder sleep". *That* is the act for Macbeth. It is an intrusion he cannot stop. Macbeth is "afraid to think what [he] has done" (II.ii.49). The act therefore *becomes* something else; it is translated into voices and apparitions. But, in a sense, it is not translated at all. It always was that. That was its appeal; that horrible imaginings would be all.

Thomas De Quincey highlights the terrible sequestration of Macbeth's mind in his analysis of the Porter scene. We must, according to De Quincey, "be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested" during the murder, and that the "murderers" are "locked up and sequestered in some deep recess".⁹⁵ The effect is achieved through the simple fact that "when the deed is done... the knocking at the gate is heard", which "makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended" the "regular pulses of life".⁹⁶ Although De Quincey captures the cocooning of Macbeth, he sees the "knocking at the gate" as the tearing of that

⁹⁵ Thomas De Quincey, *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*. Volume 3. Frederick Burwick. Ed. London: Pickering, 2000, p.153.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

cocoon: “the human has made its reflux on the fiendish”.⁹⁷ But this is not borne out by the Porter himself, who does not open the door. Rather, Macduff’s knocking is again and again transformed imaginatively into the knocking of hell’s newest arrivals, of “a farmer that hanged himself” (II.iii.4) or “an equivocator” (II.iii.8), as the Porter plays “devil-porter” (II.iii.16). It is quite literally a form of closedness to the outside. The play, like the Porter, does not open the door to the “ordinary life” of history embodied by Macduff. The Porter almost functions as Macbeth, refusing to admit the material action but translating it into something else, turning everything into images of guilt and isolation.

The Porter, who appears from nowhere before disappearing again, is another of the play’s arresting intrusions, from the weird sisters to Banquo’s ghost, that take over the play and grip our attention. He embodies the uncontrollable, overriding power of the sublime, which invades the play-world. He appears out of place; his comedy is jarring; his imaginings ungrounded and excessive. The unrelenting flow of association in his visioning of hell speaks to the domination of the ordinary by the spiritual and imaginary. What ends the Porter’s refusal to open the door is not history or teleology but coldness: “But this place / is too cold for hell. I’ll devil porter it no further” (II.iii.15-16). While the Porter may cease his devil portering, it does not mark the return of the “ordinary” or the “human” but their freezing out by the play. Macbeth’s castle, but also Macbeth mind, and the play as Macbeth’s mind, is “too cold” for them; is caught in the icy grip of Macbeth’s horror. The play’s life is now an afterlife or rigor mortis.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The appearance of Banquo's ghost is the most striking representation of the afterlife of the act. Macbeth loses all sense of the material present as his imaginings now overrun the public persona as well as the private mind. "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (III.iv.49-50). The hint of humour in Macbeth's shocked speech below stems from his inability to link words to his experience. As with the Porter's runaway visions, or the weird sisters' riddling, things are, in a darkly comic fashion, not in their right place:

The time has been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end. But now they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools. This is more strange
Than such a murder is.
(III.iv.77-82)

There is now "nothing serious in mortality" (II.iii.89) as life and the living world have been usurped by the dead. And yet, the experience of deadness is so vivid and present for Macbeth that it is the life of the play. Just as Macbeth arrived as a subject through his awareness of being altered by the rupture of the weird sisters, he now arrives as a subject of hell through his awareness that he cannot escape the haunting of the act: "Can such things be / And overcome us like a summer's cloud, / Without our special wonder?" (III.iv.109-11).

(ix) "Which must be acted ere they are scanned" – Dark Fidelity

As strikingly conscious as Macbeth is of his changed self – he speaks of the "terrible dreams / That shake [him] nightly" (III.ii.20-1) and his mind is "full of scorpions" (III.ii.37) – there is a paradoxical sense in which his torturous guilt operates to

maintain his old self. Macbeth's guilt insulates him from the full terror of the act, which becomes a floating, foreign vision, a haunting ghost, never fully belonging to 'Macbeth'. As such, Kierkegaard uses Macbeth as an illustration of "[d]esperair over sin", which is "an attempt to maintain oneself by sinking still deeper" into sin, reaching the point where "it is eternally decided that one will hear nothing about repentance, nothing about grace".⁹⁸ In particular, Kierkegaard turns to Macbeth's lines after the murder:

...from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality.
All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.
(II.iii.88-90)

For Kierkegaard, "[t]he masterly double stroke is in the last words, '*renown and grace*'".⁹⁹ In short, "despairing over his sin, he has lost every relation to grace and to himself at the same time".¹⁰⁰ Translated into my terms, the grace of the event is now blocked so that Macbeth, once open, is now closed to the irruptive and caught within his own mind. He now dismisses the possibility of transformation. Palfrey writes that "Macbeth suffers what Kierkegaard calls the 'demonic'", which is a "fear of the good".¹⁰¹ It involves an "inclosing reserve" that isolates the subject from goodness and others – "Macbeth speaks *to* basically no one"¹⁰² – in order to maintain its own self-consistency.

The demonic attempt to avoid the good is, paradoxically, both a consummation of Macbeth's dark imaginings, a courageous pursuit of "what is not", and a shielding of

⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.241.

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.241.

¹⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.241.

¹⁰¹ Simon Palfrey, "Macbeth and Kierkegaard", *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004), 96-111, p.102.

¹⁰² Palfrey, "Macbeth", p.102.

the old self, an avoidance of the full terror of the act that would come if grace and goodness were admitted. We see this in Macbeth's ultimate response to his ongoing hell: "Strange things I have in head that will to hand, / Which must be acted ere they may be scanned" (III.iv.138-9). The most straightforward reading is that he is contemplating murderous deeds that he needs to act before others suspect them. He must kill Macduff. But it also implies that *he* cannot, or will not, scan them before he puts them to hand. To some extent, Macbeth's acting before scanning is a continuation of the eye winking at the hand, suggesting that Macbeth attempts to escape his tortured mind by avoiding thought. Hence Coleridge's idea that he "mistranslates" these "terrors of remorse into fear from external dangers".¹⁰³

Something more is going on, however, as Macbeth now knows that the horror will follow the act; that these "[s]trange things" *will* be "scanned". Just as Banquo is really only there for Macbeth after he has been murdered, these dark thoughts will only be truly present and truly felt – which for Macbeth is always through a visual scanning – once they are done. Knowing this, Macbeth's decision to put all his horror to hand is almost a moment of fidelity: he pushes his imaginings of "what is not" to their consummation so they can be scanned in all their awfulness. It is, at the same time however, a demonic attempt to "maintain oneself" by "sinking still deeper" into sin.¹⁰⁴ Or, looked at from another angle, his attempt to appease his fears by wiping out all potential opposition is a protracted and bloody effort to achieve the be-all and end-all blow that he earlier envisaged. To some extent, Macbeth continues to seek a final resting place where he will be free from others and action; from "renown and grace". The idea that he is "in blood / Stepped in so far that, should [he] wade no

¹⁰³ Coleridge, p.104.

¹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.241.

more, / Returning ere was as tedious as go o'er" (III.iv.135-137), suggests that there *is* a place "o'er" it, a foothold, on the other side of this river of blood. He still thinks he can escape blood with more blood. (Though the dark aural joke that turns "go o'er" to gore suggests that really it is just more blood, that blood is the same as gore).

The "strange things" in Macbeth's mind are not merely his murderous acts, but also incorporate his desire for a transcendental stillness. We see this in the fact that after determining to put his acts to hand he does not attack Macduff's castle but goes to meet the weird sisters. The attempted recourse to the certainty of prophecy – "But yet I'll make assurance double sure" (IV.i.99) – involves a final retreat from process and occasion into absolute finality. What Macbeth ends up being open to in the weird sisters is therefore a world of the 'beyond', which is metaphysical and not material. Macbeth's deadlock is that, by becoming alive in the movement beyond "what is", he exchanges life – both the inadequate life of Duncan but also all life – for "what is not". So while Macbeth escapes the static world of I.ii and enters a fluid realm of imagination, his longing for "the be-all and the end-all" in a sense re-establishes the stillness of that world. The apparitions that arise from the cauldron are pure images, incapable of communication: "Listen, but speak not to't" (IV.i.105). We come close to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the "death instinct" as "pure silence, pure transcendence, not givable and not given in experience".¹⁰⁵ As they continue: "Death is not desired, but what is desired is dead, already dead: images".¹⁰⁶

(x) What Might Have Been

¹⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Trans. London: Athlone, 1984, p.332.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.378.

Macbeth's desire to reach a final resting place fails not only on the grand scale but in each moment of the drama. Macbeth is never still. Action is never grounded "upon this bank and shoal of time". His mind is always moving with the phantoms and visions that possess it. And this tortured, possessed movement brings the play to life. It shows, perhaps, that Macbeth lies on the borders of good and evil, event and simulacrum, fidelity and disaster, courage and anxiety. In this sense we see that evil may work in the same manner as the good. There is a processual link between Macbeth's evil and the prospect of genuine subjectivity, beyond the blankness of Duncan's feudal world. Here it is worth returning to Kierkegaard, a thinker who is very aware of the closeness of good and evil. Kierkegaard regards most people as "only momentarily conscious, conscious in the great decisions", and therefore only "spirit (if this word may be applied to them) once a week for one hour", which "is a pretty bestial way of being spirit".¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Macbeth's nightmare visions speak to a mind that is inescapably aware of its being in sin. Although Kierkegaard's ultimate form of "spirit" is the consciousness of "possessing the essential continuity of the eternal by being before God in faith", there is also a (demonic) "continuity of sin".¹⁰⁸ Such is the case with Macbeth's refusal to turn to the good. It involves a "continuity" of "his consciousness of himself", which, however dark, makes him a man of "spirit": "Every existence which is under the rubric of spirit...has essentially consistency within itself, and consistency in something higher, at least in an idea".¹⁰⁹

We may also define this consciousness more positively. Greatness for Kierkegaard is not essential, it is a matter of what one is attached to: "but everyone became great in

¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.236.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.238.

proportion to his *expectancy*".¹¹⁰ Insofar as Macbeth expects a new horizon of consciousness and imagination the weird sisters are an 'event'. Insofar as he expects to usurp the role of king, to merely reshuffle the deck of the old order, the weird sisters are a 'simulacrum'. Rather than reaching a final name for Macbeth's tragedy, rather than settling on one of Badiou's categories, or dismissing them altogether, perhaps we can again turn to Latour's notion of "relative existence"¹¹¹ to see how Shakespeare creates a hero who embodies both event and simulacrum, truth, and evil, fidelity and disaster; a hero whose horizons of expectation are both the greatest and the worst. We have a sense of art's, and particularly drama's, ability to rest in ambiguity in a way that philosophy cannot. As Empson writes of Shakespeare's "dramatic ambiguity", we should avoid "taking sides between two viewpoints instead of letting both be real".¹¹² Or, to return to Bradley, "the elements in...[Macbeth's] nature are so inextricably blended that the good in him, that which we admire, instead of simply opposing the evil, reinforces it".¹¹³

Philosophical and ethical categories, along with historical context, struggle in the face of Shakespeare's drama because its creation of presence – that Macbeth *does* arrive – almost becomes a cardinal virtue that overruns regular virtues. Drama is animating and affecting. It brings "what is not" to life before us. Macbeth is given to us in darkness while Macduff is withheld. We reach an impasse at which both moral and processual readings of the play falter. We are left asking speculatively, 'what might have been'. Whitehead writes that "[t]he meaning of 'givenness' is, that what is 'given' might not have been 'given'; and that what *is not* 'given' *might have been*

¹¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Fear*, p.50.

¹¹¹ Latour, p.310.

¹¹² Empson, *Shakespeare*, p.37.

¹¹³ Bradley, *Oxford Lectures*, pp.88-89.

‘given’”.¹¹⁴ In theatrical terms, Elam points out that drama involves a “necessary *projection* by the spectator of possible future developments in the action”,¹¹⁵ and this projection continues after the play ends. The thinking of ‘what if’ is, in fact, specifically evoked by the way the play only ‘gives’ Macbeth life, calling us to question how this life comes to be and whether it might have been given otherwise. Whitehead goes on to state that “relatively to any actual entity, there is a ‘given’ world of settled actual entities and a ‘real’ potentiality, which is the datum for creativeness beyond that standpoint”.¹¹⁶ There is a sense in which the play calls us to consider a potentiality in Macbeth that might be divorced from its particular “‘given’ world of settled actual entities”; divorced from its ‘situation’.

We are therefore called to follow Macbeth into “what is not”; into the imagination. If any ‘hope’ resides in *Macbeth* it resides in the thinking of what might have been: in a “potentiality” that was present but is lost. Such thinking is very different to Hegel’s idea of tragic affirmation, which sees the hero’s death as the “negation of the negative” that “changes all the same into the affirmative as the resurrection of the spirit out of its mere natural embodiment and the finitude which is inadequate to it”.¹¹⁷ One can hardly sense a “resurrection of the spirit” in Macbeth’s nihilistically resigned death. Hope must reside in the unrealised idea of surpassing the simple dichotomy between the sterile world of Duncan and the living death of Macbeth. As Žižek writes of lost causes, from Maoism to the Islamic Revolution, “while these phenomena were, each in its own way, a historical failure and monstrosity...*this is not the whole truth*: there was in each of them a redemptive moment which gets lost in the

¹¹⁴ Whitehead, *Process*, p.160.

¹¹⁵ Elam, p.91.

¹¹⁶ Whitehead, *Process*, p.90.

¹¹⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.523.

liberal-democratic rejection – and it is crucial to isolate this moment”.¹¹⁸ *Macbeth's* redemptive quality, which is a barest hint, lies in the thinking of an untaken path: the idea of a subjective animation that does not drown in darkness but which enlivens the half-lit world of Duncan. It is the unrealised possibility of breaking the deadlock between the irruptive Macbeth that opens a new form of subjectivity, and the closed Macbeth that repeats the situation and leads to its resumption at the play's end.

(xi) Embarrassments and Conclusions

The belatedness and embarrassment that Macduff is forced to experience suggests *Macbeth's* potential to embarrass various discourses. It embarrasses a certain historicist impulse by placing a non-historicisable intrusion at the heart of a play that is about historical figures and drawn from historical chronicles. What is potentially embarrassing to the idea that the work's sources or context offer the best method of understanding it, is the almost brutal dominance of this 'something more' in the play. The unnatural weird sisters conjure the imaginative world of *Macbeth*, gripping the imagination of its hero and its audience. Meanwhile, the figure of historical progression is thrust to the sidelines and deferred. The irreducible excessiveness and otherworldliness of the weird sisters – and of Macbeth – reveals the incommensurability of historical sources. It recalls Derrida's "irreducible point of originality of this writing", around which "an immense series of structures, of historical totalities of all orders, are organized, enveloped, blended".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, p.7.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, *Literature*, p.105.

The play also embarrasses the humanist impulse by placing the powers of imagination, reason, rhetoric, and poetry in the service of an attractive evil.

Shakespeare's technology of character creation does not produce Promethean heroism but utter alienation in a living hell. To some extent the play also embarrasses my impulse to associate Shakespearean arrivals with subjective possibility. What arrives in *Macbeth* is magnetic and alive, it conjures consciousness, but it is not the vision of joyous self-creation that, at times at least, breaks out in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's arrivals simply need not be affirmative.

The play also has the potential to embarrass Badiou's theory of subjectivity based on 'truth-events' by showing how the event that founds a subject can be as much an 'evil' as it is a 'truth' that is open to all. While Badiou makes various attempts to explain why such an occurrence is not an 'event', Macbeth's experience, and our experience of the theatrical event, does not fall easily within the categories he outlines. Rather, Macbeth and the play seem to slide indistinctly between the old situation, its void, and the irruptive event. Things never remain where they should but keep bursting from and disappearing into the unseen void. The weird sisters and their chestnuts, the ghost of Banquo, the Porter, the visions of Macbeth, keep rising to the top of the cauldron and sinking down again. There seems to be no way out, no settled fidelity, no release point like Hamlet's "readiness" or "providence", by which Macbeth can channel the void into a workable 'truth' or 'subject'. He remains inescapably entangled between the old situation and the new excess.

Ultimately, *Macbeth* prompts us to consider Shakespeare's relation to his art. There is a sense in which Macbeth's substitution of the world for the linguistic excess of the

weird sisters' supplementary realm is a deal with the devil that both brings spirits to life and makes the world barren. The black arts, but also 'art', is a supplement that is gained at the expense of living. The trade is reminiscent of Faust, of Faust's fatal refusal to burn his books, but it also foreshadows Prospero's abjuration and the drowning of his books that leads to a recuperated life. Books, reading, writing, creativity, magic, illusion, imagining are all somehow tied to a denial of living in these tales. "What is not" threatens to usurp "what is".

It brings to mind Derrida's writing on the "supplement" (of writing) in "...That Dangerous Supplement...". For Derrida, the idea of the supplement "harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary".¹²⁰ First, "[t]he supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence".¹²¹ It is, for Macbeth, energising and animating: it brings 'something more' into the immediate realm of Duncan and brings the drama into our present. But, secondly, the "supplement supplements", it "adds only to replace".¹²² The supplement "intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place of*" "the thing itself".¹²³ The weird sisters' realm comes to supplant the world it supplements. Macbeth destroys his situation so that "nothing is but what is not". The "desire of presence" is a desire "born from the abyss of representation, from the representation of representation, etc".¹²⁴ Macbeth's "horrible imaginings" give birth to an impossible desire for a world beyond action or representation; a desire for a world that is fully present; to an end of stories and of the subjects that tell them. This fraught role of imagination connects with a concern about tale-telling we see from

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.83.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.108.

Othello's tale of himself to winter's tales, and which appears to link story-telling to a desire for finality, for an absolute end.

It would seem that these sorts of concerns led to a different approach to character and narrative in the later plays. While it would be conjecture to claim that Shakespeare himself was 'embarrassed' by the way his technology of character creation could create a subject of alluring evil, in the late plays there is a movement away from the single dominating consciousness, as character becomes more diffused and tentative. Perhaps in response to the electric evil of *Macbeth*, we are given a world of orbits and interrelations in which there is no single subject but a model of subjectivity. As in *The Tempest's* isle, consciousness is diffused throughout as the hero struggles to earn some redemption. There is a search for a supplement that does not supplant but reconciles, albeit at a cost, as in Prospero's abjuration and fading life.

If the arrivals of Shakespeare's tragic subjects are in some way 'right' – that it is only fitting that Romeo and Juliet should become something different through love; that Othello should, however briefly, be changed and made vulnerable; that Hamlet should rise from the unseen of the ghost and the ghostly voyage; and even that Macbeth should follow the horrors of the supernatural – this dynamic is fundamentally altered in the late plays. In a sense they are about characters who are not yet changed, who have not yet arrived. And, if and when they do change, there is a sense it is too late, that something has been irrevocably lost. Although written before *Macbeth*, the trend starts with *King Lear*, the story of a man who does not accept the event of love and whose moments of transformation are not foundational but a painful recovery. It is

this sense of having to earn one's arrival through pain and suffering, as opposed to experiencing it as a lightning strike, that flows into the late plays.

Chapter Six: *King Lear*

Whereas “what is not”, or nothing, was an alluring vision of finality towards which Macbeth aimed, Cordelia’s love, expressed as “Nothing” (I.i.85), is *King Lear*’s point of emergence. It marks the breakdown of the mechanistic worldview that underpins Lear’s love-test: of his insistence that “Nothing will come of nothing” (F.I.i.88), and his attempt to calculate love, and kingship, as a (proto-Cartesian) substance. And it prompts the creative emergence of not only Cordelia, but also of France, Edgar, and eventually Lear himself. I therefore examine the event of Cordelia’s silent love through a number of different formulations and paradigms in order to get closer to its operation and effects.

(1) The Love Test

Both the Folio and Quarto texts indicate that the kingdom has already been divided, the portions settled, before the notorious love-test. As Coleridge observes, “the triple division is stated here as already determined, and in all its particulars, previously to the trial of professions”¹:

Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom, and ’tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths *while we*
Unburdened crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters’ several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now.
(F.I.i.35-43, emphasis added)

¹ Coleridge, p.95.

Coleridge therefore views the “trial of professions” as “but a trick”.² It is a show, a ceremony, performed after the fact. The additional lines in the Folio-text, italicised above, emphasise this point, with Lear announcing that he has “this hour a constant will to publish”. The will is written, it just needs to be published through the formal exchange of speeches with his daughters. The Folio, which is the primary text for this chapter,³ adds three other significant elements to the speech that undermine Lear. First, it provides an additional reason for the division of the kingdom – “that future strife / May be prevented now” – which is deeply ironic given the kingdom’s future plight. Second, it stresses Lear’s age: “To shake all cares and business *from our age*” replaces the Quarto’s “off our state”. Lear thus seems frailer and less reliable. And finally, the Folio adds the important phrase “while we / Unburdened crawl toward death”, which, as we shall see, fairly well sums up what Lear is attempting to achieve.

Stanley Cavell contends that we cannot understand Lear “seriously to believe that what Goneril and Regan are offering in that opening scene is love...and to believe that Cordelia is withholding love”.⁴ Rather, Cavell argues that Goneril and Regan “*not* offering true love is exactly what he wants”.⁵ Lear “feels unworthy of love when the reality of lost power comes over him”, and this feeling is precisely “what his plan was to have avoided by exchanging his fortune for his love at one swap”.⁶ Lear is attempting to reach a settled state in which all debts have been paid, in which he securely possesses his daughters’ love as a property gained “at one swap”, and in which he can thereby rest unburdened by future obligations and actions, including the

² Ibid.

³ The reason being, as I will show, that it emphasises Cordelia’s “Nothing” as the central event of the play and, relatedly, because of the plausible theory that it was revised by Shakespeare.

⁴ Cavell, p.60.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p.61.

burden of loving. A further addition in the Folio, again italicised, makes this even clearer: “Tell me, my daughters— / *Since now we will divest us both of rule, / Interest of territory, cares of state—* / Which of you shall we say doth love us most” (F.I.i.46-49). The word “Since” indicates that Lear appropriates absolute expressions of love *because* he is divesting himself of power and authority. As with his retention of 100 knights, Lear is trying to be rid of the burden of power – to “Unburdened crawl toward death” – while retaining his self-identity (and possessions) as king. He is putting his love in the bank before he loses the power to command it. As Cavell puts it, “he wants something he does not have to return *in kind*, something which a division of his property fully pays for”.⁷

By treating love as a settled property or possession, Lear necessarily shuts down the processual and the creative. Bergson writes at the outset of *Creative Evolution* that “there is no feeling, no idea, no volition which is not undergoing change every moment”.⁸ Bergson’s thought informs Witmore’s argument that the opening of the play reveals Lear’s inability to “tolerate” the “incalculable emotional possibilities and costs” of “immanence”.⁹ Contrasting Lear to Viola in *Twelfth Night*, who “seems always to be waiting for that ripe moment in which circumstances have conspired to assist action”, Witmore writes that, “in the manufactured ‘occasion’ of the love contest”, Lear “reveals all to everyone, and in so doing attempts to cancel any further dependence on occasion for the remainder of his life (crawling ‘unburdened’ to ‘death’).¹⁰ But the subject is “the *bearer* of a fidelity”.¹¹ It is burdened. Or, in Whitehead’s terms, the subject *is* its process, so that “*how* an actual entity becomes

⁷ Ibid., pp.61-2.

⁸ Bergson, *Creative*, pp.1-2.

⁹ Witmore, *Metaphysics*, p.61.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.43. Italics mine.

constitutes *what* that actual entity is".¹² To be "unburdened" is thus to unburden oneself of the process that is subjectivity. Lear exiles love by replacing its "occasion", its irruptive event, with his mechanistic quasi-event. He, like Macbeth and Othello, recalls the "motionless tranquillity" of Hegel's early Symbolic art, with its "absence of situation".¹³

Bergson's processual understanding of existence is a rebuttal of the "mechanical explanation", the "essence" of which "is to regard the future and the past as calculable functions of the present, and thus to claim that *all is given*".¹⁴ Lear's love-test is a mechanism that specifies a definite input and a definite result. Moreover, the result is already "*given*": the kingdom already divided and the daughters' loves already counted upon before they are handed over in a once-and-for-all exchange. Because everything is already given, "time is here deprived of efficacy, and if it *does* nothing, it *is* nothing".¹⁵ Bergson therefore writes that "radical finalism is very near radical mechanism": "Both doctrines are reluctant to see...an unforeseeable creation of form".¹⁶ A machine entails a process, of course, but Lear's process produces a product, an output, that is calculable and finished.

Given the play's tension between the mechanical and "Nothing", its almost obsessive concern with how things are engendered, it is worth pursuing the idea of "mechanism" in more detail. Jonathan Sawday has shown how Shakespeare's age

¹² Whitehead, *Process*, p.233.

¹³ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.200.

¹⁴ Bergson, *Creative*, pp.39-40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.47.

was more industrial and mechanistic than is sometimes assumed.¹⁷ Even before the emergence of ‘mechanical philosophy’ with Francis Bacon – who stresses in *The Advancement of Learning* that “the use of History Mechanical is of all others the most radical and fundamental towards natural philosophy”¹⁸ – the growing importance of machines and the new discoveries in astronomy gave rise to mechanical ways of understanding the physical world (and the human body), which were severed from the mental and spiritual world. So, although the “idea of analysing human and animal bodies in terms of mechanisms of different kinds is associated with Cartesian modes of thinking”, this “system of metaphors and similes...[was] in play long before the publication of Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method* in 1637”.¹⁹ In “Thomas Dekker’s *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606), for example, we read how humans are restless mechanisms, anatomical machines in perpetual motion”.²⁰ Sawday therefore concludes that by “[d]issociating thoughts and identity from corporeal existence, it was as if both Shakespeare and Dekker had anticipated the existential dilemma of the Cartesian ghost in the machine”.²¹

Renaissance thinking about machines was deeply ambivalent. Machines may have been both wonderful and useful but they were often seen as “fundamentally at variance with the ideal of ‘nature’, or even of God”.²² The art and ingenuity of machinery, like that of Faustus, could thus be seen as a product of pride and transgression. The more positive view, meanwhile, treated nature itself as mechanical, as suggested by Bacon’s observation that the new scientific methods and

¹⁷ Jonathan Sawday, *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine*. London: Routledge, 2007.

¹⁸ Francis Bacon, *The Major Works*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002, p.178.

¹⁹ Sawday, p.234.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.234-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.235.

²² *Ibid.*, p.4.

mechanical instruments not only give rise to “many ingenious practices in all trades”, they permit a greater understanding of nature itself: “so the passages and variations of nature cannot appear so fully in the liberty of nature, as in the trials and vexations of art”.²³ This “fundamentally optimistic sense of the role of machines” thus gave rise to the belief “that the world” was “on the brink of being rendered calculable and hence predictable”.²⁴

King Lear itself is engaged with the ambivalent idea of the machine. “Wheels and mechanical motion seem to haunt *King Lear*”,²⁵ most obviously the repeatedly evoked wheel of Fortune, but also Lear’s “wheel of fire” (IV.vi.40). It is, however, far from simply mechanistic. A wheel of Fortune seems paradoxical given Fortune’s capriciousness, while a wheel of fire has no immediately obvious function. It hints how machines struggle and fail to control the excess of the dramatic event. Fortune and fire send their respective wheels spinning destructively out of control in *Lear*. So while the love-test may attempt to mechanise love, neither Lear nor *Lear* is mechanistic. It is only in Tate’s adaptation, in which the dramatic world operates according to an overarching rule of redemption and reward, that Lear gets his wish. There is no electric moment or inexplicable rupture, only pre-determined virtue and vice: “You must, you shall, nay I am sure you will, / For you were always styled the just and good” (Tate, III.ii.63-64).²⁶

In Shakespeare, the love-test itself may be mechanical but, given that the kingdom is already divided, it is also superfluous. It is a showman’s “trick” devised to facilitate

²³ Bacon, p.178.

²⁴ Sawday, pp.3-4.

²⁵ Ibid., p.153.

²⁶ Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear*. James Black. Ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1976.

Lear's desire for ever-increasing flattery, which suggests a surplus or "superflux" (F.III.iv.35) at Lear's heart. Lear seeks a secret enjoyment of this excess while containing it within the logic of measurement. So whereas love "exposes the subject to everything that is not its dialectic and its mastery as a subject",²⁷ the love-test is an elaborate apparatus constructed to harness the excess of love while avoiding exposure. Indeed, for Cavell, "Lear's behaviour in this scene" is "explained by...the attempt to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation".²⁸ Lear thereby misses how love is the utterance "I love you" rather than the word "love", which, as Nancy stresses, "would be a substance or a faculty".²⁹ "Love does not fulfil itself" but is the process of an ongoing "promise" that "does not anticipate or assure the future".³⁰ The fulfilment and assurance of future love and majesty after the passing of kingship are, of course, exactly what Lear seeks. He seeks to avoid the helplessness of relying on a promise. And he thereby avoids becoming the "autonomous" individual who, in Nietzsche's words, "has developed his own, independent, long-range will, which dares to make promises".³¹ Or, in Cavell's words, Lear "cannot bear love when he has no reason to be loved, perhaps because of the helplessness, the passiveness which that implies, which some take for impotence".³²

In Badiou's framework, Lear attempts to formulate a unified structure or count that forms a 'one': the one love of his daughters, indivisible, given over to Lear, who remains the one king of a kingdom he has already divided in three. But as Badiou

²⁷ Nancy, *Finite*, p.254.

²⁸ Cavell, pp.57-8.

²⁹ Nancy, *Finite*, p.265.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals. The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*. Francis Golfing. Trans. New York: Doubleday, 1956, p.191.

³² Cavell, p.61.

stresses, “[*t*]*he one* as such...is not”, which is to say that “[i]t is always the result of a count, the effect of a structure”,³³ which necessarily excludes all inconsistent multiples. Cordelia’s “Nothing” is the inconsistency or excess that punctures Lear’s ‘one’, undermining his count and revealing the situation’s void. As such, the “manufactured ‘occasion’”³⁴ of the love-test is not an event but a “simulacrum”. While the “simulacrum” uses “names borrowed from real truth-processes”, such as love, it “convokes not the void but the ‘full’ particularity or presumed substance of that situation”.³⁵ Lear attempts to extract the “presumed substance” of Cordelia’s love for him, along with his own kingly self, from its process. The result is closure: “Fidelity to a simulacrum” leads to the “unending construction” of the “closed particularity of an abstract set”.³⁶ Love is closed off from its constitutive promise and possessed by Lear as this “abstract set” of one.

(2) Cordelia’s “Nothing”

(i) Silence

Even amidst the dominating clamour of Lear’s machine-like ritual another force is operating. Before her “Nothing” brings the machine’s gears to a shuddering halt, Cordelia’s love works between them invisibly. Her asides form little pockets of genuine feeling amidst the gross flattery of her sisters:

GONERIL A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.
CORDELIA What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be

³³ Badiou, *Being*, p.90.

³⁴ Witmore, *Metaphysics*, p.61.

³⁵ Badiou, *Ethics*, p.73.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.74.

silent.

LEAR Of all these bounds even from this line to this
(F.I.i.58-61)

As Cavell writes, while it may be easy to “pretend publicly to love, where you do not love...to pretend to love, where you really do love, is not obviously possible”.³⁷

Cordelia therefore “hits on the first solution to her dilemma: Love, and be silent. That is, love *by being* silent”.³⁸ It is, in these terms, a heroic and decisive moment in which Cordelia maintains her honest love despite being hemmed in by the long, formal, and very public speeches of her family, with her dissembling sisters on the one side and the implacable droning of Lear’s pre-determined division on the other: “Of all these bounds even from this line to this”. The same pattern occurs in her second speech:

REGAN And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness’ love.
CORDELIA Then poor Cordelia—
And yet not so, since I am sure my love’s
More ponderous than my tongue.
LEAR To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom
(F.I.i.73-78)

While Cordelia’s forthright words arise in the situation, they are also cut-off from it, contained in their own little bubble. They elicit no response from Lear, who goes on measuring and dividing regardless. It is, of course, being cut-off from, and set-off by, the heartless economy of exchange that gives Cordelia’s words their affective power, in a similar manner to Hamlet’s refusal to reveal that within that “passeth show” (*Hamlet*, I.i.85). They seem beautiful but powerless, unable to avert the march of Lear’s mechanical logic. That Cordelia’s love is ineffectual in this bleak world is, as we shall see, a fairly dominant understanding of the play. Indeed, this feeling led to

³⁷ Cavell, p.62.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Tate's now maligned reworking of the play with its happy ending. Tate's Cordelia is neither silent nor sublime, but explains her refusal to participate in the love-test in calculated terms as she determines to "tempt the choleric king / Rather to leave me dowerless, than condemn me / To loathed embraces!" (Tate, I.i.92-95). In this conventional battle over whether Cordelia should obey her father or her heart, the beautiful and inscrutable refusal to enter the theatrical love-test becomes cynical and disingenuous.

While the contemporary appreciation of *Lear* rejects Tate utterly, it accepts, as Tate did, *Lear's* bleakness. It accepts, in short, the ineffectual nature of Cordelia's silent love: "Pity, like kindness, seems in *Lear* to be precious yet ineffectual".³⁹ The criticism of arrivals rejects both positions. Cordelia's love is not merely a sublime failure, it is the play's central event, the force behind its becomings and arrivals. Emotionally, for the audience, her "Nothing" is everything. But it is also effectual in a dramatic sense. Palfrey and Stern note that "[e]ven though Cordelia's passages are spoken as 'asides' on-stage" it is they, and not the speeches of Regan and Goneril, that "directly cue Lear".⁴⁰ He is cued by the very silence he soon rejects as monstrous. Her silence thus has a dramatic power even if it does not have a narrative power. It is *doing* something both to us and to Lear. And we soon see this dramatic power at work more forcefully as it prompts France's arrival and Lear's explosive rejection.

(ii) The Machine Broken by Nothing

³⁹ Dollimore, p.193.

⁴⁰ Palfrey and Stern, p.109.

The violent breakdown of Lear's mechanistic love-test stems from the exchange of "Nothing" between him and Cordelia, perhaps the play's pivotal moment. The exchange directly follows Lear's question, "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak" (F.I.i.83-4). The term "to draw" suggests a very specific purpose for the requested expression of love, tainting any participation with the idea that love is exchanged for kingdoms. Cordelia does not refuse to love, or even to express her love, but refuses to participate in a competition that *is not love*. To match her sisters would not only pander to Lear's absolutism, which severs him from the process of love, it would be a collusion with Lear's tying of love to reward. As such, Cordelia's refusal is neither mere perversity nor "some little faulty admixture of pride and sullenness".⁴¹ Cordelia incenses Lear by forcing him to see love's complicity with property, power, and show:

CORDELIA Nothing, my lord.
 LEAR Nothing?
 CORDELIA Nothing.
 LEAR Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.
 CORDELIA Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
 According to my bond, no more nor less.
 (F.I.i.85-91)

Cordelia's silent love is the situation's "phantom remainder",⁴² left over from the count, expressible only as "Nothing". As an "inconsistency" within Lear's mechanistic "count", Cordelia's love – as we saw with her earlier asides – is "not actually presented"⁴³ in the situation. As Badiou writes, because within "set theory what is presented is multiple of multiples...the unrepresentable can only figure within

⁴¹ Coleridge, p.98.

⁴² Badiou, *Being*, p.53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.52.

language as what is ‘multiple’ of *nothing*’.⁴⁴ Badiou seeks “to try to *name* the very thing which is impossible to *discern*”; he is “searching for a language for the unnameable”; trying “to name [it] without naming it”.⁴⁵ We saw Juliet struggle to articulate what could not be discerned, to develop a language for love that transforms the old names without itself resorting to the finality of the name, to exist between names, and Cordelia arrives within the same dilemma. Meisel notes that “Cordelia is the first instance I at least have met in drama where the gap between feeling and capacity for its expression in words is taken seriously”.⁴⁶ Because love emerges from the void, reasons, justifications, and explanations – all these things of language – cannot account for it. Love is again that which cannot be discerned and Cordelia names it “without naming it”: “Nothing”.

Given the focus on Cordelia’s silence, it is easy to miss what Cordelia does express: obedience, love, honour. As Meisel puts it, Cordelia’s bond “is a most sacred and compelling tie...strong in love and obligation”.⁴⁷ Her elaboration of this “bond”, which precipitates Lear’s breakdown, is expressed in short, sharp words, many of them monosyllabic:

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 honour you.
 Why have my sisters husbands if they say
 They love you all? Haply when I shall wed
 That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
 Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
 (F.I.i.93-101)

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.67

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.376.

⁴⁶ Meisel, p.164.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.165.

Although there is love in here, it is a difficult speech. For one thing, the starkness of its expression, its lack of art, is a brutal rejection of not only Lear's grandiose ceremony, but of the very human feelings that underpin it. Lear is almost left behind, weak and bereft, for this future "lord" that Cordelia envisages marrying. For another, Cordelia herself here uses the language of measurement and exchange. She does not love Lear "all", as her future husband will carry "half" her "love". It is for this reason that Bradley writes that "[t]here surely never was a more unhappy speech", concluding that Cordelia "perverts the truth when it implies that to give love to a husband is to take it from a father".⁴⁸

Cordelia, then, is enmeshed in a situation in which love is infected by property and measurement. Even she cannot break out of its grip, except through her barely articulate "Nothing". We therefore have a twinned Cordelia. On the one side, she speaks as an overwhelmed daughter and combative sister who is forced by the violence of the situation into an almost cruel assertion of her integrity as she refuses to participate in the love-test. Not that *Cordelia* is cruel, but that the starkness of her speech, the aloofness of her truth from Lear's emotional needs, raises the possibility that she could be interpreted as such; as an heir to *Measure for Measure's* Isabella. We see this in Bradley's reference to her "failure" to make the "unreasonable old King feel that he was fondly loved"⁴⁹ and Coleridge's reference to her "pride". Given the tyrannical and false nature of the love-test one could dispute both assessments, and particularly Coleridge's, but Shakespeare does not foreclose such judgements. On the other side, however, Cordelia is an almost fairy-tale figure. She is the 'good' sister who opposes the 'evil' sisters, she loves unjealously from the start, she talks

⁴⁸ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.321.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.318.

directly to us, and she speaks truth that we do not question. It is thus hard to do justice to her. There is a tendency to either psychologise – either blaming or excusing her – or to treat her as a purely emblematic figure of love.

Perhaps a more profitable way forward is to focus upon what Cordelia releases into the situation. Despite the fact that it is unavoidably implicated with the language of measurement, her speech also expresses something else. Taken in light of her “Nothing”, Cordelia’s refusal to give “all” is also an implied affirmation. Bergson explains that “[i]f I pronounce the negative proposition, ‘This table is not white,’ I mean that you ought to substitute for your judgment, ‘The table is white,’ another judgment”.⁵⁰ In other words, it “indicates a need of substituting for an affirmative judgment another affirmative judgment, the nature of which, however, is not specified”.⁵¹ Cordelia does not reject *love* but rejects Lear’s love-test, while affirming an alternate vision of love that is left undetermined, anticipated, and almost transcendent. Cordelia’s speech not only flows from her “Nothing”, it is directed toward a husband who is not yet present, who is as yet nothing. Her reference to the shadowy, absent figure of her husband – “that lord” – enrages Lear. It intrudes into Lear’s unifying structure, raising the spectre of multiple loves and multiple others that would fracture its unity and consistency. It also raises the possibility of a different kind of love, beyond jealousy and measurement, which is impossible in the situation.

In taking up this ‘other’ love, which filters through Cordelia despite not being strictly expressible, we can move beyond Bradley’s continued use of the logic of measurement when he attempts to balance the competing obligations of truthfulness

⁵⁰ Bergson, *Creative*, p.305.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

and the daughterly obligation to “preserve a father”.⁵² In the context of “Nothing”, Cordelia’s reference to “half” her love is immeasurable. The logic of calculation breaks down. If love is a force from the void there is no ‘thing’ to be halved. What is half of nothing or half of infinity? Rather than divisibility, what Cordelia’s “half” implies is equality. There are multiple loves to be given, not one. Writing of Bergson, Witmore observes that “changes in the quantity of a sensation always result in a new and different *kind* of sensation *rather than an increase or decrease of the original one*”.⁵³ Love is not a quantity that can be possessed but, as we saw in *Romeo and Juliet*, a sharing of an ongoing multiple of moments: it “move[s] like a musical phrase that gradually accumulates meaning and emotional resonance”.⁵⁴ Whereas Lear’s proto-mechanistic worldview traps him in the logic of quantity, Witmore shows that if we instead treat it “as a quality, love would no longer have degrees, only varieties”.⁵⁵ There is a hint of this in Cordelia’s question, “Why have my sisters husbands if they say / They love you all?”. By treating it as a quantifiable property, however, Lear sees Cordelia’s love not as a different variety of love but a corrupted love or, indeed, no love at all.

Diverse thinkers such as Badiou and Bergson argue that the mechanistic denial of the creative stems from the very nature of that basic question: why is there something rather than nothing? It is a question that haunts *King Lear* and all of Shakespeare’s work. From “To be or not to be” to “Nothing is but what is not”, from “Nothing will come of nothing” to “this insubstantial pageant faded”, Shakespeare’s plays grasp after the borders of being and nothingness. And yet, we also see the destructiveness

⁵² Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.321.

⁵³ Witmore, *Metaphysics*, p.22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.21.

of this attempt to grasp nothing. Macbeth's efforts to reach a final vision of "what is not" destroys "what is". In philosophical terms, Bergson suggests that asking "why bodies or minds exist rather than nothing" leads to a search for "a logical principle, such as $A = A$ ", which has "the power of creating itself, triumphing over the nought throughout eternity".⁵⁶ By passing "through the idea of the nought in order to reach that of being, the being to which we come is a logical or mathematical essence, therefore non-temporal".⁵⁷ It means that "things themselves must go forth from this principle like the applications of an axiom".⁵⁸ Ultimately, if we approach existence through the strict opposition between something and nothing (rather than through process and gradations) we absolutise something – substance – and we exile nothing from the kingdom. And so "a static conception of the real is forced on us: everything appears given once and for all, in eternity".⁵⁹ The creative, the moment of grace, what Žižek describes as those "miraculous but *extremely fragile* moments [in which] another dimension transpires through our reality",⁶⁰ have no place in such a scheme.

Badiou comes to a remarkably similar conclusion in his analysis of Leibniz. By beginning the thinking of being with the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?", Leibniz is forced to admit that "essence in and of itself strives for existence".⁶¹ "Otherwise", as Badiou continues, "we would have to conceive of an abyss *without reason* between possibility...and existence".⁶² Whereas the event springs out of just such an "abyss", or void, "constructivist thought is built" "around

⁵⁶ Bergson, *Creative*, p.292.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.315.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.292.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.315.

⁶⁰ Žižek, *Fragile*, p.128

⁶¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.317.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.317-8.

the exclusion of the indiscernible, the indeterminate, the un-predicable”.⁶³ Badiou quotes Leibniz to illustrate this point:

*‘The present is always pregnant with the future and no given state is naturally explainable save by means of that which immediately preceded it. If one denies this, the world would have hiatuses, which would overturn the great principle of sufficient reason, and which would oblige us to have recourse to miracles or to pure chance in the explanation of phenomena’.*⁶⁴

Leibniz’s thought “does not tolerate interruption” and so there “is no event, since everything which happens is locally calculable and globally placed in a series whose reason is God”.⁶⁵ Not that Leibniz claims that the future is “locally calculable” by mere mortals, just that it is theoretically capable of being calculated. As Bergson explains, because he has “denied all mechanical influence of substances on one another”, “Leibniz’s determinism” arises from “a pre-established harmony” that “God has to regulate...in advance”, and “not at all from the dynamic conception of the relation of causality”.⁶⁶ What is at stake here is the creativeness of existence. In claiming that the future *could* be foreseen by what “immediately preceded it” (if we had divine knowledge) Leibniz explicitly rejects “pure chance” and “miracles” in his explanation of phenomena, which are critical to Badiou’s thought and to Shakespeare’s drama.

In very different ways, both Badiou’s event and quantum physics, with its randomness and uncertainty, undermine this calculability. Even infinite knowledge of the immediate precedents does not guarantee translatability into the future. In Badiou’s framework we see this in the centrality of Pascal’s “miracle” as “the symbol

⁶³ Ibid., p.319.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Bergson, *Time*, p.214.

of an interruption of the law in which the interventional capacity is announced".⁶⁷ As Badiou continues, "[t]o be faithful is to gather together and distinguish the becoming legal of a chance".⁶⁸ Or, to return to Bergson, even if we accept that, physically, "something cannot come from nothing", "experience alone will tell us which aspects or functions of reality must count for something, and which for nothing".⁶⁹

Translated into Badiou's terms, although the void "counts...for nothing" in the situation, it *becomes something* through the chance of the event. The "absence of the event", on the other hand, leads to what Badiou calls the "grammatical subject": "an interiority which is tautological with respect to the name-of-itself that it is".⁷⁰ As with Bergson's axiomatic "A = A", such a subject is what it is, given, and synonymous with its name. In absencing the event and Cordelia's "intervention" through the love-test, Lear becomes "tautological with respect to the name-of-[him]self" as *King Lear*, and he seeks to be king without the process or circumstance that makes kings kings. Lear is here aligned with the self-contained and complete language of Duncan's Scotland. He seeks to be what he is, without prospect of change; without burden or action or inconsistency.

Lear's attempts to settle the existing situation in perpetuity are, of course, bound to failure. Shakespeare's drama follows Badiou's "*theorem of the point of excess*",⁷¹ in that every situation includes inconsistent, and therefore uncounted or unrepresented, multiples. Lear is not, and cannot be, purely 'mechanical'. His unified situation immediately comes up against its point of excess, or void, in Cordelia's "Nothing", which tears the situation apart. Cordelia's "Nothing" causes Lear to reject her utterly:

⁶⁷ Badiou, *Being*, p.216.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.232.

⁶⁹ Bergson, *Time*, p.151.

⁷⁰ Badiou, *Being*, p.323.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.84.

Let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower;
 For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
 The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
 By all the operation of the orbs
 From whom we do exist and cease to be,
 Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
 Propinquity, and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee from this for ever.
 (F.I.i.106-114)

Lear is attempting to efface Cordelia's existence in what is almost the definition of 'all or nothing'. "I loved her most, and thought to set my rest / On her kind nursery" (F.I.i.121-2) he reveals, but as her love is not given over absolutely, it is absolutely rejected: "Better thou / Hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better" (F.I.i.231-2). Lear's extravagant profession of severance is the dark mirror of Goneril's and Regan's extravagant professions of love. Its absoluteness and highly wrought imagery is just the sort of expression of love he expected. But now the everlastingness of his oaths of severance, sworn by the unending movements of the cosmos, fills the space left by the absence of Cordelia's everlasting declaration of love.

We see something similar in the way Edmond uses "Nothing" to advance his plots against Edgar. He hides a paper conspicuously, and when Gloucester asks what he was reading, Edmond responds: "Nothing, my lord" (F.I.ii.31). "Nothing" is used to point to the horrible, the monstrous. It again leads to terrible oaths and the violent expulsion of a loved one. Gloucester is thus quite wrong to claim that "The quality of nothing hath not such need / to hide itself" (F.I.ii.33-4). Because "every structured

presentation unrepresents 'its' void",⁷² "nothing" must be repressed, exiled, destroyed. It threatens the whole edifice of 'something' if one presumes that "Nothing will come of nothing". It turns Edgar into an "[a]bhorred villain, unnatural, detested, brutish villain – worse / than brutish!" (F.I.ii.73-4).

The whole thrust of Badiou's *Being and Event* is, of course, "that for the void to become localizable at the level of presentation... a dysfunction of the count is required, which results from an excess-of-one".⁷³ Cordelia is certainly "a dysfunction of [Lear's] count". Her quiet words burst into the situation with extraordinary force, prompting Lear's reaction of extreme violence. Ultimately, what is excluded from the count is not only inconsistent multiplicity but the necessity of the count itself:

...one has to admit that if the one results, then 'something' – which is not an in-situation-term, and which is thus nothing – has not been counted, this 'something' being that it was necessary that the operation of the count-as-one operate.⁷⁴

Lear is the "one" that "results" from the count of his love-test. Three portions of the kingdom, three professions of 'love', and one hundred knights are brought into the calculable possession of Lear as "one". But, as Cordelia's "Nothing" stresses, Lear's "one" relies on "something" that "has not been counted". First, it relies on excluding not only inconsistent multiplicity but also the excess, the superabundance, that makes love possible. And second, it relies on excluding the "count" itself, which is hidden and naturalised. In this sense, "Cordelia is alarming precisely because he knows she is offering the real thing, offering something a more opulent third of his kingdom

⁷² Ibid., p.55.

⁷³ Ibid., p.56.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.55.

cannot, must not, repay”.⁷⁵ What Cordelia’s “Nothing” reveals is not some inward, privileged world that Lear’s count misses, but the fact that Lear’s situation is based on this artificial structure and is not natural or pre-existing. Hence Cordelia’s reference to her shadowy future husband prompts Lear’s violent breakdown: it admits the void’s unseen inconsistency and excess.

We thereby reach a more complete sense of the stakes involved in Lear’s trial and the subsequent “grossness of the old king’s rage” that Coleridge sees as “the result of a silly trick suddenly and most unexpectedly baffled and disappointed.”⁷⁶ The supposedly natural underpinnings of Lear’s structure are revealed as nothing, nothing but structure itself: “For her part Cordelia’s real transgression is not unkindness as such, but speaking in a way which threatens to show too clearly how the laws of human kindness operate in the service of property, contractual, and power relations”.⁷⁷ And so, to maintain the structure it is necessary to reject what is inconsistent with it. As Othello rejected Desdemona to maintain his romantic image of himself, Lear rejects Cordelia to maintain his kingly image of himself.

The fact that Lear absolutises his count, treating its result as a substance rather than a process, ties into a broader point about process and Cartesian substance. Indeed, Cavell analyses Shakespearean tragedy as “a response to the crisis of knowledge inspired by the crisis of the unfolding New Science in the late 16th and early 17th centuries”.⁷⁸ The thrust of Cavell’s engagement with *Lear* is to treat it and Lear’s

⁷⁵ Cavell, p.62.

⁷⁶ Coleridge, p.95.

⁷⁷ Dollimore, p.198.

⁷⁸ Cavell, p.xiii.

avoidance of love as a response to “modern skepticism”,⁷⁹ which emerges from the Cartesian separation of the mind from the world. The “crisis” that underlies Cavell’s work stems from the fact that, as Whitehead observes, “Descartes’ notion of ‘substance’” – with its attendant “phrase ‘requiring nothing but itself in order to exist’” – treats the object of perception “in complete disconnection from any other such existent”.⁸⁰ Each object becomes a sort of self-contained absolute:

In the unbroken tradition of epistemology since Descartes and Locke (radically questioned from within itself only in our period), the concept of knowledge (of the world) ... becomes fixed to the concept of certainty alone, and in particular to a certainty provided by the (by my) senses. At some early point in epistemological investigations, the world normally present to us (the world in whose existence, as it is typically put, we ‘believe’) is brought into question and vanishes, whereupon all connection with a world is found to hang upon what can be said to be ‘present to the senses’; and that turns out, shockingly, not to be the world.⁸¹

Lear’s rejection of Cordelia follows “[t]he skeptic”, who “refus[es] our knowledge as of the world, so refusing the world, because he cannot satisfy our apparently *pure* demand for certainty, or demand for pure certainty”.⁸² As Bruno Latour shows, this tradition ends up “burden[ing] th[e] solitary mind with the impossible task of finding absolute certainty instead of plugging it into the connections that would provide it with all the relative certainties it needed to know and to act”.⁸³ We saw a similar movement in *Othello*: by treating Desdemona’s “faith” as a quality or substance to be perceived ‘out there’ rather than as a liaison between the subject and the event, Othello turns what should have been an interrelation into an unfathomable gap. Following Cavell’s idea of the “best case”, the world is, in effect, staked on a particular object or knowledge, to the effect that “if I cannot know this then I cannot

⁷⁹ Ibid..

⁸⁰ Whitehead, pp.144-5.

⁸¹ Cavell, p.94.

⁸² Ibid., p.12.

⁸³ Latour, p.12.

know anything”.⁸⁴ But although such a “best case” may allow one to function in a groundless world of unreliable perception, the “collapse of the ‘best case’” in “skepticism” leads to a profound shock and radical unmooring from existence: the “withdrawal of the world”.⁸⁵

Lear’s best case – his absolute possession of his daughters’ love– is punctured by Cordelia’s “most small fault” (F.I.iv.228) and his whole world crumbles as a result. It leads to the sort of inhumanity we saw with Othello: to the need to destroy the exposure and love that threatens the best case. Cavell describes it as “the human wish to escape the bounds or bonds of the human, if not from above then from below. I call it the human craving for, and horror of, the inhuman, of limitlessness, of monstrosity”.⁸⁶ The mechanical inhumanity of Lear’s initial severance from the world leads to his “monstrous” oaths as he disclaims all humanity and love. Here, in the relation to the other, we have something close to Cavell’s idea that “[w]hat skepticism threatens is precisely irretrievable outsideness”, the desire to “excommunicate oneself from the community in whose agreement, mutual attunement, words exist”.⁸⁷ So, for Cavell:

Lear’s ‘avoidance’ of Cordelia is an instance of the annihilation inherent in the skeptical problematic, that skepticism’s ‘doubt’ is motivated not by (not even where it is expressed as) a (misguided) intellectual scrupulousness but by a (displaced) denial, by a self-consuming disappointment that seeks world-consuming revenge.⁸⁸

We see this “world-consuming revenge” in the way Lear’s oaths turn nature against nature, as the naturalness of his structure breaks down. The “sacred radiance of the

⁸⁴ Cavell, p.19.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.229.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.29.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.5-6.

sun”, “The mysteries of Hecate and the night”, and the “operation of the orbs” are all aligned against “paternal care, / Propinquity, and property of blood” (F.I.i.107-112). Paul Cantor suggests that the combination of natural and divine imagery derives from the fact that, for Lear, “the natural and the divine orders are one and the same, and both are aligned with human justice and law”.⁸⁹ His “monumental self-assurance as a reigning monarch” stems from the assumption that “the political order is rooted in the natural”.⁹⁰ Unlike Cantor, however, I see Lear’s need for an absolute correspondence between nature, the divine, and human order as arising not because he is “certain”⁹¹ of the correspondence, but as a response to the underlying uncertainty, or doubt, that drives the ‘best case’.

By refusing to participate in the “trick” of the love-test, Cordelia rejects Lear’s closed kingly image of himself and its mechanical superstructure. Lear, of course, understands this to be a rejection of his self as such and it precipitates a dismantling that is marked by a number of mechanical images. Very soon after Lear’s renunciation of his love for Cordelia, Lear is aware that his violent oaths involved a sort of break down:

O most small fault,
 How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show,
 Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature
 From the fixed place, drew from my heart all love,
 And added to the gall!
 (F.I.iv.228-32)

Lear is far from self-understanding but he is aware that the count has malfunctioned.

The catastrophic malfunction stems from a “most small fault” that has disrupted the

⁸⁹ Paul A. Cantor, “The Cause of Thunder: Nature and Justice in *King Lear*”, *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. Jeffrey Kahan. Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008, 231-252, p.232.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.231.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.232.

fragile correspondence between the structural “frame” and “nature”, and thereby “wrenched” him from his “fixed place”. Lear feels himself coming from his hinges, he senses that his foundational structures – his “count” – is slipping, and he therefore fears madness: “O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!” (F.I.v.41).

The reductive consequences of Lear’s mechanistic logic are finally revealed to him in the diminishment of his retinue. “What, fifty followers? / Is it not well? What should you need of more, / Yea, or so many” (F.II.ii.402-4) Goneril asks Lear. Regan continues the countdown before the reductive logic accelerates to its logical end:

GONERIL Hear me, my lord.
 What need you five and twenty, ten, or five,
 To follow in a house where twice as many
 Have a command to tend you?
 REGAN What need one?
 LEAR O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
 Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
 Allow not nature more than nature needs,
 Man’s life is cheap as beast’s.
 (F.II.ii.427-430)

Frank Kermode describes it as “the great scene in which Goneril and Regan turn upon their father and show him what it means to value love in terms of possessions”.⁹² It is also, as Grady writes, a case of “Lear’s instrumental reason” being “turned against him”.⁹³ It is in response to this countdown, plummeting to zero, that Lear recognises that calculability is not enough; that something “superfluous” is what makes us human. “O, reason not the need!” is, as Grady continues, “a shift away from the implications of the instrumental, reductive logic employed earlier by Lear in his

⁹² Frank Kermode, *King Lear: A Casebook*. London: Macmillan, 1969, p.15.

⁹³ Grady, *Wolf*, p.149.

quantification of love and reductive banishment of Cordelia”.⁹⁴ It is a movement that leads to the onset of his divesting and madness in the storm.

(3) What Comes of Nothing

(i) Vanishing Terms

We have begun to see how Cordelia’s “Nothing” is an affirmative and creative force in *King Lear*. To some extent, of course, Cordelia is an emblematic character, almost purely ‘good’. Whereas France only arrives as a magical exception after a bland beginning, Cordelia is never anything but a magical exception. Cavell writes that “to love is all she knows how to do”.⁹⁵ It is because of her seemingly set mode of being that Bradley can conclude of Cordelia (whereas he ignores France) that, “[w]ithout loss of self-respect, and refusing even to appear to compete for a reward, [other heroines] could have made the unreasonable old King feel that he was fondly loved. Cordelia cannot, because she is Cordelia”.⁹⁶ But Cordelia is not simply or essentially Cordelia. She must arrive like other Shakespearean characters. The difference with Cordelia is that she arrives in her very first line so that she has always-already arrived: “What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be / silent” (F.I.i.59-60). Shakespeare thereby makes it difficult to see how the subject emerges from its originary action or event. It seems as if Cordelia simply acts “because she is Cordelia”.

Cordelia is, however, more situational than Bradley implies. Her initiating aside, “What shall Cordelia speak?”, establishes not only an inward looking consciousness,

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.147.

⁹⁵ Cavell, p.63.

⁹⁶ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.318.

it also addresses a crossroads, a very specific problem in the here-and-now. She does not know what to do. She is faced with circumstances that force her to make a decision as to what she will become. “Love and be silent” is her answer to that dilemma. Because these initiating words are ‘unjustified’ and ‘unprepared’, traditional character criticism is forced to posit a pre-existing truthfulness, or even a sometimes-alleged pride, in order to explain her decision. But in processual and dramatic terms it seems clear that Cordelia is founded here and only here, in loving and being silent. It is only *through* this action that Cordelia becomes Cordelia, this figure of love. Again, her statement is unavoidably contextual, it is not a mantra for life. There is nothing to indicate she previously loved silently.

After Cordelia, the second subject to emerge from “Nothing” is France. Cordelia’s “Nothing” here has an efficacy that goes beyond her self or her tragic end. The little pockets of silence formed by Cordelia’s initial asides are what animate France. He inherits and recuperates some of their latent power by seizing the “Nothing” that is everything for us: “Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon” (F.I.i.250). France’s speeches work by taking up the potential in Cordelia’s speech that has been stymied by the situation. He therefore operates almost in a refrain with Cordelia. France picks up Cordelia’s rejection of the “oily art” of flattery (F.I.i.222) when he speaks of the “tardiness in nature” that “leaves the history unspoken / That it intends to do” (F.I.i.233-5). The thought then leads him to challenge Burgundy as to whether he will take Cordelia without her dowry, for “Love’s not love/ When it is mingled with regards that stands / Aloof from th’ entire point” (F.I.i.236-238), which in turn prompts Cordelia to reject Burgundy:

Peace be with Burgundy;

Since that respect and fortunes are his love,
I shall not be his wife.
(F.I.i.245-7)

Cordelia's speech here elaborates on her earlier silent love, which France had missed, and prompts his sudden seizure of "Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor" (F.I.i.248). Culminating in his "Gods, gods!" (F.I.i.252), we have a condensed refrain on love that results in the arrival of France. As against Lear's failed attempt to treat love as a given, the process of the refrain gives rise to something in its movement that was not there before. From Cordelia's "Nothing" and France's initial emptiness we have the dramatic emergence of something from nothing: the emergence of the subject. "Nothing" is thus given a basic dramatic creativeness. We are dealing not with an "astronomical, physical and chemical fact" whose future "is foreseen" in mechanical fashion, but with the creativity of "an original situation" that "imparts something of its own originality to its elements".⁹⁷

We have moved definitively away from the Cartesian "substance" and its isolated subject. Rather than being "a zero-sum game"⁹⁸ that discovers an extant substance, France's arrival follows Latour's experiment in being "*an event*",⁹⁹ which is made up of its given elements but also produces something new. Or, to return to Whitehead, "relatively to any actual entity, there is a 'given' world of settled actual entities and a 'real' potentiality, which is the datum for creativeness beyond that standpoint".¹⁰⁰

King Lear's tragic end undoubtedly shows that much of the world is "given"; that it does not respond to our hopes and dreams; that we are subject to its evil and suffering. But the play also shows, through Cordelia and France, and ultimately through Edgar

⁹⁷ Bergson, *Creative*, p.29-30.

⁹⁸ Latour, p.125.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁰⁰ Whitehead, *Process*, p.90.

and Lear as well, this world's "creativity": that there is a potential for the new to arrive. The twentieth century descendants of the Cartesian subject – whether it is the Bradleian subject trapped by 'character' or the postmodern subject trapped by inescapable discourse and ideology – tend to focus on what is "given" and thus miss this "potentiality". The tragic vision of *King Lear* transcends these critical approaches because it so clearly and powerfully reveals *both*: both the inescapable tragic "given" and the incredible creative "potentiality".

Because France is initially subjectless, the process of his arrival through a subjective commitment is more apparent than with Cordelia. In Badiou's terms, the truth that emerges from "the ultra-one of the event...*forces decision*".¹⁰¹ The grace of what comes without being due is only materialised if the subject grasps it and forces it into the situation:

Everything hinges on knowing whether an ordinary existence, breaking with time's cruel routine, encounters the material chance of serving a truth, thereby becoming, through subjective division and beyond the human animal's survival imperatives, an immortal. ... Or let us posit that it is incumbent upon us to found a materialism of grace through the strong, simple idea that every existence can one day be seized by what happens to it and subsequently devote itself to that which is valid for all...¹⁰²

The subject is not inoculated from existence, crawling unburdened to death, but is "seized by what happens to it". France, who more obviously than Cordelia emerges from "ordinary existence", becomes "an immortal", a subject, because he "encounters the material chance of serving [the] truth" that Cordelia's silent love reveals.

France's "Gods, gods!" thus points us to a "materialism of grace".

¹⁰¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.430.

¹⁰² Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.66.

And then he is gone. France arrives from nothing only to disappear for the rest of the play. France and Cordelia, these powers of nothing, are exiled from the kingdom.

And while Cordelia will return, she returns not as the irruptive force of “Nothing” but as a force of restoration and redemption. Rather than breaking up Lear’s situation, the later Cordelia reconciles him to her situation of love. The foundational moment is over and its agents are gone. The event vanishes almost as soon as it impels the play’s trajectory, leaving those who remain to their own struggles and decisions.

We have, perhaps, an instance of what Badiou calls the “vanishing term”.¹⁰³ Badiou examines the “Greek atomists”, who posited a “strong (qualitative) difference... between atoms and the void”, so that all atoms are the same.¹⁰⁴ Because all atoms are “identical with regard to the void” any “movement is perfectly null, for lack of a reference point with which to mark it”.¹⁰⁵ In order for the atoms to form *something*, something distinct or singular – an evental site – deviation is required so that everything is not identical and hence indistinguishable:

An atom is deviated, the world can come into being. The sudden obliqueness of a trajectory interrupts the identical movement of the atoms and produces a collision of particles from which is finally born a combined multiplicity, a thing, sufficient to make up a world.¹⁰⁶

For the atom to “deviate from its course” it “must relate to the void in a singular manner”, “excepting itself from the law” that arranges all atoms to relate to the void in the same way. The “vanishing term” is thus a forerunner to Badiou’s event: it ruptures the structure that excludes the void. The original errant term “is marked by the void in a singular way” so “that its movement...interrupts the isotropism of the

¹⁰³ Badiou, *Subject*, p.69.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.55-6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.57.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.58.

domain”¹⁰⁷ and founds the new through its difference to what was previously identical or isotropic (pure multiplicity).

In this sense, not only do France and Cordelia arrive from the void, Cordelia’s “Nothing” creates a new world, with a new relation to the void. It is the world of the play, with all its arrivals and its creations; arrivals and creations that do not obey Lear’s demand that something emerge calculably from something. It is, of course a divided world, with two distinct texts, two distinct plots, two distinct families, and with Gloucester’s family having its own originating act in his dark deed. And yet, this divided world is given its creative impetus by Cordelia’s original “Nothing”, thereby forming it into a loose whole. To return to Badiou, while the “vanishing term” founds a new “Whole”, it “is none of the elements of the Whole” and “is thus nothing” within it.¹⁰⁸ So while the new world of *King Lear* emerges “under the effect of the deviation of one One” – of Cordelia, who is “marked by the void” – this deviating “One” has now “vanished in the whole”.¹⁰⁹ It is diffused throughout the play whose almost obsessive preoccupation with nothing constantly recalls its founding moment. Cordelia, and less obviously France, quietly haunt the play.

(ii) The Vanished and the Foolish

The foundational deviating term that breaks from the tautological situation vanishes into the whole and we see its echoes and after-effects everywhere. These after-effects are the focus of the following sections, as I continue to trace what comes of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.69.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

“Nothing”. In Whitehead’s terms, I look to Cordelia’s “stream of influence”.¹¹⁰ The Fool most immediately takes up the mantle of “Nothing”:

KENT This is nothing, fool.

FOOL Then ’tis like the breath of an unfee’d lawyer: you gave me nothing for’t. Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

LEAR Why no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing.
(F.I.iv.114-118)

Kent and Lear continue to insist on the nothingness of nothing, and, in response, it is the Fool who takes up the energies of France and Cordelia, and of the audience’s frustration with Lear and his insistence on calculation. He is, however, a darker and more cynical figure than his forbears. The Fool envisages an almost post-apocalyptic world in which his profession has been usurped by the wise: “Fools had ne’er less grace in a year, / For wise men are grown foppish” (F.I.iv.133-4). He harasses Lear with his fears of nothing: “Now thou art an O without a figure. I / am better than thou art, now. I am a fool; thou art nothing.” (F.I.iv.158-9). It is the Fool who, along with the cruelty of Regan and Goneril, pushes Lear to the logical endpoint of his mechanistic worldview, to the idea that his old count is nothing. The Folio, which gives the “shadow” line to the Fool and not Lear, suggests that Lear is not yet ready to accept the nothingness of the machine he has created:

LEAR Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied – ha, waking? ’Tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?
FOOL Lear’s shadow.
(F.I.iv.191-6).

¹¹⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures*, p.202.

But the Fool's vision is not altogether bleak. The Fool is far from a 'psychological' subject, but he shares with the lady he "pine[s] away" (F.I.iv.63) for an element of the unjustified; of taking up nothing's power of giving more than is due. The Fool does not follow his own bleak conclusions. According to the logic of love and rewards the Fool concludes that one should "Let go thy hold when a great / wheel runs down a hill" (F.II.ii.238-9), and yet, he "would have none but knaves follow" this "counsel" (F.II.ii.241-2). The mechanical reason that abandons the descending wheel is a knavish reason. Unlike the one who "serves and seeks for gain", and therefore leaves "when it begin[s] to rain", he "will tarry, the fool will stay, And let the wise man fly" away (F.II.ii.244-49). In a world subject to mechanical laws and motions, in which he will be dragged down with Lear's wheel, the Fool tarries. He articulates the wise course but follows the foolish. He articulates the calculable end but he follows the incalculable. In this limited fashion the Fool reflects an element of Kierkegaard: "but he who expected the impossible became greater than all".¹¹¹ And it is in this sense we might agree with Welsford's conclusion "that in this play [Shakespeare's] mightiest poetry is dedicated to the reiteration of the wilder paradoxes of the Gospels and of St Paul".¹¹²

The incalculable excess that springs from Cordelia's "Nothing" and continues after she has departed entails an ongoing refusal of the mechanical worldview. By opposing the tradition of treating the "Mechanical" as "familiar and vulgar" unless it "be such as may be thought secrets, rarities, and special subtleties",¹¹³ Bacon helped to establish a mechanical nature that, in effect, "fashion[ed] a 'vehicle for taking the

¹¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear*, p.50.

¹¹² Enid Welsford, "The Fool in *King Lear*", *King Lear: A Casebook*. Frank Kermode. Ed. London: Macmillan, 1969, 137-149, p.149.

¹¹³ Bacon, p.177.

wonder out of nature”, thereby ending the “long Renaissance conflict between ‘art’ and ‘nature’”.¹¹⁴ Or as Frances Yates writes, “[d]rained of its animism, with the laws of inertia and gravity substituted for the psychic life of nature as the principle of movement”, the early seventeenth century saw a transition to a “mechanical universe” whose God was “not a magician but mechanic and a mathematician”.¹¹⁵ In Shakespeare, however, a wonder in the world persists and the art/nature opposition remains a complex interrelation: the play’s probing of which is borne out by the “critical commonplace that ‘natural’, ‘unnatural’, and their cognates are used more in *King Lear* than in any other play by Shakespeare”.¹¹⁶

Although the “vanishing term” of Cordelia’s unartful and incalculable “Nothing” establishes “an absolutely qualitative difference”¹¹⁷ from the tautological situation, and thereby gives rise to the play-world, this new world is not maintained as a triumph of pure “nature” or incalculability. Apart from the fact that Cordelia’s refusal of art kick-starts the play’s tragic course, Cordelia’s romance traits, her evocation of Christ and redemption, her pointing inward to hidden recesses of feeling, are all obvious products of Shakespeare’s dramatic ‘art’, which is itself mechanical.

Moreover, almost every other character in the play, whether good or bad, requires art. Edmond, for instance, sees himself as a product and champion of nature – “Thou, nature art my goddess” (F.I.ii.1) – who opposes the artificial orders of legitimacy and primogeniture, but he is nonetheless forced to rely almost entirely on art to advance:

“Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed / And my invention thrive” (F.I.ii.19-20). He joins Regan and Goneril in practicing dark arts. He also joins Kent, an altogether less

¹¹⁴ Sawday, p.220.

¹¹⁵ Yates, p.451.

¹¹⁶ R.V. Young, “Hope and Despair in *King Lear*: The Gospel and The Crisis of Natural Law”, *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. Jeffrey Kahan. Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008, 253-277, p.259.

¹¹⁷ Badiou, *Subject*, p.68.

likely bedfellow. Plain old Kent is one of the most artful characters in the play. After donning his disguise, Kent spends the rest of the play acting, using art, so there is perhaps no less true line in the play than his “Sir, ’tis my occupation to be plain” (F.II.ii.85). While the excess of Cordelia’s “Nothing” exists only on the borders of art, barely expressible, coming from the void, art, in all its ambivalence, is essential to the process of making it manifest or effective in the world. It is a concern that lies at the heart of Edgar’s incomplete arrival.

(iii) Edgar’s Incomplete Arrival

Edgar is the character Shakespeare uses to delve most deeply into the nature of art, its creativeness, and its ambivalence. I do not here address the full range of Edgar’s complex, and very different, mode of being, but only that which relates to Cordelia’s ongoing event. Like Cordelia, Edgar is both an offering to Lear and an individual dramatic subject. But whereas Cordelia offers an immediate and irruptive emergence through love, Edgar offers a protracted and painful emergence through suffering. It is in this sort of wounded, suffering emergence that the event is manifest in the “given” world of *Lear*.

At his first appearance, Edgar is an empty shell controlled by his brother.

Shakespeare withholds from Edgar any of the usual ‘subjectivity effects’ given to a major character. He has no long speeches, asides, soliloquies, midline shifts, witticisms, or personal reflections. He is, in short, the fop that Edmond thinks he is. Edgar’s re-entry soon after his stale opening is cued by Kent’s ambiguous use of “Nothing” as he waits in the stocks:

Nothing almost sees miracles
 But misery. I know 'tis from Cordelia,
 Who hath now fortunately been informed
 Of my obscured course, and shall find time
 For this enormous state, seeking to give
 Losses their remedies. All weary and o'erwatched,
 Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold
 This shameful lodging. Fortune, good night;
 Smile once more; turn thy wheel.
 (F.II.ii.150-9)

The miracle Kent seeks is Cordelia. It is she that must “give / Losses their remedies” and turn the wheel of fortune. She knows; she sees; she will act. But there is also a hint that Cordelia is vanished and not recoverable – that the awaited miracle will not come – in Kent’s “Nothing almost sees miracles / But misery”. Although it can mean any number of things its darker implication is that misery *almost* sees miracles; that misery strains to see a miracle that does not come. In an article dedicated to Kent’s phrase Roche writes that, given its openness, the “sentence becomes almost a paradigm of the various ways of interpreting the play, from a Lear transcending his misery into a miracle beyond our ken to a Lear descending into a further misery that deludes him as a miracle”.¹¹⁸ Kent’s speech also does something more immediate. It in fact cues Edgar’s re-emergence just as he determines “To take the basest and most poorest shape” of humanity (F.II.ii.164). In a sense, Edgar enters as the product of Kent’s hope and prayer that the “wheel” will “turn”.

Between the great divide between miracle and misery is the creativeness of the middle ground. Whereas Cordelia is the miracle that haunts the “misery” of *Lear’s* play-world – is the miracle that is “almost” seen, that “almost” breathes, and “almost”

¹¹⁸ Thomas P. Roche, Jr., “‘Nothing Almost Sees Miracles’: Tragic Knowledge in *King Lear*”, *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s King Lear*. Jay L. Halio. Ed. New York: G.K. Hall, 1996, 149-169, p.151.

gives losses their remedies – Edgar is the miracle that it has to make do with. Kent wants Cordelia’s plenitude but he gets Edgar’s emptiness as he plans to take shapes, to cover himself in filth, to roar, to wander, to disappear. The play’s only miracle-worker, constructing miracles for his despairing father on imaginary cliffs, Edgar will, before Lear, become something by first becoming nothing: “‘Poor Tuelygod, Poor Tom.’ / That’s something yet. Edgar I nothing am” (F.II.ii.177-8). The “miracle” is that here, on the edge of “Nothing”, something new begins to emerge as Edgar is summoned by Kent’s invocation of “Nothing”, “miracles”, and “misery”. The continuing efficacy of the event as “vanishing term” is indicated by this mirroring of France’s arrival, in which he was summoned by Cordelia’s “Nothing” from the “misery” of Cordelia’s rejection and thereby emerged almost as a “miracle”: “Be it lawful, I take up what’s cast away” (I.i.251).

Edgar almost magically re-enters as the wretched Poor Tom at the very moment when empathetic feeling penetrates the imagery of kingship with Lear’s celebrated remarks on “houseless poverty”. As Palfrey and Stern put it, “the figure of Tom is almost literally cued by Lear’s famous prayer for the ‘poore naked wretches’”:¹¹⁹

You houseless poverty—
 Nay, get thee in. I’ll pray, and then I’ll sleep.
 Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these? O, I have ta’en
 Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
 And show the heavens more just.

Enter FOOL, and EDGAR

EDGAR Fathom and half! Fathom and half! Poor Tom!

¹¹⁹ Palfrey and Stern, p.248.

(F.III.iv.26-37)

Edgar's arrival as "Poor Tom" is again prompted by another character's invocation of nothingness (Lear's "Poor naked wretches") and divine justice ("show the heavens more just"). Here Lear begins to transform and Edgar enters transformed. They emerge together, through a refrain on nothing. As the old structures are ripped away in their escalating back and forth of divestment and abandonment, a wild poetry emerges from Edgar who re-emerges from nowhere as a conglomerate of persecuted suffering – pursued by the "foul fiend" (F.III.iv.43) – and strange blessing – "Bless thy five wits, / Tom's a-cold! O, do, de, do, de, do de. Bless thee from / whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking" (F.III.iv.54-6??). Debased, poetic, and intense, we have something utterly different to the stale, foppish Edgar of earlier scenes. Both Lear's and Edgar's transformations thus occur at the point of 'nothing', in a continuation of the Cordelia-effect. They arrive only after they are first stripped down and purged.

What "wretches feel" is, at bottom, the beginning of love. Love begins to exist for Lear as something not to be exchanged, but to be felt where there is *nothing left to exchange*, not even clothes or shelter. Such non-calculability resembles Levinas' "interhuman", which is "a responsibility of one for another, but before the reciprocity of this responsibility, which will be inscribed in impersonal laws, comes to be superimposed".¹²⁰ The naked and vulnerable other, this "Unaccommodated man" (F.III.iv.95-6), "tears [Lear] away" from his old self and mechanistic logic: "I see myself from the other's vantage point; I expose myself to the other person; I have things to account for".¹²¹ Here is, then, the exposure that Lear avoided in the love-

¹²⁰ Levinas, *Entre*, p.86.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.74.

test. As well as being cued by Lear's speech, Edgar thus also cues a shift in Lear: "Poor Tom's appearance" is what "appears instantaneously to cue Lear's decisive entrance into insanity".¹²² Madness is the culmination of Lear's movement to nothing, permitting the emergence of something closer to Cordelia's non-jealous and non-proprietary love in Act Four.

So while madness is the endpoint of Lear's diminishment – Jones writes that the "over-all effect, accelerated" in the loss of his retinue, is "of a countdown... with a final terminus" of zero¹²³ – madness is not only blankness or destruction, it is the possibility of a new creation. In this sense, divesting not only "signals the presence of tragic necessity",¹²⁴ as Jones suggests, but the capacity to start again. It is only after the blank of madness that Lear awakes by Cordelia's side. We here connect with a tradition that sees nothing as the point where the new emerges. We have what Žižek describes as "the 'good news' of Christianity: the miracle of faith is that it IS possible to traverse the fantasy, to undo this founding decision, to start one's life all over again, from zero point – in short, *to change Eternity itself (what we 'always-already are')*".¹²⁵ Or, in the more doctrinal words of Luther, "it is impossible for someone who does not first hear the law and let himself be killed by the letter, to hear the gospel and let the grace of the Spirit bring him to life".¹²⁶ Grace and the new life of faith only comes about by first dying, by first becoming nothing. In Kierkegaard's terms, Lear must reach deep into despair so that his "externals" – "immediate man... recognizes that he has a self only by externals"¹²⁷ – are ripped from him: "Off,

¹²² Palfrey and Stern, p.248.

¹²³ Jones, *Scenic*, p.33.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Žižek, *Belief*, p.148.

¹²⁶ Luther, p.83.

¹²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, p.187.

off, you lendings!” (F.III.iv.97). As Kierkegaard continues: “But if repentance were to emerge, one would first have to despair completely, to despair out and out, and then the spirit-life might break through from the very bottom”.¹²⁸

In a completely non-religious sense, the process of tearing oneself from the old machine and letting free repressed poetry and desire in ‘madness’ also recalls Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between the “paranoiac” and the “schizoid” “poles of social libidinal investment.”¹²⁹ The “paranoiac” chimes with Lear’s attempt to construct a structure that represses the explosive force of love: “The paranoiac...invent[s] heavy apparatuses for the regimentation and the repression of the desiring-machines”.¹³⁰ The wildness of the storm breaks down Lear’s rigid “codes or axiomatics”¹³¹ and moves him from the “paranoiac” to the “schizoid”, which is defined “by lines of escape that follow the decoded and deterritorialized flows, inventing their own nonfigurative breaks or schizzes that produce new flows”.¹³² Out of the schizzes of Lear’s madness comes a new, less rigid or axiomatic Lear: “When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness” (F.V.iii.10-11).

Similarly, it is only after fully becoming the deterritorialized Tom on the empty heath, that a more reflective ‘Edgar’ voice finally emerges through a compassionate aside: “My tears begin to take his part so much / They mar my counterfeiting” (F.III.vi.17-18). And yet, despite attaining this new voice through suffering and divestment, it continues to be employed indirectly, through asides. Indeed, it soon turns to a sort of “paranoiac” refusal of exposure in his interaction with his father. Despite Edgar’s

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.193.

¹²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.366.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.364.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.366.

¹³² Ibid., p.367.

creative emergence from nothing, there is always some sort of buffer between his experiences and his consciousness. In almost the opposite fashion to Cordelia's refusal to name love, Edgar constantly translates his personal shock and trauma into generalisations and philosophical statements. The Fourth Act opens with Edgar's embrace of being "the worst" (F.IV.i.2), who therefore "Owes nothing" (F.IV.i.9). The entrance of Edgar's blinded father shatters this line of thought, but even this personal horror is distanced by third-person philosophising: "O gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'?...The worst is not / So long as we can say 'This is the worst?'" (F.IV.i.25-28). Edgar's "O gods!" recalls France's "Gods, gods!" but whereas France's "gods!" came after his generalising, at the point of emerging singularity, Edgar's "gods!" moves *from* his singular experience of his father's blinding, and *toward* generalisation. In this sense, Edgar never quite has his own "Gods, gods!" moment; he always moves to the philosophical rather than to the irruptive.

Act Four Scene Five sees Edgar become the play's chief miracle-worker in an ambivalent coming together of the recurring motifs of miracle, art, and misery. He acts out of compassion, but he also acts with the dissembling art of Edmond, Goneril, and Regan in his "conceit" (F.IV.v.42). The result is painful and almost absurd. He may "trifle...with his [father's] despair...to cure it" (F.IV.v.33-34), but one must question why the "miracle" (IV.v.55) Edgar asserts is the concocted cliff fall rather than his reunion with his father. He seems to demand a "cure" that can be contained in, or even be manufactured by, his own 'art', and its philosophical and theological structures. It is a demand that contrasts sharply with the unbounded forgiveness of Cordelia's curative "No cause" (F.IV.vi.69) and links him with Lear's regimented

love-test. Edgar's continued use of disguise in pursuing this end suggests that he is, as Cavell remarks, "*avoiding recognition*".¹³³ His exposure to events, his arrival, remains incomplete.

In a sense, Edgar's artful construction of the miracle of Gloucester's 'fall' – "Thy life's a miracle" (F.IV.v.55) – humiliates the possibility of outside, miraculous intervention. The "miracle" is the product of blindness and misery. To return to Kent's "Nothing almost sees miracles / But misery", which cued Poor Tom's emergence, Edgar's "miracle" is only possible because Gloucester "almost sees", because he is blind and miserable, and cannot see the cliff's (and the miracle's) absence. Further, the very need for the miracle stems from Gloucester's blind desire to attribute misery to a higher force, to those "great opposeless wills" (F.IV.v.38) of the gods. But men, it turns out, are not the "sport" (F.IV.i.38) of anything but other men. In this case a loving son.

Edgar's feigned miracle prepares us for a different sort of miracle that *is possible*; for a miracle that is not divine but human; that does not seek an articulable and final "cure" but a shared moment. Such a genuine and redemptive miracle occurs, of course, in the very next scene, as Lear wakes up beside Cordelia in their moment of reunion and reconciliation. Unlike Edgar, whose miracle of avoided sight "deprives Gloucester of his eyes again" and "links [Edgar], as Lear was and will be linked, to Cornwall and the sphere of open evil",¹³⁴ Cordelia does not blind her favour with false miracles but clears his eyes through tears.

¹³³ Cavell, p.54.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.55.

(4) Vanishing Breath

Although Edgar's and Lear's emergence from suffering to unsettled and incomplete arrivals is where the force of Cordelia's "vanishing term" leads, it also continues to work in other ways. Cordelia does not simply vanish, like Christ she vanishes and then returns, only to vanish again. The power of her silent love is not only foundational to the play-world and its difficult arrivals, it also leads to moments of restoration and reconciliation. The nature of Cordelia's return varies, however, in the Quarto and Folio texts. One of the reasons I have used the Folio text is its greater emphasis on the power of "Nothing", from its initial repetition of the term at F.I.i.86-9 onwards. The Folio omits Scene 17, which foreshadows Cordelia's return through the First Gentleman's description of her weeping with pity at her father's suffering: "There she shook / The holy water from her heavenly eyes" (Q.17.30-1). In the Folio, in contrast, "Cordelia appear[s] abruptly, with no preparation".¹³⁵ She again arrives from nothing, without being due.

The Folio also stresses that Cordelia returns as an *active* force rather than as a passive or sorrowing love. In the Quarto, not only do references to France remain, the French army is led by the "Maréchal of France, Monsieur la Far" (Q.17.9). By removing these references, along with Scene 17, the Folio transforms Cordelia "late in the play from an emblem of pity into a fighting Queen of France",¹³⁶ who "appears abruptly...at the head of an army, 'with drum and colours...Gentlemen and

¹³⁵ R.A. Foakes "French Leave, or Lear and the King of France" *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 217-223, p.222.

¹³⁶ R.A. Foakes, "The Reshaping of *King Lear*", *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. Jeffrey Kahan. Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008, 104-123, p.121.

soldiers”¹³⁷ That said, despite “purging *Lear* of romance elements”,¹³⁸ the Folio’s Cordelia remains something of a romance heroine. The First Gentleman still tells Lear that “Thou hast a daughter / Who redeems nature from the general course” (F.IV.v.195-6). Jones thus writes that “Romance lies too deep to be eradicated”,¹³⁹ so that “Romance and Tragedy ought to be thought of as intertwined in both texts”.¹⁴⁰ And he feels that “the *something wrong* which has been felt through the centuries over the death of Cordelia stems from Shakespeare’s breach of his own romance conventions” in allowing Cordelia to die.¹⁴¹ Shakespeare’s keeps the romance aspects of Cordelia in play until the very last moment, making the tragic end all the more shocking.

Although Cordelia’s redemptive force is ultimately defeated, it is not *only* defeated. There are moments in which it ceases to hover tantalisingly and lands tenderly. We see, for instance, Cordelia dealing out gratitude to Kent (F.IV.vi.1-3), who will find it nowhere else. We see her oversee the ‘cure’ of Lear’s madness, when she intones:

O my dear father, restoration hang
 Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
 Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
 Have in thy reverence made!
 (F.IV.vi.23-6)

Here she is indeed the restorative romance heroine that the Quarto’s Gentleman describes, but she is so in her own action rather than in his description. For the first and only time, she is given circumstances in which she can act productively as her kiss precipitates Lear’s gradual, touching awakening. We thus have a palpable and

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp.119-20.

¹³⁸ Jones, *Scenic*, p.211.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.225.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.219.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.210.

physical restoration. Rather than the sham of Edgar's 'divine' miracle we have an honest human miracle. As Žižek affirms, "THE IMPOSSIBLE DOES HAPPEN" and "miracles' like Love...DO occur".¹⁴² Cordelia's 'miracle', like Žižek's, is one of the earth. For as Cavell points out, Cordelia is "the only good character whose attention is wholly on earth, on the person nearest her".¹⁴³

The change in Cordelia's re-arrival in the Folio also entails a change in France's vanishing. Foakes points to "the consistent excision in F of all references to the King of France from Act 3 to the end of the play",¹⁴⁴ while Gary Taylor has shown how this excision has the effect of turning the conflict into a civil war rather than a foreign invasion.¹⁴⁵ The result is that while Shakespeare's "France has quite a strong presence in the opening scene", only "[t]hree later references to him survive in the Quarto" and "all of [them] were omitted from the Folio text".¹⁴⁶ The Quarto therefore "seems uncertain and ambiguous about the role of the French King", "suggest[ing] that Shakespeare may have had an early conception of his play that was closer to the old [play of *King*] *Leir*", in which "the King of Gallia invades England...and restore[s] Leir to his throne".¹⁴⁷

The consistent removal of France's potential intervention from the Folio not only gives Cordelia a more active role, it makes France less active in his absence. Whereas France hovers on the borders of the Quarto as the warlike figure envisaged by Gonoril

¹⁴² Žižek, *Belief*, p.84.

¹⁴³ Cavell, p.74.

¹⁴⁴ Foakes, "Reshaping", p.119.

¹⁴⁵ Gary Taylor, 'The War in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980), 27-34.

¹⁴⁶ Foakes "French", p.221. Though it is not strictly correct that there are only "[t]hree later references" as there is a further reference to France in both texts, made by Cordelia, which I address shortly, and which Foakes himself mentions: "Cordelia reports in 4.4. that 'great France' has been moved by her tears to provide an army to aid her father" (222).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.221-2.

– “France spreads his banners in our noiseless land, / With plumèd helm thy flaxen biggin threats” (Q.16.55-6) – the Folio’s France is absent in a different way. He is recalled only once explicitly, in a passage in both texts, by Cordelia as she re-enters the play: “Therefore great France / My mourning and importuned tears hath pitied” (F.IV.iii.25-6; Q.18.26-27). Once again, France is the facilitator of Cordelia’s latent power. He endows her with a force from France to set about her father’s work: “O dear father, / It is thy business that I go about” (F.IV.iii.23-4). He is, again, what releases the power of pity and love. And this is particularly true of the Folio, where this is *all* France is; where he is not imagined as a warlike agent in his absence.

The absent France thus facilitates the great moment of reunion and reconciliation that takes place in Cordelia’s next scene. Madness melts from Lear along with his rage and his hardened heart. He is awakening. He slowly accepts that Cordelia’s “tears [are] wet” (F.IV.vi.64), that she is really here, that he is alive, that she has “some cause” against him (F.IV.vi.68). And then she utters those beautiful words of forgiveness: “No cause, no cause” (F.IV.vi.69). What is his response? It is to ask “Am I in France?” (F.IV.vi.69). France fittingly shares a line with Cordelia’s most cherished words of love. “In your own kingdom, sir” (F.IV.vi.70) Kent corrects Lear. “Do not abuse me” (F.IV.vi.71) Lear replies. At this, the moment of his awakening and reconciliation, it is inconceivable to Lear that he should be in his “own kingdom”. In Lear’s kingdom there is only the “poison” (F.IV.vi.65) he imagines Cordelia has for him. He “will drink it” (F.IV.vi.65), because he has “cause” to; because he deserves it; because he owes her. Here are the remnants of his mechanistic world in which nothing comes of nothing.

“No cause” is Cordelia’s soft but emphatic rejection of that logic. She effaces the debt. Cordelia’s speech, whose love and truth were so harsh in the opening scene, is now magically in tune with Lear’s emotional needs. For as Blanchot admonishes: “Do not forgive. Forgiveness accuses before it forgives. By accusing, by stating the injury, it makes the wrong irredeemable”.¹⁴⁸ Cordelia “wipes the slate clean as in the sacrament of penance”.¹⁴⁹ Such unjustified words, such boundless gifts, coming without being due, could not come in Lear’s kingdom. They could only come “in France”. France, then, is transformed into a land of healing and redemption; a land that works otherwise, outside mechanistic laws. It is a land only glimpsed at, between sleep and awakening, madness and reality. Cordelia’s breath stirs. But only in France.

If we take France as an agent of the “materialism of grace”, as a moment in which “ordinary existence” is seized by a truth,¹⁵⁰ we have another way of understanding his erasure from the Folio text. France cannot continue to exist in the play because Cordelia has already redeemed him. France moves to the fringes, as a figure of hope, as an alternative model of kings and kingdoms. But France is more than a quasi-messianic alternative to the tragic end, he is also a model of how to respond to the tragic end. As an “audience surrogate” France “offers the playwright an engaging means for leading an actual audience in the paths, emotional and intellectual, wherein it should go”.¹⁵¹ It calls us to embrace love that has been cast aside, to affirm what has been rejected, and to thereby become something different. It is a call to recognise another kingdom, but one that *is* of this world.

¹⁴⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*. Ann Smock. Trans. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986, p.53.

¹⁴⁹ Young, p.272.

¹⁵⁰ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.66.

¹⁵¹ Meisel, p.127.

France here connects with the seemingly contradictory, but often expressed, feeling of affirmation amidst the suffering of *King Lear's* finale: "Its final and total result is one in which pity and terror, carried perhaps to the extreme limits of art, are so blended with a sense of law and beauty that we feel at last, not depression and much less despair, but a consciousness of greatness in pain, and of solemnity in the mystery we cannot fathom".¹⁵² That such affirmation has been found amidst the failure and loss of the final scene is a marker of the "sublime", which, broadly stated, "refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language".¹⁵³ Expression fails at the end of *King Lear*, as we are left only with "Never, never, never, never, never" (F.V.iii.283) and some impossible illusions of breath reborn. (Once more it is the Folio that stresses 'nothing' by adding two further 'nevers', along with Lear's "Look, her lips. / Look there, look there" (F.V.iii.285-6)). What is unaccountable in the sublime feeling is that the very terror of Cordelia's unjustified death, and the inarticulate suffering of Lear's 'nevers', strangely hint at their opposites.

It is here worth turning to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he argues that "[a]rt is not an imitation of nature but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside it in order to overcome it".¹⁵⁴ It is crucial that tragedy is understood as a supplement to, rather than a representation of, life. By focusing primarily on the unjust suffering of *Lear*, in embracing its vision of a violent world without gods or justice, we implicitly

¹⁵² Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.279.

¹⁵³ Shaw, p.3.

¹⁵⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. In *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*. Francis Golfing. Trans. New York: Doubleday, 1956, p.142.

think of it as a timeless representation of our world, a leap made all too easy by the horrors of the twentieth century. As Foakes outlines, from “about 1960” the play was transformed “into a bleak vision of negation” as it was “considered in direct relation to a new political consciousness engendered by the Cold War, the rediscovery of the Holocaust, the renewed interest in Hiroshima, and the development of the hydrogen bomb”.¹⁵⁵

But the play is primarily a creation, an action, and an event, not a representation. We can perhaps here rethink and reappropriate Nietzsche’s idea that tragedy, as a “supplement”, throws its “transfiguring light on a region in whose rapt harmony dissonance and the horror of existence fade away in enchantment”, so that tragedy is able to “justify the existence of even the ‘worst possible world’”.¹⁵⁶ There is a feeling of awe in this worst of possible endings: that even in this tragedy of loss and crushed possibility, such glories and such joys, such loves and transformations, were able to arrive. They were not simply crushed by the terrors of this storm-tossed world, they arose in and through these terrors; they were born and delivered amongst them. Here we have, perhaps, a different sense of the *birth* of tragedy. It is a feeling that is distinct from Bradley’s affirmation:

The feeling I mean is the impression that the heroic being, though in one sense and outwardly he has failed, is yet in another sense superior to the world in which he appears; is, in some way which we do not seek to define, untouched by the doom that overtakes him; and is rather set free from life than deprived of it.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ R.A.Foakes, “*Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare’s Art*”, *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on William Shakespeare’s King Lear*. Grace Ioppolo. Ed. London: Routledge, 2003, 59-60, p.59.

¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Birth*, p.145.

¹⁵⁷ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.324.

While Bradley captures the indefinable nature of this affirmation, I differ with him on where it is located and how it is achieved. The trouble with Bradley, as we have seen throughout, is that he follows Hegel's privileging of the spirit over finitude. Hegel's concept of tragic affirmation treats "death" as "the resurrection of the spirit out of its mere natural embodiment and the finitude which is inadequate to it".¹⁵⁸ In Bradley, this is manifest in his reference to the hero's "superior[ity] to the world", and his conclusion that we should "renounce the world, hate it, and lose it gladly. The only real thing in it is the soul, with its courage, patience, devotion. And nothing outward can touch that".¹⁵⁹

The inadequacy of the world is not the dramaturgy of Shakespeare. Taking France as our guide, we see that hope and affirmation pertain not to the subject's undefined "superior[ity] to the world", or to being "untouched" or "set free" from life, but to its creation and arrival *in* this world and this life. Both France and Cordelia show that the subject must be outward if it is to be anything. They neither transcend the world nor renounce it – and Cordelia is crushed rather than "set free" – but they nonetheless "seize upon" (I.i.250) failed and finite love. Indeed, Cordelia is the most earthed character in the play: Cordelia's "grace is shown by the absence in her of any unearthly experiences".¹⁶⁰ Her "Nothing", which is the source of the affirmative and creative feeling of *King Lear*, stems not from transcending an inadequate world in the manner of Macbeth's "what is not", but from rejecting an inadequate 'love' and thereby transforming her world. Cavell rightly points out that if "Cordelia resembles Christ, it is by having become fully human, by knowing her separateness, by knowing

¹⁵⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume 1, p.523.

¹⁵⁹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.327.

¹⁶⁰ Cavell, p.74.

the deafness of miracles, by accepting the unacceptability of her love, and by nevertheless maintaining her love and the whole knowledge it brings".¹⁶¹

Cordelia's final speech makes no reference to fate, providence, the gods, or even justice. Coming from this figure of mercy and redemption – the play's closest thing to the 'divine' – her clear-sighted realism is striking. She recognises, without resignation or despair, that things often go horribly and undeservedly wrong. Unlike almost every other character, she does not draw lessons from terrible circumstances, for such lessons are irrelevant to her fidelity:

We are not the first
 Who with best meaning have incurred the worst.
 For thee, oppressèd King, am I cast down,
 Myself could else outfrown false fortune's frown.
 Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?
 (F.V.iii.3-7)

For Cordelia herself, unjust death does not destroy love. The result is not bleakness or resignation but triumphant defiance. She goes hence in fidelity and "best meaning" to her truth, which is love. She does not turn away from this evil but rejects it sternly, even to death: "Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?".

We can, perhaps, re-define the old debate about whether *King Lear* is a 'Christian' play.¹⁶² We can forego the old oppositions that tend to focus on the outcome of the plot: "Interpreters have generally sought to show either that the tragic close evinces a redemptive possibility, notwithstanding its horror, or that Tate was right, that *King Lear* in fact subverts a Christian or even Enlightenment world view and anticipates

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.73.

¹⁶² See for instance, Jeffrey Kahan, *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. New York: Routledge, 2008, pp.45-48.

the absurd universe of existentialism or postmodern materialism”.¹⁶³ Rather, what is ‘Christian’ about *King Lear* is the idea that love, like grace, comes without being due, works silently, and acts creatively. It implies a recognition that what happens – the event that ruptures the old situation – transforms the world and indeed the past. And this involves a very different worldview to that of stable Cartesian substance.

The affirmation of arrivals is distinct from the contemporary appreciation of *Lear’s* bleakness, which treats *King Lear* as an accurate portrayal of a world in which virtue is not rewarded, in which hideous suffering afflicts the innocent, and in which the gods are silent, meaning elusive, and frail human life “progresses towards despair rather than towards redemption”.¹⁶⁴ As Jeffrey Kahan writes in a recent collection of essays on *Lear*: “As of this writing, it is safe to say that in the public’s mind the story of Lear’s physical and spiritual suffering, and, above all, his heartbreaking end, aptly sum up the human condition: ‘When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools’”.¹⁶⁵ Appreciating *King Lear* as “a profound, if bleak, meditation on the human experience”¹⁶⁶ does lead to something sublime: to the sublime of love’s loss in overwhelming storms; of love’s fragile light amidst the blackness of indifferent suffering and death. It is, however, a passive and reductionist sublime. By ignoring France’s model of seizure, there is a sublime that is smoothed over and a potential that is lost.

Shaw writes that the “postmodern” understanding of the sublime “lays stress on the inability of art or reason to bring the vast and the unlimited into account”, but

¹⁶³ Young, p.253.

¹⁶⁴ Foakes, “*Hamlet versus Lear*”, p.59.

¹⁶⁵ Kahan, p.1.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

“affirms nothing beyond its own failure, and it does so without regret and without longing”.¹⁶⁷ To affirm our failure to account for the sublime without longing is a mode of resignation rather than rebellion or hope. The sublime is deadened, if not accounted for via the back door, because its unaccountability and terrible vastness is seen as the unavoidable ‘way of things’. Unlike Tate’s version, in the modern *Lear* it is suffering and not redemption that is the inescapable rule of existence. It thereby begins to render it comfortable and familiar. The sublime is stripped of its active force, so that *Lear* comes to embody a structural suffering and not an eventual drama in which something can come of nothing. It misses the sublime potential of *arrivals*: that the subject and even redemption can arrive, even amidst suffering, on the edge of the void, and beyond ordinary language. In *Lear*, of course, this potential is only ever recuperated in a provisional and incomplete fashion by Edgar and Lear, rather than experienced in the immediate fashion of Macbeth’s dominating arrival.

Treating *King Lear* as a theatre of the absurd may, in effect, create a second ‘Restoration’ version of the play that, like Tate’s, misses the sublime’s creative potential. In *The Century*, Alain Badiou describes the period from around 1980 onwards as the twentieth century’s “Restoration”. It witnesses a retreat from revolutionary movements and, above all, from the attempt to create a ‘new man’:

This is because the interval between an event of emancipation and another leaves us fallaciously in the thrall to the idea that nothing begins or will ever begin, even if we find ourselves caught in the midst of an infernal and immobile agitation. We have thus returned to classicism, though we are deprived of its instruments: everything has always already begun, and it is vain to imagine that foundations are built on nothing, that one will create a new art, or a new man.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Shaw, p.115.

¹⁶⁸ Badiou, *Century*, p.140.

There is a retreat, in other words, from the power of Cordelia's "Nothing". Rather than an active force that founds France, summons Edgar from emptiness, restores Lear after the nothing of madness, and inspires the audience, Cordelia's love becomes a passive and ineffectual light in the darkness. Such a bleak vision of *Lear* loses the connection between the sublime and action: how failure can inspire the creation of a new subject and thus a new world. The failure of love may be bleak but France shows us that *we* must respond to it: we too must "take up what's cast away" (F.I.i.251); we must seize the potential that ends in "Nothing". Affirmation lies not in the character's 'spirit' but, ultimately, in our 'taking up' of their actions, and thus in our actions. It is the spectator that must channel Cordelia's rebellion from the mechanistic world.

So while Bradley contends that "the world" of *Lear* "is convulsed by evil, and rejects it",¹⁶⁹ it is in fact *we* that must reject it. And while contemporary criticism contends that the play reveals that nature is indifferent to suffering, the play also reveals that *we* are not indifferent. It is not that the plot is 'affirming', but that the play prompts us to rebel against this bleakness and its structural suffering. Badiou quotes André Breton on the strange moment in which suffering is translated into an affirming rebellion:

It's there, at the poignant moment when the weight of endured suffering seems about to engulf everything, that the very excessiveness of the test causes a *change of sign*, tending to bring the inaccessibly human over to the side of the accessible and to imbue the latter with a grandeur which it couldn't have known without it ... One must go to the depths of human suffering, discover its strange capacities, in order to salute the similarly limitless gift that makes life worth living. The one definitive disgrace one can bring upon oneself in the face of such suffering, because it would make that conversion of sign impossible, would be to confront it with resignation. ... Rebellion is its own justification, completely independent of the chance it has to modify the state

¹⁶⁹ Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p.304.

of affairs that gives rise to it. It's a spark in the wind, but a spark in search of a powder keg.¹⁷⁰

Like Cordelia and France, our guides to active rebellion, we must *respond* to failure and injustice; we must *refuse it*, and work to change it. Only then can there be “*a change of sign*” from suffering to creativeness. Such a rebellious affirmation celebrates how the seizure of “Nothing” creates *new* subjects and *new* loves even amidst suffering and destruction; how “Nothing” is not a bleak “state of affairs” but a point of emergence. Not that the trajectory of this emergence or rebellion is assured. It is, in fact, uncertain and tragic, flowing into both Cordelia’s redemption of Lear and her death. And yet, as Cordelia’s “We are not the first” speech affirms, her rebellious “Nothing” is “its own justification”. Its future unseen, it opens a *possibility* of creativeness beyond the given world of the existing language, culture, and suffering. As Badiou puts it, “[a] creative disposition, be it vital or artistic, must be the conversion of a negative excess into an affirmative excess; of an unfathomable pain into an infinite rebellion”.¹⁷¹ We might call it a dramatic feeling of grace. Love is not simply to be preserved, it is an active force to be unleashed, a force of rebellion with which to challenge and change cruelty into something else. In this sense, a criticism of ‘arrivals’ prevents us from falling into the trap of thinking that nothing new is possible and that “everything has always already begun”.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Badiou, *Century*, pp.140-1.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.142.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.140.

Conclusion

In seeking to explore and articulate the transformations and arrivals of Shakespeare's subjects, this thesis has also been driven by a desire to locate a transformative potential in Shakespeare's plays; to move from the tragedies to action in our world. The first aim has, I hope, been in some part achieved. The second is more uncertain. Although a broad structure of situation, void, rupturing event, and new subject is a helpful one – highlighting the points of emergence through which Shakespeare's well-known characters become something more than individual 'characters' – Shakespeare continually plays with the configurations of this structure. It is, like Badiou's void and event, not really *a* structure but a probing of the possibility and possibilities of structure (and its breakdown). Structures of speech, the tragic genre, subjectivity, and action are constantly formed and unformed, never settling into a predictable model. In this flow of life, structures seem almost accidental and certainly inessential. And it is for this reason that I have used the thinking of events and processes to balance a thesis' inevitable need to distil and structure with the flowing and irruptive happenings of Shakespeare's drama.

The concept of 'arrivals' attempts to maintain this balance by stressing that while something arrives, the process of its 'arriving' constitutes *what* the 'thing' is. The balance is precarious, however, because even the philosophies of process and event must categorise and structure the movement of life, as seen with Badiou's categories of 'Evil'. Shakespeare's plays do not settle into stable categories, however, but shift, turn, explode, and fade. Their irruptive arrivals give rise both to love and to terror. The sublime emergence from the void is not controllable; it does not form an

exemplar of how to live or act or arrive in the world. It leads to Cordelia's magical arrival from "Nothing" but also to Macbeth's terrible arrival into "what is not".

Macbeth is here a problem play for arrivals, refusing any easy relation between the sublime and the ethical. The play does not allow us to submit to the sublime of Macbeth's arrival but places sublimity in league with the forces of evil and horror, bringing the question of ethics to the fore even while refusing to resolve it. There is thus no idealising of the process of arrivals in Shakespeare. It does not march toward 'spirit' in the manner of Hegel's dialectic. It does not reconnect with a higher 'nature' in the manner of the Romantics. And, as we see in *Macbeth*, it perhaps does not connect to a 'truth' in the manner of Badiou's truth-events. Rather, the void in Shakespeare's plays is as terrifying as it is creative. The trajectory of its sublime potentiality is not linear but explosive, errant, moving everywhere. It may close over or slide away, or it may give rise to horror and violence. And this is because the "fermenting", the "continual composition and decomposition of its elements",¹ the arrival and the perishing into future occasions, is irrevocably local, arising from the singular occasions and events of the particular drama.

Shakespeare's sublime arrivals are not in the service of an overarching or transcendent concept that can be straightforwardly grasped or applied to our situation. As with the weird sisters' intense particularity when they fret over the sailor's wife's "chestnuts" (*Macbeth*, I.iii.3), the transformations and destructions of Shakespeare's tragedies turn on the smallest details of dramaturgy, language, and emotion. The "sublime", as in Žižek's formulation, is "the magic *combination*" of "two dimensions"

¹ Hazlitt, *Poets*, p.276.

whereby the “the sublime dimension transpires through the utmost common details of everyday shared life”.² Sublime arrivals are grounded in the material, in the details, in the dramatic action: in a sudden recognition while recounting a voyage; in forgetting why one called a lover back; in a belated but wondrous discovery of a wife who has arrived early; in the singular happenings of storms, ghosts, and witches; in asides, midline shifts, relentless metaphors, or sudden variations in verse.

It may seem that what I have arrived at is some sort of supra-ethical sense of incipience that answers to no one; that there is no relation between the unpredictable particularity of Shakespeare’s tragedy and action in our world. But the very locality of arrivals, their closeness to detail and their distance from philosophical categories, gives a clue as to the *sort* of action that is effective in reconfiguring the subject’s relation to the world. Hamlet’s singular experience of “rashness” comes to transform the situation as “readiness”. Events transform the very ground of these plays and they thereby give rise to new subjects, who are what they are in virtue of being *where* they are. Subjects are local and located, for it is only in a specific place that there is a site for an event to irrupt into, to interrupt, and expose its void. The event may point beyond the place in which it arises, to its void, but it remains an “*immanent break*”, as “truth proceeds *in* the situation, and nowhere else – there is no heaven of truths”.³ More specifically, the subject and its “fidelity” always remain “inside the situation”,⁴ so that, as Gillies writes in relation to *Paradise Lost*, “what matters to man concerns his own being, his own place, and, indeed, place rather than space”.⁵ Badiou’s thought is central to arrivals because it focuses on how to transform the subject *in* the

² Žižek, *Belief*, p.41.

³ Badiou, *Ethics*, pp.42-3.

⁴ Badiou, *Being*, p.417.

⁵ Gillies, p.37.

world and to thereby transform the world itself. It is a focus on material action rather than spiritual or transcendent subjectivity. But it is also an openness to events, a faith in the possibility of transformation in the particularity of place, indeed, even in the least likely of places and from the least likely of sources.

However difficult, unstable, and unfinished, there is, in Shakespeare's arrivals from the void, a *truth* that still strikes us. It is the fact that while there are always situations and structures that define language, meaning, and subjects, there are also always voids. Every situation has its void: its point of inconsistency or excess that may irrupt as an "event", an "opening of an epoch", that transforms "the relations between the possible and the impossible".⁶ Whether it be the liking-upon-looking of love, the harrowing ghost, or the voyage into the unknown, situations in Shakespeare keep breaking down into nothing, and things keep emerging from nothing. Shakespeare is not a dramatist of "the State" or the situation but, as Yeats stresses, of the "flaming-out of the unvilised heart".⁷ It is, however, always the particularity of place that provides the grounds for this flaming-out of the absolute to occur.

The fact that no situation is closed, that no structure is complete, that no language is all-encompassing, is an invigorating fact of Shakespeare's dramaturgy that is lost to mechanical explanations of subjectivity, whether it is the determinism of context, or culture, or ideology. In its critical history, character has been hemmed in by determinisms, with the idea of an unchanging 'nature' or 'spirit' on the one side, and the idea of a determining structure or context on the other. Following Badiou's

⁶ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.45.

⁷ W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan, 1961, p.106.

“*theorem of the point of excess*”,⁸ which dictates that there is always an excess of multiples over counted structure, we arrive at a different logic of being and history: one that guarantees the possibility of an “event” that causes a “dysfunction of the count” whereby “the void of a situation is retroactively discernible”.⁹ The subject is neither the mechanical result of its situation, nor the return to a mystifying ‘nature’, but a process of liaison with the rupturing event that intrudes into the situation. “*That which founds a subject cannot be what is due to it*”.¹⁰ History, like Shakespeare’s subjects, does not work like a contract, giving over what is ‘due’ from what went before; it picks up remainders, things that were cast aside, and which burst into life in the present.

The “still more” that emerges in Shakespeare’s plays is not “already”¹¹ there in the manner of Hegel’s spirit, or postmodernism’s linguistic superstructures, or historicism’s explanatory contexts. It *comes to be*. Something is always arriving. Not that these dramatic arrivals are a faithful representation or “imitation” of our world, rather, they are “its metaphysical supplement”.¹² Not only are the arrivals of Shakespeare’s subjects supplementary and excessive, so too is the theatrical event through which we experience them. They are a supplement that may, if we choose it, inspire our own action and arrivals. Shakespeare’s creation of the new from the limit, or the void, provides an energy, if not a plan, for our transformative actions. The “limit” is, as Nancy writes, where “*everything comes to pass*”,¹³ where new forms come into existence. And the “sublime”, which takes place at the limit, “is the act –

⁸ Badiou, *Being*, p.84.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

¹⁰ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.77.

¹¹ Badiou, *Being*, p.162.

¹² Nietzsche, *Birth*, p.142.

¹³ Nancy, *Finite*, p.229.

or the motion or emotion – of freedom...in the double sense that freedom is both what offers and what is offered”.¹⁴ It is the possibility of creation, of creative action, even if what is created remains undetermined, which is to say that it is left open, or ‘free’.

Of course, if Shakespeare’s tragedies do thereby provide a cue to action, it is not a cue to a particular act, such as Othello’s “cue to fight” (*Othello*, I.ii.84). It is based not on *what* arrives but on *how* it arrives. It is based, in other words, on the ongoing arrival, on the *arriving*, which flows into different times and different circumstances. It can thus cue subjective ‘action’ in a broader and less instrumental sense. It must be interpreted, inherited, taken up, and thereby transformed: “inheritance must be reaffirmed by transforming it as radically as will be necessary”.¹⁵ What is transformed is both the work, transformed by the act of interpretation, and the interpreter, transformed by the thinking and taking on of the work. This thesis is just such an action: it is not a return to the ‘old’, an explanation by origins, but a search for what is new in these old plays; a search for a different model, a more fluid and commensurate ‘structure’, for understanding them. It is we, then, that must give ‘action’ its content, must turn it into an instrument in our particular instant, while not losing its openness to other occasions. For although Shakespeare’s plays may offer insight or inspiration for the creation of form at the limit, perhaps their greatest power is that as well as acting on their characters and subjects, they continue to act on us. As Nancy continues, the “sublime...*touches* us”, it is “to be exposed and to be offered”, and it takes place “in the contact of the work”, which is “beyond the work, at its limit, in a sense beyond art: but without art, it would not take place”.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., p.238.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.54.

¹⁶ Nancy, *Finite*, p.240.

In these terms, the sublime arrivals of Shakespeare's subjects remain an event for us. They are an event in the straightforward sense of continuing to be the most performed plays in the twenty-first century, but also in the more fundamental sense of the present action, energy, and thought of those who perform and reinterpret them. Through this ongoing action, they continue to infiltrate and irrupt into our inner worlds.

Shakespeare's tragedy is an event we remain exposed to, which offers itself to us, which continues to arrive. And it is an event that requires us to act upon it and for it; that we must offer ourselves to. As Cavell writes, at the end of Shakespeare's tragedies "is another crossroads", one in which "we are cast into the arena of action" and "compelled" to act because the "actors have stopped".¹⁷ Shakespeare's plays thereby remain "promise-crammed" (*Hamlet*, III.ii.86). They arrive through a continuing poetic "action" – "the stellar assumption of that pure undecidable, against a background of nothingness" – "of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth".¹⁸ They arrive because we continue to seize upon them in the present. And so, ultimately, this thesis is my action of seizing onto the new in Shakespeare that continues to arrive, of betting upon its truth, and not letting it sink into a background of nothingness.

¹⁷ Cavell, pp.113-4.

¹⁸ Badiou, *Being*, p.192.

Bibliography

- Aristotle, *Poetics. Ancient Literary Criticism*. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom. Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972.
- Bacon, F., *The Major Works*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Badiou, A., *Badiou: Theoretical Writings*. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano. Trans. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Badiou, A., *Being and Event*. Oliver Feltham. Trans. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Badiou, A., *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. Louise Burchill. Trans. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.
- Badiou, A., *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Peter Hallward. Trans. London: Verso, 2001.
- Badiou, A., *Logic of Worlds*. Alberto Toscano. Trans. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Badiou, A., *Saint Paul: The Foundation for Universalism*. Ray Brassie. Trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Badiou, A., *The Century*. Alberto Toscano. Trans. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Badiou, A., *Theory of the Subject*. Bruno Bosteels. Trans. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Barker, F., and P. Hulme, "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Contexts of The Tempest", *Alternative Shakespeares*. John Drakakis. ed. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 1985, 195-209.
- Barthes, R., "The Death of the Author", *The Book History Reader*. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery. Eds. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Bate, J., *The Genius of Shakespeare*. London: Picador, 1997.
- Belsey, C., "The Name of the Rose in Romeo and Juliet", *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*. R.S. White. Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, 47-67.
- Belsey, C., *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London: Routledge, 1985.
- Benjamin, B., *Illuminations*. Harry Zohn. Trans. London: Fontana, 1992.
- Benjamin, W., *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. John Osborne. Trans. London: NLB, 1977.

- Bergson, H., *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell. Trans. London: Macmillan, 1911.
- Bergson, H., *Matter and Memory*. Nancy Margaret Paul. Trans. New York: Zone, 1988.
- Bergson, H., *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. F.L. Pogson. Trans. London: George Allen, 1912.
- Bertram, B., *The Time is Out of Joint: Skepticism in Shakespeare's England*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004.
- Betteridge, T., *Shakespearean Fantasy and Politics*. Hatfield: U of Hertfordshire P, 2005.
- Bevington, D., L. Engle, K. Eisaman, and E. Rasmussen, eds., *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Blanchot, M., *The Writing of Disaster*. Ann Smock. Trans. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986.
- Bloom, H., *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. London: Fourth, 1999.
- Bowie, A., *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990.
- Bradley, A.C., *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1926.
- Bradley, A.C., *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. Second Edition. Macmillan: London, 1932.
- Bradshaw, G., *Shakespeare's Scepticism*. Brighton: Harvester, 1987.
- Brecht, B., *Brecht on Theatre*. John Willett. Trans. London: Methuen, 1964.
- Bright, C., "'Treason Doth Never Prosper': The Tempest and the Discourse of Treason", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.1 (1990), 1-28.
- Broke, A., *Romeus and Iuliet*. Amsterdam: Da Capo, 1969.
- Cantor, P.A., "The Cause of Thunder: Nature and Justice in *King Lear*", *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. Jeffrey Kahan. Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008, 231-252.
- Cavell, S., *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Updated Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Chesterton, G.K., *Chesterton on Shakespeare*. Henley-on-Thames: Darwen, 1971.
- Cinthio, G., *Hecatommithi*. J.E. Taylor. Trans. <http://shakespeare-navigators.com/othello/Osource.html>. Visited 14 June 2011.
- Coleridge, S.T., *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*. R.A. Foakes. Ed. London: Athlone, 1989.

- Cox, J.D., "Devils and Power in Marlowe and Shakespeare", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993), 46-64.
- D'Avenant, W., *The Dramatic Works of Sir William D'Avenant*. Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1874.
- De Grazia, M., *Hamlet Without Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- De Quincey, T., *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*. Frederick Burwick. Ed. London: Pickering, 2000.
- Deleuze, G., *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Hugh Tomlinson. Trans. London: Athlone, 1983.
- Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Trans. London: Athlone, 1984.
- Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Brian Massumi. Trans. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- Derrida, J., *Acts of Literature*. Derek Attridge. Ed. Routledge: New York, 1992.
- Derrida, J., *The Gift of Death*. David Wills. Trans. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.
- Derrida, J., *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Peggy Kamuf. Trans. New York: Routledge, 1994
- Derrida, J., "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. Eds. London: Edward Arnold, 1989.
- Dollimore, J., *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Third Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Dollimore, J., and A. Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. Second Edition. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985.
- Drakakis, J., ed., *Alternative Shakespeares*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 1985.
- Eagleton, T., *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell. Second Edition. 1996.
- Eagleton, T., *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
- Eagleton, T., *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Eagleton, T., *William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986
- Elam, K., *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Eliot, T.S., *On Poetry and Poets*. Faber: London, 1957.

- Eliot, T.S., *Selected Essays*. London: Faber, 1932.
- Empson, W., *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*. London: Chatto, 1987.
- Empson, W., *Essays on Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Empson, W., *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Third Edition. London: Chatto, 1973.
- Empson, W., *Some Versions of Pastoral*. Third Impression. London: Chatto, 1968.
- Erne, L., *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Fernie, E., "Critical Debates and Initiatives: Terrible Action: Recent Criticism and Questions of Agency", *Shakespeare* 2.1 (2006), 95-118.
- Fernie, E., "Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism", *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 169-184.
- Fernie, E., ed., *Spiritual Shakespeares*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Fernie, E., "The Last Act: Presentism, Spirituality and the Politics of Hamlet", *Spiritual Shakespeares*. Ewan Fernie. Ed. London: Routledge, 2005, 186-211.
- Fineman, J., *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.
- Finkelstein, D., and A. McCleery, eds., *The Book History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Fletcher, A., *Time, Space, and Motion in the Age of Shakespeare*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007.
- Foakes, R.A., "French Leave, or Lear and the King of France", *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 217-223.
- Foakes, R.A., "Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art", *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on William Shakespeare's King Lear*. Grace Ioppolo. Ed. London: Routledge, 2003, 59-60.
- Foakes, R.A., ed., *King Lear*. Arden Shakespeare. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1997.
- Foakes, R.A., "The Reshaping of *King Lear*", *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. Jeffrey Kahan. Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008, 104-123.
- Fuchs, B., "Conquering Islands: Contextualizing The Tempest", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.1 (1997), 45-62.
- Gallagher, L., "Faustus's Blood and the (Messianic) Question of Ethics", *English Literary*

History 73 (2006) 1-29.

- Gallagher, L., "Waiting for Gobbo", *Spiritual Shakespeares*. Ewan Fernie. Ed. London: Routledge, 2005, 73-93.
- Gibbons, B., ed., *Romeo and Juliet*. Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Gillies, J., "Shakespeare's Virginian Masque", *ELH* 53.4 (1986), 673-707.
- Gillies, J., "Space and Place in Paradise Lost", *ELH* 74.1 (2007), 27-57.
- Gillies, J., "The Scene of Cartography in *King Lear*", *Literature, Mapping and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain*. Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein. Eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001, 109-137.
- Girard, R., *A Theater of Envy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Goldberg, J., "'What in a names that which we call a Rose', The Desired Texts of Romeo and Juliet", *Crisis in Editing: Texts of the English Renaissance*. Randall McLeod. Ed. New York: AMS, 1994, 173-201.
- Goldberg, J., "Romeo and Juliet's Open Rs", *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*. R.S. White. Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, 194-212.
- Grady, H., *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Grady, H., *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
- Grady, H., *The Modernist Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.
- Grady, H., "Theory 'After Theory': Christopher Pye's Reading of *Othello*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.4 (2009), 453-459.
- Greenblatt, S., *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.
- Greenblatt, S., *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Greenblatt, S., *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.
- Greenblatt, S., *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- Gross, K., *Shakespeare's Noise*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.
- Gurr, A., *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*. Fourth Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

- Gurr, A., and M. Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Habib, M.A.R., *A History of Literary Criticism*. Malden: Blackwell, 2005.
- Halio, J.L., *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's King Lear*. New York: G.K. Hall, 1996.
- Happe, P., ed., *Four Morality Plays*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979.
- Hawkes, T., "Telmah", *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Harmen. Eds. New York: Routledge, 1990, 310-332.
- Hazlitt, W., *Characters of Shakespear's Plays and Lectures on The English Poets*. London: Macmillan, 1903.
- Hazlitt, W., *Selected Writings*. Oxford: OUP, 1991.
- Hegel, G.W.F., *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. In Two Volumes. T.M. Knox. Trans. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- Hegel, G.W.F., *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Bernard Bosanquet. Trans. London: Penguin, 1993.
- Hegel, G.W.F., *The Phenomenology of Mind*. J.B. Baillie. Trans. New York: Dover, 2003.
- Herman, V., *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Hill, G., *Collected Critical Writings*. Kenneth Haynes. Ed. Oxford: OUP, 2008.
- Hobson, A., *Full-Circle: Shakespeare and Moral Development*. London: Chatto, London, 1972.
- Holinshed, R., *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. Text of 1587.
<http://www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/>. The Holinshed Project, 2008-2010. Visited 16 February 2011.
- Holland, P., ed., *Macbeth and its Afterlife*. *Shakespeare Survey* 57. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Holmer, J.O., "The Poetics of Paradox: Shakespeare's Versus Zeffirelli's Cultures of Violence", *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 163-179.
- Holy Bible. King James Version. New Jersey: Thomas Nelson, 1972.
- Honigmann, E.A.J., ed., *Othello*. Arden Shakespeare. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1997.
- Hughes, D., *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

- Hulme, P. and W. Sherman, eds., *The Tempest and Its Travels*. London: Reaktion, 2000.
- Hulme, P., *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Ioppolo, G., *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on William Shakespeare's King Lear*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Jackson, K., and A.F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies", *Criticism* 46 (2004), 167-190.
- Johnson, S., *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Arthur Sherbo. Ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 1968.
- Jones, E., *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971.
- Jones, J., *Shakespeare at Work*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Jonson, B., *Poetaster*. The Revels Plays. Tom Cain. Ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.
- Jonson, B. *The Alchemist and Other Plays*. Gordon Campbell. Ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Kahan, J., ed., *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Kastan, D. S., *Shakespeare after Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Kermode, F., *King Lear: A Casebook*. London: Macmillan, 1969.
- Kermode, F., *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1967.
- Kierkegaard, S., *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*. Alastair Hannay. Trans. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Kierkegaard, S., *Fear and Trembling*. Alastair Hannay. Trans. London: Penguin, 1985.
- Kierkegaard, S., *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*. Walter Lowrie. Trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.
- Kierkegaard, S., *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*. Walter Lowrie. Trans. London: Oxford UP, 1942.
- Kierkegaard, S., *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson. Trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Kierkegaard, S., *Works of Love*. David F. Swenson. Trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1946.

- Knight, G.W., "The Othello Music", *Shakespeare: Othello: A Casebook*. John Wain. Ed. Second Edition. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994.
- Knowles, R., "Carnival and Death in Romeo and Juliet: A Bakhtinian Reading", *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 69-85.
- Kristeva, J., *Tales of Love*. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.
- Kyd, T., *The Spanish Tragedy. Four Revenge Tragedies*. K.E. Maus. Ed. Oxford: Oxford, UP, 2008, 1-91.
- Latour, B., *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999
- Leavis, F.R., "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero", *Shakespeare: Othello: A Casebook*. John Wain. Ed. Second Edition. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994, 120-140.
- Lee, J., *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000.
- Levao, R., *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.
- Levinas, E., *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. Trans. London: Continuum, 2006.
- Levinas, E., *The Levinas Reader*. Seán Hand. Ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- Locke, J., *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: J.M. Dent, 1961.
- Loomba, A., *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989.
- Lupton, J.R., "Creature Caliban", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.1 (2000), 1-23.
- Lupton, J.R., "Othello Circumcised: Shakespeare and the Pauline Discourse of Nations" *Representations* 57 (1997), 73-89.
- Lupton, J.R., "Shakespeare's Citizen-Subject: Distracting the Gaze, Contracting the City: A Response to Christopher Pye", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.4 (2009), 448-453.
- Luther, M., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Second Edition. Timothy F. Lull. Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- Mamet, D., *Three Uses of the Knife: On The Nature and Purpose of Drama*. London: Methuen, 2002.
- Marion, J., *The Crossing of the Visible*. James K.A. Smith. Trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004.
- Marlowe, C., *Doctor Faustus: A- and B-texts (1604, 1616)*. The Revels Plays. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Eds. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993.

- Marlowe, C. *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Maus, K.E., *Four Revenge Tragedies*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Mauss, M., *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. W.D. Halls. Trans. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Meisel, M., *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- Middleton, T., *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino et al. Eds. Oxford: Clarendon, 2007
- Miller, J.H., *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Tollope, James, and Benjamin*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.
- Miller, K., *Doubles: Studies in Literary History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Milton, J., *Areopagitica*. London: Oxford UP, 1954.
- Montaigne, M., *The Essays of Montaigne: Done into English by John Florio Anno 1603*. In Two Volumes. John Florio. Trans. New York: AMS, 1967.
- Mousley, A., *Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007.
- Nancy, J., *A Finite Thinking*. Simon Sparks. Ed. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Nancy, J., *The Birth to Presence*. Brian Holmes. Trans. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Nancy, J., *The Ground of the Image*. Jeff Fort. Trans. New York: Fordham UP, 2005.
- Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*. Francis Golffing. Trans. New York: Doubleday, 1956.
- Nietzsche, F., *Untimely Meditations*. R.J. Hollingdale. Trans. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Orgel, S., *The Authentic Shakespeare: And Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Palfrey, S., *Doing Shakespeare*. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2005.
- Palfrey, S., *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.
- Palfrey, S., "Macbeth and Kierkegaard", *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004), 96-111.
- Palfrey, S. and T. Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*. Oxford: OUP, 2007.
- Parker, P., and G. Hartman, eds., *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. New York:

Routledge, 1990.

Petrarch, *The Canzoniere. Francesco Petrarch – Father of Humanism.*

<http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere/the-canzoniere.txt>. A.S. Kline. Trans. Visited 06 June 2011.

Pye, C., “‘To throw out our eyes for brave Othello’: Shakespeare and Aesthetic Ideology”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60.4 (2009), 425-447.

Reynolds, B., *Transversal Enterprises in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Rice, P., and P. Waugh, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. London: Edward Arnold, 1989.

Roche, Jr., T.P., “‘Nothing Almost Sees Miracles’: Tragic Knowledge in *King Lear*”, *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s King Lear*. Jay L. Halio. Ed. New York: G.K. Hall, 1996, 149-169.

Russell, D.A. and M. Winterbottom, *Ancient Literary Criticism*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972.

Ryan, K., “‘The Murdering Word’”, *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*. R.S. White. Ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, 116-128.

Sawday, J., *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Schweizer, H., *On Waiting*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Scolnicov, H., and P. Holland, *Reading Plays: Interpretation and Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Shakespeare, W., *The Norton Shakespeare*. Greenblatt, S., et al. Eds. New York: Norton, 1997.

Shaw, P., *The Sublime*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Smith, S., “Love, Pity, and Deception in Othello”, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 44.1 (2008), 3-51.

Sidney, P., *Astrophil and Stella. The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Volume 1. Abrams, M.H., et al. Eds. Seventh Edition. New York: Norton, 2000.

Sinfield, A., “From Bradley to Cultural Materialism”, *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006), 25-34.

Sinfield, A., *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.

- Skura, M.A., "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.1 (1989), 42-69.
- Slights, J., "Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare's Miranda", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41.2 (2001), 357-379.
- Snyder, S., "Ideology and the Feud in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996), 87-96.
- Stanislavsky, C., *An Actor Prepares*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937.
- Steiner, G., *Real Presences*. London: Faber, 1989.
- Stern, T., *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Stoll, E.E., *Shakespeare Studies: Historical and Comparative Method*. New York: G.E. Stechert, 1942.
- Tate, N., *The History of King Lear*. James Black. Ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1976.
- Taylor, G., "The War in *King Lear*", *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980), 27-34.
- Taylor, G., and M. Warren, eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.
- Thompson, A., and N. Taylor, eds., *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*. Arden Shakespeare. London: Thomson, 2006.
- Thompson, A., and N. Taylor, eds., *Hamlet*. Arden Shakespeare. London: Thomson, 2006.
- Tillyard, E.M.W., *Shakespeare's Last Plays*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1938.
- Tribble, E., "Distributing Cognition in the Globe", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56.2 (2005), 135-155.
- Wain, J., ed., *Othello: A Casebook*. Second Edition. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994.
- Watts, I., "Alas! And Did My Saviour Bleed?", *Hymns and Spiritual Songs, 1707-9*. <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/a/l/a/alasand.htm>. Visited on 17 June 2011.
- Weimann, R., "Mimesis in Hamlet", *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. Eds. New York: Routledge, 1990, 275-291.
- Wells, S., ed., *Shakespeare Survey 49: Romeo and Juliet and its Afterlife*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Wells, S., and G. Taylor, with J. Jowett, and W. Montgomery, eds., *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon, 2005.

- Wells, S., and G. Taylor, with J. Jowett, and W. Montgomery, eds., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.
- Welsford, E., "The Fool in *King Lear*", *King Lear: A Casebook*. Frank Kermode. Ed. London: Macmillan, 1969, 137-149.
- White, R.S., ed., *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.
- Whitehead, A.N., *Adventures of Ideas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1933.
- Whitehead, A.N., *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1929.
- Williams, R., *Modern Tragedy*. London: Hogarth, 1992.
- Wilson-Okamura, D.S., "Virgilian Models of Colonization in Shakespeare's *Tempest*", *English Literary History* 70 (2003), 709-737.
- Wilson, L., *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.
- Witmore, M., *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.
- Witmore, M., *Shakespearean Metaphysics*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Worthen, W.B., *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*. Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Wright, G., *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- Yates, F.A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Routledge: London, 1964.
- Yeats, W.B., *Essays and Introductions*. London: Macmillan, 1961.
- Young, R.V., "Hope and Despair in *King Lear*: The Gospel and The Crisis of Natural Law", *King Lear: New Critical Essays*. Jeffrey Kahan. Ed. New York: Routledge, 2008, 253-277.
- Žižek, S., *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso, 2008.
- Žižek, S., *On Belief*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Žižek, S., *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London: Verso, 2000.
- Žižek, S., *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 2003.
- Žižek, S., *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

Žižek, S., *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 1999.