

SHAKESPEARE AND THE LANGUAGE OF VIOLENCE

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## Abstract

Focusing on a selection of Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems, I examine the way in which violence is articulated in language and argue that language not only figures acts of violence but is also violent in itself. I begin by situating my argument historically, exploring perceptions of language and its effects in Renaissance England, and demonstrate that there was a keen sense of the materiality of language. Following on from this, I outline the theoretical insights that inform my argument, highlighting the way in which Marx's assertion that the subject is socially constructed can be usefully considered in conjunction with Lacan's conception of the role of language in the development of the subject. I argue that because language precedes our entry into it, it effects a violent circumscription of the limits of the subject. I examine the representations of sexual violence in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece* and identify the ways in which assumptions about gender difference are encoded within language, producing a female subject position largely shaped by patriarchal imperatives. In Chapter Four, I discuss executions as a highly visible form of state violence during the period and suggest that as a recurring spectacle, they contributed to the changing attitudes towards death. Paying particular attention to the representations of death in *I Henry VI*, I consider the way in which the production of history occurs at the level of language and emerges out of violent contestation. The violence of the bear-pit provides the focus for Chapter Five, and I offer a reading of *Coriolanus* which interrogates the significance of the metaphors of bearbaiting found

throughout the play. I argue that the paradigm of unremitting violence offered by the sport addresses aspects of an anxious subjectivity neglected by the teleological form of tragedy. Finally, I discuss domestic violence in relation to *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, emphasising that the violent potentiality embodied within linguistic structures is often the agent of violence inflicted within the domestic sphere.

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed:

September 2003

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## Introduction

### I - *Shakespeare and the Language of Violence*

The works of Shakespeare have, since the publication of the first folio, functioned collectively as a privileged signifier of English, and subsequently British, culture. In his verses 'To the Memory of ... the author Mr. William Shakespeare', Ben Jonson writes, 'Triumph my Britaine, thou hast one to showe,/ To whom all scenes of Europe owe' (1954: 286) and Leonard Digges, in the 1640 edition of Shakespeare's poems, praises his 'language exquisite' (Kermode 1965: 38). The elevated position afforded to Shakespeare's works exemplifies the common equation of language with 'high' culture. Violence, in contrast, is frequently perceived as a menacing presence, traversing the margins of culture. I disagree profoundly with this perceived opposition. The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that violence and culture are in fact inextricably linked, and specifically, to argue that because the relationships which constitute 'culture' take place within language, violence and language are inextricably linked.

My argument necessarily forms part of a larger challenge to the inherited idea that Shakespeare's works exist in a vacuum, unaffected by the conditions in which they were produced, and interpreted by an audience and readership that remain equally detached from their cultural moment. This idea, which has proved remarkably persistent, contributes to a perception that Shakespearean

literature and drama transcends its historical bounds, and promotes an abstracted notion of 'Shakespeare' and in particular 'Shakespearean language' which is upheld as the ultimate example of, and appropriated in the name of, elite culture. Frank Kermode claims to be able to pinpoint '[t]he years 1599-1600' as the time when Shakespeare's language ascends 'to a new level of achievement and difficulty' (2000: ix). Harold Bloom even suggests, in an argument which if nothing else tacitly acknowledges language as the place in which the social subject is produced, that Shakespeare invented 'what has become the most accepted mode for representing character and personality in language' and 'thereby invented the human as we know it' (1999: 714). These kinds of suggestions perpetuate a conception of Shakespeare as an ultimate authority, the source of a fixed and coherent body of meanings. Recent scholarship, particularly that of the last three decades, has done much to dismantle the essentialist framework which underpins these ideas, interrogating the way in which texts become and remain canonical, insisting upon a critical engagement with texts which recognises the importance of the cultures in which they are embedded, and radically problematising any notion of stabilised meaning.<sup>1</sup>

John Drakakis notes that 'the way to displace 'Shakespeare' from his pedestal as a supreme icon of English culture is to return him to context' (1996: 243). A significant contribution to this process has been made by a number of works

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<sup>1</sup> Critics such as Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, John Drakakis, Stephen Greenblatt, Terrence Hawkes and Alan Sinfield have been instrumental to this process.

which foreground issues of violence that have previously been taboo for the study of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. R.A. Foakes' study, *Shakespeare and Violence*, is characterised by his suspicion of the current trends in critical thinking; nevertheless, he concedes that '[v]iolence is culturally constructed in different ways in different ages' (2003: 17), and provides a useful introductory section outlining the paradigms of violence in circulation during the Renaissance. However, Foakes reinforces the conception of violence as 'other', suggesting that it is a disruptive element which culture works unsuccessfully to contain. He contends that violence is an 'unruly dimension that cannot be contained by the concepts of culture, and ... may be related to the deepest instincts in human beings, especially in males' (1993: 17). Rather than speculating about the biological determinants of violence and aggression, Derek Cohen understands violence as integral to the structures and agency of power, arguing that it is 'an inherent feature of the political system of patriarchal authority', and asserting that '[a]cts of violence belong to patriarchy as surely as fathers do' (1993: 1). He examines the ways in which patriarchy both produces and condemns violence, and, affirming that 'female chastity is the cornerstone of patriarchy', pays particular attention to the way in which violence impacts upon women.

In his important study, *The Culture of Violence*, Francis Barker places a similar emphasis upon the ways in which violence was embedded within Renaissance society. He argues that violence, far from existing on the margins of culture, is central to the dynamics of power which produce 'culture'. In Shakespeare's

representations of violence, however, he suggests that ‘even when violence is shown it is occluded’ (1993: 194) and that this

raises questions about the politics of representation ... in Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* ... and in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre as a whole, questions in particular of the extent to which the theatre either underwrites the signifying practices of the dominant culture (and by way of that the political and social power of the dominant, as well as its cultural authority) or alternatively unsettles such structures and institutions by transgressing, erasing, confusing, contesting or making ‘disfunctional’ the categories and representations they support and which in turn support them (1993: 194-5).

At the same time, Barker interrogates the politics of current critical practices, criticising aspects of New Historicism. He takes issue with the tendency to produce a reading of history which substitutes ‘notions of circulation for those of oppression, anxiety for terror’ (1993: 124) in a process complete with its own violence, which obfuscates the modalities and functions of violence. In addition, he warns against the ‘received hierarchisation of literature and background’ and stresses the need to maintain an awareness of the ‘hierarchisation of discourse, whose description should continue to allow the discussion and apprehension of the (traces of) structures and practices of dominance and resistance’ (1993: 125). Fundamental to his thesis, and to mine, is the assertion that discourse and violence should be recognised as ‘likes rather than opposites’ (1993: 126).

Throughout the dissertation, I pursue this idea further, and through readings of selected plays and poems of Shakespeare, attempt to foreground the violence of language. I argue for an understanding of the materiality of

language and show that language has the capacity to effect violence. J.L. Austin's seminal discussion, *How to do things with Words*, explains that performative utterances involve 'doing something as opposed to just saying something' (1962: 133), demonstrating that language can and frequently does have material effects. But more than this, I contend that violence inheres within the very structures of language and that from his/her entry into language the subject is thoroughly penetrated by these structures: from this point onwards, the individual is subject to the violence which is an integral aspect of the signifying process. Bearing this in mind, I discuss the ways in which literary texts are involved with the processes of selecting and obscuring, contesting and prioritising the meanings of violence, and indeed, the way in which these processes are themselves dramatised. I argue that representations are never simply neutral reflections, but active and politically motivated events replete with their own violence.

## II - *Violence in Political Context*

Violence permeated every aspect of life across the social spectrum, from the food and anti-enclosure rioting of the extremely poor to the stylised martial displays that were the mark of a courtier. In diverse and often conflicting ways, violence effected social change, disrupting and redistributing the functional relations of power. The state sanctioned acts of corporal punishment as part of the judicial process in an ongoing attempt to maintain

political stability. At the same time, agrarian workers exercised a dynamic and inclusive community politics of direct action. The institutional upheavals initiated by religious reforms affected the physical and verbal structures of Christian worship, implicating all of England's Christians. Ongoing disputes with France and the aggravated tensions of the Anglo-Spanish relationship informed the national identity, which was ultimately fortified by these conflicts. Violence was unavoidable; it operated across and between social groups, working at an interpersonal and communal level.

Norbert Elias's assessment of the civilising process explores the changes in the way in which violence operates within society. He suggests that

In the social spaces where violence is an unavoidable and everyday event, and where individuals' chains of dependence are relatively short, because they largely subsist directly from the produce of their own land, a strong and continuous moderation of drives and affects is neither necessary, possible nor useful ... The moderation of spontaneous emotions, the tempering of affects, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into the past and future, the habit of connecting events in terms of cause and effect – all these are different aspects of the same transformation of conduct which necessarily takes place with the monopolization of physical violence, and the lengthening of the chains of social action and interdependence. It is a "civilising" change of behaviour (1994: 370).

Richard Halpern identifies primitive accumulation, or 'the genealogy of capital' in English Renaissance culture, which is suggestive of the expansion of the individual's chains of dependence (1991). This necessarily required an active connection between cause and effect and was contingent upon and indeed consolidated by the emerging sense of social security.

During Elizabeth's long reign, she gradually achieved a previously unforeseen stability. Through progresses, she ensured that she was accessible to her subjects through a 'privileged visibility' (Greenblatt 1988: 64), and in her speeches she consistently maintained that there was an unequal, but nonetheless, mutually constitutive relationship between monarch and subject. In her celebrated speech to the troops at Tilbury, she asserts, 'I would not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people ... I have so behaved myself that under God I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects' (Marcus et.al. 2000: 326).

Elizabeth famously lacked a standing army, however. A militia, to which all able men between sixteen and sixty belonged, provided the defensive arm of state violence. Their weaponry consisted mainly of pikes, calivers, muskets, and also bills and bows, which were stored throughout the country, either in the private armouries of aristocrats or common armouries in towns, usually located in gatehouses or, in rural areas, in churches. In addition, those who had an annual income of ten pounds or over were obliged to maintain their own stock of arms and armour. The extent of an individual's personal armament was, therefore, a symbol of status, and one's skill in the use of particular weapons was also an indicator of position. Organised in this way, the militia was a broad based, decentralised fighting force whose very diffuseness meant that the implications of a popular uprising were potentially extremely serious. This threat was managed in large part by the militia's

promotion of a religiously defined self-image that was articulated within an increasingly hierarchical internal structure.

The militia gained status in the 1580s as its role became more clearly defined in relation to the external threats to national security. As these threats were increasingly identified with Catholicism, it became associated with a particularly militant brand of Protestantism. A clear set of religious objectives was instrumental to the way in which the force achieved a sense of internal coherence. Sir George Carey, a muster master in the 1580s, instructed his Captains to,

caswse all their Centonne [company] at tymes appointed, to frequente the Church, both for the use of diuine prayer, for receauinge the holie sacramente, and for hearinge the preachinge of godes worde, whereby they maie knowe their dewtie chieflie to god, then to her Majestie, nexte to their neighbour. If anie of frowardnes or by seducement of the Pope's confederates, Jesuites, and seminarie priests, professed enemies to our state and contrie, wilfully refraine resortinge to diuine service, or if anie be spotted with anie notable vice, that yow make presente advertisement of suche persons unto me, leste your and my suffereance of such unpunished worthelie provoke godes heauiwrathe and displeaure againste us (cited in Boynton 1971: 101).

Religious observance shaped the ethos of the militia. Not only did it provide a theological justification for the potential use of force, but it also functioned coercively, invoking the prospect of God's wrath, or divine violence, to ensure compliance.



Internally, this same belief system was central to the corporal and capital punishments regularly deployed by the state. William Harrison comprehensively details the ‘Sundry Kinds of Punishments Appointed for Malefactors’ in his description of England:

In cases of felony, manslaughter, robbery, murder, rape, piracy, and such capital crimes as are not reputed for treason or hurt of the state, our sentence pronounce upon the offender is to hang till he be dead. For of other punishments used in other countries we have no knowledge or use, and yet so few grievous crimes committed with us as elsewhere in the world. To use torment, also, or question by pain and torture in these common cases, with us is greatly abhorred, sith we are alway to be such as despise death and yet abhor to be tormented, choosing rather frankly to open our minds than to yield our bodies unto such servile halings and tearings as are used in other countries ... our jailers are guilty of felony by an old law of the land if they torment any prisoner committed to their custody (1994: 187).

Harrison emphasises the rarity of serious violent crime in England in comparison with other countries, and voices a sense of national pride in the authorities’ reluctance to use violence for coercive purposes. Writing in the 1570s, Harrison was able to contrast the relative stability of England with the more volatile conditions on the continent. The Spanish Inquisition was notorious for its formidable use of force: an inquisitor operating in the 1570s asserted that ‘the main purpose of the trial and execution is not to save the soul of the accused but to achieve the public good and put fear into others’ (Kamen 2000: 174). In addition, the Wars of Religion traumatised France.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Montaigne’s meditations ‘On Cruelty’ describe the distressing events in France:

I live in a season when unbelievable examples of this vice of cruelty flourish ... If I had not seen it I could hardly have made myself believe that you could find souls so monstrous that they would commit murder for the sheer fun of it; would hack another man’s limbs and lop them off and would cudgel their brains to invent unusual tortures and new forms of murder, not from hatred or for gain but for the one sole purpose of enjoying the pleasant spectacle of the pitiful gestures and

Francis Barker argues that '[n]o one alive in Early Modern England could fully have *believed* that the location of violence was elsewhere, but we know that ideology – perhaps especially when deployed in the form of 'cultural performance' – works in mysterious but effective ways' (1993: 191). In Harrison's account of the justice system, English violence was meaningful as part of a coherent body of judicial practices, and functioned as a marker of national and religious difference.

As Harrison tacitly acknowledges, violence signifies by degree, and the various corporal punishments meted out by the state encoded social and gender hierarchies. Foucault notes that torture – the infliction of pain as a mode of punishment – 'correlates the type of corporal effect, the quality, intensity, duration of pain, with the gravity of the crime, the person of the criminal, the rank of his victims' (1979: 34). The signs of criminality were inscribed upon the bodies of offenders, simultaneously marking them out as deviants and reinforcing the image of a coherent and meaningful policy of state violence. Rogues and vagabonds could be stocked and whipped, or permanently scarred by a burn through the ear. If caught, thieves could lose a hand or be burned through the thumb. Seditious speech against the magistrate could leave the speaker without one or both ears and those who committed perjury could be pilloried or branded on the forehead with a 'P'. There were also a number of gradations in the execution of the death penalty. Murder was usually punished

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twitchings of a man dying in agony, while hearing his screams and groans. For there you have the farthest point that cruelty can reach (1991: 181).

by public hanging, but when a woman murdered her husband it was considered treason because it subverted the 'natural' order that required women to be subject to their spouse. A woman found guilty of spousal murder would be burned at the stake, just as she would have been punished for high treason. The penalties for men who were convicted of high treason were different again. Social status was taken into account and could influence the method of trial and punishment. Members of the nobility were entitled to be tried by peers and could escape hanging, drawing and quartering, and be hung instead. Even death, the great leveller, was recovered for the temporal realm and used to reinforce the social distinctions of the living.

### III - *Approach*

In order to explore the language of violence and to demonstrate the violence of language, I offer a reading of selected plays and poems of Shakespeare focusing upon the violence they represent, considering their relationship to incidences and discourses of violence during the period, and highlighting the violence inherent within the representational practices they deploy and contest. Literary texts, as examples of the way in which a culture represents itself to itself, provide an important point of convergence for the discourses in which and through which violence is understood. I begin, in the first two chapters, by setting out the historical and theoretical co-ordinates of my

argument. I illustrate that central aspects of Renaissance culture emerged out of conflicts which took language and the written and spoken word as both their means and their end, and demonstrate that during the period there was a well-developed sense of the materiality of linguistic structures. In addition, I outline the way in which the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Post-structuralism elucidate the violence which inheres within the structures of language. Whilst the subject of this study is itself violence, I attempt to maintain a tripartite focus upon the way in which language figures acts of violence, effects violence and is in itself violent. Concentrating on *Titus Andronicus*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *I Henry VI*, *Coriolanus* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* respectively, I explore these issues in relation to sexual violence against women, state executions, bearbaiting, and violence within the domestic sphere.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, I exercise considerable latitude by including *A Yorkshire Tragedy* as one of Shakespeare's plays. As an expediency, I do so on the grounds of Tucker Brooke's classification of the play as part of *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*.

## Chapter One

### 'The strong rein of commanding words'

Language's capacity to articulate violence is always both insufficient and supplementary: it can never render an experience of violence fully or with adequate economy, but is always implicated in the violent act itself. Michel Foucault writes that '[w]e know that discourse has the power to arrest the flight of an arrow in a recess of time' (1977: 53). Language, as a system of signs, has the capacity to circumscribe violence 'so that misfortunes will never be fully realized, so that their fulfilment will be averted in the distance of words' (Foucault 1977: 54). But in his influential study of violence and the sacred, René Girard asserts that '[t]he procedures that keep men's violence in bounds have one thing in common: they are no strangers to the ways of violence' (1988: 23), and indeed, language is no stranger to the ways of violence. Language mediates all human experience and, at the most fundamental level, violence is immanent in the signifying process itself.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries were writing during a period of unprecedented awareness of, and attention to, the materiality of language, where language was both the subject and object of violent controversy. In radically different ways, Reformed theology and classical humanism, the cornerstones of Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, affirmed and contested material conceptions of the word. The Reformation divided Western Christendom irrevocably, and as a consequence political and religious

authorities were realigned within national boundaries and the English language, and the national identity it helped to foster, were strengthened in opposition to other European nation states. In addition to the conflict with the Papacy and those countries under its jurisdiction, the emerging status of the English language was consolidated by the contact with other languages and cultures brought by the exploratory travel of the age. The vernacular overtook Latin to become the language of literature, the liturgy and almost all written discourse. And of course, as Francis Bacon suggests, '[w]e should note the force, effect and consequences of ... printing' (1960: 118), which allowed for the reproduction and dissemination of written materials, in English and Latin, on an unprecedented scale.

Discussions of the material dynamics of language that were endemic to the foremost social, political and theological debates of the period implicitly acknowledged the possibility of linguistic violence. In the chapters that follow, I explore some of the ways in which Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems were involved in the process of making violence meaningful in Renaissance culture. The aim of this chapter, however, is to examine the self-conscious attention to language and the discursive production of meaning that characterised the prevailing religious and pedagogical discourses, and to demonstrate that violence was always, overtly or covertly, implicated at all levels of linguistic signification.

In seeking to characterise popular perceptions of the agency of language, it is tempting to draw parallels with contemporary academic debates in the humanities. Jonathan Dollimore has suggested (in a self-confessedly provocative move) that ‘post-structuralism rediscovered what the Renaissance already knew’ (1989: xlvi). Post-structuralism’s engagement with the radically unstable qualities of language is certainly recognisable in writing of the period: Francis Bacon observed that ‘[t]here are ... in words certain degrees of distortion and error’ (LX, 1960: 58) and his acknowledgement that ‘even definitions cannot cure the evil in dealing with natural and material things, since the definitions themselves consist of words, and those words beget others’ (LIX, 1960: 56) is analogous to Jacques Derrida’s ideas of the deferred presence of meaning and the play of the linguistic sign (2001: 351-370). But as Margretta de Grazia has noted, ‘[t]he trend is to assume that Shakespeare, like writers of our own century, mistrusted the faulty medium of his trade’ (1978: 374).

In the current critical understanding, the insufficiencies and excesses of language as a signifying system are seen as consequences of the inevitable gap between the signifier and the signified. During the Renaissance, however, Christian and humanist discourses informed perceptions of language, and the deferred presence of meaning, which complicated language’s effectiveness as a means of communication, was believed to be a punishment from God. Adam’s language was seen as originally divinely ordained, allowing for perfect communion with God: in the Garden of Eden, ‘the Lord God formed of the

earth everie beast of the field and everie fowle of the heaven, & broght *them* unto the man to se how he wolde call them: for howsoever the man named the living creature, so was the name thereof (*Genesis* II: 19).<sup>1</sup> This privileged status was lost after the fall and although the language spoken remained the same, its efficacy did not. According to the *Old Testament*, it was not until the construction of the tower of Babel that this single language was divided.

*Genesis* recounts a time when '[t]he whole earth was of one language and one speache' (11: 1). The descendants of Noah

said, Go to, let us buylde us a citie and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto the heaven, that we may get us a name, lest we be scatted across the whole earth. But the Lord came downe to se the citie & tower, which the sonnes of men buylded. And the Lord said, Beholde, the people is one, & thei all have one language, & this thei beginne to do, nether can thei now be stopped from whatsoever thei have imagined to do. Come on, let us go downe, and there confound their language, that everie one perceive not an others speache (*Genesis* 11: 1- 7).

This biblical explanation again identifies sin as the cause of language's imperspicuity. In Babel, the punishment for overreaching ambition was the fragmentation of the single unified language into many different tongues. This idea translated into an understanding of language as a medium, not faulty in itself, but skewed by the inherent sinfulness of those that use it. As Margretta de Grazia has observed, the perception was that '[w]hen language fails, the fault is with the speaker, not with speech' (1978: 377).

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations are taken from the *Geneva Bible* of 1560 unless otherwise stated.



The cultural significance of the story of Babel is demonstrated by its reworking in the literature and drama of the period. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's instructions for the play within the play refigure this act of God's vengeance:

HIERONIMO: Each of us must act his part  
 In unknown languages,  
 That it may breed the more variety,  
 As you my lord, in Latin, I in Greek,  
 You in Italian; and for because I know  
 That Bel-imperia hath practised the French,  
 In courtly French shall all her phrases be ...  
 BALTHASAR: But this will be a mere confusion,  
 And hardly shall we all be understood...  
 HIERONIMO: Now shall I see the fall of Babylon,  
 Wrought by the heavens in this confusion.  
 (IV.ii.172-196)

The performance of *Solimon and Perseda* is used by Hieronimo to entrap his son's murderers. Kyd uses this episode to highlight the players' sinfulness and their distance from God: the babbling confusion he invokes belongs to the Christian-based linguistic economy which underpinned Renaissance culture.<sup>2</sup>

In this perceptual framework, the linguistic confusion visited upon Babel did not, however, amount to a permanent deferral of meaning. The *New Testament* book of *Acts* describes the Holy Spirit's descent to earth and the temporary removal of all language barriers:

And when the day of Pentecoste was come, they were all with one accorde in one place. And suddenly there came a sounde from heaven, as of a rushing and mightie winde, and it filled all the house where they sate ... And they were all filled with the holie Gost, and began to speake with other tongues, as

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<sup>2</sup> In his notes on the text, David Bevington explains that the fall of Babylon and the Tower of Babel were frequently confused or conflated during the period, and clearly both meanings are in play here (Kyd 1996: 117n.195).

the spirit gave them utterance ... Now when this was noised, the multitude came together and were astonished [sic], because that everie man heard them speake his owne language (*Acts* II: 1-6).

Pentecost counteracted the disordering after-effects of attempts to build the tower of Babel and allowed unfettered access to God's word. The Holy Spirit made meaning present in language: essentially, both the presence and the meaning of the Word *were* God. This passage maintains a focus upon personal responsibility for the transparency of language, and suggests that is through charity that the individual can achieve linguistic clarity. Fulke Greville wrote 'The divers tongues, and Babylon's downfall,/ Are nothing to the man's renewed birth' (Jones 1991: 359) and studies of rhetoric often claimed that they offered a way to such a renewal. Thomas Wilson begins his treatise, *The Arte of Rhetorique*: 'Eloquence first geven by God, after loste by man, and laste repaired by God agayne' (1553: 9).

In a culture which was inescapably self-conscious of language, a great deal of time was devoted to the study of linguistic structures. Rhetoric was a central part of the humanist education, and the profusion of manuals and handbooks, such as Thomas Wilson's, that provided instruction in the subject are a testament to its enduring status. Wayne Rebhorn goes so far as to suggest that,

considering the central place rhetoric had in education during the Renaissance as well as the enormous volume of material that was published about it, perhaps it would be best to speak of the Renaissance not in traditional terms as the rebirth of antiquity or the age of exploration, but as the age of rhetoric (2000: 2).

Aristotle affirmed that ‘Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic’ (1991: 66) but during the Renaissance, rhetoric took precedence. The humanist educational program marked a movement away from the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, which had been characterised by pedantry and extreme rigidity. Scholasticism, which had its basis in the thought of Aristotle, and in particular his work on dialectic, used syllogistic reasoning with the aim of establishing absolute truth. In a deliberate movement away from the inflexibility of this form of Aristotelian praxis, the subsequent Neoplatonic fusion of the Platonic ideal forms and Aristotelian hierarchies allowed for a more robust Humanist pedagogy.<sup>3</sup>

The Neoplatonism that was revived in Europe from the late Middle Ages onward advanced a conception of language which emphasised its importance as the vehicle for man’s ascendancy to the divine. Trapezuntius declares that ‘nothing was ever given to us by God that is better than speech’ (Rebhorn 2000: 31), and this idea is reproduced in Thomas Campion’s *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*. In his introductory dedication to Lord Buckhurst, Campion asserts that ‘In two things ... it is generally agreed that man excels all other creatures, in reason, and speech: and in them by how much one man surpasseth an other, by so much the nearer he aspires to a celestial essence’ (1602). The humanist study of language was touted as a means of active reparation for the divine violence visited upon the Tower of Babel: in *An Apologie for Poetrie*, Sir Philip Sidney opines that ‘those cumbersome differences

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of humanist education see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, (1986).

of Cases, Genders, Moodes, and Tenses ... I thinke was a peece of the Tower of *Babilons* curse, that a man should be put to school to learne his mother-tongue' (1915:60).<sup>4</sup> But the humanist engagement with language was itself stratified by violence.

When, in Samuel Daniel's *Musophilus* (1599), Philocosmus asserts that 'Th'unmateriall swellings of your pen/ Touch not the spirit that action doth import', Musophilus responds with a sonorous defence of the ideals and effects of eloquence:

Powre above powres, O heavenly *Eloquence*,  
 That with the strong reine of commanding words,  
 Dost manage, guide and master th'eminence  
 Of mens affections, more than all their swords:  
 Shall we not offer to thy excellence  
 The richest treasure that our wit affords?  
 Thou canst do much more with one poor pen  
 Than all the powers of princes can effect:  
 And draw, divert, dispose, and fashion men  
 Better than force or rigour can direct:  
 Should we this ornament of glorie then  
 As th'unmateriall fruits of shades, neglect?  
 (Norbrook, 1993: 716)

The Christian exhortation with which this passage opens situates the text within an expiatory tradition. But this extract also provides a point of convergence for the various modalities of humanistic violence. Musophilus confidently asserts the materiality of language, defending the 'strong reine' and 'commanding' qualities of words and demonstrating that language has material effects which can be violent. This idea is reinforced with the metaphor, familiar to humanist discourse, of armed conflict, where the linguistic sign

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<sup>4</sup> Here, Sidney conflates Babylon with the Tower of Babel.

forms part of a rhetorical arsenal affording the word a greater authority than the sword. Significantly, and touching upon another issue at the centre of Humanist education, ‘the powers of princes’ are also subject to the pen. Whilst Musophilus defends ‘th’unmateriall swellings’, he calls attention to the political ramifications of the violent potential of rhetoric. His question – ‘Should we this ornament of glorie then ... neglect?’ – inquires into the implications of this agency for those in positions of authority, who could be ‘disposed’ of as a result of the powers of persuasive speech.

Rhetoric’s purpose is to persuade, to effect changes to people’s thoughts, actions and the conditions of their material existence. Trapezuntius produced *Rhetoricorum Libri V* (*Five Books on Rhetoric*), the first comprehensive treatment of rhetoric in the Renaissance. In his *Oration in Praise of Eloquence* he expounds his belief in the supreme status of the art of rhetoric, arguing that:

Rhetoric excels the other arts inasmuch as it alone embraces almost every aspect of human life ... rhetoric alone has undertaken the managing of private as well as public matters. For what could be thought up or said in the conduct of our affairs that does not require the power of oratory? In court, it defends what is right. In the Senate, it shows you both the useful and the useless. In public meetings, it has always protected the state as a whole. It teaches us to be provident and to avoid adverse things before they happen. If they should happen through chance or ignorance, rhetoric alone will come to our aid and will support us with hope or consolation. It adorns our successes and mitigates our disasters. It intimidates our enemies and strengthens our friends. It founds, preserves, and enlarges cities. It both promulgates and abrogates laws (Rebhorn 2000: 31-32).

Trapezuntius demonstrates that there is nothing outside language and therefore nothing that cannot benefit from rhetorical training. He acknowledges and celebrates the way in which language mediates all human experience, marking a decisive shift away from the medieval scholasticism which tried to force a correspondence between word and concept, or *verba* and *res*. Rhetoric revealed the fundamentally contingent nature of meaning.

This very contingency was the basis of much of the criticism of rhetoric. The emphasis upon the possibilities generated by the fundamentally unstable relationship between words and concepts was, for a number of reasons, profoundly unsettling. Rhetoric discredited the idea that language provided a neutral mode of expression, and instead promoted an understanding of the way in which all thought is mediated and manipulated by linguistic structures. In Heinrich Agrippa's *On the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Arts and Sciences*, he explains his anxieties about the use of rhetoric:

To know how to speak precisely, ornately, gravely, and copiously is certainly beautiful, delightful, and always useful, but it is sometimes base and inconsiderate, more often dangerous, and always suspect ... Plato thought they [orators] should be excluded from his republic together with tragic actors and poets, and surely he is right, for nothing is more dangerous to civic functions than this art, since it produces prevaricators, shifty tricksters, perverters of the law, sycophants, and all kinds of men with wicked tongues. Equipped with it, many people plot against the state and foment sedition, while by means of their artful loquacity, they betray others, attack them, satirize them, flatter yet others, and obtain something like a tyranny over the innocent (Rebhorn 2000: 78-79).

The trajectory of Agrippa's and Trapezuntius' arguments are similar but the tenor differs. Both writers acknowledge the material consequences of persuasive speech, the dual purposes of rhetoric and the contingency of meaning, but Agrippa places a much stronger emphasis on the intention of the speaker. He posits eloquence as a suspect practice which always carries the threat of transgression by 'perverters of the law' who manipulate the skills of rhetoric for illegal purposes. Indeed, he identifies rhetoric as a means of inciting insurrection, of committing treason, and as a favoured tool of the tyrannical.

The myth of the orator, which originated in classical antiquity with Cicero's *De inventione*, remained influential in the Renaissance. The orator was said to have established 'civilised society': his art of speaking had innovative and constructive effects, demonstrating and symbolising the materiality of language. For Cicero, however, the orator's power was exercised within a republican state where political decisions were informed by debate. Under the monarchical rule of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, however, the decisions of government were not reached transparently within the public domain, nor were they directly influenced by it. In this context, the conception of the orator's role was subject to modification, and aligned more closely with the figure of a prince. According to this perception, the benevolent orator – Quintillian's good man skilled in speaking – was involved less in the process of debate and more with the promotion of a singular aim.

The humanist pedagogues of the English grammar schools replicated this singularity of purpose in their teaching methods. The imitative methods of learning, which required students to model themselves upon their tutors, were inextricably bound up with an ideal of sovereignty. Rigid grammatical categories, which Sidney claims are a part of God's punishment, engendered a binary logic governing language use. Figured in these terms, the student has a choice of obedience or disobedience to grammatical rules. This paradigm extended to the idea of obedience more generally, with the tutor assuming a position that was identifiable with that of the monarch. This scholastic philosophy created the conditions for an unquestioning reproduction, not only of humanist ideologies, but also of the ideology of sovereignty.

Jack Cade's rebellion against the crown in Shakespeare's *II Henry VI* challenges the authority of the sovereign. Significantly, he directs an attack against Lord Saye, an exponent of English humanist education, as an extension of this authority. Cade lambastes Saye, claiming:

Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school ... It will be proved to thy face that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a noun and a verb, and such abominable words ... Away with him, away with him! He speaks Latin.

(IV.vii.29-53)

The contempt with which Cade talks of the grammar school and the learning which it promotes is symptomatic of the social inequalities of the period. Lord Saye seems curiously unaware of the motivation for Cade's hostility and in his defence, pleads, 'my book preferred me to the King:/ And seeing ignorance is



the curse of God,/ Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven' (IV.vii.67-69). He acknowledges that learning brought him social advancement and he articulates the humanist preoccupation with lofty spiritual attainment. This only serves to call attention to the disparities between the two men and antagonise Cade, who subsequently calls for his beheading. Saye's plea for his life, which reflects his rhetorical training, does effect a momentary change of heart, and in an aside, Cade admits 'I feel remorse in myself with his words, but I'll bridle it. He shall die, an it be but for pleading so well for his life' (IV.vii.98-100). Although Cade's barbarity seems antithetical to the ideals of humanism, violence was, on several levels, embedded within humanist praxis.

The final call for Saye's removal is made on the basis of his command of Latin. Whilst Cade's animosity is directed against education in general, training in Latin was representative of a high level of learning that was not commensurate with the distribution of literacy. The grammar schools, which Cade believed had 'most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm', provided a Latin-based humanist education for boys. Halpern asserts that,

[t]he schools' exclusionary function was ... complemented by a hegemonic one in which the behavioural disposition of the 'middle sort' was imposed on a relatively broad array of classes. In the second function the school neither signified an already-existing class system nor simply reproduced it; it helped reform both the ruling and the subaltern classes along the lines of a proto-bourgeois model (1991: 26).

Cade is doubly marginalised by the school system. He is subject, in the first instance, to its exclusionary practices, and subsequently, to the hegemony of

the schools' Latin curriculum which functioned as an instrument of institutional force.

Questions of violence dominated humanist pedagogy, as the use force of was not restricted to its exclusionary practices. Institutional force and politically motivated violence formed a recurring topos in the curriculum. Students studied classical texts whose accounts of tyrannical leaders had often originally formed the basis of discussions about republican government, which was anathema to the English political system. As Stephanie Jed has argued, 'an exercise of domination and suppression may be implicated in the very conditions of humanistic codification' (1989: 29). Humanist practice was instrumental to the process of re-evaluating, transforming and transmitting the political import of violence within a complex network of figures and tropes.

It was, however, the schoolmaster's use of violent punishment in the classroom which provoked one of the fiercest internal debates within the humanist pedagogical tradition. Corporal punishment was endemic in the English school system. Roger Ascham, Elizabeth Tudor's former tutor, complained of the 'cruelty in schoolmasters in beating away the love of learning from children' (1967: 38) and encouraged pedagogic ideals to come into line with the ideals of eloquence, so that 'the schoolhouse should be counted as a sanctuary against fear' (1967: 38). But despite the moderate aims of Ascham and others, extreme violence remained a commonplace. Ramus, one of the foremost Renaissance educators, was reputedly prone to repeated

outbursts of such ferocious temper that he beat children in his care almost to death (Ong 1959: 114). Although this is an extreme example, very rough treatment was evidently not uncommon. One English schoolboy articulates his resentment of his overbearing schoolmaster in a short rhyme, claiming 'I would my master were an hare/ And all his bokes howndes were/ And I myself a joly hontere;/ To blow my horn I would not spare,/ For if he were dede I wold not care' (Martin 1979: 2). Walter Ong, however, suggests that physical punishment was an integral part of Latin language study in the Renaissance, and functioned as a puberty rite (Ong 1959: 103-124). The schoolmaster's violence, he argues, marked the boy's initiation into learning, separating him from the domestic sphere and signalling his membership of an educated male elite.

Increasingly, the elevating powers of language were asserted in patriotic terms and were related specifically to the English language. In his treatise on *The Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham asks,

If th'art of Poesie be but a skill appertaining to utterance, why may not the same be with us aswel as with them, our language being no lesse copious pithie and significative then theirs, our conceits be the same, and our wits no lesse apt to devise and imitate then theirs were? If againe Art be but a certaine order of rules prescribed by reason, and gathered by experience, why should not Poesie be a vulgar Art with us aswell as with the Greeks and Latines, our language admitting no fewer rules and nice diversities then theirs? (1589: 5).

The English language was enjoying a new-found status. It became a dynamic symbol of the nationalism that was consolidated as a result of the conflicts of

the 1580s. The vernacular became central to an English identity that developed in opposition to other nation states and cultural heritages. In *The Tempest*, Ferdinand's delight at hearing his own language is suggestive of the way in which identity is constructed through language and strengthened in relation to difference: 'My language! Heavens! / I am the best of them that speak this speech, / Were I but where 'tis spoken' (I.ii.431-433).

Richard Mulcaster writes in even stronger terms of the need to establish a distinctive tradition of learning, separate from Italy. He contends,

is it not in dede a mervellous bondage, to become servants to one tung for learning sake, the most of our time, with losse of most time, whereas we maie have the verie same treasur in our own tung, with gain of most time? our own bearing the joyfull title of our libertie and freedom, the Latin tung remembering us of our thraldom & bondage? (1582: 254).

Surprisingly for an educator who was one of the few to openly advocate the use of corporal punishment in schools, Mulcaster's attempts to persuade people of the need for change are realised in the metaphor of humiliating physical subjection.<sup>5</sup> The Italian tongue, associated with the Roman Church, is figured as a tyrannical jailor keeping the English tongue in 'thraldom and bondage'.

As the organ of speech, and as such, the corporeal location of language, the tongue came to symbolise a belief in, but ambivalent relationship to, the materiality of language. Employing the symbol of the tongue or 'lingua' as a

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<sup>5</sup> For Mulcaster's views on corporal punishment see *Positions ... for the Training up of Children* (1591: 150-151).

representation of the materiality of language, an often-cited quotation during the period from the *Old Testament* book of *Proverbs* states that ‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue’ (18: 21). Specifically, the tongue became the locus of pervasive anxieties about the relationship between utterance and inward thoughts. Occupying a unique position precisely because of its liminality and its capacity to transgress the body’s boundary, its physical, linguistic and symbolic attributes were frequently conflated, as Carla Mazzio has demonstrated. She explains that ‘[r]epresentations of the tongue in the early modern period often encode crises of logic, of language, and of sense’ (1997: 53).

The stereotype of the scold or shrew is symptomatic of the fact that the female tongue was widely thought to be particularly troublesome. Women’s tongues threatened to usurp phallic authority. William Whately, in *A Bride Bush*, warns,

we have some women that can chase and scold with their husbands, and rail upon them, and revile them and shake them together with such terms and carriage, as were unsufferable towards a servant. Stains of womankind, blemishes of their sex, monsters in nature, botches of human society, rude, graceless, impudent, next to harlots, if not the same with them. Let such words leave a blister behind them, and let the canker eat out those tongues (1617: 36).

Whately’s fulminations reveal an intense fear of the material consequences of women’s words, which, he believed, could ‘shake’ men with their force. He develops this idea, soliciting the causticity of words to blister scolds’ tongues, and summoning a canker to eat them out altogether. The tongue was seen as

the physical location of women's emasculating powers and these alarming suggestions illustrate the way in which obsessive concerns about female speech were displaced onto it. The scold's bridle is an example of the brutal punishments devised to physically correct the use of the tongue as a means of maintaining social control. In response to the concerns about its equivocal status and its destabilising effects, numerous tracts and sermons were produced during the period proffering advice on the 'government of the tongue' (Perkins 1593: 1).

In his instructions 'Of the duty of maids and young unmarried women', Thomas Becon advises women:

be not full of tongue, and of much babbling, nor use many words, but as few as they may, yea and those wisely and discretely, soberly and modestly spoken, ever remembering this common proverb: a maid should be seen and not heard. Except the gravity of some matter do require that she should speak, or else an answer is to be made to such things as are demanded of her: let her keep silence. For there is nothing that doth so much commend, avaunce, set forth, adorn, deck, trim and garnish a maid, as silence. And this noble virtue may the virgins learn of that most holy, pure and glorious virgin Mary, which when she either heard or saw any worthy and notable thing, blabbed it not out staightways to her gossips as the manner of women is at this present day, but being silent she kept all those sayings secret and pondered them in her heart (1564: 513<sup>r</sup>).

There was an urgency surrounding the efforts to subjugate the tongue's verbal powers. In the Christian tradition, the tongue was thought to give voice to the inner thoughts that were located in the speaker's heart: 'those things which procede out of the mouth, come from the heart and they defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts' (*Matthew* 15: 18-19). This notion of a

correspondence between an individual's utterance and their sinful interior reality was stressed by the Puritan preachers of the period. The English Calvinist, William Perkins, in his sermon 'A Direction for the Government of the Tongue According to God's Word' states that,

The government of the tongue is a vertue pertaining to holy usage of the tongue according to Gods worde. And for the well ordering of it, two things are requisite: a pure heart, and skill in the language of Canaan. The pure heart is most necessarie, because it is the fountaine of speech, and if the fountaine be defiled, the streames that issue thence can not be cleane (1593: A3r).

That the human heart was necessarily sinful was, for Calvinists, an incontrovertible fact. Indeed, Calvin states that man's 'heart is so thoroughly envenomed by sin that it can breath out nothing but corruption and rottenness' (1949: II.v.19). Perkins is at pains to stress that the purity of the heart is the most important factor in the government of the tongue, but in arguing for this he reveals a rather different concern.

In Psalm 141, the speaker asks, 'Set a watche, o Lord, before my mouth, & kepe the door of my lippes' (3). In his sermon, Perkins develops this idea and counsels that

The minde is the guide of the tongue: therefore men must consider before they speake. The tongue is the messenger of the heart, and therefore as oft as we speak without meditation going before, so the messenger runneth without his arrand. The tongue is placed in the middle of the mouth, and it is compassed in with lippes and teeth as with a double trench, to showe us, howe we are to use heede and preconsideration before we speake and therefore it is good advice to keep the

key of the mouth not in the mouth, but in the cupboard of the heart (1593: 11).<sup>6</sup>

Despite prioritising the heart as the originator and the mind as the regulator of speech, the text returns repeatedly to the tongue itself. Whilst the heart and mind are associated with the category of the metaphysical, the tongue is discussed in overtly physical terms. Although the text purports to counsel the Christian subject on how best to maintain an inner reverence and piety, it focuses obsessively upon the tongue as a recalcitrant organ with the capacity, and indeed the intent, to act in isolation from the rest of the body. The imagery Perkins uses suggests that the teeth and the lips should actively obstruct the tongue, 'as with a double trench' and work to contain it. As Mazzio has persuasively argued,

The spectacle of the independent organ of speech ... in many ways perfectly embodies anxieties about reference itself, not only about the movement of speech away from the individual body but also about the movement of signs away from any singularly discernable, naturalized context' (1997: 54).

The tongue functioned as the cathexis of metaphysical worries about the destabilisation of divinely ordained social hierarchies and of gendered bodily difference. However, it is the symbolic importance of the tongue as an isolated entity that is suggestive of an implicit anxiety that language could function independently from the speaker's intentions. This idea is represented in George Wither's emblem of the 'Evill Tongue' which is shown below:

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<sup>6</sup> This image is mirrored in *Richard II*: told of his banishment Mowbray responds 'Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,/ Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips' (I.iii.166-167).





The 'Evill Tongue', in George Wither's *Collection of Emblemes* (London, 1635)<sup>7</sup>

The airborne tongue has its own 'unruly motion' which is not influenced by the heart's moral governance. A similar image is used in Shakespeare's *II Henry IV* where Rumour appears 'painted full of tongues'. Rumour acknowledges 'the wind my post-horse' and declares:

Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,  
The which in every language I pronounce,  
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.  
I speak of peace, while covert enmity  
Under the smile of safety wounds the world  
(Induction, 5-10)

<sup>7</sup> The Latin motto reads 'Where is your tongue taking you?' This emblem had been in circulation for around twenty years before its inclusion in Wither's collection.

The tongue came to represent the generalised anxiety that individuals were, as a result of sin, subject to the (potentially destructive) processes of language rather than the other way around.<sup>8</sup> It is not anachronistic then to suggest that there was a concern that language was a system with an agency which functioned in isolation from the speaker. Nor is it anachronistic to suggest that this idea was bound to a materialist conception of language.

Protestantism profoundly influenced this materialist understanding. Martin Luther's *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* of 1517 initiated the reform of the Western Church through a radical questioning of the material effects of the word. The Catholic Church had sought to make money by offering remission of the penalties it had imposed upon individuals in return for cash, but in time, the practice of issuing written indulgences extended beyond the bounds of the ecclesiastical polity and the Church proposed a monetary equivalence for the penalties to be enforced by God in the afterlife. When Luther was writing his theses, the material effects of the written word were highly visible: Pope Leo X was using the money raised from the sale of indulgences to fund the construction of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Luther was troubled by pardon-preachers' promises of immediate release from purgatory and the increasingly secular uses to which the resulting funds were

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<sup>8</sup> For Renaissance examples of writing about the tongue, see Erasmus *Lingua* 1525 (1989), Thomas Tomkis (1607), Thomas Adam (1619), and John Abernethy (1622). Peter Stallybrass discusses the kiss and significance of the lips. He draws attention to the metonymical link between the lips and the anus, which provides a further insight into the social encoding of language and the tongue (1991: 210-220).

put, and was concerned that the time spent raising money for worldly goods was detracting attention from true Christian engagement. He asserted that '[t]hey are enemies of Christ and of the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some Churches in order that pardons may be preached in others' (Thesis no. 53, 1957: 30). Moreover, he challenged the assumed correspondence between the letters of indulgence and the posthumous rewards they promised. He was impelled to confront the growing licence afforded to the clergy and maintained that

The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons ... Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences (Theses nos. 5 & 21, 1957: 26-27).

The clergy issued indulgences to Christians on God's behalf but their ability to do so was predicated upon the assumption that the Church had the authority to interpret and communicate Biblical teaching. However, the printing press, which had enabled the relatively speedy dissemination of Luther's theses, was responsible for an irrepressible circulation and uptake of written materials and this upsurge in popular print opened up a multitude of unprecedented possibilities. Theological debate had been the preserve of the Church and the universities, but was now accessible to a much wider readership. The increasing levels of literacy throughout Europe meant that printed sermons, broadsheets and chapbooks were read and read aloud, allowing a far greater dissemination of information: the lay community was no longer excluded from the processes of contesting the meanings of the biblical teachings to which they were subject. For Luther, only the Holy Scripture could provide access to

God's saving grace, and as written materials became more accessible, the implications of his disputations heralded a radical repositioning of the individual in relation to the Church. Indeed, his attack upon the Catholic Church went to the very heart of the relationship between the Christian subject and the word of God initiating a struggle for meaning at the level of language.

The debate following the publication of the ninety-five theses had material implications at both religious and secular levels. Luther's text challenged the intermediary role of the Catholic Church by advocating a scripture-based faith. As a consequence of the Reformation, the Protestant Church no longer had the same power to authorise and prioritise the meanings generated by the Bible and, free from the tutelage of the Church, the individual was now able to forge a personal relationship with God. This effected a radical repositioning of the Christian subject in relation to the dominant scriptural ideology which shaped the material conditions of existence. The new emphasis upon individual religious response was dependant upon the individual's access to the Scriptures and the improvements of the printing press were accompanied by the immensely important translation of the Bible into the vernacular. The new materiality of the word was instrumental to the geographically and psychologically wide-reaching effects of the Reformation. In England, however, it was not until almost a decade after its publication in 1526, that Tyndale's translation of the Bible into English helped to transform the religious landscape.

As texts influenced by the reformed theology of northern Europe began to arrive in England in the 1520s, there was an increased awareness of the subversive potential of the written word. Earlier attempts to suppress the Lollards' English translation of the Bible had been relatively successful in restricting their circulation. In 1408, before the invention of the printing press, a ban was placed upon any unauthorised translation of the scripture and, for the laity, the cost of the licence that was needed in order to read the translations ensured that they were only accessible to an elite. Because the ecclesiastical authorities had been granted the power to prosecute those involved with the production of heretical texts over a hundred years previously in 1414, Cardinal Wolsey was responsible for taking action against these imports. Henry VIII was initially sympathetic to the Church's concerns, and in 1521, after Pope Leo X had denounced the ninety-five theses, Henry earned himself the title of 'Defender of the Faith' for his pugnacious response to Luther, *Assertio Septem Sacramentum*. Following the publication of Tyndale's translation, Henry supported the attempts made by the Church to suppress its circulation but although severe and often violent punishments were meted out to anyone found in possession of the text, the Church's attempts were, broadly speaking, unsuccessful. Not only did they fail to prevent imports, but illicit copies of Tyndale's Bible were also being produced in England.

For Henry, however, the German reformation coincided with opportunities for personal advancement, and the written word became a powerful political

tool. Whilst publicly condemning the dissemination of Protestant literature, he privately supported its distribution. The Church was increasingly dependent upon the support of the monarch, and when, in 1529 the King published a list of prohibited books, this marked a shift to the secular control of print. In 1534, Parliament passed the 'Act of Supremacy' and Henry finally broke with Rome, consolidating his position as King of England, head of the Church of England and overseer of the press. The first authorised translation of the Bible to be printed in England was supervised by the King and was published in 1537. The breakdown of Catholic hegemony was politically expedient for the monarchs of the emerging European nation states. Therefore, whilst the worldly hierarchies of the Church were in many places dissolved, political authority was reconstituted anew, emerging out of the conflict on behalf of, and at the level of, the written word.

Successive translations of the Bible continued to act as barometers of the political, and religious, climate. Whilst the English translation of the Bible had helped to facilitate the break with Rome, for the very same reasons, it called Henry's position into question: it did not provide explicit justification for Papal authority, or for Henry's sovereignty. The 'Act for the Advancement of True Religion' of 1543, which prohibited the working classes from reading the Bible in Church, is indicative of these anxieties. The *Geneva Bible* of 1560, which was produced 'with most profitable annotations upon all the hard places and other things of great importance' (1560: title page), created similar problems. The translation, undertaken by Protestant reformers exiled during

Mary Tudor's reign, was explicitly aimed at widening access to the Scripture and encouraging personal engagement. The marginal notations reflect the socially levelling aims that characterised the reformers' emphasis on Bible-based faith. Official opposition did not diminish the popularity of the translation among England's Protestants and after James' accession, many were hopeful that he had sympathies with the austere Protestantism of the Scots. Politically, however, James was acutely aware of the Geneva Bible's potential to undermine the ideological underpinning of the monarchy. The *King James Bible*, commissioned by James in 1604 and published in 1611, is a textual monument to the sovereign's anxieties that scriptural authority threatened his position. The various translations of the Bible reflected and actively negotiated the tensions generated by the monolithic imperatives of the monarchy and the increasing personal freedom advanced by Reformed theology, printing and the steady increase in the number of people able to read.

Literacy levels, although notoriously difficult to determine, are suggestive of standards of education which had a profound effect upon the material conditions of peoples' lives. The signature is the favoured method of measuring literacy. Whilst relatively accurate figures for those able to sign their names have been produced, this measure does not take into account the fact that reading and writing were taught as separate skills. Although necessarily crude, David Cressy affirms that this method of measurement 'is remarkably sensitive to changes in the distribution and progress of literacy' (1980: 42).

Throughout the reigns of Elizabeth and James there was a sustained and significant increase in the levels of literacy across society. Literacy had always been closely related to social status but it was now also influenced by an individual's location and occupation. Whether they lived in the town or the country, men at the top of the social hierarchy were almost universally literate. The majority of rural workers were illiterate, however, with only about one in four able to sign their name. London saw an exponential growth in population during the period and the growing numbers of tradesmen had a greater need for literacy skills than their rural counterparts. Consequently, the number of literate tradesman rose sharply from fifty-five percent in 1590 to around eighty percent in 1600. The number of illiterate women in London remained more or less the same from 1580 to 1610 with less than ten percent of women signature literate.<sup>9</sup>

Over time, however, the illiterate were marginalised and the status and opportunities that literacy afforded gave rise to social divisions and hostility. This tension is reflected in various texts of the period; in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, Envy declares 'I cannot read, and therefore wish all books were burnt' (II.i.133-134). And in Shakespeare's *II Henry VI*, Jack Cade's proposed social reforms would honour the working man and overturn the hierarchies that prioritise the literate:

WEAVER:	The clerk of Chartham: he can write and read and cast account.
CADE:	O, monstrous!
WEAVER:	We took him setting of boys' copies.

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<sup>9</sup> All figures taken from Cressy (1980: 141-163).



CADE: Here's a villain!  
 WEAVER: H'as a book in his pocket with red letters in't.  
 CADE: Nay, then, he is a conjuror.  
 BUTCHER: Nay, he can make obligations and write court-hand.  
 CADE: I am sorry for't. The man is a proper man, of mine honour; unless I find him guilty, he shall not die. Come hither, sirrah, I must examine thee. What is thy name?  
 CLERK: Emmanuel.  
 BUTCHER: They use to write that on the top of letters. 'Twill go hard with you.  
 CADE: Let me alone. Dost thou use to write thy name? Or has thou a mark to thyself, like an honest plain-dealing man?  
 CLERK: Sir, I thank God I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.  
 ALL: He hath confessed: away with him! He's a villain and a traitor.  
 CADE: Away with him, I say! Hang him with his pen and inkhorn around his neck.

(IV.ii.78-101)

Cade draws the crowd's attention to the Clerk's ability to sign his name and to the copybooks he has prepared as calligraphy primers. Whilst the Clerk thanks God for his education, Cade insists that the pen and inkhorn, the symbols of literacy, should be placed around his neck, coterminous with the hangman's noose as lasting markers of shame and humiliation.

This event evokes the practice of allowing what was known as 'benefit of clergy', a practice that exemplifies the intimate bond between language and violence. Men facing execution were granted a dispensation commuting their sentence to a lesser punishment if they could read. Nearly one in three men sentenced to death during Elizabeth's reign were able to escape the gallows in this way and in accord with rising levels of literacy, this number rose to almost

forty percent during James's reign (Wheale 1999: 30).<sup>10</sup> This background throws the irony of Cade's comments into relief. He asks, 'Is this not a lamentable thing that the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment; that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man? (IV.ii.72-74). Literacy and printing, under Cade's control, become the agents of degradation and corruption, and not the vehicle for advancement proposed by the exponents of Reformed theology and humanism. Indeed, Cade's rebellion identifies a significant tension: the egalitarian ideals of the Reformation were, at that time, incompatible with the social and gender hierarchies which played a large part in determining who had access to literacy skills.

Literacy was a key element in the reformation of the Church in England but the textual basis of reformed theology ran contrary to the overwhelmingly oral and ritual-based Catholicism inherited from the late medieval period. The Reformed Church was at the forefront of efforts to inculcate the virtues of reading and writing in the lay community. Individuals were encouraged to enter into a personal relationship with God through individual study of the scriptures and this was to be supplemented with reading from the widely available religious works that were produced as a result of the zeal and assiduity of the reformers. Estimates suggest that at least forty percent of the books published during Elizabeth's reign focused upon religious matters (Wheale 1999: 56).

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<sup>10</sup> Because the condemned were almost always given Psalm 51 to read, it is highly likely that many men were reciting rather than reading the passage.

The relationship that Elizabeth established with the Church reflects the particular difficulties she had to negotiate on her ascendancy and is suggestive of the political importance of the way in which religious ideas were linguistically encoded. In a speech delivered to the Lords on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1558, one of the first of her reign, Elizabeth stated

I am God's creature, ordained to obey His appointment, I will thereto yield, desiring from the bottom of my heart that I may have assistance of His grace to be the minister of His heavenly will in this office now committed to me ... I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern (Marcus et al. 2000: 51-52).

Here, she outlines her belief in the divine right of her sovereignty, a belief which was reiterated in the homilies recited, by instruction of the crown, in churches throughout the country. Elizabeth's own rhetoric reinforced the idea of her divine appointment and she encouraged the powerful iconography which developed around her. Indeed, her style of governance was markedly different from previous Tudor monarchs. As Leonard Tennenhouse suggests, 'she redefined the concept of the body politic' (1991: 27) and actively engaged with the politically charged representations that brought together her gender and status. Tennenhouse notes that '[t]he identification of the queen's sexual body with the political body was no less absolute than the iconic bonding of the political body to the sacred authority of the Church' (1991: 29). Since Henry VIII passed the 'Act of Supremacy' and broke with the Church of Rome, the monarch held the title of 'Supreme Head' of the Church of England. Elizabeth was the first female ruler to assume this role and her sex,

combined with the problematic theological implications of the position, meant that the title was amended to 'Supreme Governor'. The language Elizabeth used to represent herself was heavily dependent upon religious imagery, but as Susan Fry notes, these representations used 'religious forms of expression while repressing religious questions' (1993: 45).

The structure of religious observance changed after Elizabeth's accession, and the changes took place at the level of language. In April, 1559, the 'Act of Uniformity' was passed abolishing the Mass and altering the prayer book first introduced by her brother, Edward VI. The significant changes to the 1552 prayer book, particularly in the wording of the administration, reflected the circumspect Protestant line that Elizabeth wished to pursue. In July of the same year, the Injunctions re-instituted an English liturgy. Although the direction in which she steered the Church was purposely moderate and propitiatory, and the revisions deliberately ambiguous, those who oversaw the implementation of the changes had their own political agenda. Several of the Protestant commissioners had been exiled during Mary's Catholic regime, and on their return, undertook their duties with particular zeal. But whilst Edward VI achieved a high level of conformity throughout England with the sweeping changes he made, the response to Elizabeth's revisions was decidedly half-hearted and the transition to her brand of moderate Protestantism was slow. However, as Eamon Duffy concludes,

Cranmer's sombrely magnificent prose, read week by week, entered and possessed their minds, and became the fabric of their prayer, the utterance of their most solemn and their

most vulnerable moments. And more stringent and strident words entered their minds and hearts too, the polemic of the *Homilies*, and of Jewel's *Apology*, of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and of a thousand 'no-poper' sermons (1992: 593).

A copy of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, more commonly known as the *Book of Martyrs*, could be found in every Church in England by 1570. This self-professedly monumental text represents a systematic attempt to extrapolate, contextualise and control the conditions of the reproduction of meaning from horrendous acts of religiously motivated violence. The widespread changes in attitude were a consequence of the terminological shifts produced by this body of texts and speeches. Thoroughly embedded within the linguistic practices of the church, this new vocabulary became the means through which personal experience was understood and articulated

Elizabeth's early attempts to depoliticise the Church were characterised by an implicit tolerance of religious heterodoxy but this policy was largely dictated by circumstance: in the 1550s and 1560s, the conjuncture of unstable internal politics and the volatile conditions in Europe meant that her resolute ambiguity was tactically adroit. Prosecuting cases of heresy with the fervour of her predecessor, Mary, would have been widely unpopular and would have threatened the delicate balance of her power. In the first year of her reign she repealed all previous statutes relating to heresy and, for the first time, set clear guidelines for what constituted the crime (Blackstone 1979 Vol. IV: 48). Common censures were to be administered by the ecclesiastical courts and only the provincial synod was licensed to condemn the heretic to be burned at

the stake. Such action was received positively as the first instance of a lucid definition of the crime of heresy, but it was also a shrewd political move which served to distance ecclesiastical and monarchical authority, and, in doing so, to obfuscate the mutually constitutive nature of their powers.

By the 1580s however, Catholic attempts to install Mary Queen of Scots upon the English throne and the conflict with Spain radically altered the political and religious landscape. Elizabeth could no longer afford to be equivocal about religious matters and was unable to dismiss the differences between the Catholic and Protestant faiths as 'disputes over trifles'. Religious opinion polarised and anti-Catholic feeling reached fever pitch. Sedition, treason and heresy were frequently linked, and were all crimes against the state that could be committed through the agency of the written or spoken word. Moreover, they all carried the death penalty. Whilst allegiance to the Church of England was demonstrated by a series of performative gestures, verbal rituals, such as the saying of Mass, constituted illegal and treasonous acts of Catholic worship.

When, in 1603, James I ascended the throne, he was initially able to exploit the uncertainty of his intentions: although he was a Protestant, and the King of the fiercely Calvinist Scots, his wife was a Catholic. James had inherited a Church which had worked retrospectively to produce the history from which it now derived its authority. In 1604, James met with the Anglican bishops and the Puritans, who were now eager to work with the Church to provide an evangelical emphasis. The *King James Bible* was a pre-emptive attempt to diffuse

the potentially subversive emphases of the *Geneva Bible*, but the treasonous Gunpowder Plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605 demonstrated the strength of Catholic feeling.

Many types of actions amounted to treason, but the possibility of its being committed verbally proved a contentious issue. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Richard, Duke of Gloucester initiates a sustained campaign against his brother, King Edward IV. He urges Buckingham to tell 'how Edward put to death a citizen/ Only for saying he would make his son/ Heir to the Crown – meaning indeed his house' (III.v.75-77).<sup>11</sup> This betrays the very real problem of the uncertainty of the speaker's intention and the instability of linguistic signifiers. Indeed, in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, William Blackstone reflects at some length upon the complexity of this issue:

How far mere words, spoken by an individual, and not relative to any treasonable act or design then in agitation, has been formerly matter of doubt ... words spoken amount only to a high misdemeanour, and no treason ... their meaning depends always on their connection with other words, and things; they may signify differently even according to the tone of voice with which they are delivered ... As therefore there can be nothing more equivocal and ambiguous than words, it would indeed be unreasonable to make them amount to high treason ... If the words be set down in writing, it argues more deliberate intention: and it has been held that writing is an overt act of treason; for *scribere est agere*. But even in this case bare words are not the treason, but the deliberate act of writing them (Vol. IV 1979: 79-80).

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<sup>11</sup> Blackstone also touches upon this issue. He recounts this and another instance in the reign of Edward IV where a man was executed for treasonable utterances: 'the one a citizen of London, who said he would make his son heir of the *crowns*, being the sign of the house in which he lived; the other a gentleman, whose favourite buck the king killed in hunting whereupon he wished it, horns and all, in the king's belly' (1979 Vol. IV: 80).

Blackstone accounts for the contingency of meaning here, and during the period there was evidently a keen awareness of the slippery nature of the signifying process. John Harrington offers a persuasive explanation for the difficulty of establishing treason, claiming that 'Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason?/ For if it prosper, none dare call it Treason' (Norbrook 1993: 120). Although utterance, in and of itself, may not have been regarded as treasonous, sedition, the use of language to incite insurrection undoubtedly was.

The performativity of language is explored in Shakespeare's *Richard III* with the vivid dramatisation of treason incited by persuasive speech. Richard mounts a concerted verbal assault upon his brother Edward. Richard is actively involved in the dissemination of rumours and lies and despite his early assertion that 'We speak no treason' (I.i.90) he uses his rhetorical skill to facilitate his political advancement. He recognises that the monarchical authority which motivated his treasonous attempts to usurp the crown is linguistically constructed, asserting that 'the King's name is a tower of strength/ Which they upon the adverse faction want' (V.iii.12-13). In order to achieve his sovereign ambitions, he recognises and exploits the power of speech, but is also wary of the way in which this power can work to his disadvantage. He issues a warning to the men he has employed to kill Clarence, instructing them to 'be sudden in the execution ... do not hear him plead;/ For Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps/ May move your hearts to



pity, if you mark him (I.iii.346-349). In this instance, life and death really are in the power of the tongue.

Fears about the performativity of language led to greater organisation in the attempts to suppress undesirable texts. Throughout the reigns of Elizabeth and James, the Worshipful Company of Stationers had control over the press. Established in 1557 by Mary Tudor, the Company was granted a royal charter, which conferred exclusive privileges. In return, it was expected to prevent seditious Protestant publications. After her accession in 1558, Elizabeth was keen to exploit this mutually beneficial relationship and politically repositioned the Stationers' powers of censorship. Around the same time, Elizabeth issued a proclamation 'Prohibiting Unlicensed Interludes and Plays, Especially on Religion or Policy'. According to this proclamation, those involved in the licensing of stage plays should

permit none to be played wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal shall be handled or treated, being no meet matters to be written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning, and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons (Hughes Vol. II 1969: 115-116).

The Elizabethan regime's most effective censorship was aimed at civic religious drama, which had all but disappeared by the end of the 1570s. Her involvement with plays and players endured throughout her reign, and she kept a closer control over all aspects of the production of plays than any other Tudor monarch (Tennenhouse 1991: 31). Plays became the preserve of licensed professional players and were increasingly performed in purpose-built

playhouses. The system of licensing plays and players was beneficial for actors because the 'Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes and for the Releif of the Poore and Impotent' (1572) deemed any actors 'not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honourable Personage of greater Degree' as 'Rogues Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggers' (Chambers 1923 IV: 270). The status that was afforded the players protected them from the often-intolerant local authorities. In addition, this system served the interests of the state because it provided the opportunity to censor politically sensitive material.

Censorship was intended to prevent seditious, libellous and heretical texts and speeches. Implicit in the very idea of censorship is the knowledge that the written and spoken word has material effects. The *Exhortacion concernyng Good Ordre and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates* was originally published in 1547 and was reprinted in 1559 shortly after Elizabeth's accession to the throne. It was reprinted on several occasions during her rule and again during James I's reign.

It states that:

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things in heaven, earth and waters in a moste excellent and perfect ordre ... Every degre of people, in their vocacion, callyng and office, hath appoynted to them their duetie and ordre. Some are in high degre, some in lowe, some kynges and princes, some inferiors and subjectes, priestes and laimen, masters and servauntes, fathers and chyl dren, husbandes and wifes, riche and poore, and every one hath nede of other (Bond 1987: 161).

The homily posits a divinely prescribed hierarchical and patriarchal order where everyone is subject to God, and to the monarch as God's appointee.

Monarchical authority was inextricably linked to that of the Church, to the extent that the values of one were used to sanction the actions of the other, and any attack made on the legality of either institution necessarily implicated the other. It was within these parameters that the suitability of the material contained in plays and publications was assessed. The censors had the power to prohibit anything which was thought to have the potential to subvert this. Indeed, the homily cautioned that 'Where there is no right ordre, their reigneth all abuse, carnall libertie, enormities, syn and babilonicall confusion' (Bond 1987: 161).

In her extended study of Elizabethan press censorship, Cyndia Clegg describes the general practice as 'a crazy quilt of proclamations, patents, trade regulations, judicial decrees, and privy council and parliamentary actions patched together by the sometimes common and sometimes competing threads of religious, economic, political, and private interests' (Clegg 1997: 5). The Master of the Revels oversaw the licensing and production of stage plays and the Worshipful Company of Stationers had a similar regulatory role in the production of printed materials after the charter granted in 1557. In addition, the Church played an important part in the detection of schismatic and heretical works. Censorship was largely centralised in these bodies, but the Privy Council and the Monarch retained the ultimate authority. Despite the ominous forecasts made in the *Homily on Obedience*, the censors seemed to allow a reasonable degree of latitude. This was politically expedient, as Bacon suggests in his essay 'Of Seditions and Troubles': 'Libels and licentious

discourses against the state, when they are frequent and open, and (in like sort) false news, often running up and down to the disadvantage of the state, and hastily embraced, are amongst the signs of troubles'. He goes on to warn that 'Neither doth it follow that because these fumes are a sign of troubles, that the suppressing of them with too much severity should be a remedy of troubles' (1985: 101-102). Elizabeth was eager to avoid a repetition of the kind of oppressive regime that characterised her sister Mary's time on the throne and, as a consequence, she took a deliberately lenient approach to the matter.

Ben Jonson, writing mainly in the Jacobean and Caroline periods, was, however, famously subject to repeated investigation by the censors. His experiences are documented in his *Epigrammes* where he poignantly draws attention to the material effects of his written works. 'On Play-wright' traces a tangible link between his drama and the experience of physical violence:

Play-wright convict of publicke wrongs to men,  
Takes private beatings, and begins againe.  
Two kindes of valour he doth shew, at ones;  
Active in's braine, and passive in his bones.  
(1954: 33)

Although he identifies valour in the two distinct locations of the brain and the bones he simultaneously strains the distinction between the physical and linguistic effects of the written and spoken word to breaking point. It was alleged that his play *Sejanus* contained treasonous material, but it is not clear whether the threat came from an allusion to the Earl of Essex or a veiled

comment upon the political climate after James's accession to throne.<sup>12</sup> What this highlights, however, and what Jonson himself made reference to, is the potentially problematic contingency of meaning.<sup>13</sup>

Located on the margins of the city, London's purpose-built theatres, 'the quick forge and working-house of thought' (*Henry V*, V.0.23), were instrumental to what Stephen Greenblatt calls the 'circulation of social energy' (1988). Dollimore, in his discussion of the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, argues that the theatre 'anticipates, and is therefore usefully explored in relation to, a central tenet of materialist analysis, namely that the essentialist concept of 'man' mystifies and obscures the real historical conditions in which the actual identity of people is rooted' (1989: 153). Although prohibited from touching explicitly upon matters of religion or government, the drama interrogated the relationship of the individual to God and the state, dramatising and engaging with the processes of representation and the circulation of competing and collaborating discourses which constituted the real historical conditions in which the subject is constituted. In *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors*, I.G. reviles actors for their involvement with 'obsceane *Stage-playes*', which he claims are 'the most impious and pernicious of all other unlawfull artificiall Pleasures' (1615: 4). The anti-theatricalists had a fundamental mistrust of the distinction between

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<sup>12</sup> Annabel Patterson has explored the implications of censorship for writers and readers of the Early Modern period, and has argued that Jonson's work actively incorporated these tensions to produce a 'poetics of censorship' (1984: 57).

<sup>13</sup> The impact of censorship on the written word has been examined by Richard Dutton (2001) and Patterson (1984). For a discussion of dramatic censorship, see Clare (1999), Dutton (1991) and Finkelpearl (1986: 123-138).

representations and 'real life' and their attacks on the theatre were predicated upon a belief that 'mimicall inventions' did not simply 'represent'; they had an affective and effective agency.<sup>14</sup> Whilst it is difficult to concur with many of the purported effects of attending the theatre, the basis of their argument is correct. The theatre, the main focus of the following chapters, provided a distinctive representational mode through which the meanings and effects of violence were contested and re-negotiated. Moreover, it actively questioned ways in which language was implicated at all levels of this process.

Many of Shakespeare's dramatic works draw attention to their own status as representations: the Chorus opens *Henry V*, asking the audience to 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts' (Prologue, 23), drawing attention to the inconsistencies of the performance, and, pointedly, the boy actor playing Cleopatra had to deliver the lines, 'I shall see/ Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness' (*Antony and Cleopatra* V.ii.218-219). Striking visual images and verbal descriptions of events were often in competition, and, as Andrew Gurr explains:

The contrast between the attractions of witplay and swordplay is part of the larger story of the conflict between stage verse and stage spectacle, and the priority that the poets fought the players for, of hearing and beholding. The poets wanted audiences, hearers, to use their ears for the words, while the players went for spectators and spectacle, the pleasures of the eye (1992: 173).

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, John Rainolds (1599).

There was conflict even at the site of representation as the ideology that governed the exchange of representations between society and the theatre was contested in the very process of performance.

Violence on the stage, unlike that of the neighbouring bear-pit, was not real: the theatre provided a platform upon which ‘to make an act of tragic violence’ (*Richard III*, II.ii.39). Whilst on many occasions acts of violence were only related to the audience second hand – for example, the rape of Lavinia, and the death of Autolycus at the hands of a bear – there were many ghastly on-stage representations of excruciatingly graphic violence. Suffolk’s body and severed head are displayed as a ‘barbarous and bloody spectacle’ (*II Henry VI*, IV.i.146), Titus’s hand is hacked off with an axe (*Titus Andronicus*, III.i.), Desdemona is smothered (*Othello*, V.ii), and ‘vile jelly’ is extirpated from Gloucester’s eye sockets as he is blinded (*King Lear*, III.vii). Although the violence was not real, the effects of representing violence were. The signifying codes governing theatrical representations translated acts of physical damage suffered only by the individual into meaningful occurrences intelligible within a wider cultural context. The method of translating physical pain into cultural meaning was itself subject to dispute and these codes were also forcibly contested.

Many of these codes were inherited from an eclectic mix of materials which provided the sources of Shakespeare’s dramatic works. Livy’s *History of Rome*, Ovid’s *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*, Seneca’s tragedies, Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble*

*Grecians and Romans* and Holinshed's *Chronicles* were among the diverse influences upon Renaissance drama. The reading of a grammar school education, these works were already involved in the transmission and codification of violence, but these meanings were in turn contested in the theatre. In the process of performance, multiple discourses were invoked, challenged and refigured as a result of their confrontation. Tragedies and histories had the most clearly defined interest in representing acts of violence. Although Renaissance tragedy is characterised by its heterogeneity as much as its homology, it is widely understood as a profoundly teleological mode. According to this understanding, violence is circumscribed within an inexorable movement towards an end. For the histories, however, 'blood is their argument' (*Henry V*, IV.i.143) and in broad terms they approach violence more as a force integral to the production of historical narrative. Each genre codifies violence according to different criteria, working to recuperate it for the spheres of historical, political and metaphysical knowledge. However, this process is complicated by the fact that the discursive production of meanings is not subject to any teleological imperative: it is endlessly deferred and continually in play.

In their dramatic and literary work, Shakespeare and his contemporaries contributed to the discursive production of meanings. New and self-conscious forms of representation emerged, which were both a product of and engagement with the foremost cultural debates. The theatre interrogated the ideologies of Protestant theology, the monarchy and the pedagogical tradition,



which was greatly influenced by both. But in addition, it allowed a questioning of the very conditions under which these positions were articulated. Taking language as its object as well as its principal medium, drama explored the implications of its materiality and the grappled with the problems of finding a language with which to speak of violence, and indeed, with the violence effected by language itself.

## Chapter Two

### 'Men are but blankes where pow'r doth write her lust'<sup>1</sup>

There is something problematic about the Biblical account of the fall of the tower of Babel. When the people of Babel declared, 'let us buyld us a citie and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto the heaven, that we may get us a name' (*Genesis* 11: 4), they precipitated the fragmentation of their language into several different languages. Yet, their motivation for building the tower – to get a name – suggests that they were actively seeking a marker of difference: a name which would distinguish them. Like the description of the Fall of Adam and Eve, this account functions not as an aetiology of certain desires, impulses, and states but rather as confirmation of their always-already anterior quality. In this instance, the narrative attempts to provide an explanation for linguistic differences, but instead, it posits language as the source of difference and addresses the issue of its constitutive quality. The people of Babel required language to construct their sense of self and the subsequent act of the vengeful god of the *Old Testament* is suggestive of how violent this process can be.

To think about the language of violence is to think about many complex and intertwined issues concerning the agency of linguistic structures. My aim here is threefold: to explore the ways in which language figures violence, to consider violence as an effect of language, and to assert that violence inheres within the structures of language. Language thoroughly structures our thought: the fact that language always precedes our entry into it requires and effects a

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<sup>1</sup> Greville (1965: 49).

violent circumscription of the limits of the subject. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Renaissance culture was, to a large extent, preoccupied by linguistic issues. In this chapter, I look at the way that language is once again at the forefront of our cultural consciousness as the focus for discussions of all aspects of the social totality. Here I examine these issues as they relate specifically to violence.

## I

Fulke Greville, writing at the turn of the seventeenth century, reflected in his 'Treatise on Monarchy' upon the relationship between the state and the subject:

Men are but blankes where pow'r doth write her lust,  
 A sprightlesse masse, which for it cannot weld  
 It self, at others pleasure languish must;  
 Resolve to suffer, and let power doe all  
 (1965: 49)

Greville's conception of the subject as a 'sprightlesse' or soulless 'blank' inscribed upon by an external authority is profoundly unsettling, and ostensibly, startlingly modern.<sup>2</sup> Man, he is suggesting, is not the 'author of himself' (*Coriolanus*, V.iii.36), but shaped and welded by forces from without. This passage has a particular resonance when considered alongside Marx's influential assertion that '[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their

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<sup>2</sup> The first posthumous collection of Greville's work was printed in 1633 and later attracted controversy with Richard Baxter, the non-conformist clergyman and chaplain of Cromwell's army. He remarked that 'Sir Fulke Grevil ... hath a Poem lately Printed ... which I greatly wonder this age would bear' (Greville 1965: vii).

consciousness' (1963: 67). 'The real nature of man' Marx argues, 'is the totality of social relations' (1963: 83). Greville's idea that the individual is formed through a process of inscription is suggestive of the fundamentally linguistic structure of both authority and the subject; that is to say, of the social totality. Indeed, as Marx and Engels state, 'language is practical consciousness' (1970: 51). The subject, whether s/he is subject to the monarch, as in Greville's treatise, or to any other authority, is first and foremost subject to language.

Language forms the totality of all social relations, and although neither Marx nor Engels wrote much more on language specifically, subsequent thinkers have explored the implications of Marxist thought for the study of linguistics.<sup>3</sup> V. N. Vološinov, writing in 1929, anticipated the direction in which left-wing thinking about language was to develop. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* he states that '[c]onsciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse ... individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them' (1973: 13). Ideology, he goes on to explain 'may not be divorced from the material reality of sign' (1973: 20). In Greville's 'Alaham' the Chorus of the

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<sup>3</sup> See, however, 'Language and Thought' where they state that '*Language* is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they make language into an independent realm. This is the secret of philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content. The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life. We have shown that thoughts and ideas acquire an independent existence in consequence of the personal circumstances and relations of individuals acquiring independent existence. We have shown that exclusive, systematic occupation with these thoughts on the part of ideologists and philosophers, and hence the systematisation of these thoughts, is a consequence of the division of labour, and that, in particular, German philosophy is a consequence of petty-bourgeois conditions. The philosophers would only have to dissolve their language into the ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, to recognise it as the distorted language of the actual world, and to realise that neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only *manifestations* of real life' (Marx and Engels 1970: 118).

People state that 'Of words we are the grammar' (1965: 144), suggesting the indissoluble connection between subjectivity and linguistic structures.

In his discussion of 'Ideology and the State', Louis Althusser pursues this idea, suggesting a theoretical scene of the interpellation of subjects within apparatuses embodied in linguistic practices. Althusser's notion of interpellation proposes a process whereby an officer of the Law, as a representative of ideology, 'hails' the subject, and the subject, recognising that the call is addressed to him/her, is, by virtue of this recognition, created as a subject. Although this process is described sequentially, Althusser explains that, 'in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing ... *individuals are always-already subjects*' (1971: 163-164). The theoretical scene posed by Althusser functions in a similar way to the biblical narratives of the fall of the tower of Babel, and the Fall of Adam and Eve. Althusser stages an event in order to explain a particular state – that of being interpellated by ideology – but it is an event which has always already happened. Emphasising the fundamentally linguistic nature of ideology, and stating that 'the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology' (1971: 160), Althusser looks specifically at the mechanisms which disseminate and reproduce the body of ideas which support and maintain the social order. Examining how these mechanisms fix a place for the individual, he identifies various 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs) and 'Repressive State Apparatuses' (RSAs) responsible for the circulation and implementation of

formative ideological discourses. Religious organisations, schools, family units, media groups and various entertainments can function as the state's ideological apparatuses: during the Renaissance, ISAs would have included the Church of England, the grammar school curriculum and various printed materials such as sermons, homilies and conduct manuals. The Army and the police form repressive apparatuses, but whilst England lacked a standing army or police force engaged in the active prevention of crime, the seemingly ubiquitous intelligence agents, who worked to detect potential threats to national and monarchical security, functioned as a repressive arm of the state. Althusser explains that the primary difference between repressive and ideological apparatuses is their mode of operation: ISAs operate predominantly at the level of discourse, whereas RSAs function predominantly by force and violence. Language and violence, Althusser concludes, collude to serve the interests of the state.

In a letter to J. Bloch in 1890, Engels wrote, '[a]ccording to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted' (cited in Coward and Ellis 1977: 69). Following on from this, Althusser notes that 'no production is possible which does not allow for the reproduction of the material conditions of production' (1971: 124). Specifically, he highlights the way in which ideologies must, in addition to maintaining the power of the state, ensure the conditions of their own reproduction. He explains that,

the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'.

Ideologies function through language but have a material existence in the subject. By locating a functional ideology within a linguistic system, Althusser suggests that the reproduction of the existing order is achieved through discourse, or collective arrangements of utterance. What is more, he suggests that ideology works to imbue and delineate the significations of these utterances to the extent that those subjected to a discourse regard the practices and positions it sets up as the 'natural order'. Therefore, the power of an ideology lies in its inability to be perceived as such, and by its assimilation into a seemingly innocuous notion of common sense. Indeed, 'the obviousness of the "transparency" of language' is itself, he claims, 'an ideological effect' (1971: 161).

Drawing a parallel between the ideas expressed in Greville's treatise, where the individual can do no more than 'let power doe all', and Marxism, where the subject is an absolute product of the social conditions of their existence, highlights one of the fundamental problems of Marxist thought, however. As Greville goes on to write,

No native notion, lawe, or vyolence  
Fashion his hard heart to an humble scene.

But that hee still should grudge at government,  
 Scorne mercy, yet rebell at tyrannie,  
 Repine at discipline, rest discontent  
 Both with his equalls, and authority:  
 (1965: 40)

How can a subject produced by ideology rebel at the tyranny exercised on behalf of that ideology? Marxism is a revolutionary philosophy: *The Communist Manifesto* calls for the 'forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions' (Marx and Engels 2002: 258), yet it conceives of a subject that is both produced by the totality of social relations and capable of effecting the radical change of these same relations. Coward and Ellis explain the contradiction: for Marx, 'the human subject is constituted in ideology and by history, and at the same time acts to make history and change society, without having full and self-sufficient knowledge of or control over the actions it undertakes' (1977: 61). The speaker of Greville's treatise speaks from an impossible position, therefore. The conditions upon which the subject is purportedly predicated would automatically prohibit the knowledge that would allow an articulation of this kind. The very statement that 'men are but blanks' demonstrates a profound but, in Marxist terms, unthinkable understanding of the conditions of subjectivity. The speaker, by virtue of language use, has already been inscribed by the structures of power, but part of the process of an ideology's inscription is to conceal its own status as ideology. Despite these problems, subsequent critical theories have pursued Marxism's attack upon humanist essentialism and maintained its insistence that the subject is a socially



constructed entity. Once this conceptual framework is dismantled, the constitutive qualities of language are thrown into relief.

## II

In the opening sentences of the first section of the 'Treatise on Monarchy', Greville writes that:

There was a tyme before the tymes of story,  
When nature raign'd, in stead of lawes or artes,  
And mortall Goddes with men made upp the glory  
Of one republique, by united hearts.

(Greville 1965: 35)

His idea of the primitive conditions of unity can usefully be considered in relation to the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis, which heralded an equally radical rethinking of the subject and continues to exert an extraordinary influence upon critical practice. Indeed, Freud's formulations have come to serve as paradigms in various areas of literary and cultural criticism and the implications of psychoanalysis are such that the difficulties of thinking outside its bounds are now virtually insurmountable. Whilst Marx focused on the material conditions of collective existence and advocated the 'violent overthrow' (Marx and Engels 2002: 232) of capitalist structures, the subsequent work of Freud identified violence in the developmental processes of the individual, and understood societal conflict as a corollary of these processes.

Freud believed that mental processes were not restricted to the conscious domain and that a significant proportion of mental activity occurred unconsciously. The contents of the unconscious, he theorised, are

“representatives’ of the instincts’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 474) governed by the primary processes of symbolisation, condensation and displacement. In addition, Freud postulated a tripartite division of the psyche into the id, the super-ego and the ego where the id is the instinctual and unconscious aspect of the personality, the superego, governed by ideals, exercises judgement or censure and is often associated with the codes of conduct instituted by parental demands and prohibitions, and the ego is the domain of conscious life. The ego is the sense of self which emerges from the tensions between the id and the super-ego. At the beginning of a child’s life, Freud claimed, there is no distinction between the superego and the id because the child perceives her/himself and the external world as a single entity:

Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches itself from the external world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a far more extensive feeling -a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world. If we may suppose that this primary ego-feeling has been preserved in the minds of many people - to a greater or lesser extent - it would co-exist like a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity, and the ideational content belonging to it would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe (1994: 4).

The developmental process circumscribes the child’s sense of self as it comes to realise the distinction between its body and that of its mother. This process is not a smooth one, however, and, according to Freud, the ego emerges out of violent conflict:

The tendency arises to dissociate from the ego everything which can give rise to pain, to cast it out and create a pure pleasure ego, in contrast to a threatening outside, not self.

The limits of this primitive pleasure ego cannot escape readjustment through experience. Much that the individual wants to retain because it is pleasure-giving is nevertheless part not of the ego but of an object; and much of what he wishes to eject because it torments him yet proves to be inseparable from the ego, arising from an inner source (1994: 4).

In common with Marx, Freud noted that external events play a formative role in the development of the self. However, he suggests that the initial state of the immature ego serves as a prototype for subsequent erotic experience, which may be understood as the desire to recreate this primary feeling of limitless extension, of 'united hearts'. In a similar manner, the process of the ego's maturation sets the precedents for violence in later life. Violence inheres within the process of establishing the ego's boundaries and subsequent acts of violence are dependent upon these limits; violence may be motivated by an individual's enforced separation from a desired object, or by the desire to appropriate an object outside of the self. Indeed, any notion of violence would be unthinkable without the anterior bonds that allow the immature ego to experience a form of continuity with the outside world.

*Civilisation and its Discontents* discusses the ways in which violent and erotic impulses affect an individual's concept of her/himself and influence their interaction in the world. Freud suggests that 'the two kinds of instinct seldom - perhaps never - appear in isolation, but always mingle with each other in different, very varying proportions, and so make themselves unrecognizable'

(1994: 47).<sup>4</sup> The concepts of the life and death instincts, which he develops in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, were introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he postulates that the life instinct, Eros, responsible for the impulse to create and maintain unity, exists in conjunction with the death instinct, Thanatos, which also aims to alleviate tensions, but is compelled to achieve this through the elimination of all suffering, in death. The singularity of ultimate aim leads to the chiasmatic ambivalence of each drive; however, the continual state of tension generated by these two instincts is instrumental to the establishment of cohesive social groups. Freud recognised, however, that social structures, once formed, are not impenetrable. The impulses towards self-preservation which motivate their formation, can also put them at risk. The way in which an individual's psychic life develops, must, therefore, involve the suppression of destructive impulses to allow the maximisation of the benefits of communal living. There are points, however, at which suppressive strategies (whether they be positive or negative) collapse, leaving open the possibilities for violence and eroticism. This is compounded, Freud suggests, by the fact that violence is intrinsic to mankind: 'men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked ... a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment' (1994: 40).

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<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žižek warns that a 'confusion to be avoided here is with the common-sense notion (to which, from time to time, all great theoreticians of antagonism succumb ... Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, for example) of Eros and Thanatos or expansion and contraction as two opposed forces engaged in an unending and unrelenting battle for domination. The co-dependence of the two antagonistic forces does not reside in the fact that one force needs the other as the only ground against which it can assert itself (no light without darkness, no love without hate ...); the logic at work here is much closer to what Marx had in mind apropos of his crucial concept of a 'tendency' which can lead to counter-effects' (1996a: 28).

Perhaps of greatest importance to this argument, however, is the way in which Freud centred the psychoanalytic project on an interchange of words between patient and analyst, thereby acknowledging and making explicit the materiality of language. In his introductory lectures of 1916 Freud explains:

By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair, by words the teacher conveys his knowledge to his pupils, by words the orator carries his audience with him and determines their judgements and decisions. Words provoke affects and are in general the means of mutual influence among men. Thus we shall not depredate the use of words in psychotherapy and we shall be pleased if we can listen to the words that pass between the analyst and his patient (1991: 41-42)

The so-called ‘talking cure’ was based upon an understanding that words are not just the vehicles that enable the transmission of knowledge: they are the things to be known. Indeed, much of Freud’s work dealt with psychological processes that were of a fundamentally linguistic character. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, and *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud demonstrates that language cannot be divorced from the totality of mental processes, and that symptoms, the result of conflict between the ego and super-ego, often manifest themselves linguistically.

Following on from the work of Freud, Georges Bataille develops the thesis that violence and eroticism are inseparable. He argues that ‘the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation’ (1962: 16) and explores the

expression of this problematic partnership. Although suggesting that '[e]roticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns ... of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals' (1962: 18) he also asserts that integral social institutions are born out of this seemingly amorphous and potentially anarchic impulse. In his important study, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, Bataille contends that eroticism can operate on physical, emotional and religious levels, and he identifies some of the material effects of violent and erotic impulses, highlighting the importance of literature and the structures and practices of Judeo-Christian religious observance.

At a physical level, Bataille explains the impulse towards eroticism saying simply, 'If you die, it is not my death. You and I are *discontinuous* beings' (1962: 12). The only true source of continuity is the certainty and actuality of death. Violence and eroticism have to do with a vertiginous force which compels the subject to the brink of annihilation, experienced either through the desire for continuity, or in the attempts to reject this attraction. Bataille reasons:

If the union of two lovers comes about through love, it involves the idea of death, murder or suicide ... On a lower level than this implied violence – a violence matched by the separate individual's sense of continuous violation – the world of habit and shared egotism begins ... Only in the violation, through death if need be, of the individual's solitariness can there appear that image of the beloved object (1962: 21).

Both violence and eroticism involve *jouissance*, the ecstatic but temporary loss of self, the moment at which pain becomes pleasurable and pleasure borders

on the painful. However, as Bataille observes, '[c]ontinuity is what we are after, but generally only if that continuity which the death of discontinuous beings can alone establish is not the victor in the long run' (1962: 18-19). That is to say, the act of transgressing the ego's boundaries – of losing oneself – has considerable erotic potential, providing the transgression is transient. The possibilities for physical continuity, therefore, are found only in sexual acts or death, with the motivation always involving some form of nihilistic self-preservation. Indeed, Bataille asserts that '[p]hysical erotism has ... a heavy, sinister quality. It holds on to the separateness of the individual in a rather selfish and cynical fashion' (1962: 19).

In contrast to physical eroticism, Bataille's notion of emotional eroticism is not constrained by the same corporeal boundaries. Rather, the erotic energies derived from an emotional intimacy have the ability to transcend the purely physical realm, thereby elevating sexual activity to a 'spiritual plane' (1962: 19). Hence, the aim of an individual in a loving relationship is to 'substitute for their persistent discontinuity a miraculous continuity between two beings' (1962: 19). This involves the experience of *jouissance* as the subject surrenders their individuality in exchange for continuity with their loved one, often repeatedly, but never permanently. The implications of an emotional interaction are consequently greater than in those instances where there are only physical sensations. Freud previously made reference to this state, explaining that

towards the outer world, at any rate, the ego seems to keep itself clearly and sharply outlined and delimited. There is only one state of mind in which it fails to do this - an unusual state, it is true, but not one that can be judged pathological. At its height, the state of being in love threatens to obliterate the boundaries between the ego and object (1994: 3).

In this circumstance, the subject is vulnerable. The threat of violence from the introjection of the other painfully exposes, or in fact creates an absence, so that ultimately, as Bataille notes, 'this continuity is chiefly to be felt in the anguish of desire' (1962: 19).

Religious eroticism, Bataille suggests, removes our dependence upon the favourable actions of an external object. In contrast to the feelings experienced when in love, mystic experience substitutes the beloved object for a divine love where violent and erotic energies become concentrated on an immaterial object that has no tangible correspondence with an immediate reality. Bataille believed that a more profound understanding is afforded by mystic experience, which transcends the possibilities of emotional, and, to a greater extent, physical eroticism. An appreciation of 'divine love' brings about awareness that an individual's temporal discontinuity can only ever be superimposed upon a fundamental and unalterable continuity; indeed, a 'problem arises when man is faced with death which seems to pitch the discontinuous creature headlong into continuity' (1962: 21). However, by suggesting that religious participation, or 'mystical experience', 'reveals an absence of any object' (1962: 23), he renders the notion of discontinuity



problematic, provoking questions about the nature of the structure which establishes discontinuity and holds meanings and identities in place.

Bataille's theoretical perspective is exceptional because it locates violation and eroticism, at their most intense, not in any physical activity but in an emotional or spiritual realm. Although Bataille maintains a somewhat idealised conception of 'inner experience' and the 'spiritual', his insights, when recast in terms of mental processes, are compelling. Having stated that '[e]rotic experience will commit us to silence' (1962: 252), he tentatively identifies his own personal difficulty in finding an appropriate language with which to write about eroticism and proclaims his desire to find a language sufficiently 'silent', and suitably unobtrusive for his discussion. However, as he acknowledges, '[l]anguage does not exist independently of the play of taboo and transgression' (1962: 276). Language is the structure in which and through which limits are constructed.

What Bataille touches upon, but does not provide a systematic examination of, is the instrumentality of language to the formation of the subject as a discontinuous being. The development of the subject's sense of self, or ego, occurs in language: the individual achieves 'discontinuity' through the system of differences instituted by language. But, as Bataille writes,

language scatters the totality of all that touches us most closely even while it arranges it in order. Through language we can never grasp what matters to us, for it eludes us in the

form of interdependent propositions, and no central whole to which each of these can be referred ever appears' (1962: 274).

The lack of a 'central whole' fixing meaning in place is precisely what threatens the subject with a radical non-differentiation. As Derrida, writing shortly after Bataille, notes, 'the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself' (2001: 352). Violence and eroticism are experienced at their most extreme when an external object does not govern the impulse towards continuity. The moments at which the structures of language no longer hold the subject in place, and no longer maintain its discontinuous identity, are the moments at which the subject experiences radical violence. Indeed, as Bataille goes on to write, 'Where would we be without language? It has made us who we are. It alone can show us the sovereign moment at the farthest point of being where it can no longer act as currency' (1962: 276). Language is the thing to be dissolved in violent and erotic experience.

René Girard's study of *Violence and the Sacred* starts from a similar premise of fundamental continuity, derived from Freud and paralleling aspects of the work of Bataille. Girard shared with Freud a belief that violence was an unavoidable aspect of human society and suggested that continuity, which he termed 'undifferentiation', was an essentially violent condition. Focusing specifically upon the structures of primitive religions, Girard examines the way in which sacrifice functions to contain and make meaningful the violence inherent within social groups. Through the mechanism of sacrifice, he argues, violence is given a definitive object outside the community and, as a result, the

possibilities of internal conflict are reduced or removed as the identification of an external target constructs a clear distinction between community members and others.

In order to maintain ritual systems and the order they confer upon the community, they must be invested with authority. Girard suggests that this is achieved by situating ritual practices within a theological superstructure, which provides an interpretative overlay. Sacrifice, as Girard reminds us, is based on the substitution of a potential victim for an actual victim. The custom is therefore predicated on a fundamental misunderstanding: Girard insists that 'the celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act' (1988: 7). What the theological configuration offers, then, is a coherent structure within which to misunderstand. Consequently, a fundamental tenet of Girard's argument is that 'the reality of the divine rests in its transcendental absence' (1988: 143). The individual's subjection to the sacrificial process is, therefore, founded upon lack and misunderstanding, a misunderstanding of the true human condition. Re-reading Bataille's notion of religious eroticism in the light of Girard's argument produces a rather more sinister apprehension of the 'profound understanding' afforded by mystic experience. What is glimpsed transiently in an experience of religious eroticism is nothing other than the deeply disturbing reality of a continuity that is intrinsically violent, anarchic and traumatic. Paradoxically, the moment at which the subject becomes aware

of this misunderstanding is the moment at which the necessity of the structure is reaffirmed.

One of Girard's most compelling arguments is that '[i]t is not differences but the loss of them that gives rise to violence and chaos' (1988: 51). The sacrificial rituals employed by primitive religions are required to implement a system of differences within the community, thereby managing violence to create 'differentiated', or discontinuous subjects. But the implications of Girard's thesis are more widespread than this and are particularly important for a discussion of language and violence. The influential work of the linguist, Ferdinand Saussure provides the critical backdrop for the insights contained in Girard's study. Saussure asserted that language gives form to the 'shapeless and indistinct mass' of thought (1915: 111). Language, he argued, is made up of signs, which are comprised of a signifier – the word itself – realised aurally or visually, and the mental concept to which the word, or signifier, refers. The sign's relationship to the concept which it denotes is arbitrary and, therefore, signifies only as a consequence of its difference from other signs. This means that it is language which divides up our conception of reality: language does not provide a means through which to articulate concepts already in existence, but is the structure through which these concepts come into being. Reality is constituted for us by language, a system of signs which signify as a result of their difference from other signs. It is in this context that Girard's observations derive their significance.

Girard explains that, '[b]eing made up of differences, language finds it almost impossible to express undifferentiation directly. Whatever it may say on the subject, language invariably says at once too much and too little' (1988: 64). Linguistic systems impose order, but because they signify through difference they run into difficulty when they attempt to signify the points at which there is a lack of difference. Approaching this from the perspective of the violent breakdown of differences afforded by erotic experience, Bataille makes much the same point, noting that 'descriptive language becomes meaningless at the decisive instant when the stirrings of transgression itself take over from the discursive account of transgression' (1962: 275). Violence is, in many ways, antithetical to language because '[c]ommon language will not express violence' (Bataille 1962: 186).

Jacques Derrida, following on from the work of Saussure, introduced the concept of '*différance*' to connote the way that language signifies through difference and deferral. Because, as Saussure explained, signs signify only by virtue of their difference from other signs, their meanings cannot be realised until the signifying chain, of which the sign is a part, comes to end. That is to say, because the meaning of the sign is derived from its relationship to other signs, its meaning can never be fully realised and is therefore, constantly and endlessly deferred. Just as Girard and Bataille consider the effects of a breakdown of language's differential system, Derrida warns that '[w]hat *must*

*not* and cannot be approached is the origin of *difference*: it must not be presented or represented and above all not penetrated' (1992: 205).

### III

In the work of Jacques Lacan the anti-essentialist insights of Marx and the developmental processes proposed by Freud are brought together to produce a radical understanding of the place of language in the formation of the subject. Lacanian psychoanalysis illuminates the violence inherent within the structures of language, and the processes through which language figures violence. In place of the tripartite division of the psyche proposed by Freud, Lacan conceptualises the division rather differently, positing three orders: the imaginary, which is the realm of images, the symbolic, which is the realm of symbols, and the real, which is constituted by that which is neither symbolic nor imaginary. Central to Lacan's thesis is the mirror stage. He explains that the human infant, 'still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence' (1977: 2) is, nevertheless, able to recognise him/herself in the mirror. The child holds on to this coherent image as an 'Ideal-I', an idealised image of the self which does not correspond to the infant's lack of full bodily control. The 'Ideal-I', at this point interior and specular, functions as an immature ego as yet unmediated by external socio-material forces. Indeed, the mirror image exhibits

in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject (1977: 2).

The child's jubilant identification with the mirror image gives rise to a 'primary narcissism' where the image of the self is invested with a profound libidinal dynamism. The specular image forms the basis of the 'Imaginary' order, which Lacan identifies as the realm of outward and often misleading appearances of coherence and completeness. Remembrance of the first identification with this image is never completely lost, therefore, but serves as a prototype for the ego, which is ultimately circumscribed by the subject position posited by the structures of language, where powerful prescriptions and proscriptions, governing all aspects of subjectivity, are embodied. Language, therefore, is an agent of psychological violence, operating at the most fundamental level.

Lacan notes that 'language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it' (1977: 148). When a child enters into language, it takes on the subject position 'I' which simultaneously confers upon it its sense of self and constitutes it as a social subject. It is language, he argues, which enables the distinction of the ego from the outside world and which objectifies the subject in 'the dialectic of identification with the other'. However, the signifier 'I' can never fully correspond with the child's 'Ideal-I'. Lacan's conception of the relationship between violent and erotic impulses marks a departure from the work of Freud, who had previously proposed that these highly ambivalent energies could be located in either the death drive or the libido. Lacan suggests

instead a perpetual struggle between the specular Ideal-I and the linguistically constructed social subject:

the term primary narcissism ... reveals in those who invented it the most profound awareness of semantic latencies. But it also throws light on the dynamic opposition between this libido and the sexual libido, which the first analysts tried to define when they invoked destructive and, indeed, death instincts, in order to explain the evident connection between the narcissistic libido and the alienating function of the *I*, the aggressivity it releases in relation to the other (1977: 6).

More than a simple conflict between life and its destruction, subjectivity is problematic in its form and not in its matter. It is either a struggle towards an imaginary, unattainable and internally imposed ideal, or towards an external subject position, equally predicated upon lack. In this way, the relationship between violence and eroticism may be conceived as a dialectic between language and the body, that is between the categories of the linguistic and the pre-linguistic.

Whilst Freud acknowledged the materiality of language, insofar as he recognised that the exchange of words between the patient and analyst constituted the analysable material of psychoanalysis, Lacan, through a careful re-reading of Freud's work, expands and develops the linguistic implications of psychoanalysis by employing ideas derived from Saussure's and Jakobson's linguistics. 'It is Freud's discovery', Lacan affirms, which 'gives to the signifier/signified opposition the full extent of its implications: namely, that the signifier has an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its mark, by becoming through that



passion the signified.’ (1977: 284). The signifier, therefore, is always logically anterior to the signified. As he goes on to explain:

This passion of the signifier now becomes a new dimension of the human condition in that it is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man it speaks (*ça parle*), that his nature is woven by effects in which is to be found the structure of language, of which he becomes the material, and that therefore there resounds in him, beyond what could be conceived of by a psychology of ideas, the relation of speech (1977: 284).

Lacan’s approach to linguistics demonstrates an important difference from Saussure’s in that he does not accept a constitutive relationship between the two elements of the sign. Rather, he insists that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is radically unstable. Because linguistic signifiers are meaningful only as a consequence of their difference from other signifiers, and because the signifying chain in which the signifier is a differential element is effectively endless, signification, and therefore the subject, is always in process, a process which is not and will never be complete. Indeed, ‘it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning “insists” but ... none of its elements “consists” in the signification of which it is at the moment capable’ (1977: 153). The unstable relationship between the signifier and the signified means that ‘[w]e are forced ... to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier’ (1977: 154) and signification and the subject are only held in place by certain anchoring points – *points de capiton* – which serve to pin down the relationship between the signified and the signifier. Nevertheless, signification can never be fully present to us, and as a result, we can never be

fully present to ourselves. The signifying process, therefore, violently imposes a fundamental absence upon the subject.

Lacan argues that because of this absence, there is a resistance to signification inherent in language. He suggests that this can only be overcome through the use of metaphor and metonymy, claiming that the 'properly signifying function ... depicted in language ... is *metonymy*' (1977: 156). Rather than denoting the substitution of part for the whole (or vice versa), Lacan's conception of metonymy is derived from the work of Roman Jakobson and suggests the process of combining signifiers to produce a signifying chain: 'it is in the *word-to-word* connexion that metonymy is based' (1977: 156). Metaphor, however, is the process whereby a signifier becomes the signified. He explains that '[t]he creative spark of metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is, of two signifiers equally actualized. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain' (1977: 157). It is these linguistic operations, Lacan argues, which govern the primary processes which Freud suggested were at work in the unconscious. Displacement, the process whereby the associations connected to one idea are passed on to another, corresponds to the linguistic concept of metonymy; and condensation, the process by which a single idea provides the intersection of several associative chains, corresponds to metaphor.

Lacan's dictum that 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (1993: 167), underpins his linguistic-materialist understanding of the subject. He affirms

the materiality of the signifier, stating that 'signifiers are well and truly embodied, materialized' (1993: 289), and asserts the role of the signifier in the unconscious, explaining that 'the unconscious is structured as a function of the symbolic' (1992: 12). Although effectively a linguistic order, the symbolic is the domain of the signifier rather than of signification, which is associated with the illusory coherence of the imaginary. Lacan suggests that '[t]he exteriority of the symbolic in relation to man is the very notion of the unconscious' (1966: 469); therefore, whilst Marx affirmed that consciousness was the product of the social totality, Lacan asserts that the social totality takes place in language, and looks at the implications of language/the social totality, for the construction of the unconscious. He re-conceptualises the unconscious as a discourse where the meanings of repressed material are constituted in conflict, that is to say, dialectically.

In *The Violence of Language*, Jean-Jacques Lecercle pursues the implications of Lacan's ideas, asserting that 'the necessity of violence lies deep in the structure of language' (1990: 242). Lecercle identifies the violence inherent in the linguistic construction of the subject, and acknowledges the limitations placed upon the speaking subject. He observes that the user of language is 'is cast in the mold of a system exterior and anterior to him, he negotiates his meaning with the expressive potentialities that language allows him' (1990: 104). By focusing upon the violence that inheres within the structures of language, he is therefore necessarily examining the way in which the subject is constituted by this violence.

Specifically, Lecerclé's study focuses upon the notion of the *remainder*, and is derived in part from a theory of linguistics which is devoted to an understanding of the way in which meaning is generated in excess of any given language system. The term *langue*, which corresponds to those aspects of language such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, and may be identified as the 'the symbolic object *par excellence*' (1990: 36)<sup>5</sup> is considered in conjunction with the *remainder*, that which remains inassimilable to the symbolic order. *Lalangue* is posited as the combination of the '*remainder*' with '*langue*' and is defined as that which is outside language, yet constituted by it. It is 'something in language that exceeds scientific enquiry' (1990: 33): '*lalangue* is language at play' (1990: 39). Indeed, as Lecerclé goes on to note:

What is treated by *langue* as a lack, an exception, and is largely ignored by it as it would like to ignore the points where the system fails, where the structure becomes uncertain and threatens to collapse, is treated by *lalangue* as an excess, a locus for the proliferation of meaning ... The dialectic of lack and excess rules the relationship between *langue* and *lalangue*. It also governs the relationship between language and the remainder – it is basically the same relationship (1990: 40).

Lack and excess are at once anarchic and affirmative, inspiring movement away from the centre that is at once desired and yet repudiated. Consequently, the remainder may be identified as an agent of violation, which in the same movement effects a frisson of erotic excitement at the moment of transgression, and whilst '*langue* is articulated on the unconscious, *lalangue*

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<sup>5</sup> Lecerclé draws attention to J.C. Milner's position, however, explaining that, for Milner, whilst '*langue* is the epitome of what one knows as 'the symbolic' it can also be viewed in its real and imaginary and aspects: '*langue* is real. The object of linguistics ... is not a fantastical construction of the human mind; it is independent of man, imposed on him, impervious to manipulation' (1990: 34).

returns within it' (1990: 38). Threatening and necessary, meaning is generated by the remainder in excess of, and despite the lack inherent in the signifier.

In addition to the violence that is an inescapable consequence of the remainder's return within the signifying process, Lecerle insists that there 'is an inescapable materiality to language' (1990: 105) and that language can effect actual violence:

The violence of language cannot be limited to the violence of agrammaticality, as the remainder subverts the rules of *langue*. Exploring the material violence of language will take ... two directions: the direction of history ... where language is both the locus of and the means of historical (political) intervention, and the direction of the social, of the body and the body politic (1990: 179).

In order to explore the social and historical implications of this position, Lecerle advocates a reconsideration of Althusser's brand of Marxism. Although rejecting the base/superstructure distinction of traditional Marxism, and simultaneously, the idea of language *as* ideology, Lecerle notes that language, 'far from being a neutral instrument placed at the disposal of each individual speaker, is an institution in that sense; that it is pervaded not only by the violence of affects but by the symbolic violence of institutional struggle' (1990: 107). He goes on to argue that 'the subject can only say what is made available to him by the historical conjuncture – he speaks within a collective arrangement of utterance' (1990: 106). Utilising Althusser's notion of interpellation, he suggests that,

The concept 'social formation'... seeks to account for the specific mixture of modes of production, some dominant, some mere 'survivals', within a nation state, at a given moment in history. In the same vein, when we speak of 'English', we speak of a multiplicity of dialects, registers, and styles, of the sedimentation of past conjunctures, of the inscription of social antagonisms as discursive antagonisms, of the coexistence and contradiction of various collective arrangements of utterance, of the interpellation of subjects within apparatuses embodied in linguistic practices (1990: 228).

Therefore, to ascertain the expressions and treatments of violence in any given age, the various modes of production, the social and discursive antagonisms, the cultural codes and the 'collective arrangements of utterance' must be interrogated. To be able to understand the subjectivities that language produces during any given period, its linguistic practices and social apparatuses must first be examined.

Slavoj Žižek undertakes a reconsideration of Althusser's notion of interpellation in relation to the idea of a 'remainder'. He argues that Althusser 'never succeeded in thinking out the link between Ideological State Apparatuses and ideological interpellation' (1989: 43).<sup>6</sup> He explains his objection:

this external 'machine' of State Apparatuses exercises its force only in so far as it is experienced, in the unconscious economy of the subject, as a traumatic, senseless injunction. Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machine of ideology is 'internalized' into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth: but ... this 'internalization', by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, that there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness

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<sup>6</sup> For additional discussion and criticism of Althusser's theory of interpellation, see also Judith Butler (1997: 106-131) and Michel Pecheux (1982:103-109).

sticking to it, and that this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it (1989: 43)

If we can assume, then, that some part of the individual remains 'non-integratable' within the symbolic matrix, interpellation is always in essence incomplete. The representation of coherence that ideology offers is, therefore, a necessarily imaginary one because it is a 'fantasy-construction ... an illusion which structures our effective, real, social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel' (1989: 45). A functioning ideology must enforce an ostensibly 'natural' order to maintain the subject's distance from the 'real' (in the Lacanian sense), that is to say, 'to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic real kernel'. Nevertheless, there is always the latent danger that the 'kernel' or the 'real' will surface transiently, in excess of the ideological system.

Foucault conceptualises the agency of language rather differently from Althusser. He locates discourse as the point at which power and knowledge converge. Instead of inhering in the discourse of a particular governing body or identifiable set of institutions, power is seen to function in a far more fluid manner. Rejecting the idea of a power residing solely in a principality or state authority, Foucault asserts that '[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (1990: 94) and stresses 'the strictly relational character of power relationships' (1990: 95). He goes on to say that

power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (1990: 92-93).

This concept of the workings of power and of force relations contrasts with the Althusserian notion of a discourse that must be revolutionised before ultimately being dissolved. Power, as Foucault understands it, is a 'complex strategical situation' which is 'permanent, repetitious, inert and self-reproducing' (1990: 93) and therefore, is never able to be located in any one 'discoverable' site. Language's potential for violence, is therefore, part of its structural make-up.

This 'complex strategical situation' may be understood as discourse. Foucault examines the dynamics in play within linguistic systems and suggests:

it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. ... [w]e must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. ... Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are.



We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an affect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (1990: 100-101).

In such a system, then, the conditions of production are never reproduced in exactly the same way, making for a more mobile and fragmentary notion of a society that is always already in process, and not set up under the domination of a monolithic discourse of power.

Foucault asserts that '[r]elations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationship (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter' (1990: 94) and he locates the agency of language in the realm of the erotic, which, as Bataille claims, is always the domain of violence. Foucault argues that,

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power ... Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies (1990: 103).

At the most fundamental level, sexual relations are a 'dense transfer point' of relations of power because they constitute the principal means of ensuring the

reproduction of the conditions of production. It is evident, then, that 'the deployment of sexuality is linked to the economy through numerous and subtle relays, the main one of which, however, is the body - the body that produces and consumes' (1990: 107). In order for a discourse to have a material reality it must function at the level of the material subject, that is to say, upon the body. And, because subjectivity is always embodied, discourses of sex, he claims, are applicable to all and, therefore, they come to serve as the linchpin of strategies of power. However, Foucault goes on to suggest that sexuality is dialectically constructed within discourse, and he explains that it should not be considered a 'natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct' (1990: 105). Sexuality is not only the level at which discourse functions, it is constructed in discourse at the very moments that questions are asked of it. Rather than being understood or discovered by questioning, sexuality is actually constituted in this process. Therefore, at all levels, relations of power are not only inscribed in the structures of language, as Lacan explains, but are produced dialectically in the operations of language.

#### IV

Raymond Williams notes that '[a] definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world' (1977: 21), and, as I have shown, a definition of language is also a definition of violence. The process of

figuring acts of violence cannot be divorced from the violence which inheres within the structures of language or from that which arises as an effect of language. The insights of Marx and Lacan provide a significant contribution to our understanding of the immanent violence of language. Expanding upon the theoretical framework of psychological development proposed by Freud, Lacan suggested that the violent process of individuation occurs with the child's entry into language. This is the decisive point at which the subject/object distinction is instituted and it effects a radical and violent separation. It is the point at which the child comes to experience absence; indeed, the lack or absence exposed by language is central to the linguistic function. Because signifiers generate meaning through difference from other signifiers, the signifier precedes the signified, and therefore, the signifying process is always structured by absence, by the gap or slippage between the signifier and the signified. The subject is an effect of this relationship; however, the conditions under which the subject assumes language remain unarticulable.

Lacan, Lecerle, Foucault and Žižek all engage with the potentially anarchic notion of the remainder, of that which is excluded from the structure of language but nevertheless returns within it. This concept is articulated in several different terms, perhaps an indication of its refusal to be symbolised. In psychoanalysis, the remainder is understood as the primordial lie upon which subjectivity is predicated – the fundamental and constitutive misrecognition (for example, Lacan's specular image). Lecerle explains the

remainder as the excess that is generated at the point where the signifying process fails. Again, this is based upon the idea of an intrinsic lack, and an awareness of the effects produced by approaching a temporary awareness of it. Foucault develops this idea as he suggests a dialectical process through which the hidden secret (for example, sexuality) is actually produced in discourse. The site of absence, he claims, necessarily proves to be the site of a proliferation of meanings.

It is Žižek, however, who provides one of the most detailed interrogations of this 'indivisible remainder' or 'sublime object of ideology'. He explains that there is always a kernel of the non-integratable leftover. The leftover is non-symbolisable precisely because it is what, in the first instance, provided the conditions and the necessity of the symbolic. He identifies the nature of the violence inherent within the linguistic structures, and asserts that the lesson of Lacanian psychoanalysis is 'that this coincidence of the highest form of violence with the absence of violence can occur only within the symbolic universe – that is, in an order where the very absence of a determination functions as a positive determination' (1994: 204). The highest form of violence, to which we are all subject, is also the least perceptible.

In addition to the process of acquiring language, the production of meaning – the process of ascribing a signified to a signifier – also has the potential for violence. Hayden White explains that 'certain sign-systems are privileged as necessary, even natural ways of recognizing a "meaning" in things and others

are suppressed, ignored, or hidden in the process of representation' (1982: 288). That is to say, 'the words we use to represent the subjects and objects of violence are part and parcel of events themselves' (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1989: 24). Indeed, the violence of signification and representation is at its most intense when it is not recognized as violence.

Žižek explains this further:

the well-known paradox of (social-symbolic) violence is that supreme violence is no longer experienced as violence, since it determines the 'specific colour' of the very horizon within which something is to be perceived as violence. The task of dialectical analysis, therefore, is to render visible the violence that maintains the very neutral, 'non-violent' framework that is subsequently perturbed by the eruptions of (empirical) violence, the very standard by means of which we measure the extent of violence. When we are able to perceive this fundamental violence as violence, the first step towards effective liberation is already accomplished (1994: 204).

Any analysis of the language of violence must therefore be predicated upon an understanding of the way in which our perceptions of violence are coloured by the violence of language. Language is implicitly performative, therefore and violence can be effected through linguistic structures.

The violent effects of language can be explicit as well as implicit, however, because as J. L. Austin makes clear, it is possible to do things with words (1962). Language is performative and enunciation can be violent: with words a person may be condemned to death. I concur with the position Lecercle outlines and assert that 'if there is such a thing as violence in language, the term must be taken literally – not the violence of the symbol, but the violence of intervention, of an event the immateriality of which does not prevent it

from having material effects' (1990: 227). In the chapters that follow, I explore the way in which acts of violence are articulated, maintaining an awareness that the articulation can never be separated from violence itself. Montaigne suggests that we need to interpret interpretations rather than things (1991: 369) and, with this in mind, I look at the various ways in which violence is made meaningful, how it is codified in Renaissance culture, and how certain signs systems are privileged and while others repressed. However, as Armstrong and Tennenhouse remind us, '[t]o regard certain practices as violent is never to see them just as they are. It is always to take up a position for or against them' (1989: 9). This analysis is itself subject to the cultural codes and discursive antagonisms in which and through which it has been produced.

## Chapter Three

'This helpless smoke of words': *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece*<sup>1</sup>



'The Triumph of Chastity' 1488

<sup>1</sup> *The Rape of Lucrece* (1027).

The meanings of sexual violence are not produced in isolation from the social conditions in which they operate: perceptions of sexual assault encode wider cultural assumptions. To recognise certain acts as violent, as Armstrong and Tennenhouse have suggested, always involves taking up a position for or against them. Rape was mimetically reproduced as a form of entertainment with remarkable frequency during the Renaissance, and therefore the repeated figuring of violation occupied a prominent position in cultural consciousness. Representations of rape on the Renaissance stage and in literary works were informed by the circulation of social significations and in their turn, were engaged in a process of contestation and redefinition. As a corollary of this process, these representations exemplify, not only the difficulties of articulating violence, but also the violence effected by language and the violence that inheres within the signifying process.

Rape, defined by Blackstone as ‘the carnal knowledge of a woman forcibly and against her will’ (1979 Vol. 4: 210) accounted for one in every hundred indicted felonies in early modern England (Walker 1998: 1). In *The Law’s Resolution of Women’s Rights*, T.E. explains the process of pursuing a rape case:

if any virgin, widow, or single woman be ravished, she herself may sue an appeal of rape, prosecute the felon to death, and the king’s pardon (it seemeth) cannot help him. If a feme covert be ravished, she cannot have an appeal without her husband ... But if a feme covert be ravished and consent to the ravisher the husband alone may have an appeal (1632: 393).



Sexual violence against women was not conceptualised solely in terms of the injury suffered by women. A husband's interests were perceived to have been equally violated by rape, and married women were unable to prosecute a case without their husbands' consent. Rape was punishable by death, and during the reign of Elizabeth I, the convicted man's right to claim benefit of clergy was withdrawn. But despite the severity of the punishment, rape was an extremely difficult charge to prove, and it is very probable that the incidence of rape was far higher than the number of convictions would suggest. Because of the difficulties of providing evidence in support of an accusation of rape, a successful prosecution required proof of the female accuser's virtuous character and the onus was on her to establish the veracity of her testimony. Purely by virtue of their sex, however, this was not easy for women to do.

A profound inequality existed between the sexes, and an implicit, and often-explicit assumption persisted that women were always ultimately culpable for any violence to which men subjected them. This assumption was derived from – or at least legitimised in large part by – the popular interpretation of the passages in *Genesis* which describe the fall of mankind. Because the serpent tempted Eve, and because she in turn incited Adam to sin, the burden of responsibility for the post-lapsarian state rested collectively but firmly upon all women. In his widely circulated 'Sermon on the Epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians', John Calvin asserts that 'women ought to feel the fruit of their sins', explaining that 'women must needs stoop and understand that the ruin and confusion of all mankind came in on their side, and that through them we

be all forlorn and accursed and banished the kingdom of heaven' (1577: 277<sup>v</sup>-283<sup>v</sup>). Regardless of how faithful, modest and chaste a woman may be, she was *a priori* tainted by Eve's transgression.

Chastity, or sexual purity, was nevertheless central to Renaissance culture, and was, as Laura Gowing observes, 'a measure of female virtue that could outdo every other way of defining a woman' (1996: 251).<sup>2</sup> In *The Fairie Queene*, Spenser's epic treatment of 'Morall vertues', 'The Legend of Britomartis' affirms chastity as 'That fairest vertue, farre above the rest' (III.i.4), excelling friendship, temperance, justice and even holiness. Conduct literature of the period, written primarily by men for a male readership, was instrumental to the prescription and dissemination of expectations of female behaviour. Juan Luis Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman* advises on the 'virtues of a woman and examples she should follow', explaining that '[a] woman shall learn the virtues of her kind altogether out of books, which she shall either read herself, or else hear read'. It is clearly Vives' assumption that women will be read to, because, as he goes on to recommend, to an implied male reader, 'let her understand that *chastity* is the principal virtue of a woman, and counterpoiseth with all the rest: if she have that, no man will look for any other, and if she lack that no man will regard any other' (1540: 18<sup>r</sup>-22). The precepts extracted 'out of books' formed part of a wider discourse concerning women's chastity and as Vives' text suggests, this discourse, although about women, was designed to exclude their participation in the formulation of its meanings. The

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<sup>2</sup> The emblematic 'Triumph of Chastity' featured on the first page of this chapter is derived from Petrarch's *Triumphs* and is representative of the prominence given to chastity.

unremitting focus and insistence upon the chaste female body was, to use Mark Breitenberg's phrase, the product of an 'anxious masculinity' (1996), and the ideal of chastity functioned predominantly as an indicator of male interests and concerns. The male-dominated ecclesiastical hierarchies of the Reformed Church, and the gendered Christian values they promoted, as well as the ideas and approaches of classical humanism contributed to the production of a conception of femininity which focused upon women's bodies. Designed to preserve and protect patrilineal filiation, chastity was a social construct, produced discursively with the interchange of colluding and competing patriarchal ideologies.

The concept of rape could not be extricated from the idea of chastity and the clear but paradoxical implication of this is that only 'good' women can be raped: only those who assiduously protected their female honour could be violated. As Blackstone in his survey of the laws relating to rape explains, the civil law 'seems to suppose a prostitute or common harlot incapable of any injuries of this kind: not allowing any punishment for violating the chastity of her, who hath indeed no chastity at all, or at least no regard to it' (1799 Vol. 4: 213). The threat of rape provided a backdrop against which the significance of chastity could be clarified and confirmed, and therefore rape was qualitatively aligned with unchastity to provide the conceptual and semantic opposition to the chief female virtue. As Ian Donaldson explains, '[n]o distinction was made between adultery and rape, for the polluting effect of both acts was thought to be the same' (1982: 23). This is significant because such an understanding

denies women's agency: according to this conception, a woman's chastity or unchastity does not ultimately depend on her. Women were always thought to be in some way culpable, purely by virtue of their femininity. It was rape, therefore, which hailed the female subject and as Althusser explains, 'guilt feelings' (1971: 163) are an element in the process of interpellation.

Althusser asserts that the process of interpellation is a fundamentally linguistic one. The significance and fragility of sexual purity and, more importantly, the public perception of a woman's sexual purity, were embedded within the linguistic practices of Renaissance culture. Patriarchal ideologies were inscribed within the language used to describe women, and the vocabulary available for the description of female honour was bound by a restrictive binary logic that would acknowledge women only as chaste or unchaste. In order for a woman to be able to successfully prosecute a charge of rape, she must be unsullied by the vocabulary of a patriarchal culture which was 'fram'd to make women false' (*Othello*, I.iii.396). A dynamic language of insult developed around the issue of sexual morality, and as Gowing explains:

It was ... language that differentiated persistently and profoundly between the sexual morals and sexual honour of women and men, and ... in which gendered insults marked off the outlines of gender roles in sexual, marital and social relations ... The production of language was a site of particular contest in the definition and prescription of womanhood with which so many writers and preachers were concerned (1996: 59-61).

Chastity, then, was a value produced and negated through language. Common insults directed at women – for example, 'whore', 'jade', 'quean', 'punk', and

‘strumpet’ – took women’s chastity, and therefore their social reputation, as their object. What is more, insults directed at men were also predicated upon women’s sexual conduct: terms such as ‘cuckold’, ‘bawd’, and ‘whoremaster’ were designed to denigrate men by virtue of their association with licentious women. The steep increase in the cases of libel and slander brought to the ecclesiastical courts, and the overwhelmingly sexual nature of the specific insults registered, illustrates the prominence of sexual reputation as a means of defining women.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the endemic exclusionary violence faced by women asserting their credibility as plaintiffs, when accusations of rape were actually pursued, there were significant terminological difficulties describing the violence of sexual assault. As Garthine Walker explains, ‘[t]he language which signified sexual intercourse was itself one of female complicity ... Describing sexual intercourse necessarily depicted a woman’s submission, her succumbing or being persuaded to a man’s will’ (1998: 6). For women, finding a language with which to express sexual violence was complicated by the dominant patriarchal discourse which encoded an expectation of a certain amount of aggression in its descriptions of sex, and which suggested that violence should be recognised and understood as an integral part of intercourse.

Žižek identifies the way in which male violence is privileged whilst female experience is implicitly and actively repressed through the signifying process:

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed breakdown of the use of various terms of insult, see Gowing (1996: 64).

Take the ambiguous status of patriarchal violence against women: one could claim that this violence becomes actual violence *only when it is experienced* – ‘registered’ – *as such by a woman*. In a society in which the traditional patriarchal ideology exerts unquestionable hegemony – one which lacks even a minimal of ‘feminist awareness’ – a certain kind of ‘possessive’ attitude of a man towards a woman is not only perceived by a woman as ‘violent’, but even received with open arms as a sign of authentic passionate devotion. The point here, of course, is not to ‘soften’ this violence by reducing it to something merely imagined: violence is ‘real’, yet its raw, indeterminate reality becomes the reality of ‘unacceptable violence’ only via its ‘registration’ in the symbolic order. (1996a: 222).

In the symbolic order, violence can be obscured or made meaningful in terms which shroud its full significance. That is to say, the import of violence is figured at the level of the signifier.

The representations of rape in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece* rehearse and interrogate the meanings of sexual violence. Drawing upon classical paradigms from the work of Ovid and Livy, and engaging with the ideals of female virtue fostered by the Church and consolidated by the leading patriarchal hierarchies, these texts explore the processes through which culture interprets and makes meaningful violence against women.<sup>4</sup> In an economy of patriarchal violence, the female body is ascribed a symbolic significance and the female body-as-text functions as the site upon which, and indeed the means by which, male subjectivity is reproduced and reaffirmed.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Ovid (1955: 146-152) and Livy (1960: 97-101).

<sup>5</sup> The equation of the female body with text was a familiar one: Jocelyn Catty notes that ‘rape provided a powerful metaphor for illegitimate publication’ and that writers of the period ‘pervasively trope the text as a female body and publication as an exposure and invasion of that body akin to rape’ (1999: 1).

In both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, the patriarchal discourse of rape is wrought around a system of exchange based upon triangular desire. In an argument derived from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lacan asserts that ‘women in the real order serve ... as objects for the exchanges required by the elementary structures of kinship’ (1977: 207). When women were conceptualised in this way, the violence of rape amounted to theft, the wilful appropriation of another man’s possession. Indeed, as Karen Bamford explains, during the Renaissance there was an inescapable ‘patriarchal structure in which women, defined as male property, act as tokens of exchange between men’ (2000: 7). The violence of sexual assault was understood as violence directed at another man, but experienced by a woman.

The theoretical perspectives proposed by Alexandre Kojève, Jacques Lacan and René Girard provide a critical apparatus for discussing the way in which women are posited as objects, as well as subjects, in the symbolic order. Their conceptions of the desiring subject – implicitly the male subject – allow for an understanding of the way in which women are required to function in an economy driven by relationships between men. Kojève argues that ‘[d]esire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other’ (1969: 6). Following on from this, Lacan later states that ‘it is *qua* Other that he [the subject] desires’ (1977: 312), and goes on to explain that ‘Man’s desire is the desire of the Other’ (1994: 235). Girard provides an extended discussion of this idea, asserting that all desire is essentially mimetic functioning within a

triangular model where subject A desires an object *because* it is desired by subject B (1988: 143-168). Women therefore function as objects of exchange between men, and are desirable to men only as a consequence of their desirability to other men. Violence arises when desires converge upon a single object, and rape is one form violence can take when male desires converge upon the objectified female body.

Shakespeare's representations of rape draw attention to the patriarchal economy in which a woman's agency is circumscribed by her status as an object of exchange between men. Girard's theory of triangular desire provides a useful conceptual framework with which to elucidate the homosocial relationships in both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece*: throughout both of these texts, the major relationships operate recognisably within this triangular structure. Recent critical discussions of these texts have identified the way in which the male characters' subjectivities are constructed in and through the representation of the female body, and in particular, its violation. Nancy Vickers argues that the language of blazon employed in *The Rape of Lucrece* is an intrinsically patriarchal one because it reflects and intervenes primarily, if not exclusively, within relationships between men (1985). Coppélia Khan suggests that the poem engages with 'a struggle in which Lucrece figures not so much as Tarquin's antagonist but rather as the telltale sign of *his* subjectivity rather than her own' (1991: 143). Mary Jacobus goes even further, asking '[i]s there a woman in this text?' (1982). David Willbern has identified similar concerns surrounding the figure of Lavinia in *Titus*



*Andronicus* who proves to be the locus of male-dominated social and political tensions (1995).

From the outset, in *Titus Andronicus*, the relationship between Saturninus and Bassianus affirms the structuring agency of rivalry. The desires of the two brothers converge in the political wrangling that surrounds the contest for the leadership of Rome. Saturninus' opening appeal to the assembled crowds – 'Noble patricians, patrons of my right,/ Defend the justice of my cause with arms' (I.i.1) – is immediately challenged by Bassianus who calls upon 'Romans, friends, followers, favourers of my right' (I.i.9) and continues with a rhetorically dexterous verbal attack. The initial foregrounding of fraternal differences sets in place the foundations for the subsequent events of the play and highlights their emergence out of political conflict, in particular, the tensions between monarchical and republican rule. Saturninus and Bassianus embody the ideological conflict between governments that appoint leaders based on birth as opposed to merit. When Titus arrives, bearing the coffins of twenty-five 'valiant sons', his plea that he be given 'a staff of honour ... But not a sceptre to control the world' demonstrates the authority of his voice. As Foucault has suggested, 'discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire – it is also the object of desire ... discourse is the power which is to be seized' (1989: 240). Following the conventions of primogeniture, Titus proclaims: 'People of Rome ... I ask your voices ... that you create our emperor's eldest son,/ Lord Saturnine' (I.i.221-229). Once elected, Saturninus requires a consort and tells Titus of his desire to marry Lavinia. She is

desirable to him because of her relationships with other men: not only is she Titus' daughter, but also she was betrothed to Saturninus' brother, Bassianus. Here, power is asserted and inscribed upon the figure of Lavinia as 'text', who functions as an object of exchange within a politically driven economy.

Girard explains that one aggressive act begets another, engendering a violent cycle which can only be ended by cataclysm. Consequently, the conflict between the brothers continues, and this struggle for power is enacted upon Lavinia. She functions as a metonymic representation of the state, with her physical body being equated with the body politic. As Titus exclaims 'Treason my lord – Lavinia is surprised' (I.i.287), Bassianus explains that he is taking '*his* betrothed from all the world away' [my emphasis] (I.i.290). Lavinia's assault and abduction are understood as acts of treason that offend the political leader Saturninus, rather than as acts of violence against her as an individual. The broken marriage promise also implicates Titus, who afterwards says 'Follow, my lord, and I'll soon bring her back [*Saturninus does not follow, but exit at the other door with Tamora, her two sons and Aaron the moor*]' (I.i.293). Aggrieved, Saturninus rejects calls to find Lavinia, exclaiming 'no, the emperor needs her not,/ Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock' (I.i.304-305) and instead, proposes marriage to Tamora. The significance of this union may also be understood in terms of Girard's notion of triangular desire: because Tamora is the focus for Titus' desire for revenge, she is an effective instrument of retaliation against him.

In a similar manner, the relationship between Tamora's sons, Chiron and Demetrius, is constituted in the conflict of sibling rivalry and governed primarily by the conventions prescribed by patriarchy. In common with the relationship between Saturninus and Bassianus, the tensions within this relationship often converge upon the female body. Both brothers desire the maternal body and this desire is frequently exploited by Tamora. Their sexual desires, however, focus and converge upon Lavinia:

CHIRON	I am as able and as fit as thou To serve, and to deserve my mistress' grace ... I love Lavinia more than all the world.
DEMETRIUS	Youngling, learn then to make some meaner choice; Lavinia is thine elder brother's hope.

(I.i.533-564)

Ultimately, these desires are both sanctioned and subverted by Tamora, who insists that her sons exact physical retribution upon Lavinia for allegedly plotting against her life: 'Revenge it as you love your mother's life,/ Or be ye not henceforth called my children' (II.ii.114-115). Lavinia's attempts to dissuade Tamora from this course of action are unsuccessful, primarily because the arguments that she makes in her defence are precisely those that have originally given rise to the desire for vengeance. Lavinia's plea, 'O, let me teach thee for my father's sake', is countered by Tamora's warning to her sons:

Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain  
To save your brother from the sacrifice,  
But fierce Andronicus would not relent.  
Therefore away with her and use her as you will:  
The worse to her, the better loved of me.

(II.ii.163-167)

The attack upon Lavinia is figured in response to the 'cruel, irreligious piety' of the Roman rituals invoked by Titus, which required that Tamora's eldest son must die 'T'appease their groaning shadows that are gone' (I.i.97). Girard asserts that 'Violence is not to be denied, but can be diverted to another object' (1988: 4). The lopping of Alarbus' limbs has not served to contain the outbreak of violence but rather to inflame it and in an act of vengeance, Tamora incites her sons to commit rape.

In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the female is always, and can only be, represented within the triangular structures of relationships between men. This relatively simple dynamic provides the framework for the events before, during and after Lucrece's rape. In common with Lavinia, Lucrece's attempts to prevent rape are futile because she is only able to give voice to, and hence, to reaffirm, Tarquin's motivations: Tarquin's desire for her is brought about principally *because* she 'belongs' to Collatine. She argues, 'My husband is thy friend; for his sake spare me' (582) but he silences her, saying 'Have done ... my uncontrolled tide/ Turns not, but swells the higher by this let' (645). In accordance with Girard's suppositions, the obstacles that ought to prevent the realisation of one's desires are the very same as those that initially gave rise to them.

The omniscient narrator who opens the poem describes Lucrece in a discourse of inanimate value, possession and commodity. Her chastity is reduced to a material abstraction, realised in the metaphors of property and commercial value. She is depicted as a 'treasure' (16), a 'priceless wealth (17): she is

Collatine's 'possession' (18), his 'fortune' (19), and something to be appreciated by him as the 'owner' (27). The description of Lucrece as a 'rich jewel' (34) has a dual significance, however, suggesting the value of female chastity in marriage through a comparison with a gem of a high monetary value (Partridge 2001: 165). But money only has value when it forms part of a system of exchange, and the implication here is that Lucrece's value is also produced in this way. Her character is objectified in a discourse of male power where her worth is derived from her potential value in an exchange between men.

The double meanings of 'jewel' are deployed in a similar way in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* where, once again, a woman's chastity is a critical issue among men. Posthumous, exiled and living in Rome, insists that in his absence, his wife Imogen 'holds her virtue still' (I.v.62). Challenged by the Italian, Iachimo, who claims that he 'must not so far prefer her 'fore ours of Italy' (I.v.63), Posthumous agrees to a wager in which a diamond ring, gifted to him by Imogen, will be won by Iachimo if he successfully seduces her. Iachimo reasons, 'if I come off, and leave her in such honour as you have trust in, she your jewel, this your jewel, and my gold are yours' (I.v.148-150). The way in which women are objectified as units of exchange is realised in a strikingly literal way here as the diamond functions as a reification of Imogen's chastity, and is presented as its monetary equivalent.

Tarquin is implicitly aware of Lucrece's 'value' and recognises that 'she is not

her own' (241). He can only conceptualise the rape and the possible repercussions as they figure for Collatine and his male counterparts, and as he rehearses the potential consequences of his actions, he asks,

If Collatinus dream of my intent,  
 Will he not wake, and in a desp'rate rage  
 Post hither, this vile purpose to prevent? -  
 This siege that engirt his marriage  
 (218-221)

The primacy of relations between men is so deeply ingrained in the social structure that it is implicitly understood that Collatine will perceive the rape as a 'siege that engirt *his* marriage'. Tarquin thinks only about the way in which the rape will affect Collatine, and indeed, how Collatine's discovery will subsequently affect him. The military metaphor of the siege affirms the often-violent agency of the patriarchal structures of power within which the rape will be understood. But even more unsettling than Tarquin's disregard for Lucrece, however, is his list of the circumstances in which the rape would be acceptable. He reasons:

Had Collatinus kill'd my son or sire,  
 Or lain in ambush to betray my life;  
 Or were he not my dear friend, this desire  
 Might have excuse to work upon his wife,  
 As in revenge or quittal of such strife;  
     But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,  
     The shame and fault finds no excuse nor end.  
 (233-238)

Rape was considered an acceptable way for one man to exact vengeance on another. Indeed, Tarquin proves to be the embodiment of a male discourse which insisted that female experience must always be subordinate to the

interests of men. Writing specifically about the Ovidian literary tradition, Lynn Enterline observes that 'rape is the call that interpellates the female subject. The call of rape requires ... female characters to recognize themselves as "female" in a peculiarly violent form of socially determined subjection' (2000: 158). Rape is the call that requires Lucrece to acknowledge, and to a certain extent accept, her subject position within the ideology that defines her. What is more, this position is produced in response to a latent but pervasive threat which, by virtue of her sex, she is simultaneously subject to and culpable for.

In her influential reading of the representation of rape in the Philomela myth, Patricia Klindienst Joplin pursues the implications of Girard's study for women. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard examines the way in which culture works to impose limits upon violence. Specifically, Joplin urges a reconsideration of the significance of the mechanism of the surrogate victim.

Girard suggests that

Ritual is founded on a double substitution. The first, which passes unperceived, is the substitution of one member of the community for all, brought about through the operation of the surrogate victim. The second, the only truly 'ritualistic' substitution, is superimposed on the first. It is the substitution of a victim belonging to a predetermined sacrificial category for the original victim. The surrogate victim comes from inside the community and the ritual victim must come from outside; otherwise the community might find it difficult to unite against it (1988: 102).

Joplin argues that Girard, in common with Lévi-Strauss, 'tends to equate the male point of view with culture, so that he does not pause to see how the woman, in exchange, becomes the surrogate victim for the group' (1991: 43).

Through her violation, the woman's position as 'Other' is both reaffirmed and negated; she functions as the surrogate victim, a focus for the violent energies which would otherwise spill out into relationships between men. The woman's body is ascribed a symbolic function, as Joplin goes on to explain: '[t]he exchange of women articulates the culture's boundaries, the woman's hymen serving as the physical or sexual sign for the limen or wall defining the city's limits' (1991: 43). Consequently, the woman is necessarily both within and out-with culture. In Rome, the bodies of Lavinia and Lucrece fulfil a symbolic function, representing the totality of relationships among men and as such, operating as metonymic representations of the body politic. However, this representative agency denies women's interaction in the very relationships they symbolise.

Rape constitutes an act of violence committed inside and against the body of Rome, requiring appeasement with an act of violence directed against those outside Rome. In this way, the community unites against an external enemy on behalf of a transgression against a symbolic representative of Roman culture.

Girard explains that

The rite aims at the most profound state of peace known to any community: the peace that follows the sacrificial crisis and results from the unanimous accord generated by the surrogate victim. To banish the evil emanations that accumulate within the community and to recapture the freshness of this original experience are one and the same task. Whether order reigns supreme or whether its reign is already challenged, the same model, the same plan of action is invariably proposed. It is the plan, associated with the victorious resolution of all communal crises, that involves violence against the surrogate victim (1988: 103).



In *Titus Andronicus*, the rape of Lavinia not only leads to the death of her attackers, Chiron and Demetrius, but also to the deaths of their mother Tamora, and Tamora's husband, the emperor Saturninus. The threat Tamora posed to the patriarchal order as a licentious and unfaithful wife is removed, and with Titus' death, the political struggles which have characterised the drama are put aside as Lucius assumes power with an aim to 'govern so/ To heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe' (V.iii.146-7). In a positive attempt to restore the violated metaphor of the body politic, Marcus calls to the Romans, 'O let me teach you how to knit again/ This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf,/ These broken limbs again into one body' (V.iii.69-71). Similarly, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, the violence she experiences as the surrogate victim serves to bind the community together and helps to resolve the communal crisis. Shakespeare's narrative poem does not close with Lucrece's 'execution on herself' (*Titus Andronicus*, V.iii.75), but with the removal of the Tarquins and the change of the state government from kings to consuls. And when the Romans 'did bear dead Lucrece thence/ To show her bleeding body thorough Rome' (1850-1851), parading her body as a symbol of the offence done to the political body of Rome, they restore the 'profound state of peace ... that follows the sacrificial crisis'. As Derek Cohen explains, '[p]atriarchy renews itself – with a self-conscious nod to heroic tragic necessity – through the killing of an innocent woman' (1993: 80).

For women, however, as Lacan observes, ‘there’s something insurmountable, let us say unacceptable, in the fact of being placed in the position of an object in the symbolic order, to which, on the other hand, she is entirely subjected no less than the man (1988: 262). In this symbolic order, women are reduced to signifiers, dependent upon differential relationships between men for their meaning, and conceptualised, like language itself, as radically ‘Other’. As Girard asserts, ‘[t]o refer to the origin of symbolic thought is to speak as well of the origin of language’ (1988: 235). Elissa Marder suggests that ‘[t]he sexual violation of the woman’s body is itself embedded in discursive and symbolic structures’ (1992: 158) and it is my contention that language, as the transcendent discursive and symbolic structure, is the collateral site of women’s violation. Entry into language is necessarily a violation of sorts: as Derrida writes, ‘violence did not exist before the possibility of speech’ (2001: 146). Alexandre Kojève postulated that ‘[m]an becomes conscious of himself at the moment when – for the ‘first’ time – he says “I.” To understand man by understanding his “origin” is, therefore, to understand the origin of the I revealed by speech’ (1969: 3). Lacan pursues this idea in his work on the mirror stage, arguing that this moment of the assumption and recognition of the subject position ‘I’ – what Kojève calls consciousness – is also the genesis of the unconscious, and the genesis of desire. When the subject enters into the symbolic order, which, as Žižek explains, is ‘a formal order which supplements and/ or disrupts the dual relationship of ‘external’ factual reality and ‘internal’ subjective experience’ (1989: 19) they are subjected to an experience of irreparable absence or lack. Žižek continues:

The very existence of man *qua* being-of-language stands thus under the sign of an irreducible and constitutive lack: we are submerged in the universe of signs which forever present us from attaining the Thing; so-called 'external reality' itself is already 'structured like a language', that is, its meaning is always already overdetermined by the symbolic framework which structures our perception of reality (1996a: 95).

In the patriarchal culture of Renaissance England, the way in which external reality was structured like a language – that is to say, the way in which certain sign-systems were privileged as natural or necessary ways of recognising meaning – had insidious and inescapable realities for women: language, as Coward and Ellis remind us, is 'the place in which the social individual is constructed' (1977: 1).

Both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are thematically concerned with the language of violence. Violence cannot be dissociated from the language used to describe it and each text demonstrates an acute awareness of the way in which language and rhetorical practices generate, transmit, represent and effect violence. The texts engage with the contestation of the meanings of violence, and the self-conscious attention to the language used reflects and effects 'a struggle for meaning on the terrain of the linguistic sign itself' (Drakakis 2001: 21). But at an even more basic level, the violence enacted against the women occurs in the 'struggle between speech and the suppression of speech' (Kahn 1991: 143). The violated women are largely denied a public voice and rather than having the capacity for self-representation, Lucrece and

Lavinia are constrained by their position as both subject and object of the patriarchal discourse.

*Titus Andronicus* engages with the struggle between the imperative to speak and the limits of representation, interrogating the relationship between, and the political implications of, the processes of inscription and interpretation. The rape of Lavinia appears as the material reality of this conflict. During the assault, Lavinia's hands are cut off and her tongue is cut out. In an act of violence instigated by Tamora and intended to be interpreted as a wrong against Titus, a discourse of vengeance is forcibly inscribed upon her body.

Chiron and Demetrius revel in their offence, jeering at Lavinia:

DEMETRIUS	So, now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak, Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee.
CHIRON	Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so, And if thy stumps will let thee, play the scribe.
DEMETRIUS	See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl.

(II.iii.1-5)

The brothers are conscious of the difficulties that she will now face in any attempt to represent the events of her violation. The project is not impossible, however, and we are told she is still able to 'scrawl' and 'play the scribe'; however, by hindering Lavinia's ability to represent herself, and, by implication, her father's ability to interpret her, Tamora and her sons have inflicted unthinkable cruelty upon their enemies. In Renaissance culture, the tongue was identified as the corporeal location of language; consequently, the excision of Lavinia's tongue signifies more than the removal of her physical ability to speak. The tongue symbolised the materiality of language and

therefore, without her tongue, Lavinia is without agency. The *Old Testament* book of *Proverbs* asserts that '[d]eath and life are in the power of the tongue' (18:21), and without her tongue, Lavinia quite literally has no power over her life. She dies at the hands of her father who kills her to prevent the material realities of the discourse of shame to which she would inevitably be subject after her rape. Having been sexually violated and sullied by the vocabulary of unchastity, Lucrece is a debased signifier and no longer an acceptable unit of currency for exchange between men.

Initially Lavinia is unintelligible. This is frustrating for Titus and Marcus whose preliminary attempts to understand her seem futile. Marcus is the first to discover Lavinia in her mutilated state and presses his niece for information, prompting her, 'Speak, gentle niece ... Why dost not speak to me?' (II.iii.21). She is unable to participate in his discourse and is similarly unable to be read as a signifier but Marcus' willingness to ventriloquise her voice proves unsettling. He conjectures that 'some Tereus hath deflowered thee/ And lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue' (II.iii.26). In a peculiarly disturbing moment he asks, 'Shall I speak for thee?' (II.iii.33), thereby suggesting that a male discourse, as it is assimilated and reproduced by a female subject, is then articulated by a man. This breakdown in communication emphasises the inconsistencies inherent in the ruling, male-dominated discourse and demonstrates the ease with which its ability to signify may be disrupted. As Patricia Klindienst Joplin observes, 'behind ... woman's silence is the incomplete plot of male dominance' (1991: 39).

Titus also maintains the pressure upon Lavinia, pleading 'Speak Lavinia ... Or make some sign how I may do thee ease' (III.i.122). His masculine desire to be able to understand her in accordance with male systems of signification is thwarted as a result of male agency. Undeterred, he affirms:

I can interpret all her martyred signs –  
 ... Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,  
 Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,  
 But I of these will wrest an alphabet  
 And by still practice learn to know thy meaning.  
 (III.ii.36-45)

His ability to understand has been thwarted by his daughter's rape and mutilation. By disrupting and thus drawing attention to the mechanisms normally used in the processes of interpretation, Tamora and her sons have violently exposed Titus' subjection to the structures of language. This radically overturns traditional notions of gender and effectively emasculates Titus in a violation that parallels that of his daughter.

Eventually, however, Titus goes some way to overcoming the crisis in signification through his desire to 'wrest' – to obtain forcefully and even to distort – the meanings of her mutilated body. Lavinia partially manages to convey her literally unspeakable experiences only by making reference to another text:

	<i>[Lavinia turns over the books]</i>
TITUS	Some book there is that she desires to see ... Come and take choice of all my library ... Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so?
BOY	Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's <i>Metamorphosis</i> ...
TITUS	Lavinia shall I read?

This is the tragic tale of Philomel,  
 And treats of Tereus' treason and his rape –  
 And rape, I fear, was root of thy annoy.  
 See, brother, see: note how she quotes the leaves.  
 (IV.i.31 -50)

MARCUS

At the point at which language's capacity to signify threatens to collapse, Ovid's text, which recounts the rape of Philomela, traverses the gap. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* formed part of the grammar school curriculum and functioned not only as a source for much Renaissance literature, but also as a cultural cornerstone from which to situate the 'unspeakable' discourse of rape. However, as Stephanie Jed explains, in the humanist tradition, 'the narrative in which violence is figured is coded in such a way as to disguise the violence it exercises' (1989: 29). Philomela is raped, mutilated and rendered mute by her brother-in-law Tereus. Unable to speak of her violation, she weaves the details of her assault into a tapestry, which she sends to her sister Procne, and together the women exact a violent revenge, murdering Itys, Procne's and Tereus' son, and feeding him to an unwitting Tereus. Lavinia's attack is modelled on the account of the rape in Ovid's text: Chiron and Demetrius are clearly familiar with the myth of Philomela, and to ensure that Lavinia does not follow Philomela 'and in a tedious sampler sew her mind' (II.iii.50), thereby disclosing their identities, they cut off her hands. But the myth does not wholly explain or account for Lavinia's experiences, providing at best an approximation of her situation. The similarity of the attacks occurs only at the level of the violence inflicted by men, not in the reactions or agency of the women. There is a marked disparity between the reaction of Philomela, who

actively participates in a horrific act of revenge that radically disturbs the politico-sacrificial rituals of classical Greece, and Lavinia, who is killed by her father 'Because the girl should not survive her shame' (V.iii.40). As Jane Newman suggests, Shakespeare's text engages with 'an ideology of gender that represses traditions of female political agency ... threatening to patriarchy' (1994: 307). But more than this, the conspicuous mismatching, the lack of complete correspondence calls attention to the inherent difficulties of the signifying process and highlights the impossibility of Lavinia's situation: there can never be an exact correspondence between signifier and signified, and there will never be a way for her to articulate her experience which is not inflected by the dominant masculine ideology. Gillian Murray Kendall argues:

When the disfigured Lavinia enters, it is as if she were no longer simply a character in the play but an emblem ... of the way in which, throughout the play, facts resist the violent manner in which characters define and transform their world through language (1989: 305-306).

Lavinia's gesture towards the text of the *Metamorphoses* is symptomatic of the double-bind of the female subject: the only way in which she can express herself is through a reference to a text which has shaped the physical realities of her assault, and will inform the subsequent interpretation of it. Lavinia is thoroughly subjected to physical and linguistic violence: she is raped, physically denied a voice, and symbolically excluded from the processes of inscribing and interpreting the meanings of the violence committed against her. Ultimately, Lavinia's rape is recuperated for political knowledge, and made culturally significant as the catalyst for the restitution of the patriarchal social



order. As a result of the violence she sustains, she fulfils the role of Rome's surrogate victim and allows the community to unite in avenging her attackers. By creating a focus for the aggressive energies inherent within the community, she prevents the inevitable outbreak of violence from turning inwards upon the community itself. Through her actual physical violation she enables Rome's metaphorically broken limbs to be re-membered in a reinvigorated body politic.

In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the violence Lucrece experiences is demonstrably bound up with language. Without the visual dimension of *Titus Andronicus*, the poem relies solely upon words and the narrative form allows Lucrece's voice to be clearly heard. But although Lucrece is given the space to speak she struggles to articulate her experience of violence, which is by its very nature unsharable. Elaine Scarry explains that '[a] great deal ... is at stake in the attempt to invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language' (1985: 6) and when men inflict violence upon women, there is a great deal at stake for both parties. The linguistic structures employed by Lucrece are not 'invented' in isolation from the patriarchal imperatives which objectify women and encode the meanings of the violence committed against them. However, the poem goes some way towards exposing the way in which the triangular structures of desire, which give rise to violence, are embedded within language and are replicated and developed within linguistic structures. In addition, it interrogates the violent effects of a signifying system which largely excludes women from the process

of contesting and prioritising its meanings and demonstrates that the difficulties of articulating violence can profoundly amplify its effects.

In the poem, Shakespeare insists on a direct link between rhetoric and desire and foregrounds this relationship in the opening lines by making subtle but consequential alterations to the story of Lucrece familiar to Renaissance readers of Ovid's *Fasti*. In contrast to Ovid's narrative, which suggests that it is the sight of Lucrece's 'figure' (Shakespeare 1969: 199) that induces Tarquin's desires, in the poem, his 'keen appetite' is stimulated verbally by 'that "name" of chaste', that is to say, by Collatine's rhetoric. The military context for this description highlights the primacy of relationships between men, and in this environment, the discourse of chastity encodes the homosocial relationships functioning at interpersonal and more broadly political levels. Tarquin desires Lucrece before he sees her because 'Haply that name of "chaste" unhapp'ly set/This bateless edge on his keen appetite' (8-9). Collatine's language of blazon has a devastating perlocutionary effect and, as Nancy Vickers affirms, it is necessary to examine 'the limits – indeed the dangers – of that inherited, insufficient, descriptive rhetoric' (1985: 96).

One of the principal limitations of Collatine's descriptive rhetoric lies in its fundamental paradox: if Collatine kept Lucrece's 'value' secret its discursive power would be negated. The language of blazon, in which men praise women in an all male environment, is necessarily predicated upon a series of male objectives and, as is frequently the case with an elegy, and consistent with an

elegy's origins in absence, these commendations tell us more about the speaker than the subject. Blazon removes and denies female agency: as a discourse implicitly predicated upon sexual chastity, a measure of female virtue required by men, measured by men and defined by men, it removes from women the possibility of self-definition and self-representation. Indeed, as Vickers indicates, '[t]he canonical legacy of description in praise of beauty is, after all, a legacy shaped predominantly by the male imagination for the male imagination; it is, in large part, the product of men talking to men about women' (1985: 96). However, whilst male domination was certainly achieved largely through the appropriation of the female voice, the status of rhetoric cannot be unequivocally aligned with the notion of male power. Wayne Rebhorn explains:

For the Renaissance ... the orator was a potentially problematic figure because men were supposed to be warriors and knights, models of the active life, doers rather than talkers; by contrast, words – and hence rhetoric – were associated with women. As a result, the man who played the orator ran the risk of appearing effeminate so that the defenders of rhetoric were led to emphasise his masculine power in order to protect him (2000: 10).

With a narrative predicated upon the idea of rape as 'unspeakable', Shakespeare acknowledges this debate and participates in it, exploring the implications of rhetoric, for both men and women, throughout the poem.

The hyperbolic language of blazon exemplified by the Petrarchan tradition figuratively disintegrated the female body in a poetic discourse, which, by praising the beauty of individual body parts in isolation, did violence to the

image and symbol of the coherent female body. Taking a critique of the Petrarchan tradition as a starting point, *The Rape of Lucrece* continually seeks to question the desires that it replicates and generates. The politics of the Petrarchan aesthetic are highlighted, not only because they inform the poetic conventions of the Renaissance, but also because they are informed by a patriarchal discourse with potentially malevolent undercurrents. In her discussion of Petrarch's legacy, Vickers states:

By situating blazon within a story, Shakespeare's narrative provides a locus for reading this specific mode of description not as isolated icon, but rather as motivated discourse positioned within a specific context that produces and consumes it. *Lucrece* thus reveals the rhetorical strategies that descriptive occasions generate, and underlines the potential consequences of being female matter for male oratory (1985: 96).

The choice of the narrative poem format calls the fragmented Petrarchan discourse to account. The reader is encouraged to situate it within a wider political economy and to recognise that it operates within patriarchal structures that serve to reproduce the conditions of their production. Therefore, in a self-reflexive movement, this text provokes a questioning of the role of literature, and indeed the reader, in the production and maintenance of the values represented by the Petrarchan tradition.

The Petrarchan 'celebration' of the female body is instantly problematised. We are told that 'Collatine unwisely did not let/To praise the clear unmatched red and white/Which triumphed in that sky of his delight' (10-12). His triumphant praise of Lucrece directly compromises his authority and this tension is fore-

grounded by the narrator who questions his actions calling his 'shallow tongue' a 'niggard prodigal' (179). We are told:

Beauty itself doth of itself persuade  
 The eyes of men without an orator;  
 What needeth then apologies be made,  
 To set forth that which is so singular?  
 Or why is Collatine the publisher  
     Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown  
     From thievish ears, because it is his own?  
(29-35)

The idea that beauty persuades without need of an orator suggests the redundancy of rhetoric. However, the narrator simultaneously affirms its performativity, criticising the effects of Collatine's publication of the value of something which should remain hidden from public view. By openly extolling her virtues, Collatine has engaged in a discourse that he simultaneously constructs and is constructed by; in contrast, Lucrece remains able only to reify Collatine's subject position within these structures. Collatine's role as 'publisher' of 'that rich jewel' of her chastity goes some way to imply the profound limitations of her agency. Not only does her husband praise her chastity, a relative quality required and quantified principally by men, but he also circumscribes her agency, both wilfully and unwittingly.

Tarquin is able to exploit Lucrece's vulnerable position within this signifying system by manipulating the structures that have enabled the subjugation of women. His privileged relationship with male-dominated political and social institutions such as marriage, the military, and the bonds of male friendship, affords him considerable control over others. He is acutely aware of the

power that a discourse may exert, and warns Lucrece that if she resists, 'I purpose to destroy thee' (514). He intends to avoid discovery and punishment through a displacement of a crudely literal kind:

some worthless slave of thine I'll slay,  
To kill thine honour with thy life's decay;  
And in thy dead arms do I mean to place him,  
Swearing I slew, seeing thee embrace him.  
(515)<sup>6</sup>

His main threat, however, is that he will re-write the actual events of the rape, both literally and figuratively, and publish them to ensure her infamy. He claims her offspring will be 'blurr'd with nameless bastardy'. Here of course, the children would be 'nameless', in as much as they would have no known father: an indication of the power of language and naming in a patrilineal system. He goes on:

And thou, the author of their obloquy,  
Shalt have thy trespass cited up in rhymes  
And sung by children in succeeding times.  
(523)

Lucrece's agency is restricted and appropriated by male censorship. Tarquin manipulates the relationship between language and memorialisation, forcing her to ventriloquise his narrative. Lucrece is endangered by her own voice, which Tarquin threatens to appropriate and use as an instrument of her physical and psychological subordination.

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<sup>6</sup> This same form of displacement is found later in *Macbeth*, where the protagonist murders Duncan and frames the King's servants:

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd had done't:  
Their hands and faces were all badg'd with blood;  
So were their daggers, which, unwip'd, we found  
Upon their pillows

(II.iii.99-102)

In his prior contemplation of the murder, Macbeth imagines how 'wither'd Murther ... with Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design/ Moves like a ghost' (II.i.52-56) and Kenneth Muir notes the parallels between Macbeth's soliloquy and *Lucrece* (162-168).

The narrative explores the materiality of language, and in particular, the mutually constitutive relationship between language and the body. Lucrece's experience of the effects of rape serves to demonstrate their indivisibility; at critical moments in the text the distinction between the linguistic and the corporeal is difficult to determine. Chastity is a prime example of a discourse made manifest on the body. Lucrece, first described to the reader as 'chaste', is its embodiment. As a paradigm of sexual purity, she occasions praise in the language of blazon employed by her husband; however, this patriarchal language has been inscribed upon her to such an extent that she herself, as a text, *is* a language of blazon. Whilst she is figured in her husband's approbation, her body acts as its own orator, 'speaking' through its beauty. Lynn Enterline argues that 'Shakespeare's narrator insists that the usually functional differences between language and the body, representations and event, verge on collapse' (2000: 153). But the issue here is not the qualitative distinctions: bodies always have the power to signify, and representations never simply represent, but always constitute an event in their own right. The problem for Lucrece is that her capacity to generate meaning is wholly dependent upon the way in which she is interpreted. Lucrece is reduced to a signifier, meaningful only through interactions between men. The effects of these concurrent orations of blazon and body language culminate during the rape of Lucrece, effecting a simultaneous affirmation and negation of the patriarchal system.

The rhetoric Lucrece employs alters conspicuously after she is raped. A different voice emerges out of the struggle to articulate the 'unspeakable' events of her violation, and although she promises 'my tongue shall utter all' (1076), it is unclear whether her pledge constitutes an attempt to subvert the structures to which she is subject, or whether it marks the point at which she fully assumes the conditions of her subjectivity. Before the rape, Tarquin threatens 'Yield to my love: if not, enforced hate/ Instead of love's coy touch, shall rudely tear thee' (668-669). Lucrece's abject fear is discernible in her speech, which loses its grammatical coherence as she misplaces punctuation and is arrested mid-sentence:

Her modest eloquence with sighs is mixed,  
Which to her oratory adds more grace.  
She puts the period often from his place,  
And 'midst sentence so her accent breaks  
That twice she doth begin ere once she speaks.  
(563-567)

The insufficiency of language is suggested by her sighs, which have the capacity to signify out-with the bonds of language. In a continued effort to dissuade Tarquin, she challenges conventional distinctions between language and the body, exploiting the rhetorical potential of a corporeal body language. She pleads, 'If ever man were moved with woman's moans,/ Be moved with my tears, my sighs, my groans.' (587-588). In contrast to this confused and disordered outcry, her use of language after the rape displays a more sophisticated rhetoric.

The narrator depicts the rape itself, saying simply, 'The wolf has seiz'd his



prey, the poor lamb cries' (677). But this moment of crisis where violence interpellates Lucrece as a female subject is described through the dehumanising metaphor of a wolf attacking a lamb. This choice of metaphor encodes dangerous assumptions about gendered subjectivity because it suggests a troubling essentialism: the wolf is, by its very nature, programmed to act aggressively; the meek lamb, according to the laws of nature, is its prey. However, the human physicality of the assault is exposed with the portrayal of Tarquin 'Cooling his hot face in the chastest tears' (682). The heat of his face betrays a combination of sexual excitement and aggression, the grotesque and ineffable realities of the rape.

After the rape, Lucrece protests:

If it should be told,  
 The repetition cannot make it less;  
 For more it is than I can well express,  
     And that deep torture may be called a hell  
     When more is felt than one hath power to tell.  
(1284-1288)

Rape has continued to be recounted and reproduced in myths, rhymes, ballads, plays and poetry, but its continual reworking in various linguistic structures does not alter its fundamental 'unrepresentability'. It does, however, facilitate the repetition of limited descriptions in a continuous attempt to harness and assimilate its disruptive potential. After the assault, Lucrece displays a profound understanding of the implications of her situation, and the linguistic basis of the difficulties she will soon face. She identifies the linguistic life of communal rituals: the story telling, balladry, gossip-mongering and



Aware of her limited capacity for self-representation, Lucrece seeks to uphold the reputation of her husband. Recognising that the image of the female subject necessarily holds up a mirror to that of the male, she asks, 'Let my good name, that senseless reputation,/ For Collatine's dear love be kept unspotted' (820-821). Lucrece acknowledges that her body functions as the locus of a number of competing discourses and that the inscriptions upon her body constitute the materiality of the conflict. She remarks that 'The light will show character'd in my brow/ The story of sweet chastity's decay (807-808). Indeed, Lucrece believes that her body has been transcribed into a signifier of rape:

the illiterate that know not how  
To cipher what is writ in learned books,  
Will quote my loathsome trespass in my looks.  
(810-812)

Those excluded from learned literacy would, in English Renaissance culture, include the majority of women, who were denied access to a grammar school education. The classical source materials for Shakespeare's narrative were made familiar to schoolboys through humanist pedagogy. However, Lynn Enterline observes that

Not only does the rape propel Lucrece from silence into the poem's discursive orbit ... but her entry into the poem's discourse follows the perverse logic of a violent pedagogical curriculum. Lucrece ... when chaste, could not decipher sexual double meanings. But the ravished Lucrece is retrospectively aware of the dangerous errancies of language that once eluded her (2000: 158).

This demonstrates her unprecedented understanding of the way in which she

has been posited within a phallogocentric system of signification. As a signifier of both the chaste and the defiled, what she signifies and her capacity to signify are dependent upon male mediation.

With this increased rhetorical sophistication and understanding of double meanings comes a heightened apprehension of the limitations of language. Lucrece is faced with the necessary but impossible task of speaking the unspeakable. Not only must she represent the experience of rape but she must also represent herself. She is called upon to represent a violation which renders her defining characteristic fundamentally absent through an insufficient system of signification that is itself predicated on absence. These representational difficulties mean that, 'Sometime her grief is dumb and hath no words,/ Sometime 'tis mad and too much talk affords' (1105-1106). She is propelled into an experience of the abject, which, as Kristeva suggests 'is a wellspring of sign for a non-object', and is confronted by an impossibility, the symptom of which is 'a language that gives up' (1982: 11). In an effort to articulate this, she exclaims:

Out idle words, servants to shallow fools,  
Unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators! ...  
This helpless smoke of words doth me no right  
(1016-1027)

Lucrece is sensible of the inherent obstacles presented by a language that operates for and on behalf of what Lacan calls the Law of the Father. Words work to conceal and obscure her meaning.

Lynn Enterline has suggested that Shakespeare's project in *The Rape of Lucrece* is to rise to the challenge posed by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (2000) and to give a voice to Lucrece. But, as Jonathan Goldberg asks, 'Who or what speaks in the character we call Lucrece?' (1985: 118). Her desire for revenge and her ultimate suicide may suggest that she has been thoroughly intersected by a patriarchal discourse to the extent that she reproduces it as her own. But her actions may also be understood as a testament to the fact that she is conscious of the constraints placed upon women and is working within them. She asks 'Revenge on him that made me stop my breath' (1180) and,

prepares to write,  
 First hovering o'er the paper with her quill;  
 Conceit and grief an eager combat fight,  
 What wit sets down is blotted straight with will:  
 This is too curious-good, this blunt and ill.  
     Much like a press of people at a door,  
     Throng her inventions, which shall go before.  
(1296-1302)

The internal conflict between 'conceit and grief', combined with her earlier assertion that 'Myself thy friend will kill myself thy foe' (1196) may at first suggest the subversive potential of Lucrece's actions. However, this idea is problematised in the light of Žižek's statement that:

Ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich person beneath it. The position 'not all is ideology, beneath the ideological mask, I am also a human person,' is the very form of ideology, of its 'practical efficiency' (1996b: 97).

So, when she asserts, 'How Tarquin must be us'd, read it in me' (1195), she is writing from within the same structures that she wishes to denounce, calling

upon the very discourse which she has tried to cast off. The signs that will be read in her corpse are those that have been produced and inscribed by the patriarchal discourse that has simultaneously enabled and condemned her rape. As Žižek observes, '[e]verything hinges on the crucial fact that the Law is already split in itself, which is why an all too direct identification with it cripples its functioning' (1996: 99). Although patriarchy prioritises relationships between men, producing a system in which women function as units of exchange, its hierarchical organisation nevertheless allows for the possibility of conflict between men. This conflict is necessarily enacted upon the bodies of women, whose limited powers of representation ensure that they reflect relationships with and between men. Ultimately, as Jane Newman suggests, the 'script played out by the Lucretia story [is] a script that blames the victim, allows her to internalise guilt, and defines her as an agent of political change solely in terms of a male's ability to avenge her' (1994: 304-305).

In the closing lines of the narrative, Collatine struggles to interpret both the sexual assault and the violence Lucrece suffered at her own hands.<sup>7</sup> The narrator describes how,

The deep vexation of his inward soul  
Hath serv'd a dumb arrest upon his tongue;

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst the focus here is on sexual violence, important issues are raised by Lucrece's suicide. The consternation of Lucrece's husband and family at her wilful self-harm demonstrates that her suicide was not considered to be inevitable. Augustine, in *The City of God*, asks 'if she be an adulteresse, why is she commended? If shee bee chaste why did she kill her selfe?' (1610: 31), and he argues that violence may be done to the body while the mind remains inviolate. This issue comes into play in the text and her suicide is, therefore, morally ambiguous. The black blood emitted by her corpse would suggest, however, that she is sullied by the rape and that her chastity has been violated.



of the violated body. Unable to speak, she physically represents the limitations tacitly imposed upon women in Renaissance society. In contrast, a substantial proportion of the narrative poem is devoted to Lucrece's voice. In both instances, however, the women encounter severe representational difficulties.

Shakespeare's representations of rape call attention to, and contribute to the process of prioritising and marginalising the various meanings of sexual assault. In Renaissance England, rape constituted a threat against which the full significance of the discursively produced values of female conduct could be realised. The process of ascribing meanings necessarily involves the dominant ideology's active suppression and exclusion of many other possible meanings. These texts explore the way in which violence is done to women by the signifying process itself and demonstrate the suffering caused by the operations of language. Each text highlights the impossibility of ever providing an accurate representation of events. Lavinia must represent herself through an inadequate but culturally familiar narrative and Lucrece finds that her meanings disappear in a 'helpless smoke of words'. The full realities of their experiences of violence are not registered in the symbolic order because their bodies, which function as signifiers, are appropriated by the hegemonic patriarchal ideology and assigned a meaning through a process over which they have no control. But simultaneously, Lucrece and Lavinia are subject to the symbolic order in which the patriarchal interpretations of their chaste and violated bodies assume a relational significance. Consequently, the language in which their experiences are articulated is, as Katherine Eisaman Maus suggests



'as much constitutive and symptomatic' (1986: 72). Shakespeare's representations of rape demonstrate that language and violence are inseparable: it is language which enables violence to assume a cultural currency, and to become something communicable. It is through language that meanings are ascribed to violent acts, but a violent act, like a linguistic signifier, does not have an innate and fixed correspondence with the meaning it assumes.

## Chapter Four

### 'Death made an end of them'<sup>1</sup>

I  
 In his study of mortality and identity in the English Renaissance, Michael Neill argues that 'tragedy ... was among the principal instruments by which the culture of early modern England reinvented death' (1997: 3). It is my contention that the violent spectacle of public execution can be identified as another agent in this process of reinvention. The brutal realities of state executions informed the experiences of the early modern public, directly influencing the way in which death was represented and conceptualised. As J. A. Sharpe has noted, executions 'took place at, or at least near, the grass roots of ... society' (1985: 166), and it was the intention of the state that these demonstrations of power be highly visible and fulfil a didactic function, thereby contributing towards an exceptionally violent form of social subjection.

The spectacle of execution involved violence on a level qualitatively and quantitatively unparalleled in Renaissance England. On average, more than 375 people were executed each year during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I (Barker 1993: 173).<sup>2</sup> Hanging was the most common form of capital punishment, and was, without exception, a horrific affair: it was unthinkable

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this chapter is published as "Death Made an End of Them': Narrative Representations of Executions in the English Renaissance' in *The Aesthetics and Pragmatics of Violence*, Hensen and Pankratz (eds.) (2001: 57-67).

<sup>2</sup> Barker notes that this figure only represents a portion of the number of people executed annually during the period. It does not take account of the executions passed by the higher courts or those occasioned by the special sessions of Oyer and Terminer (1993: 169-179). For a detailed breakdown of the assize records see Cockburn (1985).

painful, intentionally degrading and physical shame and lasting infamy were explicit aims of the punishment. The classical treatise on rhetoric *Ad Herennium* advises on the art of memory explaining that '[w]e ought ... to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so ... if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood' (cited in Yates 1966: 25-26). The physical realities of an execution were undoubtedly rendered memorable with the stain of blood, as Francis Barker describes:

Men, women and children in 'Shakespeare's England' were strung up on permanent or makeshift gallows by a hempen noose. Sometimes the spinal chord was snapped at once; or they hung by their necks until they suffocated or drowned; until their brains died of hypoxeia, or until the shock killed them. Pissing and shitting themselves. Bleeding from their eyes (1993: 190).

People regularly gathered in large numbers to watch public executions. Such displays of the state's authority were indeed highly memorable. For the most serious offences, however, the violence of the punishment was further intensified.<sup>3</sup>

On 20 and 21 September 1586, fourteen men were executed for their involvement in the Babington conspiracy. Sir Francis Walsingham's extensive intelligence network had discovered a plot to assassinate Elizabeth I and install the Roman Catholic Mary Stuart on the throne. In August the conspirators

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<sup>3</sup> Julius Ruff notes that '[i]n print materials describing executions, the vast majority of the condemned die for homicide. But murder was not the most frequent capital offence, at least in England where statistics from court records have been compared to the numbers of murderers in popular literature. Indeed, three-quarters of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century executions in some English jurisdictions were for mundane crimes against property, not murder' (2001: 30).

were tried and convicted, before being condemned to death with the customary death sentence for high treason:

You are to be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, and there you are to be hanged by the neck, and being alive cut down, and your privy-members to be cut off, and your bowels to be taken out of your belly and there burned, you being alive; and your head to be cut off, and your body to be divided into four quarters, and that your head and quarters be disposed of where his majesty shall think fit (Baker 1977: 42).

On the day of their execution, the men were taken from the Tower through London to Holborne, and in accordance with convention, would probably have stopped *en route* for a last drink. After a lengthy procession, the men arrived at an area near St. Giles where an unusually high scaffold had been erected in anticipation of a massive crowd.

The dramatic discovery of the conspiracy and the severe punishment meted out to the conspirators gave rise to a number of ballads, pamphlets and broadsides. Here, the focus will be on one account of the executions, written by George Whetstone. His narrative describes the events from a Protestant viewpoint, and is dedicated to William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, the chief advisor to Elizabeth I. Whetstone's 'Censure of a loyall Subject' is written in the form of a dialogue between three men; Walker, 'a godlie devine', Weston 'a discreet Gentleman', and Wilcocks, 'a substantial Clothier' (1587: A3<sup>r</sup>). The dialogue opens with Wilcocks's news that:

fourteene of those ranke traitors that sought to bereave the Queenes most excellent Maiestie of her life ... have made their confession at the gallowes: for my eies saw their traiterous harts burned, and bodillesse heads advanced to the view and comfort of manye thousands of people (1587: A3<sup>r</sup>).

The subsequent description of the hangings and disembowelings as 'a happy sight' makes it clear that the spectators were encouraged to share a common gratification in the administration of justice. Despite the horrific nature of the punishments, spectators were, as Foucault claims, required to be 'witnesses, the guarantors of the punishment, and ... they must to a certain extent take part in it' (1979: 58).

By representing the events of the executions in narrative form, Whetstone contributed to a broadening cultural network that enabled public participation. Those who read about the fate of Babington and his confederates also had access to the spectacle and, to a certain extent, were implicated in its effects. Participation at every level was instrumental in structuring the systems of belief that became central to people's lived experience. Žižek explains that,

An individual experiences his society not as a mere collection of individuals but as an order which transcends these individuals and forms the substance of their lives – and it ... is purely virtual, a symbolic fiction, since it exists merely as the *presupposition*, by each of the individuals, of the already-existing co-ordination of all other individuals (1996a: 139-140).

Elizabeth's government sought to exploit this mutual 'presupposition' in an attempt to shape the dominant 'symbolic fiction'. Indeed, Whetstone's decision to seek patronage from Lord Burleigh was predicated upon a specific set of 'presuppositions'. The application was made in an attempt to elicit personal support from an authoritative figure; however, in making such an

appeal he was simultaneously producing this same authority. Although public displays of state power were employed to signify a transcendent order, they were not the products of a monolithic authority. As Peter Lake and Michael Questier argue, 'the English Protestant state was forced to enter a religious and ideological arena that no one group could entirely hope to dominate or control' (1996: 73). Therefore, rather than being static and uniform, the 'symbolic fictions' operating in Elizabethan society were constituted in conflict and were continually evolving.

The presuppositions that constitute 'symbolic fictions' thrive within linguistic structures, but are also structured by the potentially violent operations of language. As Lecercle argues, 'violence in language ... must be taken literally – not the violence of the symbol, but the violence of intervention, of an event the immateriality of which does not prevent it from having material effects' (1990: 227). When the death sentence was issued, extreme violence was enacted upon the bodies of the traitors:

The first day the Traitors were all placed upon the scaffold, that the one might beholde the reward of his fellowes treason. Ballard the Priest, who was the first broacher of this treason: was the first that was executed, and after that his bowels and traiterous heart were thrown into the fire, (his head severed from his shoulders,) was set upon the toppe of the Gallowes (1587: B1<sup>r</sup>).

The teleological thrust of the day's ceremony culminated in a tangible demonstration of the authority of the state. The triumphant publication of the

traitors' bodies provided a memorable climax to an ideological drama of the highest order.

The first group of seven had been executed 'with lesse favour, then the latter seven ... somewhat neere the severity of their judgement' (1587: A4<sup>v</sup>). Wilcocks remarked that, 'there appeared no sadnesse or alteration among the people at the mangling and quartering of their bodies: yea, the whole multitude, without any signe of lamentation greedylly behelde the spectacle from the first to the last' (1587: B1<sup>v</sup>). Yet, in response to public reaction, the second seven were treated less severely and were hanged until they were dead before the full extent of the sentence was enforced. Public discomfort with the extraordinarily severe, but less frequent violence of a hanging, drawing and quartering was not uncommon. In his essay 'On Cruelty', Michel de Monataigne writes of his experience in Italy:

I found myself in Rome at the very moment when they were dispatching a notorious thief called Catena. The crowd showed no emotion when he was strangled, but when they proceeded to quarter him the executioner never struck a blow without the people accompanying it with a plaintive cry and exclamation, as if each person had transferred his own feelings to that carcass ... My advice would be that exemplary severity intended to keep the populace to their duty should be practiced not on criminals but on their corpses: for to see their corpses deprived of burial, boiled or quartered would strike the common people virtually as much as pains inflicted on the living, though in reality they amount to little or nothing ... Such inhuman excess should be directed against the dead bark not the living tree (1991: 180-181).

Despite the undoubted affective power of witnessing an execution of this kind, in Whetstone's account, it seems to have been thought necessary that the

narrative provide a representation of events that implied people's full support for the actions of the state. This conception is dependent upon the idea that structures of power must be fully internalised in order to function. However, Žižek suggests that 'this "internalisation", by structural necessity, never fully succeeds ... there is always a residue, a leftover ... *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it* (1989: 43). Therefore, a sense of gratification was not fostered solely by the horrific spectacle of violence.

Accounts paired detailed descriptions of the physical realities of the executions with protracted reflections upon the nature of sovereign authority and civil obedience. Sharpe observes that 'public executions were not merely displays of brutality, but rather attempts by the authorities to exert ideological control, to reassert certain values of obedience and conformity' (1985: 158). Within the dialogue, the attempt on the Queen's life is represented as a threat, not only to her, but also to her subjects. Walker maintains that,

the kind affection and motherly love that her Majestie published by her gracious letters, unto the L. Mayor and state of London ... are causes strong enough to commaunde the multitude to rejoyce in nothing more, then in the destruction of those that pretend any hurte unto her Majesties person (1587: B1).

One of the 'gracious letters' referred to here is Elizabeth's letter of 18 August 1586, which was addressed to the Lord Mayor and citizens of London. In this text, she thanks her subjects for their loyalty and communicates her sense of their shared pleasure in the apprehension of Babington and the other



conspirators. She begins by asserting that 'we did not so much rejoice at the escape of the intended attempt against our person, as to see the great joy our most loving subjects took at the apprehension of the contrivers thereof' (2000: 285). In doing so, she provides a representation of her subjects specifically intended for their consumption, in which their affection and loyalty are said to be integral to her sovereignty. This idea is developed with her assurance that 'we desire no longer to live than while we may in the whole course of our government carry ourself in such sort as may not only nourish and continue their love and goodwill towards us, but also increase the same' (2000: 285). The reciprocal nature of the relationship between the sovereign and her subjects is affirmed by the idea that as a 'power *exerted on* a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power *assumed by* the subject' (Butler 1997: 11). This relationship was, therefore, central to the way in which the values of obedience and conformity were promoted.

Whetstone's account of events was not only engaged in promoting obedience and conformity, but also formed part of larger attempt to record the importance of the case for posterity. Throughout the text, however, we are confronted with conflicting ways of understanding the historical significance of the events. This conflict is most strongly expressed in the tension between a providentialist account, notably argued by Calvin who believed that, 'the order, method, end and necessity of events are, for the most part, hidden in the counsel of God' (1949: I.xvi.9) and a burgeoning secular philosophy, derived from humanist teaching. Machiavelli's renowned exposition of statecraft, *The*

*Prince*, exemplifies the humanist tradition, detailing the importance of human agency. He remarks that,

Many have held and hold the opinion that events are controlled by fortune and by God in such a way that the prudence of men cannot modify them ... I believe that it is probably true that fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves. I compare fortune to one of those violent rivers which, when they are enraged, flood the plains, tear down trees and buildings, wash soil from one place to deposit it in another. Everyone flees before them, everybody yields to their impetus, there is no possibility of resistance. Yet although such is their nature, it does not follow that when they are flowing quietly one cannot take precautions, constructing dykes and embankments so that when the river is in flood they would keep to one channel or their impetus will be less wild and dangerous. So it is with fortune (1981: 130).

The providentialist and humanist approaches to the notion of causality are very different, but they share an uncertainty as to whether history followed a linear or cyclical pattern.

Ronald Knowles suggests that 'Renaissance historiography largely secularised history by limiting the focus to secondary causes; that is, causation was seen in human terms' (Shakespeare 1999: 76). Indeed, the Reformation had many secularising contingencies and a consequence of Reformed theology's insistence on the distance between man and God was an abandonment of the belief that the material world was suffused with a divine essence. The dynamics of worldly affairs were, therefore, increasingly understood in human terms. However, in Whetstone's documentation of contemporary events there are very real tensions between the humanist ideal of personal accountability

and the Christian doctrine of divine providence. Not only did each system of belief offer a conceptual framework to enable individuals to make sense of their own mortality, but also, they each provided the state with an effective means of ensuring social order. The texts that emerge as the articulation of this conflict are indissoluble from the development of the Renaissance subject's sense of self.

In her study of providence in Early Modern England, Alexandra Walsham explains that 'providentialism played a pivotal role in forging a collective Protestant consciousness, a sense of confessional national identity which fused anti-Catholic feeling and patriotic feeling and which united the elite with their social inferiors' (1999: 5). By insisting upon the divine right of kings, Elizabeth I used the providentialist doctrine to perpetuate the mystification of her power, with a view to maintaining her subjects' reverence. She made deliberate and repeated reference to the unknowable powers of god in an attempt to emphasise her indefeasible authority over her subjects. Stephen Greenblatt asserts:

The providentialist doctrine that provided the interpretive framework for a central strain of Tudor historiography was also the basis for both the political discourse that legitimated the Elizabethan state and the personality cult that exalted the Queen (1980: 166).

However, this was not the only means by which Elizabeth sought to consolidate her authority. It was also politically expedient to stress the role of the individual in maintaining social order. The 'Homily on Obedience', which

was reprinted several times during Elizabeth's reign, expounded the importance of personal responsibility, advising that 'For as much as GOD hath created and disposed all/ things in a comely order ... we also ought ... to observe and keepe a due order, and bee obedient to the powers' (1563: II.1-5). Whilst this text was firmly rooted in religious discourse, Elizabeth's own letters and speeches encouraged an order based around a finely balanced combination of humanist and providentialist ideologies.

Elizabeth's response to the discovery of the Babington plot and the confirmation that Mary, Queen of Scots had been plotting against her required a careful negotiation of this fragile balance. The government were eager that Mary should be executed but Elizabeth did not agree to this immediately, characteristically prolonging her decision. Responding to parliamentary petitions calling for Mary's execution, Elizabeth played for time and formulated a measured reply. Her speech, delivered to the committees of both houses, provided an explanation for the delay, demonstrating her attempts to achieve a politically useful balance between the providential and humanist discourses:

Considering the manifold dangers intended and practised against me, which through the goodness of almighty God I have always escaped, I must needs say it is admirable and miraculous (if that be a miracle which is beyond and above the reason of man) that now I live. Yet do I not thank God for that nor for all the rest so much as for this: that for after twenty-eight years' reign I do not perceive any diminution of my subjects good love and affection towards me. This is the thing I most joy in and that wherein I take my greatest comfort (2000: 186).

Her appeals to the love and affection of her subjects were intended to establish a dynamic interaction between sovereignty and subjection. By asserting that the actions of her subjects had a direct impact on her effectiveness as a leader, she was explicitly advocating the importance of human agency. Simultaneously, she was keen to stress that God's protection against the attempts on her life was nothing short of miraculous. She was reluctant, however, to mention her indebtedness to the government's extensive intelligence network, arguably one of the most sophisticated in Europe.

An integral aspect of her leadership, therefore, was providing a successful and visible negotiation of the political challenges of Renaissance England. Stephen Greenblatt argues that,

[s]he was a living representation of the immutable within time, a fiction of permanence. Through her, society achieved symbolic immortality and acted out the myth of a perfectly stable world, a world which replaces the flux of history. (1980: 167)

In high profile incidents like the Babington plot, the spectacular deaths of the traitors provided a shocking contrast to the perceived immortality of the queen. However, one of the ways in which the Elizabethan state retained a 'fiction of permanence' was in its treatment of those who tried to overthrow the established order.

Engaging with the production of this 'fiction of permanence' Whetstone's dialogic treatment of these events was part of a body of texts that contributed to the conceptual framework from within which the agency of an Elizabethan subject was circumscribed. Julius Ruff notes that '[p]ublishers of pamphlets and little books, like those of broadsheets ... realized that tales of the monstrous, supernatural, catastrophic, criminal, and violent always yielded many sales' (2001: 25). By purchasing and reading this account the individual became a consumer, literally buying into a set of state-sponsored ideologies. Therefore, acts of narrative production and consumption influenced the continuously changing conditions upon which subjectivity was predicated.

Žižek explains that,

'Subjectivization' ... consists in the purely formal gesture of symbolic conversion by means of which the subject integrates into this symbolic universe – turns into part and parcel of his life-narrative, provides with meaning – the meaningless contingency of his destiny (1996a: 94).

By aligning themselves with the agency of sovereign authority, and taking pleasure in the successes of the legal system, Elizabethan subjects integrated their 'meaningless contingency' into the 'symbolic universe' of the state.

The process of integration was not only for those who bore 'dutiful hearts', however. At the scaffold, the guilty were provided with an opportunity to demonstrate an acceptance of their subjection to the very same authority that had condemned them to death. Sharpe states that, 'in most cases for which we have evidence, the convicted persons seemed perfectly happy to accept the

role allotted to them in public executions' (1985: 156). This would suggest that subjection is not simply, or even predominantly, a process comparable to subjugation. Rather, it is a process that is both required and desired by the subject. This is indicated by the importance attached to the traitors' final speeches, which were a crucial component of the execution ceremony, not only for the authorities but also for the individual. As well as their didactic function, speeches afforded the traitors a chance to display their contrition and ultimate conformity, thereby ensuring that they 'died well'. On occasions, the condemned were unable to fulfil this role, either due to nerves or extreme drunkenness. More commonly, however, when facing death, they were so conscientious in their efforts to confess all their wrongdoings that their speeches became extremely lengthy affairs.

This was not the case with the confessions of two of the Babington conspirators, John Ballard and Robert Barnwell. The priest Ballard, 'to declare (at full) his traiterous mind ... said, I am sorry I have bin so scandalous, but most sorry I have bin so remis in my delings' (1587: B2<sup>v</sup>). Barnwell's statement, in which he made 'conscience his best excuse', was similarly unsatisfactory. Walker explains:

He had had but a rotten conscience that was infected with the murder of a vertuous Queene: and since his conscience was so bad, I hope but a few that heard him, but forbad their conscience to pittie him, other than charitably to be sorrowful for his error, which was damnable (1587: C<sup>v</sup>).

Nevertheless, their confederate, Chediok Tichburn, did conform to expiatory protocols. Shortly before his execution, he demonstrated an acceptance of his impending death in verse form and on the day of his execution, his final speech publicized his contrition and, consequently, was received more favourably than those of his fellow conspirators.<sup>4</sup> Before the crowds that had gathered, he exclaimed:

alas for my offence I have brought my self unto this miserie,  
by which my good mother, my loving wife, my four brethren,  
and six sisters, yea our whole house, never before attained, is  
infamed, and our posterity ever like to be undone (1587: C1<sup>r</sup>).

The anxieties that Tichburn revealed in his confession are symptomatic of the Renaissance preoccupation with mortality. He was concerned about the way in which he would be remembered after his death, and sought to die memorably rather than notoriously. However, the possibility of this was conditional upon his acknowledgement that his formation as a subject was dependent upon the same structures of power that threatened to annihilate

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<sup>4</sup> Tichburn wrote his own epigraph shortly before his death:  
My prime of youth is but a froste of cares:  
My feaste of joy, is but a dishe of payne:  
My cropp of corne, is but a field of tares:  
And all my good is but vaine hope of gaine:  
The daye is gone, and yet I sawe no sonn:  
And nowe I live, and nowe my life is donn

The spring is paste, and yet it hath not sprong  
The fruit is deade, and yet the leaves are greene  
My youth is gone, and yet I am but yonge  
I saw the world, and yet I was not seene  
My threed I cutt, and yet it was not sponn  
And now I lyve, and now my life is donn.

I saught my death, and found it in my wombe  
I lookte for life, and sawe it was a shade.  
I trode the earth and knewe it was my Tombe  
And nowe I die, and nowe I am but made  
The glasse is full, and nowe the glass is rune  
And nowe I live, and now my life is donn.

(Norbrook 1993: 630)



him. Therefore, he chose to accept the allotted role because it appeared to confer a coherent and enduring identity upon him. As Karl Marx has suggested, '[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves' (1963: 15).

The mutually constitutive relationship between the state and its subjects was fundamental to the way in which death was understood. Moreover, the identity that it conferred upon social subjects was an indispensable factor in maintaining obedience to the sovereign. Robert Watson argues that:

It must have required a very precise calibration for Renaissance Christians ... to sustain a recognition of death without entertaining a suspicion of mere oblivion; yet on the distinction they had rested the entire moral order of their society (1999: 16).

Whetstone's account is an example of the literature that evolved out of an intense and pervasive fear of mortality. By making a spectacle out of the deaths of a few, the Tudor state encouraged the obedience of the multitude. Therefore, rather than being a peripheral concern, people's perception of death was central to the way they lived.

A radical restructuring of the culturally constructed 'fictions' of death became necessary in this society, which was confronting a number of unprecedented challenges. The latent but pervasive threat of the plague was a major factor in changing attitudes to death. Established burial rites temporarily became

impracticable by virtue of the large numbers of people affected during an outbreak.<sup>5</sup> Because rituals attached a series of culturally coded meanings to the void left by a death, working retrospectively to confer a coherent identity upon the dead, they fundamentally shaped people's experience of loss. Ritual practice was unavoidably suspended, however, at the very times when it was most needed to make sense of the overwhelming loss of life. Literature, art and other aspects of popular culture therefore assumed an even greater role in the process of reconciling people's heightened consciousness of mortality with their own conditions of existence. Representing the events of death on the stage, in texts, or in balladry, went some way to alleviate the tangible fear of death as complete annihilation. This was effected by offering the possibility of memorialisation, of a distinct identity enduring after death. Indeed, as Neill explains, all cultural products of this kind must be considered 'in terms of a wider preoccupation with the importance of remembrance in a culture forced to devise new ways of accommodating itself to the experience of mortality' (1997: 38). Moreover, the process whereby a culture represents its understanding of mortality to itself can be regarded as fundamental to the way in which its social subjects are constituted.

Frederic Jameson reminds us that reading texts from a political perspective is not a supplementary consideration 'but rather ... the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation' (1981: 17). Execution narratives are overtly

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<sup>5</sup> An outbreak of plague closed the London theatres in the summer of 1592, when *Henry VI Part One*, the focus of the later half of this chapter, was first performed.

political texts, invariably communicating a clear sense of their intended or implied reader. For this reason, the accounts are of interest not only for their engagement with descriptions of violent punishment, but because these texts, as narrative representations, may be identified as the sites of violence. It is my contention that these narratives, as intrinsically political products, cannot be dissociated from their implications for the social subject. That is to say, they cannot be considered in isolation from their involvement with the violent process of social subjection. By their very nature, they are bound up with the exploration and exploitation of the 'essential affinity between death ... and the self-representation of language' (Foucault, 1977: 55). Indeed, as Foucault suggests, 'the approach of death – its sovereign gesture, its prominence within human memory – hollows out in the present and in existence the void toward which and from which we speak' (1977: 53). The 'intimate link between language and death is ... a philosophical commonplace with a long and venerable pedigree' (Foucault 1977: 151); however, the formulation of this link is continually changing as the structures of language work to formulate identity in the face of absence and annihilation. Whilst the tragic drama of the theatre worked to establish the aesthetic ideal of a noble death, the legal system worked concurrently to produce a tangible fear of an infamous death. In a complex mediation of cultural anxieties, the spectacle of execution was used as a means of promoting civil obedience. Hanging, drawing and quartering physically and symbolically inscribed the markers of treason, whilst the custom of the last dying speech was an expedient method of demonstrating the benefits of dutiful subjectivity as well as the consequences of nonconformity.

The Elizabethan administration used various forms of violence as political tools, in a complicated process of differentiation. Sovereign authority was carefully and continually crafted, made manifest in constantly evolving representations. Popular perceptions of death were manipulated during public executions, as the agonistic authority of the state was violently inscribed upon the bodies of the traitors, literally transfiguring them. The subsequent narratives not only served to replicate this, but also to sustain, mediate and augment both the violence and its effects. Therefore, as well as effecting further violence, Whetstone's account, as the locus of competing discourses, was constituted in and through the violent process of subjection.

## II

Wilcocks' cautionary invective warns that 'the general reward of treason is the destruction of traitors: and for that, shame and perpetual infamie lead them to the Gallowes' (1587: B2<sup>r</sup>). Whetstone's dialogue is one of a number of texts that perpetuates the infamy, if not the shame of the Babington conspirators. Leonard Tennenhouse suggests, however, that '[t]he strategies of the theatre resembled those of the scaffold' (1986: 163) and indeed the theatre was similarly engaged with the processes of commemoration and memorialisation. Thomas Nashe argued that 'there is no immortalitie can be given a man on earth like unto Playes' (1958 Vol.I: 213) and the singular influence that he attributes to the theatre is based upon an understanding of drama as an especially pervasive aspect of Renaissance popular culture. As Louis Montrose

suggests, both '[t]hose who attacked the theatre and those who defended it were agreed upon its compelling affective powers.' (1996: 49). Nashe, writing in 1592, referring to Shakespeare's play, *I Henry VI*, which had recently been performed, wrote,

the subject of them ... is borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers valiant acts (that have line long buried in rustie brasse and worme-eaten bookes) are revived, and they themselves raised from the Grave of Oblivion (1958: 212).

However, the process of 'building representations with past materials' (de Certeau 1988: 6), of representing one's 'forefathers valiant acts', is always culturally sensitive. Invariably, the production of history not only communicates a society's sense of its past, but also of its present; consequently, the dramatic revivals proposed by Nashe were inescapably structured by the conditions under which they were produced.

During the 1580s Catholic threats to Elizabeth I, both at home and abroad, had a profound effect upon cultural consciousness. The implicit tolerance of religious differences which had characterised the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign was abandoned and anti-Catholic sentiment prevailed. In addition to the Babington conspiracy in 1586, King Philip II's Armada threatened to invade England in 1588. Recusancy was no longer 'managed' by the collection of fines, but was aggressively pursued through legal channels, and Catholic priests were tried and executed for high treason. An account of the execution of John Weldon details this transgression:

John Weldon Priest ... was indicted ... for that he being born within her Majesties dominions, was not onely made Priest at Parris, by authoritye derived from the sea of Rome, contrarie to the lawes of this realme, but had also traiterouslie afterwards entred into this lande, sent by the Pope or his Substitutes, to execute the office of a Seminarie Priest here, contrary to an estatute in that behalf provided: by vertue whereof, he was indicted of high treason (1588: A4<sup>v</sup>).

The traitorous body became the focus for intense cultural scrutiny. Displayed publicly to largely enthusiastic crowds in attendance at executions and depicted in written accounts of their deaths that were circulated soon after, it became a signifier of the effectiveness of divine and political agency. The history plays, which proved extremely popular in the 1590s, were written and performed in this politico-religious climate. The events they depicted were subject to a process of reinterpretation and re-evaluation, which served to explore their significance as a means of understanding, representing and articulating contemporary concerns. But, as Stephen Greenblatt reminds us, 'Shakespeare's theatre was not ... merely the passive reflector of social and ideological forces that lay entirely outside of it' (1985: 32), and the history plays do not provide an uncritical reflection of the state's ideological position. In the theatre, the meanings ascribed to the traitorous body were subject to contestation.

In addition to the political and religious threats posed by Catholicism, periodic outbreaks of the plague weighed heavily on people's minds. During the Renaissance, whole communities struggled to come to terms with the

increasing and overwhelming mortality rate that inevitably accompanied the outbreaks, and religious rites were frequently suspended out of practical necessity. However, there was an increasing movement towards a secular understanding of the world. Our understanding of death, as I have argued, informs the way we live and because popular conceptions of death were necessarily implicated in this changing attitude, new forms of collective social experience were required to accommodate the transition. Neill explains:

Eloquent testimony to the progressive secularization of death can be found in the complaints levelled by contemporary commentators at the increasing worldliness of funeral rites and mortuary art, in which they themselves diagnosed a culpable weakening of confidence in Christian prescriptions for the taming of death. Tragedy itself is among the most important cultural expressions of this secularization process: to understand the nature of the crisis which it addressed, and to appreciate the power of the representations through which it helped to reinvent the experience of death, we need to look not at the mechanisms that were designed to keep death in its place, but at those which attempted to assign it a new one (Neill 1997: 48).

The violence of execution, which was instrumental to the process of assigning new meanings to death, figures in many of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>6</sup> However, following on from the discussion of Whetstone's *Censure of a Loyall Subject*, the focus here will be on the reading of history, and more specifically, the treatment of the link between violence, death, memorialisation and infamy, in *Henry VI*, which culminates in the execution of a Catholic. Through its representations of violence, and specifically, the violent deaths of traitors,

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the execution of the Clown in *Titus Andronicus* (for a discussion of this specific incident, see Francis Barker [1993: 165-206]); *Measure for Measure*, where the dramatic action is played out under the shadow of Claudio's impending execution; *King Lear* where Cordelia is hanged, and *Cymbeline*, where Posthumous escapes the gallows.

enemies and worthy subjects, this play provides a distinctive interrogation of the way in which death and the manner of dying are made socially and politically meaningful. What is more, it brings about a confrontation between divergent and often conflicting conceptual systems, which combined to form a historical narrative in which power is shown to be operating in an often-fragmentary and uncoordinated fashion. In doing so, the play exposes the way in which the production of history is structured by violent contestation. This is not only a profoundly political process, which strives to confer meaning retrospectively upon violent acts and systemic practices of violence, but also these narratives, as they are used contemporaneously, effect a form of violence as they work to sustain the interests of the dominant ideology by legitimising and reaffirming the subordination of the marginalized.

The social and political anxieties of Renaissance England not only affected Shakespeare's representations of the War of the Roses but also the ways in which his representations were used. The dramatisations of the conflicts between the houses of York and Lancaster were included in the First Folio as history plays. However, in that edition, not all plays retained the classification they had borne in the quartos. Many plays previously purported to be histories, such as the *True Chronicle Historie of the Life and Death of King Lear and his three Daughters*, were included as tragedies, and conversely, titles such as *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*, were subsequently put forward as histories (Campbell 1947: 8). Neill suggests that 'tragedy realises itself as a genre devoted to fantasies of moral transcendence' (1997: 48), a concept



intimately bound up with the idea of immortality. Nevertheless, whilst the notion of memorialisation is common to both genres, Neill's formulation does not account for the dynamics of the history or chronicle play. Rather than pursuing 'a powerful aesthetic of closure' (1997: 48), the history plays engage with the process of memorialisation.

Shakespeare's first tetralogy opens with the funeral of Henry V. The Duke of Bedford, Regent of France, mourns his loss:

Hung be the heavens with black. Yield day to night.  
Comets, importing change of times and states,  
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky  
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars  
That have consented unto Henry's death –  
King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long.  
England's ne'er lost a king of so much worth.  
(I.i.1-7)

The imposing visual presence of Henry's coffin is accompanied by the rhetorical invocation of the signs of death. Comets, known to signal the death of a great man, menacingly 'brandish' their markers of mortality in a poignant testimonial to Henry, who once with 'His brandished sword did blind men with his beams' (I.i.10). Henry, 'too famous to live long', would nevertheless be immortalised on the stage and become 'That ever-living man of memory,/Henry the Fifth' (IV.iii.51-52).

Only a few lines later, however, Exeter questions the efficacy of the death march with which Henry's coffin is brought on stage and the ceremony with which he is commemorated. Exeter remarks simply, 'Henry is dead, and never

shall revive' (I.i.18) and claims that death has won a 'dishonourable victory' (I.i.20). Henry represents a heroic ideal that was underpinned by a composite structure of humanist and providentialist values, but whose fragility is immediately exposed in the wrangling which erupts between the Duke of Gloucester and the Bishop of Winchester. Remembering Henry's life, Gloucester stresses his personal achievements and the 'Virtue he had, deserving to command' (I.i.9), whilst Winchester identifies God's hand, asserting 'He was a king, blest of the King of kings' (I.i.28). The conflict escalates with Winchester's assertion that 'The Church's prayers made him so prosperous' (I.i.32). Gloucester vehemently rejects this claim, countering 'The Church? Where is it? Had not churchmen prayed,/ His thread of life had not so soon decayed' (I.i.33-34). Within moments, the King 'of so much worth', whose corpse remains onstage in full view, is in danger of being obscured by the very discourse that purportedly describes him.<sup>7</sup>

The mourners struggle to understand Henry's premature death, and searchingly invoke a higher power, symbolised variously by the 'bad revolting stars' and 'planets of mishap', or the 'subtle-witted French/ Conjurers and sorcerers, that, afraid of him,/ By magic verses have contrived his end' (I.i.25-

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<sup>7</sup> Ulysses in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* describes this process:

Time hath ... a wallet at his back  
 Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,  
 A great-siz'd monster of ingratitude.  
 Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd  
 As fast as they are made, forgot as soon  
 As done.

(III.iii.145-150)

27). Even Joan Puzel – the subtle-witted French conjurer fighting for the French - concedes his greatness, reasoning,

Glory is like a circle in the water,  
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself  
Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.  
With Henry's death the English circle ends:  
Dispersed are the glories it included.

(I.ii.133-137)

She interprets the significance of Henry's death within a cyclical pattern of events. However, the metaphor of the circle in water, which expands outwards until it disappears altogether, undermines conventional conceptions of masculine agency. Henry's glory has increased, we are told, not as the result of his own actions or of the unseen influence of a higher power, but rather, it has enlarged itself. Moreover, the glory is represented by a circle which forms an 'O', and therefore always already signifies the 'nought' to which it tends. Joan's statement makes a troubling comment upon the nature of glory and reputation in patriarchal culture: the distinguishing markers of Henry's glory are the ripples in the water, but the ripples are themselves made of water. According to her metaphor, the distinctions conferred by glory, reputation and memory are fundamentally absent: identity is temporal, generated and dispelled by a continual motion of displacement and dispersal.

From his funeral, which opens the play, the process of remembering Henry is vexed on many levels, and almost immediately we see the way in which he functions posthumously as a sign, whose meanings are ascribed (and contested) for political expediency by those that survive him. Soon after the

funeral, Gloucester goes to the Tower and finds the guards under instruction from Winchester to prohibit his entry. In the heated exchange which follows, Gloucester denounces 'Arrogant Winchester, that haughty prelate/ Whom Henry, our late sovereign, ne'er could brook' (I.iii.23-24). Gloucester recalls isolated aspects of Henry's life in order to legitimise his own use of violence in a manner that is symptomatic of the politics of memorialisation. Indeed, Henry, the 'ever living man of memory', who is only physically present in the play as a corpse, is dismembered rather than remembered by the way in which he is spoken of after his death: as Alexander Leggatt suggests, 'Shakespeare takes unusual care in *Henry VI* to baffle and mock any expectation of completeness' (1988: 11).

Sir John Talbot appears as one of the last representatives of the chivalric, but somewhat outmoded ideals of Henry V. His identity is derived from his ability to inflict violence on the battlefield, and his reputation is such that in battle with the French his soldiers need 'no other weapon but his name' (II.i.81). Talbot's oratory upon the death of the Earl of Salisbury, the 'mirror of all martial men', exemplifies the military tradition that both he and Salisbury had come to represent and demonstrates the way in which violence, in a military context, is retrospectively encoded in a nationalistic discourse of 'Englishness':

Bring forth the body of old Salisbury,  
 And here advance it in the market-place,  
 The middle centre of this cursed town ...  
 And that hereafter ages may behold  
 What ruin happened in revenge of him,  
 Within their chiefest temple I'll erect  
 A tomb wherein his corpse shall be interred,

Upon the which, that everyone may read,  
 Shall be engraved the sack of Orleans,  
 The treacherous manner of his mournful death,  
 And what a terror he had been to France.

(II.ii.4-17)

The French killed Salisbury, but Talbot's speech constituted an attempt to efface the fatal battle wounds and to re-inscribe the corpse with the markings of a heroic 'Englishness'. Talbot's insistence that he be remembered for the 'terror he had been to France' and not as their casualty, led to the call for a concrete reminder of his life. By erecting a tomb and engraving the details of the battle upon it, Talbot worked to ensure that his colleague remain as distinguished in death as he had been in life. However, this was not an entirely selfless action, since Salisbury's identity was derived in part from a collective ideal of nationhood shared by Talbot.

The importance of collective identity is dramatically fore-grounded when Talbot is invited to the Countess of Auvergne's castle. The Countess, hoping to circumvent the patriarchal structures, which recognise fame as an almost exclusively masculine virtue, intends to capture the renowned Talbot in the expectation that 'If all things fall out right/I shall as famous be by this exploit' (II.iii.4-5). Her ambitious plan initially seems to be given credibility by the disparity between Talbot's reputation and his physical appearance. On his entrance the Countess mocks him, asking

What? Is this the man? ...  
 Is this the scourge of France?  
 Is this the Talbot, so much feared abroad  
 That with his name the mothers still their babes?

I see report is fabulous and false.  
 I thought I should have seen some Hercules,  
 A second Hector for his grim aspect  
 And large proportion of his strong-knit limbs.  
 Alas, this is a silly child, a silly dwarf:  
 It cannot be this weak and writhled shrimp  
 Should strike such terror to his enemies.

(II.iii.12-23)

The name 'Talbot' is a signifier of violence, encoding the political meanings of martial violence within wider patriarchal and nationalistic structures. However, the meanings attached to his name seem at odds with his physical body: the Countess jeeringly draws attention to his diminutive stature, describing him as a 'child', a 'dwarf' and a 'writhled shrimp' who falls considerably short of the image his name connotes. She argues that he is not the 'scourge' of the French and, therefore, cannot be considered as the avenging agent of a higher power. Moreover, she claims that he cannot be compared with the Greek heroes he has been equated with, whose superhuman strength is assisted by the mediation of the gods. She dismisses his prowess, focusing instead on a base physicality which, she is at pains to suggest, does not correspond to the language with which he has been described.

In her bid to imprison Talbot, however, the Countess foregoes the dismissive rhetoric with which she greeted him and concedes the injuries done to France:

COUNTESS      Long time thy shadow hath been thrall to me;  
                     For in my gallery thy picture hangs.  
                     But now the substance shall endure the like,  
                     And I will chain these legs and arms of thine,  
                     That hast by tyranny these many years  
                     Wasted our country, slain our citizens  
                     And sent our sons and husbands captivate...



battlefield. Facing death, Talbot invokes a providentialist order and laments the influence of the 'malignant and ill-boding stars', warning his son, 'thou art come unto a feast of death,/ A terrible and unavoyded danger' (IV.iv.7-8). We are aware, however, that danger is unavoidable because, as a result of internal conflict in England, Talbot does not have enough men. In a protracted discussion of ways in which to surmount the insurmountable, Talbot urges John to escape from imminent death. Although young Talbot argues for 'mortality,/ Rather than life preserved with infamy' (IV.iv.32-33), he is told, 'Part of thy father may be saved in thee' (IV.iv.38). In accordance with a heroic ideal, however, both men remain together in an aestheticised portrayal of death. Memorialisation always requires a careful balancing act between the values of the individual and the community that they represent, and in the figure of Talbot we get a sense of the difficulties inherent in this process. Until his death, he maintains his belief in a preordained order and resigns himself to his responsibilities to the divinely appointed sovereign, the state and his son. However, the providentialist rhetoric used by Talbot, and by others in their descriptions of him, contrasts sharply with Joan's remarks after his death: 'Him that thou magnifiest with all these titles/ Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet' (IV.iv.187-188). Death is the only true constant and Joan's penetrating comments are a reminder that Talbot's titles – the signifiers privileged by the English – are not a universally acceptable way of recognising the meanings of his death, and cannot obscure the realities of physical decay. She refuses to accept the linguistic encoding of Talbot's life, and instead reads his rotting body as a signifier of the levelling effects of death.



Thomas Nashe, after watching a performance of the play, enthused:

How it would have joyed brave *Talbot* (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lye two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe of the Stage, and have his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least ... who ... imagine they behold him fresh bleeding' (1958 Vol. I: 212).

Nashe asserts that the purifying 'fresh bleeding' allows Talbot to resume a prominent and memorable position in the cultural consciousness. But memory, as Francis Barker explains, is

a set of cultural practices which are coded as essential, but which in the event are either absent or crucially compromised. The damage done to those practices, to their representation and their ability *to be represented* can be read as crisis in politically effective, symbolically sanctioned discourse (1993: 32-33).

Shakespeare's play exposes the ways in which the cultural practices of memorialisation and commemoration are indeed fundamentally compromised: neither the providentialist schema nor the humanist heroic ideals can adequately recover meaning from Talbot's death in battle. Somehow, in the production of historical narrative, as Alexander Leggatt notes, 'Talbot, whose name was on every tongue while he lived, is forgotten' (Leggatt 1989: 5).

In *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony observes that 'The evil that men do lives after them:/ The good is oft interred with their bones' (III.ii.76-77). Whilst Talbot's achievements appear to have been interred with his bones, Richard Plantagenet struggles to overcome the tarnished memory of his father.

Patrilineal structures work to Richard's disadvantage and he experiences the material consequences of his father's infamy. The antithesis of noble memory, infamy attaints Richard as a result of his father's political actions. Accused of treason, the Earl of Cambridge was denied a hand in shaping the circumstances of his death. Unable to manipulate his representation in the annals of history, the state inscribed his body and his memory with the marks of a traitor. The material privations experienced by his progeny were a deterrent against disobedience to the sovereign. Somerset taunts him:

Was not thy father Richard, Earl of Cambridge,  
 For treason executed in our late king's days?  
 And by his treason stand'st not thou attainted,  
 Corrupted, and exempt from ancient gentry?  
 His trespass yet lives guilty in thy blood,  
 And till thou be restored thou art a yeoman  
 (II.iv.90-95)

Again, however, memorable events are recalled to fulfil a political function. Somerset invokes the infamous death of the Earl of Cambridge in support of his dispute with Richard. In order to denigrate his opponent he works to foreground the signs of Richard's disgrace.

Rather than accepting the position ascribed to him, Richard seeks to fashion his position anew. In response to Somerset's reproach, he vows:

My father was attached, not attainted,  
 Condemned to die for treason, but no traitor;  
 And that I'll prove on better men than Somerset ...  
 I'll note you in my book of memory,  
 To scourge you for this apprehension  
 (II.iv.96-101)

In many ways, his perspective is demonstrably humanist: whilst he can do nothing to alter his father's legacy, he works to reduce its negative impact upon his life. His attitude is reminiscent of Machiavelli's assertion that 'fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves'. The metaphor of the book of memory, a familiar image in the Renaissance concerned with spatialisation as a memory technique, is derived from the classical sources of humanism, and emphasises the growing link between memory and textuality.<sup>8</sup> Here, it demonstrates that Richard, although affected by the memory of his father, is still engaged in the process of prioritising the images and meanings by which others will be remembered. Taking matters into his own hands, he petitions Henry VI to restore his titles and is later created Duke of York.

Joan Puzel, Talbot's archrival, consistently problematises conventional notions of memorialisation, however. From the outset she confounds all available sign systems, continually resisting categorisation. Her first encounter with Charles and Reignier provides a multi-layered challenge to stereotypes of femininity as she offers herself as a soldier for the French and provides an eloquent account of her desire to fight:

Dolphin, I am by birth a shepherd's daughter,  
 My wit untrained in any kind of art...  
 God's mother deigned to appear to me  
 And, in a vision full of majesty,  
 Willed me to leave my base vocation  
 And free my country from calamity...  
 My courage try by combat, if thou dar'st,

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the memory techniques in the Renaissance see Frances E. Yates *The Art of Memory* (1966, London: Pimlico).

And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex.  
(I.ii.8-90)

Joan's paternity is portrayed as a negative aspect of her past that she wishes to distance herself from, and in her struggle to create a new identity for herself, she wishes to rely upon female aid: 'Christ's mother helps me, else I were too weak' (I.ii.106). From the opening display of Henry's coffin, the audience have, as Burns suggests, been encouraged to view the 'male body as the primary witness of historical narrative' (Shakespeare 2000: 39), but Joan's insistence on her ability to pursue a traditionally masculine vocation is in itself subversive and her radical stance is compounded by her claims to have been urged to engage in violent combat by the Virgin Mary. Whilst the Countess of Auvergne sought fame on behalf of the 'sons and husbands', Joan's dedication to ideals normally undertaken in the name of the father (God) is further complicated by her desire to fulfil her role in the name of the mother (the Virgin Mary). What is more, in the socio-political climate in which the play was written and performed, her confident commitment to the Catholic faith was suggestive of the motivation and potential to subvert. Her reliance upon the feminine and supernatural, and her unswerving belief in her own abilities, not only disturbs established ideas of femininity, but of the nature of historical narrative.

The radical destabilisation Joan Puzel effects occurs at the level of the signifying process itself. She exposes and manipulates the unstable but constitutive qualities of language, endlessly frustrating the binary logic upon

which patriarchy is founded. She continually elides and deconstructs the distinctions between male and female, virgin and whore, saint and witch, somehow managing to keep both meanings simultaneously in play. This is exemplified in her name 'Pucelle' or 'Puzel', as it is given in Edward Burns' edition of the play: 'pucelle' means virgin, but indicates a temporary state of virginity, whilst 'puzel', means whore. In addition, as Burns suggests, the name carries the trace of the phonetically similar term 'pizzle', meaning penis (2000: 26). As Partridge explains, 'the implication is probably of "penal" largeness' (2001: 209) and this indicates the threat posed by her usurpation of phallic power. Despite Joan's assertion that the titles given to Talbot ultimately signify nothing, her name is fundamental to the way she is and will be conceived. Indeed, in performance on the Renaissance stage, the language she uses and the language used by others to describe her is, not least because of the convention of using boy actors to play female parts, fundamentally constitutive of her character's physical presence.

Joan's enemies seize upon the linguistic ambiguities that are an integral aspect of her character and we see their systematic attempts to do her violence through language. The English make concerted efforts to demonise her by prioritising the negative connotations, suggesting that she is unequivocally a whore and witch and often combining these images. During their confrontation in Rouen, Talbot deems her a 'witch' and a 'damned sorceress', a 'Foul fiend of France and hag of all despite,/ Encompassed with thy lustful paramours' (III.ii.37-52), and Burgundy dubs her a 'vile fiend and shameless

courtesan' (III.ii.44). In common with the rhetoric found in texts such as *Whetstone's*, where Weston wonders 'that men are bewitched with the enticements of ... Jesuits' (1587: B2<sup>r</sup>) her association with witchcraft is explicitly linked to Catholicism and would therefore have considerable currency with the play's audience. However, it proves difficult to stabilise meaning in this way and Joan's undoubted physical strength is matched by her capacity to appropriate the derogatory terms used to describe her and invest them with new value.

Joan repeatedly affirms the efficacy of her language, and when the French win Orleans, she proclaims that she 'hath performed her word' (I.v.42). Charles is convinced by this, and later, in their encounter with Burgundy, calls upon her to 'Speak ... and enchant him with thy words' (III.iii.40). She is successful, and Burgundy remarks that he feels he has been 'bewitched ... with her words' (III.iii.58), and compares the violent effects of her language to being battered by a 'roaring cannon-shot' (III.iii.79). Paradoxically, the English attempts to demonise her as a witch serve to consolidate her strong position, because the spells, incantations and conjurations accredited to her suggest that her words are truly powerful. Similarly, their portrayal of her as a whore betrays deep-seated masculine anxieties which often equated female language, as embodied by the tongue, with a threatening licentiousness. Throughout the play, Joan is intimidating because she appears to have a unique relationship with the language she uses, but it is not until the final act, when we hear Joan summoning demons, that the nature of this relationship is disclosed. Calling

for 'signs of future accidents' (V.ii.25), she radically problematises the conventional relationship between signifier and signified: in her previous communications with the demons she has eliminated the gap between signifier and signified so that meaning, for her, is not deferred but is instead uncannily present. On this occasion, no signs are forthcoming, however, and without the aid of supernatural forces, she is captured by York.

Paradoxically, the point at which it is confirmed that Joan is connected with a supernatural agency is the very point at which she appears most 'human'. Facing execution, she tells a series of contradictory lies in a desperate attempt to evade death. When she is admitted into the French force and the patriarchal order which structures it, she is asked by Reignier to 'do what thou canst to save our honours,/ Drive them from Orlean and be immortalized' (I.ii.147-148). After her capture however, the English attempt to immortalize her as one who 'hath lived too long,/ To fill the world with vicious qualities' (V.iii.34-35) and the grotesque details of her execution are indicative of the English desire to tarnish her memory with a shameful death. Despite insisting that she was pregnant and renouncing the virtues that she claimed to have prioritised throughout her life, she is burned at the stake. In Shakespeare's drama there is an attempt to immortalise her as a 'sorceress condemned to burn' (V.iii.1), but this historiographical process of memorialisation never fully succeeds. Instead, the figure of Joan Puzel 'wilst be so obstacle' (V.iii.17), and remains the site of competing historical discourses and ultimately, a site of resistance.

Shakespeare's representation of the War of the Roses is, as Edward Burns argues 'an ironic meditation on what history is, and as such it constantly exposes the gratuitous signs and symbols which allow us to think we know history' (Shakespeare 2000: 6). Historical events are often shaped by violence, but the process through which these events are recorded historically is also structured by violence. The production of what Catherine Belsey calls 'history at the level of the signifier' (1999: 13), involves the exclusion of certain signifiers and the prioritising of others as the way of taking meaning from violence, and fore-grounding these meanings in the production of historical narratives. In Shakespeare's representation of the violence of execution and interstate war, this process is continually frustrated and the inadequacies of the state's (often-violent) strategies for making violence meaningful are exposed. Žižek explains that

The supreme violence resides in this vicious circle of an act that establishes the order which retroactively renders invisible this very act in its dimension of constitutive violence. In other words, the supreme violence consists of the obliterations of the *double inscription of one and the same act*: of the act that founds, brings about, the symbolic Order *and* (re)appears within this Order as one of its elements, legitimised, founded by it. The questions of 'origins' is therefore the traumatic point of every legal order: it is what this Order has to 'repress primordially' if it is to maintain the character of an Order. In this precise sense 'dialectics' designates the effort to unearth, to render visible again, this constitutive violence whose 'repression' is coextensive with the very existence of the Order' (1994: 204-205).

The violent punishments employed by the Elizabethan state produce the symbolic order and return within it; however, in a significant way,



Shakespeare's drama works to partially unearth and render more visible this constitutive violence. Shapiro argues that '[t]he representation of state violence undermines the authority of the state, since the symbolic meaning of a public execution, that which gives it sufficient integrity to reinscribe and reactivate the power of the sovereign, never occurs' (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1989: 103).<sup>9</sup> But more than this, in the history play, these representations call into question the state's ability to authorise and stabilise the meanings which produce and are produced by the symbolic order.

Throughout Whetstone's narrative and Shakespeare's play, neither a belief in a pre-existing order, nor a faith in human capabilities can provide an adequate explanation for the way in which individuals are remembered after death, yet the tensions between these two forces shape the way people live their lives. As communities were forced into an intimate and cataclysmic relationship with mortality, people strove for ways to play a part in shaping their own death. The plague made no distinction between its victims and the mass deaths in the midst of life threatened to plunge the established social order into disarray. Attitudes were radically transforming in reaction to this, to the extent that death was no longer perceived as an intrinsic part of life, but rather as its opposite. This view of mortality emphasised the temporal gap, heightening the sense of death as complete extinction. Greenblatt notes that '[s]elf-fashioning

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<sup>9</sup> I disagree, however, with Shapiro's earlier assertion that 'to permit the theatre to imitate state spectacle could undermine the terrible power of officially sanctioned violence by showing it often enough to make it familiar' (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1989: 100). Francis Barker has demonstrated that executions were carried out on such a scale that it is unlikely that theatrical representations would render them over-familiar.

is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile. This threatening Other ... must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked or destroyed' (1980: 9). Death was now conceptualised as this Other and memorialisation became a crucial instrument in the fight against it.

Renaissance historiography was concerned with differentiating a certain discourse, or set of discourses, recording and therefore immortalising significant lives and events. As Greenblatt asserts:

The chief intellectual and linguistic tool (in this creation) was rhetoric, which held the central place in the humanist education ... Rhetoric was the common ground of poetry, history, and oratory; it could mediate both between the past and the present and between the imagination and the realm of public affairs ... It offered men the power to change their worlds, calculate the probabilities, and master the contingent, and it implied that human character itself could be similarly fashioned, with an eye to audience and effect. (Greenblatt 1980: 162)

In addition to the problems outlined above, the aims of historiography were rendered problematic by a paradoxical commitment to both the individual and the communal. In a simultaneous movement, it sought to effect the violent process of differentiation and to follow the 'erotic' impulse towards the establishment of a collective identity. Bataille insists that '[c]ontinuity is what we are after, but generally only if that continuity which the death of discontinuous beings alone can establish is not the victor in the long run. What we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain.' (Bataille 1962: 18-19). The tensions

inherent in Whestone's and Shakespeare's accounts of history are a reflection upon the extent of the continuity that the Elizabethan world could sustain.

## Chapter Five

‘All the world is but a bearbaiting’: ‘Why stay we to be baited?’<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Hotson, (1928: 59), and *Coriolanus*, (IV.ii.42).

A condensed version of this chapter was published as ‘“All the world is but a bear-baiting”: Violence and Popular Culture in the Renaissance’, in *Sites of Discourse: Public and Private Spheres*, Böker and Hibbard (eds.) (2002: 67-77).

The illustration is taken from the title page of *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (3), (1991).

In 1616 Christopher Beeston, the business manager of Queen Anne's Men, rebuilt the Cockpit theatre and installed his players there. On the Shrove Tuesday holiday of the following year, a group of playgoers from the Red Bull theatre stormed the Cockpit. An account written only days after the event records that:

The Prentizes on Shrove Tewsday last, to the number of 3. or 4000 comitted extreme insolencies; part of this number, taking their course for Wapping, did there pull downe to the grownd 4 houses, spoiled all the goods therein, defaced many others, & a Justice of the Peace coming to appease them, while he was reading a Proclamation, had his head broken with a brick batt. Th'other part, making for Drury Lane, where lately a newe playhouse is erected, they beset the house round, broke in, wounded divers of the players, broke open their trunckes, & what apparrell, bookes, or other things they found, they burnt & cutt in peeces; & not content herewith, gott on top of the house, & untiled it, & had not the Justices of Peace & Sherife levied an aide & hindred their purpose, they would have laid that house likewise even with the grownd. In this skirmishe one prentise was slaine, being shott throughe the head with a pistol, & many other of their fellows were sore hurt (Bentley VI, 1941-68: 54).

In London, the brothels and playhouses were traditionally sacked at Shrovetide, and although rioting by apprentices was not uncommon, the events of 1617 were exceptional. Various explanations have been put forward, but it seems most likely that the violence was precipitated by arguments about money. Beeston had taken his players and their repertoire of plays from the Red Bull, a 'citizen' theatre or penny playhouse, to the Cockpit, an indoor theatre where the minimum entry charge was sixpence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C. J. Sisson has argued that it was 'extremely likely that the riot at the Cockpit, which damaged it upon its opening, was a gesture of resentment ... for the desertion of the Red Bull' (1954: 68)

The apprentices' excessive display of violence led to calls for the execution of the offenders. John Chamberlain, in his letter to Sir Dudley Carleton, conjectures that '[t]here be divers of them taken since and clapt up, and I make no question but we shall see some of them hang'd this next weeke, as it is more then time they were' (Bentley Vol. VI, 1941-68: 55). This expectation was shared by Edward Sherburne, who reported that 'such of them as are taken his Majestie hath commanded shal be executed for example sake' (Bentley vol. VI: 54). At a Middlesex Special Session of Oyer and Terminer the following month, rioters were charged with causing damage to Christopher Beeston's house but no mention was made of the Cockpit.<sup>3</sup> A number of the offenders were committed to Newgate prison but the anticipated executions did not transpire. Although great hostility remained and similar revenge attacks were planned for the following year, the preventative measures implemented by the Privy Council appear to have been successful and there is no record of the raids having gone ahead. On this occasion, there was no definitive act of violence.

The events at the Cockpit locate the theatre as the site of violently contested physical and ideological struggles. Debates upon issues central to the Renaissance subject were carried out within and frequently on behalf of the theatre. From the petty theft, cozenage, prostitution and brawling that were in evidence in and round the theatres to the dramatic representations of treason, tyranny and assassination performed upon its stages, the theatre was intimately

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<sup>3</sup> A Special Session of Oyer and Terminer was a court held by a Royal Commissioner who

bound up with notions of law and order. Supporters of the Renaissance theatre affirmed its importance as a means of educating and entertaining the public and it was variously presented as an institution committed to providing moral instruction and encouraging civil obedience. In his treatise of 1612, *An Apology for Actors*, Thomas Heywood attempted to provide a systematic account of the positive influence of stage plays. He suggested that their purpose was:

to teach the subjects obedience to their King, to shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to alegeance, dehorting them from all trayterous and felonious stratagemes (1612: F4<sup>v</sup>).

Arguments such as this were often backed up with 'domesticke' or 'home-borne' examples of the theatre's contribution to the maintenance of civil order, and there are accounts of stage plays prompting spontaneous confessions by members of the audience for crimes as serious as murder.<sup>4</sup> However, attempts to align the theatre with the established authorities were by

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travelled around the country and was empowered to hear and determine all criminal matters.

<sup>4</sup> Heywood gives one such example of 'A Strange accident happening at a play' in *An Apology for Actors*: 'To omit all farre-fetcht instances, we will prove it by a domesticke, and home-borne truth which within these few yeares happened. At *Lin* in *Norfolke*, the then Earle of *Sussex* players acting the old History of Fryer *Francis*, & presenting a woman, who insatiately doting on a yong gentleman, had (the more securely to enjoy his affection) mischievously and secretly murdered her husband, whose ghost haunted her, and at all divers times in her most solitary and private contemplations, in most horrid and fearfull shapes, appeared, and stood before her. As this was acted, a townes-woman (till then of good estimation and report) finding her conscience (at this presentment) extremely troubled; suddenly skritchted and cryd out Oh my husband, my husband! I see the ghost of my husband fiercely threatening and menacing me. At which shrill and unexpected [*sic*] out-cry, the people about her moov'd to a strange amazement, inquired the reason of her clamour, when she presently un-urged, she told them that seven yeares ago, she, to be possessed of such a Gentleman (meaning him) had poisoned her husband, whose fearfull image personated it selfe in the shape of that ghost: whereupon the murdresse was apprehended' (1612: G2<sup>v<sup>r</sup></sup>).

no means straightforward. These examples were countered by suggestions that plays actually incited criminal activity, and that by their involvement, certain spectators had 'learned the cleanly conveyance of their trechery, and how, in what sort, with what secrecy, and by what means to effect their treason' (Greene 1615: D2<sup>r</sup>).

In contrast to those such as Heywood, there were some groups in society who believed the theatre to be the cause of public disorder. Henry Crosse believed that the theatre inevitably attracted

[t]he leaudest persons in the land, apt of pilferie, perjurie, forgerie, or any rogories, the very scum, rascallitie, and baggage of the people, thieves, cut-purses, shifters, cousoners; briefly an uncleane generation, and spaune of vipers: must not here be good rule, where is such a broode of Hell-bred creatures? for a Play is like a sincke in Towne, whereunto all the filth doth runne: or byle in the body, that draweth all the ill humours unto it (1603: Q1<sup>r</sup>).

He insists upon a link between the theatre and the devilish, and in particular, relates ideas of corporeal contamination from filth and disease with the representations of stage plays, implicitly questioning the distinction between mimesis and 'real life'.<sup>5</sup> Michael Neill explains that, '[l]ike the plague, the theatre was a phenomenon of the urban crowd; and their histories are entangled in a complex fashion' (1997: 24). Both the theatre and the plague became powerful symbols of city life; the theatre specifically came to represent ambivalent attitudes to social conditions in the emerging metropolis.

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the link between the theatre and the devil, see Stephen Greenblatt (1988: 94 -128).



Not only was the theatre believed to be instrumental to the spread of disease, and in particular the plague, but it was also conceptually linked to Protestant theological concerns. Louis Montrose explains that,

the religious opposition to players and to the newly established public playhouses included not only radical Puritan preachers but also orthodox Protestant clerics, who viewed the theatre as sharing the vanity and worldliness of the Roman Church and as replicating its heathenish rites (1996: 58).

Anti-theatrical sentiment was reified in a Puritanical discourse that linked the perceived psychological dangers of the theatre with the substantive dangers of the plague. As well as being an all-too-real physical threat, the idea of the plague was developed metaphorically to suggest an equally disastrous contagion of doctrinally unsound beliefs and practices. This view was frequently reproduced in contemporary anti-theatrical literature, such as Green's treatise, *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors*. In his response to Heywood's work, Greene asserts that the devil:

knowing ... that the plague should once have an end ... tooke occasion to thrust a worse plague, not into their bodies, but into their manners ... And surely the Devill would never have instituted Playes, but that he knew they were, and would be beneficial to his Kingdome (1615: C4r).

These anxieties were predicated upon a belief that dramatic representation was linked to idolatry, and therefore to Catholicism, and there was consequently a deep suspicion of the affective power of such representations. The theatre was commonly credited with the potential to corrupt the spectator, as Greene argues:

For they are full of filthy words and gestures, such as would not become very lacques and Courtezans: and have sundry inventions which infect the spirit, and replenish it with unchaste, whoorish, cozening, deceitfull, wanton and mischievous passions: besides which inconveniences Stage Players doe oftentimes envy, and gnaw at the honor of the an other, and to please the vulgar people, set before them lyes, and teach much dissolution and deceitfulness: by this meanes turning upside downe all discipline and good manners (1615: F1r).

The anti-theatricals' fear of the 'wanton and mischievous passions' aroused by stage plays and players, and particularly by the affective power of 'filthy words', was articulated in the language of the plague. The spectators' potentially anarchic desires were envisaged as a psychological malady with a pathology capable of replicating that of its biological counterpart.

Although there was extensive and continued debate surrounding the legal and moral authority of playhouses, they were an undoubted attraction for a great number of people. As a result of its popularity, the theatre became the socio-cultural space in which old and new conceptions of authority were contested and reformulated. In a parallel movement, demonstrations of state power became increasingly 'theatrical'. It has been widely noted that, from its outset, the Elizabethan state initiated a process of exploiting and appropriating existing dramatic forms and revising their cultural significance for its own political ends. Indeed, one sanctioned account of Elizabeth's coronation progress states that one 'could not better tearme the cite of London that time, than a stage wherin was shewed the wonderful spectacle, of a noble hearted princesse toward her most loving people, and the people's exceding comfort

in beholding so worth a sovereign, and hearing so princelike a voice' (Montrose 1996: 26). Elizabeth I, and later, James I, carefully and consciously 'dramatised' their power in order to maximise their political capital.

The playhouse was a unique, communal space and as a secular institution, the theatre was frequently charged with offering explanations for aspects of human experience that were not explicitly addressed by the church. As Louis Montrose notes, '[t]he drama performed in the professional playhouses provided its audiences with a distinctive source of affective and intellectual stimulus and satisfaction, an experience that was collective and commercial, public and profane' (1996: 32). The aesthetics of Renaissance tragedy developed in a society that was at times devastated by the plague and at others, terrified by its dormant threat; the austere Protestant theology of the period was accompanied by an acknowledged tendency towards religious despair. The tragic aesthetic cultivated a sense of human agency that was often obfuscated in the strict Calvinist doctrine of double-predestination, and which was effectively removed in the plague-induced moments of cultural crisis. A focus for cultural anxieties, the theatre offered a generic cultural template, whereby patterns of societal violence and an unusually fraught understanding of mortality were ostensibly circumscribed by the evolving notion of a tragic ideal.

In many ways, the theatre was entangled with notions of violence. Of course, tragedies reproduced violence on the stage, but plays were also thought to

incite individuals to violence, or conversely, to reconcile them with the habitual and discomfiting violence of lived experience. As Drakakis notes, 'the *staging* of violence in the public theatre is both a displacement and a transference of a violence which existed not very far beneath the surface of Elizabethan society itself' (1992b: 15). Furthermore, tragedy explored paradigms of violence and was involved in the complexities of their cultural codification. Discussions of the nature of tragedy have traditionally focused upon its agonistic form, that is to say, upon the way in which it negotiates conflicting explanations of human experience. On the one hand, it engages with an understanding of human suffering as the result of a transcendent order which the individual is powerless to counter; on the other, with a conception of individual autonomy and ultimate, personal responsibilities. Neill argues that English Renaissance tragedy 'catered for a culture that was in the throes of a peculiar crisis in the accommodation of death – one that reflected the strain of adjusting the psychic economy of an increasingly individualistic society to the stubborn facts of mortality' (1997: 30). As a direct result of the plague, the nature of any such transcendent order was increasingly thought of in secular terms. Indeed, in many ways, the plague itself was a destructive and anarchic but nevertheless transcendent order. Tragedy, as Neill observes, 'offered to contain the fear of death by staging fantasies of ending in which the moment of dying was transformed, by the arts of performance, to a supreme demonstration of distinction' (1997: 32). Undoubtedly indicating a widespread cultural desire for a secular rationale, the Renaissance saw an unprecedented development in tragic drama, as the concerns of the individual

became focused upon notions of personal identity and on the importance of being remembered after death. By 'aestheticising' death in this way, the theatre became involved in the dramatisation of human agency, and consequently, with a reworking of perceptions of 'reality', which, as Greenblatt reminds us, 'for each society is constructed to a significant degree out of *specific* qualities of its language and symbols' (1990: 32). Therefore, if, as Sidney Lee asserts, 'promoters of public amusement seem to have placed the attractions of bullbaiting and bearbaiting on much the same level as dramatic performances' (1950: 429) it is only to be expected that the contiguous, and equally prominent spectacle of bearbaiting was also an important factor in the codification and dissemination of paradigms of violence. As Greenblatt observes, '[t]heatrical values do not exist in a realm of privileged literariness, of textual or even institutional self-referentiality ... Collective actions, ritual gestures, paradigms of relationship ... penetrate the work of art' (1985: 32-33).

The theatre was a singularly significant cultural space, but the reproduction and reformulation of cultural meanings was not confined to its domain. A parallel form of popular entertainment provided a challenge to this stylised aesthetic ideal of supreme violence. A Jacobean advert notifies the public that:

Tomorrowe beinge Thursdaie shal be seen at the Beargardin  
 on the banckside a greate Mach plaid by the gamstirs of  
 Essex who hath chalenged all comers what soever to plaie v  
 dogges at the single beare for v pounds and also to wearie a  
 bull dead at the stake and for your better content shall have  
 plasant sport with the horse and ape and whipping of the  
 blind beare (Foakes 1977 Vol. 2: 106).

Both the general public and royalty enjoyed bearbaiting and bullbaiting, as well as horse and monkey baiting: both Elizabeth I and James I displayed a particularly keen interest in the sport. Early in her reign, Elizabeth staged a bullbaiting for a visiting French ambassador who was so impressed by the spectacle that he took a number of English mastiffs back to France (Macdonogh 1999: 212).<sup>6</sup>

As its name suggests, the Cockpit had previously been an arena for various animal entertainments, and particularly for cock-fighting. Despite its transformation into a private indoor theatre, such amusements remained extremely popular. The arena in the Bear garden, or Paris garden in Southwark was the sight of regular bear, bull and horsebaitings before its collapse in 1583. It was later rebuilt as the Hope theatre, which was designed to be suitable 'bothe for players to playe In, And for the game of Beares and Bulls to be bayted in the same' (Greg 1907: 20). This dual function is alluded to in a number of contemporary plays, perhaps most notably with the self-reflexive questioning of the chorus in *Henry V*: 'Can this Cockpit hold/The vasty fields of France?' (*Prologue* 11-12).

The Venetian sailor and merchant, Alessandro Magno, gives a detailed description of London baiting matches in the records of his voyage to England:

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<sup>6</sup> At the court of James I there was a great appetite for pitting various combinations of exotic animals against one another. An account of Prince Ulric's visit to the Tower in 1610 tells of his

First ... they bring in ... a worthless horse with all its trappings, and a monkey in the saddle, then four to six of the younger dogs, with which they make an attack. Then these are replaced by leading in more experienced ones, in which baiting it is a fine sight to see the horse run, kicking and biting, and the monkey grip the saddle tightly and scream, many times being bitten, in which baiting, after the attendants have intervened for a while, with frequently the death of the horse, and it is removed from the scene, they bring in some bears, either one by one or several together, but this baiting is not very fine to see. Finally they bring in a wild bull, and they tie it with a rope about two paces long to a stake that is fixed in the middle of the enclosure. The baiting is finer to see than the others and is more dangerous for the dogs than the others, many of which are wounded and die, and it lasts until evening (cited in Dawson 1964: 98-99).

As well as being the finest of these entertainments, in Magno's view, bullbaiting was said to add to the flavour of the bull's meat, which would be eaten after the match. Stephen Dickey notes that '[i]n an efficient symbiosis of sport and sustenance, bulls were obliged to be baited prior to being butchered. The more valuable bears, if they survived, were headed no place other than future bouts in the ring' (1991: 256). Although Magno complains that the bearbaiting 'is not very fine to see', Lee affirms that it was 'pursued in England with an earnestness which was hardly known elsewhere' (1950: 426). Robert Langham's account of a match at Kenilworth testifies to the great enjoyment derived from these spectacles. He enthuses:

It waz a sport very pleazaunt of theez beatz: to see the bear with hiz pink nyez leering after hiz enmyez approcj, the nimblness and wayt of the dog too take hiz avantage, and the fors and experiens of the bear again to avoyd the assaults: if he wear bitten in one place, hoow he woold pynch in an oother too get free: that if he wear taken onez, then what shyft with byting with clawing, with roring tossing and tumbling he woold work too wynde hym self from them: and

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visit with his cousin Prince Henry to watch such a match involving several dogs, lions and lionesses (Nichols 1967: 307-308).

when he waz lose, to shake hiz earz twyse or thryse with the blud and the slaver about hiz fiznamy, waz a matter of goodly relief (Langham 1983: 48).

His account foregrounds the intense and relentless violence which characterised such events. In contrast to the teleological thrust of tragic drama, the violence of a bearbaiting operated without a demonstrable sense of progression towards an ending. After the death of a 'worthless horse', and the baiting of a bull for food, the action continued with bears as more and more animals were introduced into the ring. 'Slaughter in the pit', Dickey conjectures, 'was either rarer than one might imagine or routinely unremarkable, simply beside the point' (1991: 259). The main casualties were the mastiff dogs, many of which were killed by the bear within moments. Members of the public would bring their own dogs to be pitted against the bears, often wagering large sums of money. Indeed, the bear-pit's undeniable popularity with gamblers is testimony to the indeterminacy of the matches. Therefore, despite the inevitable casualties, the outcome of a baiting was always uncertain. Moreover, death, in this context was not an end to the violence.

Bearbaiting therefore offers an alternative framework from within which to understand violence in the Renaissance. In contrast with the tragic model, which, as Neill asserts, is 'a profoundly teleological form whose full meaning will be uncovered in the revelation of its end' (1997: 45), the trajectory described by the baiting of a bear was markedly different. Dickey notes that,



‘the effective outcome of a bearbaiting match was something best expressed as a stalemate’ (1991: 259). Rather than codifying violence in determinable and purposeful (crudely positive humanist) terms, bearbaiting presented an inescapable *experience* of violence that could be qualitatively aligned with an unalterable (crudely negative providential) outlook. The suffering of a bear – tied to the stake and forced to endure continual and unremitting violence – offered the audience an alternative representation of the conditions of their own subjectivity. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, ‘[o]ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature’ (1980: 3), and the bear-pit provided a metaphor and a vocabulary with which to conceptualise and articulate this experience of violence and suffering. In contrast to the tragic aesthetic of Cleopatra’s ‘immortal longings’, and heroic challenge, ‘Where art thou, Death?/ Come hither, come!’, bearbaiting exemplified an understanding of human suffering more akin to Macbeth’s conception of his own situation: ‘They have tied me to a stake: I cannot fly,/ But, bear-like, I must fight the course’ (V.vii.1-2). For Macbeth, ‘baited by the rabble’s curse’ (V.viii.29), the suffering is overwhelming and cannot be rationalised in terms of the postponement of a positive personal outcome which would ultimately give meaning to the violence.

The figure of the bear was of considerable symbolic importance during the Renaissance. In addition to the celebrated role of figures such as Harry Hunks, Sackerson, Tom of Lincoln, Moll Cutpurse, Mad Bess and George Stone, the

bear made a number of significant symbolic appearances at particular events in the Renaissance calendar. Principally, the bear was linked to the Candlemas celebrations, as François Laroque details in his discussion of Shakespeare's festive world:

There was a direct link, in popular belief, between the beginning of carnival and the end of the bear's hibernation which was liable to take place on Candlemas Day (February 2). As the beast emerged from its lair, it was thought to look around to see what the weather was like. If it was fine, it went back in, which was a sign that winter would continue for another forty days, that is to say until about 10 March; if, on the other hand, the weather was overcast, the bear emerged for good, thereby marking an early end to winter. Candlemas fell on the day before Saint Blaise's Day, 3 February, which was traditionally the earliest possible day for Shrove Tuesday (1991: 48).

Signifying an end to the period of carnivalesque excess, Candlemas marked the beginning of the agricultural year, and therefore, the point at which people were required to return to work. The recurrent image of the Candlemas bear emphasises what was an essentially cyclical conception of temporality. Indeed, the infamous cameo appearance of the bear in *The Winter's Tale* plays upon this association.

In addition to its renowned stage direction, one of the most frequently discussed aspects of *The Winter's Tale* is the striking temporal gap of a vast sixteen years, and its relation to the play's overall tragic-comic structure. After Antigonus deposits Perdita in a remote location in Bohemia, a bear appears onstage and promptly kills him. However, the bear does not function solely as a signifier of violence here. Shortly before his demise, Antigonus comments, 'I

never saw/ the heavens so dim by day' (III.iii.56-57), a sign which, in conjunction with the emergence of the bear, would herald the end of winter. Here, the bear mediates between the play's initial tragic form and the forthcoming comic conclusion.<sup>7</sup> This peculiar ambivalence is characteristic of the way in which bears were perceived in the Renaissance popular imagination: it is interesting to note Thomas Dekker's playful description of bears used for entertainment as a 'company of ... Beares' who 'play their Tragicomedies' (cited in Skura 1993: 204). Their natural fierceness and aggression was thought to run parallel to their strong nurturing instincts. In Edward Topsell's comprehensive study, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607), he relates the following story in order to illustrate their 'most venerous and lustfull disposition':

a Beare carried a young maide into his denne by violence, where in venerous manner he had the carnal use of her body, and while he kept her in his denne, he dailye went foorth and brought her home the best Apples and other fruites he could get, presenting them unto her in very amorous sort; but always when hee went to forage, he rouled a huge great stone upon the mouth of his denne, that the Virgin shoulde not escape away (1607: E1<sup>r</sup>).

This combination of violence and attentiveness illustrates the profound uncertainty with which these creatures were viewed. On the one hand, they were powerful symbols of the end of winter and the beginning of spring, and therefore, of fertility and rejuvenation. But on the other, their renowned aggression signalled their capacity for great destruction. It is possible to suggest then, that people's reactions to the figure of the bear in the baiting

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<sup>7</sup> See Judie Newman (1988: 484) and Michael Bristol (1991: 145-167).

arena were informed by the ambivalent cultural meanings ascribed to them in the seasonal calendar and popular folklore.

The idea of bearbaiting was often developed metaphorically to suggest suffering and punishment and in a number of early modern discourses, these ideas are inextricably linked to the condition of selfhood. Various permutations of the metaphor of bearbaiting are explored in a series of early seventeenth century pamphlets that comprise a debate upon the nature of women. Joseph Swetnam uses this metaphor in his controversial misogynist pamphlet, *The Arraignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant women* (1615). He announces in his opening pages, '[i]f thou mean to see the Bear-bayting of women, then trudge to this beare-garden apace'. He likens his dogged and lengthy rebuke of women to a bearbaiting, and throughout the tract relies heavily upon ambivalent cultural conceptions of the bear; in particular the perceived contrast between their fierceness and their 'femininity'. He compares the temperament of woman, unfavourably, with the aggression of the bear, asserting that 'the Beare being robbed of her young ones ... [is] nothing so terrible as the fury of a woman.' (1615: 2). Indeed, he makes explicit reference to the similarities of an angered woman and a bear at the stake, stating that 'a froward woman in hir frantick mood will pull haule, swerve, scratch & teare all that stands in her way.' (1615: 12) Here, although seeming to link women firmly with their ursine counterparts, he develops the metaphor of baiting to suggest an experience of acute but continual violence

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akin to men's experience of marriage. In doing so, he implicitly allies men too with the figure of the bear.

In a lively response, Constantia Munda proposes that Swetnam's objections are a 'strange blasphemy'. Dismissing his argument, and his choice of metaphor, she counters:

You promise your spectators the Beare-baiting of women, and yet you think it not amisse to drive all women out of your hearing; for that none but your selfe the ill-favoured Hunckes is left in the Beare-garden to make your invited guests merry: whereupon it may very likely be, the eager young men ... set their doges at you (1617: 25).

Overturning his initial formulation, Munda aligns Swetnam himself with a well-known stage bear, the 'ill-favoured Hunckes', thereby suggesting that he is the figure upon whom the reader's or spectator's desires will converge. She claims that his attempts to articulate his own position have merely worked to single him out for the ridicule he intended for women. '[Y]ou beginne' she mocks 'as if you were wont to runne up and downe the Countrey with Beares at your taile' (1617: 24). As Munda conceives it, then, the bear symbolises a pitiful, ill-tempered and humiliated figure, akin to the dejected image of Macbeth in the final scenes of the play.

In her contribution to the debate, Rachel Speght provides an intelligent and patient response to Swetnam's text, focusing upon his lack of rhetorical sophistication in addition to the flaws in his argument. She declares that '[i]n ... *the Beare-bayting of Women, you have plainely displayed your owne disposition to be*

*Cynicall*, in that there appears no other Dogge or Bull, to bayte them, but your selfe' (1617: 3). In contrast to Munda's treatment of Swetnam's metaphor, Speght retains the bear-like image of women, figuratively tied to the stake. However, she locates the significance of such a restraint within a theological context, arguing that God created women 'for mans sake ... as a good yokefellow'. Women's subjugation is understood as a necessary condition of their relationship with God, and therefore to be assumed positively.

Speght goes on to criticise Swetnam's 'roaring cogitations', equating his poor grammar with an animalistic sense of disorder: 'you' she accuses, 'being greedie to botch up your mingle mangle invective against Women; have not therein observed, in many places, so much as Grammar sense' (1617: 3). By labelling Swetnam 'Melastomus', (from 'melas', meaning black, and 'stóma', meaning mouth) she conflates the tearing and biting that characterise a baiting, and the equally destructive operations of language itself, into the idea of an 'evil-mouth'. Consequently, language itself may 'oftentimes setteth a rankling tooth into the sides of truth' (1617: 4), and can be identified not only as an instrument of baiting but also as that which is baited.

The trope of bearbaiting is implicated in all of these texts, but the figure of the bear functions as an ambivalent and unstable signifier, unable to be categorically aligned with either the persecuted or persecuting subject. However, this ambiguity increases baiting's metaphorical currency, particularly in its relation to the prevailing Protestant theology of the time. At the level of

the corporeal, it is not difficult to identify a certain paradigm of violence and draw plausible links between the experience of the bear, bound to the stake, and the image of Christ on the cross. Arguing that the representations of sacrificial violence contained in the mystery plays, popular at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, remained influential, Meredith Anne Skura identifies this link, situating it within a dramatic tradition. She observes that with 'bearbaiting and the Christian mystery plays ... [p]art of the fascination was that the performance was deadly to the performer and that the audience was itself implicated in the violence' (1993: 203). Many scholars have suggested that the figure of Jesus crucified was marginalised in Reformation theology, but as Adrian Streete affirms, 'the doctrine of election and reprobation, as it was most commonly understood in early modern England, was a deeply Christological doctrine' (2001: 146). Christians were exhorted to identify with Christ, and devotional rhetoric forged express corollaries between the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of the elect. Concentrated upon the crucifixion, this reciprocal relationship reached its crisis as the process of assimilation invoked a dual identification. Not only was the individual encouraged to empathise with the figure of Christ, but also, more radically, with his tormentors. Highlighting the Renaissance fascination with cruelty, Debora Kuller Shuger makes specific reference to Calvinist passion narratives, which she observes, 'while less absorbed by the techniques of cruelty, fix compulsively on its psychology' (1994: 91). In these texts, the unusually detailed descriptions of Christ's sufferings take on overtly sadistic and erotic overtones. Indeed, in the vivid portrayal of Christ, 'his face blue and black

with buffeting, his eyes swollen, his cheeks beslavered with spittle' (Hall 1863, Vol. 2: 654), the graphic focus upon his tortured body is redolent of the enthusiastically grotesque descriptions of the 'blud and the slaver' of the baited bear.<sup>8</sup>

The listener or reader of the passions is positioned so that they too are implicated in the acts of physical and mental violence. Shuger explains:

The notion that since Christ died for our sins we are all responsible for the Crucifixion originates early in Christian thought, but the Calvinist passion narratives intensify this complicity by merging the position of the reader with that of the torturer. Our sins become not simply the antecedent cause of Christ's sacrifice; rather we find ourselves sucked into the scene as participants in the act of cruelty (1994: 92-93).

Like the complexities of the baiting metaphor in the pamphlets of Swetnam, Speght and Munda, where the bear's ambiguous position problematised any attempts to consistently align one party with the baited bear and the other with the dogs, the passion narratives hinder the reader's ability to identify him or herself exclusively with Christ. Maus explores this duality:

The Calvinist passion narratives ... present the Crucifixion as an allegory of subjectivity. By forcing the reader to identify with all the *dramatis personae*, good and evil, involved in the Crucifixion, these texts attempt to produce a specific version of Christian selfhood – a divided selfhood gripped by intense, contradictory emotions and an ineradicable tension between its natural inclinations and religious obligations (1995: 7).

The literary treatment of the Crucifixion exposes this aporia: subjectivity is constituted in conflict, experienced by the individual as a continual torment.

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<sup>8</sup> Artaud reminds us that '[t]here can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty at the basis of



Many scholars have focused critical attention on the centrality of Protestantism for the development of the Renaissance subject.<sup>9</sup> However, the notion of tormented subjectivity may also be understood in wider, and increasingly secular terms. The metaphor of bearbaiting shares with Protestant Christology a concern for the process of externalising the inward experiences of the individual, and rendering them visible to the outside world. Maus explains that 'in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England the sense of discrepancy between "inward disposition" and "outward appearance" seems unusually urgent and consequential for a very large number of people, who occupy virtually every position on the ideological spectrum' (1995: 13). Just as the rhetoric of popular piety urged Christians to emulate Christ, and in doing so, to make their outward actions the signifiers of their inward thoughts, the rhetoric of the bear-pit was concerned, in a similar manner, with the reification of internal conflict.

In an evolving taxonomy of violence, the codification of various forms of 'internal' violence are complicated by their unrepresentability. Notions of internal violence are, by implication, linked to suffering, and in her important study, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry postulates that '[w]hatever pain achieves, it achieves it in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language' (1985: 4). Bearbaiting is utilised as a

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every show ... metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body' (1993: 77).

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Maus (1995), Shuger (1994), Stachniewski (1991), Streete (2001), and Walsham (1999).

metaphor for the inherent violence of human experience, precisely because the experience cannot be represented in any other way. Scarry goes on to explain that 'pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content' (1985: 5). Nevertheless, the experiences realised by the metaphor are structured by and simultaneously serve to structure the habits of a number of conflicting discourses.

In his study of Protestantism and early modern subjectivity, *The Persecutory Imagination*, John Stachniewski identifies the way in which language functions constitutively rather than purely descriptively. He asserts that

The task of dismantling the Calvinist-puritan vocabulary and replacing it with another proves unachievable, even systematically unthinkable, partly because the authority of the first discourse maintains its status as an accurate description, but more fundamentally because the experience is generated by the words themselves, inheres in them, and is not a detachable entity receptive to alternative explanation (1991: 8).

The metaphors of the bear pit are always already infused with previous modes of understanding, and therefore, '[e]ven where ... linguistic reinforcement of negative intuitions is finally overcome, or converted into the positive terms, the trace of the former experience and its linguistic encoding remains influential' (1991: 5). Indeed, the dynamics of the Renaissance tragic aesthetic were as much concerned with habits of discourse as with patterns of actual physical violence. Tragedy's involvement with the dramatisation of human agency was complicated by the burgeoning vocabulary of ongoing internal

violence that the metaphors of the bear pit addressed. Language itself, however, is similarly unstable, and also subject to continued internal violence.

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* reflects the proximity of these physically and psychologically contiguous spheres, fusing the tragic aesthetic of the theatre with the corporeal logic of the bear-pit. Functioning at the intersection between these domains, the play derives palpable force from the instability of their material and linguistic incarnations. The result, which does not ultimately effect the restoration of balance associated with tragedy, is the combination of continuous violence and an intense focus on the body. Inevitably, tensions are generated because the intractable language of the body must operate in conjunction with the metaphysical dimensions of tragedy.

Critics concur that *Coriolanus* is, for a number of reasons, a problematic tragedy. The Aristotelian model of tragedy provides a useful framework in which to outline some of the idiosyncrasies of the play's structure. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle asserts that '[t]ragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude' (1996: 10). From this perspective, the play lacks many of the elements thought to underpin the genre of tragedy. In the first instance, the plot traces a trajectory in which the actions leading to the protagonist's death cannot be considered unequivocally admirable: Coriolanus is banished after losing the support of the plebeians he disdains, and subsequently decides to fight with the Volscians against the Romans. His decision to do so does not appear to be in keeping with the

values of noble suffering in adversity traditionally associated with the tragic hero. Aristotle goes on to state that a tragedy must be complete, with a beginning that 'does not follow necessarily from anything else' (1996: 13). But the play opens in the midst of a mutiny, signifying a moment of crisis within an ongoing conflict that predates the opening of the play. Similarly, the death of Coriolanus in the final act does not signal an end to conflict, as there is still enmity between the Romans and the Volscians. In structural terms, it may be argued that the play is a flawed tragedy. However, recent critical discussions of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama have suggested that during the period, the formal constituents of tragedy were being continually contested and reformulated. Central to this process was a re-evaluation of the nature of subjectivity. Susan Zimmerman argues that 'Shakespeare's tragedies ... explore ... how and according to what dictates the human subject is constituted' (1998: 1), and in this way offer us a knowledge of ourselves. This process is always violent, although in *Coriolanus* the orientation of the violence complicates the purposeful design of tragedy.

The play opens with the stage direction, 'Enter a company of mutinous Citizens, with staves, clubs, and other weapons', confronting the audience with a scene of violence unprecedented in Renaissance tragedy.<sup>10</sup> The play begins in the midst of a conflict arising from a series of complex political precedents. The First Citizen explains the plebeians' grievances:

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Brockbank notes that it 'is unique among plays of the period in opening with a scene of public violence' (Shakespeare 1976: 95).

We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely; but they think we are too dear ... Let us revenge this with our pikes, ere we become rakes (I.i.14-22).

Caius Martius is imputed to be the driving force behind the poor treatment of the starving plebeians and is described as 'a very dog to the commonalty' (I.i.27). The starving masses are metaphorically tied to the stake, physically restricted by poverty, and physically tormented by an authority which baits them by withholding food. The conditions of open rebellion that form the setting of the opening scene, and the likening of Martius to a combative dog immediately foregrounds the pivotal metaphor of the bear pit which is developed throughout the play.

The opening scenes resemble the chaotic environment that the bear garden has come to epitomise. Moreover, the nature of the violence throughout the play sustains this parallel. Robert Langham's light-hearted account of the bearbaiting at Kenilworth describes the events in terms of a long-standing disagreement between bears and dogs. He explains that the 'auncient quarell' is caused by

controversy that hath long depended, been obstinately full often debated with sharp and byting arguments a both sides, and could never be decyded: grown noow too so marvayloos a mallys, that with spiteful obrays and uncharitabl chaffyngs allweyz they freat, az far az any whear the ton can heer, see or smell the toother: and indeed at utter deadly fohod (Langham 1983: 47-48).

Departing from the conventions of tragedy, *Coriolanus* shares with bearbaiting the condition of dispute without end. It combines this with a similarly unremitting focus upon the body, and explores the implications of continual conflict for the individual. James Holston argues that in *Coriolanus*, 'Shakespeare satirizes those generic aspects of tragedy that depend on unquestioning faith in the ... political analogy of the body politic' (1983: 486). The metaphor of the bear pit provides an apposite challenge: whilst drawing attention to a base physicality, and therefore, to the material conditions of existence, it simultaneously permits a questioning of the metaphors that propagate and sustain the ideological apparatus of authority.

Menenius' celebrated fable of the body pointedly exposes the flaws inherent in the metaphors used by the patricians in their attempts to subdue the plebeians. From the outset, Rome is deeply divided by famine and civil unrest, and as a political body, is structured by sustained infighting. Throughout, violence is inflicted upon and at the hands of this corpus: hunger has exposed the corporeal vulnerability, not only of the starving plebeians, but also of the metaphorical body politic. Menenius tells of a time, 'when all the body's members/ Rebell'd against the belly' (I.i.95-96), but rather than ameliorating the strained relationship between the patricians and plebeians, he reinforces it. Quite apart from the legitimacy of either side's claim, in a newly established republican state, there is something strikingly inappropriate about the use of a metaphor whose reasoning is dependant upon a belief in the sanctioned authority of '[t]he kingly crown'd head' of the fabulous body. Indeed, his fable

fails to maintain an internal logic. He uses the tale in a bid to foster a sense of cohesiveness, arguing that the belly, which he equates with the senators of Rome, sustains and nourishes all parts of the body: 'through the rivers of ... blood ... The strongest nerves and small inferior veins ... receive that natural competency/ Whereby they live' (I.i.134-139). Yet only a few lines later, this image of a single unified body has broken down and the language of bodily difference infiltrates his rhetoric. Menenius taunts the First Citizen, calling him 'one o'th'lowest, basest and poorest' of the plebeians, a 'rascal, that art worst in blood to run' (I.i.158). Here, he distances himself from the First Citizen on precisely the same grounds – those of 'blood' – that he has just used to argue *for* their unity within the body politic. From the very first scene, the notion of the body politic has been exposed as an unworkable metaphor, unable to unify or contain the factions within Rome. The analogy of the bear pit offers an alternative which recognises the possibility of irreconcilable conflict.

Although the trope of bearbaiting is repeated throughout the play, the figures of the bear and the dogs are employed ambiguously. Caius Martius is initially aligned with the mastiffs which were bred to fight and were unable to act contrary to their nature. Indeed, one Roman citizen complains that 'What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him' (I.i.40). This idea is repeated, with considerably less sympathy, by Sicinius, who claims that it is as easy to provoke him as 'to set dogs on sheep' (II.i.255). But although his 'true-bred' (I.i.242) tenacity and love of war are likened to the inherent traits of a thoroughbred, an argument is made for nurture rather than nature. When

Richard III complains 'Love foreswore me in my mother's womb', he holds his mother accountable for his deformity, and likens himself to an 'unlick'd bear-whelp'. By making reference to the popular belief that the female bear physically licked her cub into shape he suggests that it is his mother who is responsible for his 'disproportion ... in every part' (*King Henry IV, Part 3*, III.ii.160). Here, Volumnia recounts with pride:

When he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb; when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way; when for a day of entreaties, a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding; I considering how honour would become such a person ... was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To cruel war I sent him (I.iii.5-13).

Thrust into a hostile environment, Coriolanus is shaped and bound by a number of political constraints and he, too, is subject to physical harm.

His renown as a warrior binds him to the political centre of Rome and dictates that he must endure the wounds of the battlefield on behalf of its citizens. In Rome, political authority is derived from the emblematic markers of engagement in physical combat. After the battle at Corioles, Menenius declares that:

MENENIUS	Martius is coming home: he has more cause to be proud. [ <i>To Volumnia</i> ] Where is he wounded?
VOLUMNIA	I'the'shoulder, and i'th'left arm: there will be large cicatrices to show the people when he shall stand for his place. He received in the repulse of Tarquin seven hurts i'th'body.
MENENIUS	One ith'neck, and two i'th'thigh – there's nine that I know.
VOLUMNIA	He had, before this last expedition, twenty-five wounds upon him.





In common with the dual identification evoked by the rebarbative Protestant discourses of the Renaissance, the metaphor of the bear pit allows for recognition of the intense suffering that structures and sustains the subject. Moreover, it paves the way for an articulation of the painful but creative process of identifying with one's tormentor. In the polemical pamphlets of the period, the metaphor is employed with considerable and unsettling ambiguity and in *Coriolanus*, its valency is dependent upon its ability to capture something of this dilemma. The language of the play draws unflinchingly upon images of dismembered bodies and riven flesh, but through these images we are encouraged to identify both with the experience of pain and with its inflictor and throughout the play we see the characters engaged in a similar interior battle.

Menenius inhabits an ambivalent position throughout the play, appearing to sympathise with the starving masses as well as the governing authority. This is manifest in the manner in which he seeks to deflect the animosity of the plebeians who complain openly against the patricians:

I tell you, friends, most charitable care  
 Have the patricians of you. For your wants,  
 Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well  
 Strike at the heaven with your staves, as lift them  
 Against the Roman state, whose course will on  
 The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs  
 Of more strong link asunder than can ever  
 Appear in your impediment.

(I.i.64-71)

Suggesting that the might of the Roman state dominates them to such an extent that they are like animals, kept in check by 'curbs', his rhetoric reinforces the plebeians' perception of their oppressed position. He attempts to mollify the citizens by echoing their sentiments, playing upon their grievances and implying that because their situation is indeed as severe as they say, it is unable to be challenged.

However, Rome's internal dissension cannot be conceived in terms of clearly polarised political agendas. To broach the gap between the opposing positions, tribunes were appointed to act as intermediaries. Although elected representatives of the people, appointed to voice popular concerns and to redress the imbalances of authority, Martius describes their office as having been 'granted' by the patricians in order that the plebeians might 'defend their vulgar wisdoms' (I.i.214). But by virtue of their position as elected members of the governing patrician authority, they too are implicated in the poor treatment of the commoners. Sicinius and Brutus are keenly aware of their onerous position and make their concerns explicit during Coriolanus' candidacy for consulship. The First Senator's oration in support of his application defers to the tribunes, asking, 'Masters o'th'people,/ We do request your kindest ears, and after/ Your loving motion toward the common body/ To yield what passes here' (II.ii.51-54). Endeavouring to resurrect the moribund metaphor of the body politic, he provisionally includes the tribunes and asks them to empathise with the very figure they have previously identified as their tormentor. As the Third Citizen claims, 'if he show us his

wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them' (II.iii.5-7). However, this is no more comfortable for Coriolanus than for the plebeians. The process of dual identification threatens to render the differences between the two factions imperceptible, and as Girard has argued, it is not differences but the lack of them which gives rise to violence.

The tribunes also symbolise the way in which Coriolanus is encouraged to identify with the commoners he disdains. Requiring the people's voices in order to validate his wounds, he must establish a connection with those he is at pains to differentiate himself from. Bitterly condemned by the tribunes for his excoriating treatment of the plebeians, they argue that, 'They have chose a consul that will from them take/ Their liberties, make them of no more voice/ Than dogs that are as often beat for barking/ As therefore kept to do so' (II.iii.212-214). As public feeling mounts against Coriolanus, he remains unable to disguise his hostility towards the very people who can secure his position. In a vituperative reproof he asks the tribunes:

Are these your herd?  
Must these have voices, that can yield them now  
And straight disclaim their tongues? What are your offices?  
You being their mouths, why rule not their teeth?  
Have you not set them on?

(III.i.32-35)



bear (I.iii.30-31). Her affirmation of Aufidius' bear-like qualities proposes an image of her son's courage and fierceness, which, similarly bear-like, must necessarily exceed this. On no other occasion in the play is an antagonistic relationship presented in terms of a conflict between opponents of (quite literally) equal standing. Aufidius himself asserts, 'I would I were a Roman, for I cannot,/ Being a Volsce, be that I am' (I.x.4-5).

There is not room on the political stage, however, for more than one ursine figure. Their relationship, which had previously been founded upon unrestrained antipathy, is transposed into one of uncanny resemblance. After his expulsion from Rome, Coriolanus promptly switches allegiance and makes his way to Antium to meet peaceably with Aufidius. The erotic charge of the resulting exchange problematises each leader's sense of self. Immediately Coriolanus has affirmed that his 'love's upon/ This enemy town' (IV.iv.23-24), Aufidius declares:

Know thou first,  
 I lov'd the maid I married; never man  
 Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,  
 Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart  
 Than when I first my wedded mistress saw  
 Bestride my threshold ... Thou hast beat me out  
 Twelve several times, and I have nightly since  
 Dreamt of encounters 'twixt thyself and me –  
 We have been down together in my sleep  
 (IV.v.114-125)

Their new-found union is described in overtly sexual terms, signalling the dissolution of their separate identities in favour of a radical communion. Each

figure previously crafted an image of himself in direct response to his political other. But once the formative tension generated by their fierce contrariety is abrogated, nothing remains to differentiate one from the other. In concordance, Coriolanus and Aufidius come closer to annihilating each other than they were ever able to in war.

Their alliance is short-lived, however. In Act V, scene three, Aufidius is in a position to reassert his enmity when Coriolanus reneges on his commitment to the Volscians. Volumnia appeals to her recreant son not to destroy Rome, pleading:

If it were so that our request did tend  
To save the Romans, thereby to destroy  
The Volsces whom you serve, you might condemn us  
As poisonous of your honour. No, our suit  
Is that you reconcile them

(V.iii.132-136)

But reconciliation would be fatal to both Coriolanus and Aufidius: neither would have a political other against which to formulate their identity. Although Coriolanus concedes to his mother's request, he understands that in doing so he has dismantled the architecture of his own subjectivity: he has acceded to demands which remove the very conflict which has provided his *raison d'être*. In recognition of this, he cries out:

O my mother, mother! O!  
You have won a happy victory to Rome;  
But for you son, believe it, O, believe it,  
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,  
If not most mortal to him. But let it come.

(V.iii.185-189)

Aufidius too identifies the need for a restitution of their differences, remarking in an aside, 'I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour/ At difference in thee. Out of that I'll work/ Myself a former fortune' (V.iii.199-201). The coalition endangered both men, but Aufidius can reclaim authority by vigorously advertising these differences.

Coriolanus, however, is ultimately overwhelmed and his attempt to reconcile the Romans and the Volscians does indeed prove fatal. In his brief experiment with peace he finally develops the capacity to identify, not only with the inflictors of his pain, but also with the pain itself. Previously, he had acknowledged neither in full. In Act II, scene two he explains, 'When blows have made me stay, I fled from words' (72), but in the final act, it is his mother's persuasive speech that holds him. On his return to the Volscians he is declared a traitor and publicly gives himself up to be baited, asking, 'Cut me to pieces ... stain all your edges on me' (111-112). Moments later, the people echo this, shouting 'Tear him to pieces!' (120): his desires and those of his enemies are conflated and given voice in the unanimous cries of, 'Kill, kill, kill, kill' (128). He can no longer live under the illusion that man is 'author of himself' (V.iii.35) and succumbs to a knowledge that hitherto, he had only transiently grasped. Formerly he remarked, 'my soul aches/ To know, when two authorities are up,/ Neither supreme, how soon confusion/ May enter twixt the gap of both (III.i.107-110). In the end, forced to recognise his place



within the symbolic order, he finally acknowledges the inexorable conflicts upon which his subjectivity is founded.

It is Coriolanus' relationship with language, therefore, which effects the most intense and unbearable violence. Throughout the play, his rigidity of mind leads him to insist upon a 'bolted language' (III.i.319), but language, by its nature, is flexible and robust, and subject to continual flux. Moreover, subjectivity is dependant upon entry into its evolving symbolic system. Coriolanus, however, is 'too absolute' (III.ii.39) and as James L. Calderwood argues:

If for him language is not subject to modification by the requirements of different social situations, not flexible enough to respond in tone and style to the demands of decorum – if it is not a social instrument, neither is it an instrument with which to probe and express the workings of the unconscious (1966: 216).

His lack of eloquence is well documented and as a dramatic figure he has been compared unfavourably with Shakespeare's other tragic protagonists. Volumnia taught him that 'action is eloquence' (III.i.76) but his uncompromising adherence to this belief results in a failure to fully engage with a linguistic system that connects him to all sections of the body politic. His desire to distance himself from the plebeians motivates him to restrict himself to a private, static language. Consequently, he lacks the symbolic apparatus necessary to understand the ambivalent feelings he comes to experience. Coriolanus is afforded a transitory glimpse of what Lacan terms the 'real' – that which cannot be symbolised – and whilst this would normally guarantee the subject's full integration into the symbolic order, his relationship

with language is not robust enough to assimilate, or reintegrate, an encounter with the traumatic kernel around which subjectivity is structured.

His failure to achieve such integration is best demonstrated by his relationship to the name 'Coriolanus'. Lacan asserts that 'man defies his very destiny when he derides the signifier' (1977: 158), and as Žižek explains,

the Word, the contraction of the Self outside the Self, involves an irretrievable externalisation-alienation ... by means of the Word, the subject finally finds himself, comes to himself: he is no longer a mere obscure longing for himself since, in the Word, he directly attains himself, posits himself as such. The price however, is the irretrievable loss of the subject's self identity: the verbal sign that stands for the subject – in which the subject posits himself as self-identical – bears the mark of irreducible dissonance; it never fits the subject (1996a: 46-47).

His commitment to maintaining a private meaning binds him to a futile struggle to make his name 'fit'. But in order to truly 'attain himself' through his name, he must acknowledge the inherently social processes which allow it to have meaning. The rigidity of his language does not allow him to incorporate this new-found knowledge; he is eventually destroyed by the discovery that his private identity is structured through and through by the social conditions he has worked to isolate himself from.

His death does not effect any wholesale restoration of balance, but instead signals a return to conflict: the only true constant. As the play ends with Aufidius' artless eulogy, we know that his quarrel with the Romans will be

resurrected. Just as it is in the bear pit, another figure will supersede Coriolanus: fatalities do not signal and end to the violence, because the individuals are simply replaced and the fighting continues. Towards the end of the play, the insurrections at Rome are discussed in a brief exchange between Roman and a Volscian. When the Volscian asks, 'Is it ended then?', he is told that 'The main blaze of it is past, but a small thing would make it flame again ... This lies glowing, I can tell you, and is almost mature for the violent breaking out' (IV.iii.15-26). The play opens with fighting and ends with the promise of more to come. The tragedy for Coriolanus, if indeed there is one, lies in the extent to which he gives way to the fractured sense of self that the fighting engenders. He identifies too readily with the agents of his suffering and is rendered incapable of maintaining the necessary illusion of a coherent self-identity.

Much has been made of the way in which theatrical discourses informed the lived experiences of the Renaissance subject. In contrast to the model of tragedy, bearbaiting, as I have shown, offers a model of protracted violence which functions without a sense of progression towards a meaningful end. Rather, this violence is a structuring agent, integral to the conditions of subjectivity. The analogy of the bear pit offers a radical understanding of what it means to be a subject, presenting a paradigm that explicitly addresses the notions of 'internal' conflict that were focused on persistently during the Renaissance. Moreover, it explores the often-contradictory identifications made by the subject. The need for such a metaphor derives from the fact that

'cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable' (Derrida 2001: 294). However, it is conceptually impossible to completely dissociate the two discourses of tragedy and bear baiting, as I have tried to show in a reading of *Coriolanus*. As Girard states, '[t]he tragic dialogue is a debate without resolution' (1988: 45), and it is a debate which takes place at the level of language.

The Shrovetide violence at the Cockpit belongs to the paradigm of violence suggested by spectacle of bearbaiting. Derived from a cyclical tradition of carnivalesque violence, which by its nature is endlessly repeated, the sacking of brothels and theatres signified the temporary cessation of a period of violent excess. The approach of Lent, a widely-observed season of fasting and penitence, exposed the common experience of prolonged internal conflict by highlighting the need for repeated demonstrable and outward signs of guilt and repentance. The antecedent violence signals an attempt to symbolically dismantle the signifiers of a baited subjectivity. In a contemporary account of this tradition of violence, Edmund Gayton observes that once the apprentices had plundered the theatres, 'then to the Bawdy houses and reforme them; and instantly to the Banks side, where the poor Beares must conclude the riot' (1654: 271).

## Chapter Six

**“The surest way to charme a womans tongue is break her neck”<sup>1</sup>:  
Representing Domestic Violence**

PETRUCHIO      Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!  
 KATHERINE      The moon? The sun! It is not moonlight now.  
 PETRUCHIO      I say it is the moon that shines so bright.  
 KATHERINE      I know it is the sun that shines so bright.  
 PETRUCHIO      ... It shall be moon, or star, or what I list  
                          Or e'er I journey to your father's house ...  
 KATHERINE      Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,  
                          And be it moon or sun, or what you please.  
                          And if you please to call it a rush-candle,  
                          Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.  
 PETRUCHIO      I say it is the moon.  
 KATHERINE      I know it is the moon.  
 PETRUCHIO      Nay, then you lie. It is the blessed sun.  
 KATHERINE      Then God be blest, it is the blessed sun.  
                          But sun it is not, when you say it is not,  
                          And the moon changes even as your mind.  
                          What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,  
                          And so it shall be for Katherine.

(IV.v.2-20)

Arguably one of the most violent episodes in *The Taming of the Shrew*, this exchange between the newly-weds reveals the intensity of the violence which can be imposed at the level of language. As part of his ‘taming’ strategy, Petruchio systematically undermines the referential value of Katharine’s words, ensuring that her engagement with language is contingent upon his will. His arbitrary equivocation violently circumscribes her agency by determining the limits of her ability to make meaning and to interpret the meanings of others. The full force of the violence is brought into relief by Kate’s prior insistence upon her right to speak:

<sup>1</sup> *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, (V.13), in Tucker Brooke (1967:251-261). All references to the play are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,  
 And speak I will. I am no child, no babe.  
 Your betters have endur'd me say my mind,  
 And if you cannot, best stop your ears.  
 My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,  
 Or else my heart concealing it will break,  
 And rather than it shall, I will be free  
 Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words.  
 (IV.iii.73-80)

Here, she makes an explicit connection between the possibility of autonomy and linguistic freedom. By emphasising her status as 'no child, no babe' she aims to validate her right to such freedom, but her assertion – 'I will be free ... in words' – stands in opposition to the reality of her situation, revealing instead the profound violence of Petruchio's policy.

Lacan states that 'no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to other meaning' (1966: 478). Petruchio understands this implicitly, and exploits the feelings of isolation engendered by his contrariety to alter Katherine's patterns of behaviour. As Greenblatt explains,

[o]ur belief in language's capacity for reference is part of our contract with the world; the contract may be playfully suspended or broken altogether, but no abrogation is without consequences, and there are circumstances where the abrogation is unacceptable (1990: 15).

Positing himself as the sole arbiter of meaning, Petruchio effectively curtails Katherine's involvement in the signifying process, severely delimiting her agency. But the equivocal style that he employs to establish dominance seems at odds with traditional assumptions about the differing ways in which men and women use language.

In the words of an anonymous sixteenth-century poet ‘Women are words, Men deeds’ (*Howell’s Devises* 1906: 31). Ideas about language were certainly heavily gendered, but the prominence of rhetoric in Renaissance culture rendered any neat polarisation unsustainable. As men were associated primarily with action, those who advocated rhetorical training stressed its value for those in positions of authority, emphasising its power to rouse and motivate. In other words, they were at pains to highlight the performativity of language. For women, however, their association with words was based upon assumptions of inaction or maleficence and those with rhetorical skill were often viewed with suspicion.<sup>2</sup> Gail Kern Paster explains that there was

a culturally familiar discourse about the female body, an anxious symptomatological discourse to be found in a variety of ... Renaissance ... texts, iconography, and the proverbs of oral culture. This discourse inscribes women as leaky vessels by isolating one element of the female body’s material expressiveness – its production of fluids – as excessive, hence either disturbing or shameful. It also characteristically links this liquid expressiveness to excessive verbal fluency. In both formations, the issue is women’s bodily self-control or, more precisely, the representation of a particular kind of uncontrol as a function of gender (1993: 25).<sup>3</sup>

Arguments opposing the use of rhetorical speech were often predicated upon a fear of appearing too ‘feminine’ or garrulous and challenges to its morality were frequently based upon concerns about a lack of control. Put simply, men were credited with an unaffected use of language, thought to amount to a relatively exact correspondence between word and thing; women were seen as

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<sup>2</sup> One notable exception to this is, of course, Queen Elizabeth I, whose self-promotion as the ‘Virgin Queen’ was both an effect and a defence against the attacks made upon her powers as rhetorician.

<sup>3</sup> See for example *The Tempest*: in the opening scene the ship is described as being ‘as leaky as an unstanch’d wench’ (1.i.47).

equivocators, either unable, or unwilling to make meanings explicit, or as being verbally incontinent.

In her study of women, words and sex in early modern London, Gowing discusses the dynamics of violence within marriage. She explains that '[m]en's blows were figured as, most justifiably, a response to women's words, and this equation featured not only in the popular literature of marriage, but in the relations of real marriages' (1996: 208). However, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, words are Petruchio's means of countering the physical and verbal aggression of his wife. His method of asserting his patriarchal authority marks a deviation from the conventional wisdom of 'shrew-taming' which accepted physical violence as the husband's prevailing method of disciplining an errant spouse. Emily Detmer contends that '[t]he same culture that still 'felt good' about dunking scolds, whipping whores, or burning witches was, during this period, becoming increasingly sensitive about husbands beating their wives' (1997: 273). Indeed, 'An Homily of the State of Matrimony' states that wife beating 'is the greatest shame that can be, not so much to her that is beaten, as to him that doth the deed' (1562: 263<sup>v</sup>). This manifest movement away from the use of physical force led to a preference for verbal coercion, and consequently to an increasing complication of the gendered differential between words and action. Petruchio's deliberate disturbance of the correlation between word and thing is an integral aspect of his attempts to discipline his wife, but paradoxically, his use of what was understood to be a



female (lack of) logic constitutes his most dogmatic assertion of male authority.

Responding to Lacan's account of the patriarchal structures implicit within the signifying process, Žižek comments:

What differentiates language from a natural entity or system is the presence in it of the element designated by Lévi-Strauss the *mana-signifier*: the 'reflective' signifier that holds the place within the system, of what eludes the system, of its not-yet-signified. The 'openness' of a symbolic system has nothing whatsoever to do with the pressure of the ever-changing external circumstances that compel the system to transform; in the case of a symbolic system proper, this openness has to be inscribed into the 'closed' system itself in the guise of a paradoxical signifier that represents non-sense within the field of Sense – what Lacan calls the phallic signifier (1994: 201).

Petruchio speaks non-sense with specific, culturally sanctioned aims. Moreover, he derives the authority to do so from a patriarchal order that actively encouraged husbands' domination of their wives. This same culture was organised around the production of meaning guaranteed by the paradoxical 'reflective' signifier, known in the work of Lacan as the phallic signifier. By enabling the possibility of future meaning, the patriarchal signifier asserts authority over absence – the 'not-yet-signified' – as well as over what is demonstrably present. In fact, as Žižek observes, 'the phallic signifier is none other than ... a 'signifier without signified' (1994: 201). In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the drama of this process is played out in a very literal sense. Petruchio relies heavily upon a practice of exposing gaps in meaning in order to assert his status as patriarch. As Dale Spender notes, 'people affect others through

the means of organizing and structuring the world, through symbolizing and representing experience, through the construction of reality' (1984: 195). For Katherine, the implications of the phallo-centric signifying system are far-reaching. Petruchio attempts to reproduce the ideals outlined in works such as William Whatley's *Bride Bush*, where Whatley explains to women that '*thy desire shall be subject to him, and he shall rule over thee*. His will is the tie and tedder even of my desires and wishes' (1617: 36). Therefore, when she ultimately defers to her husband, saying, 'What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,/ And so it shall be for Katherine' she is taking up the subject position dictated by this order.<sup>4</sup>

The growing distaste for acts of physical violence used to discipline women does not, therefore, mark a movement away from the use of violence. As Detmer suggests, '[t]he vigor of public discourse on wife-beating exemplifies a culture at work reformulating permissible and impermissible means for husbands to maintain control over the politics of the family without, however, questioning that goal' (1997: 273-274). Moreover, the motivation behind this departure was one of promoting male interests rather than those of women. That Petruchio achieves dominion over Katharine, not by physical force or verbal reprimands, but by exercising profound control over her ability to communicate with him and therefore, to formulate her position within society at large, is indicative of an enduring and effective form of subjection.

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew* see also Deer (1991), Korda (1996) and Moisan (1991).

The various ways in which Renaissance culture represented domestic violence will be explored through an examination of *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. Terence Hawkes suggests that '[a] good play 'utters', (or 'outers') the inward and formative presuppositions of its audience, confronts it with, and so potentially resolves, its own essential and defining tensions' (1973: 2). *The Taming of the Shrew* represents both physical and verbal abuse within the context of marriage. But whilst it engages with the concerns of generic conduct literature, and in the style of comedy, ostensibly reaffirms explicit gender hierarchies uncritically, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, like *Arden of Feversham*, simply by dramatising real events, is already involved with the mediation of the audience's presuppositions, and therefore, with the circulation of cultural meanings.<sup>5</sup> Based upon widely circulated accounts of actual domestic crime, domestic tragedies such as *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Arden of Feversham*, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* and *A Warning for Fair Women* traversed the perceptual boundary between art and real life, re-presenting familiar crime narratives on the stage. In contrast, plays such as Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* rely upon Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* and Robert Greene's prose Romance, *Pandosto* respectively as primary source materials. Shakespeare's reworkings of fictional narratives of marital strife and infanticide around the tragic and tragic-comic structures of the plays are shaped by an alternative set of cultural imperatives and are concerned with exploring the societal rather than individual

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<sup>5</sup> Joel Fineman states, 'In ways which are so traditional that they might be called proverbial, Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* assumes – it turns out to make no difference whether it does so ironically – that the language of woman is at odds with the order and authority of man' (Parker & Hartman 1985: 138),

implications of events.<sup>6</sup> Each work, however, replays and contests the meanings of violence within the home, questioning the nature and legitimacy of such violence, and the validity of theological justifications for patterns of violent behaviour. Moreover, they touch self-consciously upon the problems of articulating violent experience. Domestic tragedy in particular interrogates the complicated presence of violence: although its meanings are always deferred in and through language, in subtle yet significant ways, domestic tragedies suggest that violence may be 'present' in any representation of violence. The violent potentiality embodied within linguistic structures is often the agent of the violence inflicted within the domestic sphere. It is my intention here to attend to the latent violence that inheres within language and to examine its implications for the study of violence within the Renaissance domestic sphere.

Domestic violence is defined by Women's Aid<sup>7</sup> as 'physical, psychological, sexual or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour'. Furthermore, they suggest that domestic violence 'is the result of an abuse of power and control, and that it is rooted in the historical status of women in

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<sup>6</sup> See, however, G. Wilson Knight's essay on 'The Othello Music' in *The Wheel of Fire* where he argues that '*Othello* is eminently a domestic tragedy' (1930: 120). See also Deats (1991: 79-94).

<sup>7</sup> Women's Aid is a charitable organisation which was established in 1974 to work with women who had experienced domestic abuse. It provides sheltered accommodation for families escaping violence in the home and campaigns to raise awareness of the issues surrounding domestic abuse. It also advises on the principles of best practice for dealing with the victims and perpetrators of violence and works to monitor and respond to policy development. The Women's Aid website contains more information.

the family and in society'.<sup>8</sup> These definitions are suggestive of the current cultural meanings of domestic violence, which necessarily form the parameters of this argument. It may seem anachronistic or synchronic to employ a definition that is dependent upon current understandings of domestic violence, and based upon modern conceptions of the domestic. Indeed, the implicit suggestion that patterns of abuse recur with such frequency that they appear contextually unspecific seems alarmingly essentialist. But it is undoubtedly true that women's testimonies of men's abuse replay similar experiences of violence and injury. As Eagleton has observed, 'human history includes the history of the body, which in respect of physical suffering has probably changed little over the centuries' (2003: xiv). He goes on to note that, 'the suffering body is largely a passive one, which does not suit a certain ideology of self-fashioning' (2003: xiv). However, cultures do fashion their modes of enforcing violence and their responses to it, and changes to policy and practice are most readily discernible in societal approaches to the naming, control, and representation of violence.

In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, men were permitted to use moderate physical chastisement in order to ensure their wives' good behaviour. The rule of thumb governing the severity of physical violence was just that: in the interests of discipline, men were allowed to beat their wives with a stick no wider than their thumb. But despite this handy maxim, establishing permissible and impermissible uses of force remained highly subjective.

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<sup>8</sup> This definition is taken from their UK website: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>

Judging the level of pain, and thereby arriving at a qualitative estimation of the level of punishment was impossible.<sup>9</sup> As Scarry notes, '[t]o have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*' (1985: 13). What is more, any external intervention on behalf of the community was predicated upon shared patriarchal objectives, and was usually designed to curb physical excess, rather than to effect any changes to underlying motivations. As a consequence, suits brought by women alleging men's violence were far less likely to be successful than those advanced by men on the basis of a woman's adultery.<sup>10</sup> Ecclesiastical courts operated at a local level and provided a formal forum for marital complaints. They administered canon law and their jurisdiction was that of sin, rather than crime. In order to bring charges of cruelty, which could only legitimately be pursued in cases of alleged physical abuse, the violence needed to be verifiably unjustified and life-threatening. The disturbing testimony of Margery Alyver indicates the type of detail required:

Margaret ... hathe manie and sundry tymes ... come unto this deponent ... and make great mone and complayne unto her, weeping and crieinge, and tell this deponent howe cruelly her husband ... used and beaten her, showinge this deponent somtymes her eies which was blewe with her husbandes blowes, and tell this deponent that she knewe not what to doe, and that her husband would and had gryped her by the throte, and used her very cruellye wepinge bitterlye: showing this deponent she was in greate feare of her lyff with hym: And further ... the said John Farmer had beaten ... soe greveouslye att one tyme, that she the said Margarett kepte her bed, for the space of 8 or nyne weeks, being sore brused and grypped in her body (cited in Gowing 1996: 209).

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<sup>9</sup> Note the etymology of the word 'pain' in the Latin 'poena' from the Greek 'poinē' meaning 'punishment or penalty'.

<sup>10</sup> Only 26% of women were successful in complaints made about violent spouses as opposed to 42% of men alleging the woman's infidelity (Gowing 1996: 181).

Margery's description of the abuse suffered by her neighbour Margaret Farmer makes for uncomfortable but familiar reading and suggests that patterns of conjugal violence unfolded along very similar lines to those recognised today. And, as is still the case, such extreme treatment was undoubtedly more common than court records suggest. However, even in cases such as this, where incidents of violence were detailed at length by a number of witnesses, there was no guarantee of bringing a successful suit. Because charges of cruelty hinged upon establishing the boundaries beyond which violence became unjustifiable, men could engage in the process of negotiating acceptable limits. In many instances, husbands worked to re-inscribe the verbal evidence against them within an alternative conceptual framework. If it could be demonstrated that a wife's conduct in some way warranted severe physical reprimand, allegations of cruelty could easily be undermined.

Although violence was frequently advocated when women threatened to disturb the 'natural' order, the debate surrounding the issue of men's violence was escalating at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Whilst popular ballads gave voice to opinions that, as a rule, were orientated unambiguously in favour of men's right to use force, the discursive tradition upheld by many writers and orators stimulated a number of considerate and sensitive contributions to the debate. A wholesale change in attitude was not a realistic outcome: even now, studies suggest that one in five young men and one in ten young women in Britain think that abuse or violence against women is

acceptable.<sup>11</sup> Blackstone summarises women's legal position, stating that '[b]y marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband' (1779, Vol I: 430). In *An Apology for Women*, written in opposition to Gager's oration of 1608, William Heale expounds his belief that it is actually unlawful for a husband to beat his wife. He reasons:

The law ... being an artificial collection of natural precepts, how can it dispense with so unnatural an action as for a husband to beat his wife, the one part himself: nay his other self, or his better half? No man did ever willingly hurt himself: or if any man hath, certainly he may justly of all men be held a mad man: and therefore what mutual blows can lawfully pass between man and wife who are one and the selfsame? (1609: 10)

In common with his contemporaries, Heale reproduces an idea of marriage as an institution which mirrors 'natural precepts', and upholds women's subordinate legal position. However, he presses for a reinterpretation of the meanings ascribed to the union of husband and wife by insisting upon the physical, as well as theological consequences demanded by such a conception.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> These are the findings of a study undertaken by the Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust in 1998, cited on the UK's Women's Aid website <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>.

<sup>12</sup> See *Genesis* 2:24 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh', and 1 *Corinthians* 7:4 'The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not the power of his own body but the wife'. All quotations taken from the *King James Bible* (1611).



In *The Law's Resolution of Women's Rights* T.E.'s argument is predicated upon the same legal principles. He concurs that the law permits husbands to use a certain degree of force, but notes:

Fitzherbert sets down a writ which she may sue out of Chancery to compel him to find surety of honest behaviour towards her, and that he shall neither do nor procure to be done to her (mark I pray you) any bodily damage otherwise than appertains to the office of husband for lawful and reasonable correction.

(1632: III.vii)

He also pursues a more robust interpretation of the implications of marital union, proposing that 'if it be in none other regard lawful to beat a man's wife then because the poor wench can sue no other action for it ... why may not the wife beat the husband again, what action can he have if she do?' However, this beguiling logic worked better on paper than in practice, as the censure of the local community was frequently brought to bear upon women who flagrantly challenged their allotted position.

The scold or shrew was the archetype of such extreme female behaviour. Women's violent nagging, scolding or beating, was seen as the menacing manifestation of ill discipline and, as such, was seen to represent a threat to societal order. Lynda Boose affirms that,

a 'scold' was, in essence, any woman who verbally resisted or flaunted authority publicly and stubbornly enough to challenge the underlying dictum of male rule. What is ultimately at stake in the determination to gender such criminal categories as 'scold' ... is the reinforcement of hierarchy through the production of difference (1991: 189).

A recurring motif in the popular literature of the period, the figure of the scold served as a focus for pervasive male anxieties. Scolding wives were thought to

emasculate their partners, overturning hierarchies that were central to the basic tenets of society. Therefore, shrewish women were considered a significant problem and constituted recurring sites of resistance to the dominant patriarchal imperatives.

*A New Yeares gift for Shrews* (1620) pictorialises the actions of a husband beset by a disobedient wife. It portrays the husband's week-long course of action:



*A New Yeares Gift for Shrews* c.1620 (British Museum)

After marrying his wife on Monday, and becoming aware of her wayward behaviour on Tuesday, the husband takes a trip to the woods on Wednesday,

efore spending Thursday gainfully employed in the fashioning of a cudgel with which he knocks her soundly on Friday. By Saturday, it has become clear that she will not mend her ways, and we see her beating a quick retreat, pursued by the devil with his pitchfork. On Sunday, he is shown happily eating his meat in peace.

Strategies of 'shrew taming' prioritised rituals of humiliation and 'naming and shaming'. The enforced adoption of the terms 'scold' or 'shrew' had a devastating and demeaning impact on the lives of many women. In a contemporary Elizabethan account of England, Harrison notes that 'harlots and their mates' were 'often put to rebuke' and punished by 'carting, ducking, and doing of open penance in sheets, churches and marketsteads' although he adds that, 'as this is counted with some either as no punishment at all to speak of or but smally regarded of the offenders, so I would wish adultery and fornication to have some sharper law' (1994: 189).<sup>13</sup> George Riley Scott, however, describes the punishment of the cucking stool in his comprehensive work on the history of torture, as 'an ordeal to be dreaded'. He explains that

A chair or stool was fixed to the end of a long pole. When the culprit was seated in the chair, the pole was lifted, either by a number of persons standing on the bank of the river or pond, or operated by some mechanical contrivance, and the chair, with its human occupant, ducked in the water. In many cases a muddy or stinking pond was selected for the purpose. (1995: 239)

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that the process of carting – being dragged through the streets behind a cart – was, in all other circumstances, reserved for those found guilty of capital offences.

Criminal and religious discourses of shame were thereby inscribed upon the prostrate female body, reifying cultural constructions of gender and reinforcing an ideology of subjection. Reducing socially unacceptable behaviours to a degraded physicality, the cucking stool and also the bridling scold reinforced an abjected female body: neither subject nor object, the shamed female body occupied a liminal social space. As Julia Kristeva explains, 'what is *abject* ... is radically excluded ... And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master' (1982: 2). In particular, the use of the scold's bridle is suggestive of widespread fears that shrewish women would continue to challenge the patriarchal order from their excluded position. Although records of its use are less prolific than the local documentation detailing the use of the cucking stool, it is frequently referred to in the recurring bridling metaphors found in texts of the period. By physically preventing women's speech, the bridle accentuates the fact that it was the female voice, rather than the female body as such, that was believed to threaten the social order.

Discernible tensions existed between the ideals of female subordination and male ministration and the lived experiences of married people. When repressive standards of womanly conduct were combined with the ambiguous expectations of a man's powers of chastisement, the result was not always a happy marriage. The middle ground between harmonious relations and lethal violence was riven with a variety of physical, verbal and economic conflicts. Indeed, Houlbrooke remarks that '[m]arital disharmony and unhappiness ...

were ... commoner than mutual affection or contentment in the view of some' (1984: 114). In addition to the overtly physical violence manifest within discordant relationships, violence could be effected on many levels. For example, men's failure to provide their families with adequate financial support in their absence constituted abuse, and was articulated as such within the treatises and homilies on marital duties. In *A True Discourse of the Practices of Elizabeth Caldwell*, an account of Elizabeth's attempted murder of her husband Thomas, we are told of the 'continuance of [Thomas's] absence' and that 'to the great discontentment of his wife, and other friends, [Thomas left] her often times very bare, without provision of such means as was fitting for her' (1604: A4<sup>r</sup>). In this instance, the information is presented in mitigation of her crime. William Vaughan draws attention to the husband's obligations to 'provide for his wife and for her housekeeping' (1608: N7<sup>r</sup>). He also demonstrates sensitivity to the affective power of insult, counselling that 'the husband must not injure his wife by word or deed' (1608: N7<sup>r</sup>).

A robust language of insult evolved to articulate the gamut of connubial experiences: Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* utilises this vocabulary and explores its implications for gendered constructions of identity. An exasperated Ford, thinking he has been made a cuckold, complains:

See the hell of having a false woman: my bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at, and I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of villainous terms, and by him that does me wrong. Terms! Names! (II.ii.280-285)

Suggestions of a woman's promiscuous speech or sexual behaviour had potentially humiliating and repressive personal effects, but they could also have a similar substantive impact upon the lives of their husbands. Men's reputations were undoubtedly affected by the behaviour of their partners. Nevertheless, there was a marked disparity between the treatment of men's and women's transgressions within marriage. Men's violence within the home was tried in the Ecclesiastical Courts, demonstrating that although it was recognised as unacceptable, it was not considered 'criminal' in the sense that it was not a civil offence. In contrast, violent acts committed by women were considered criminal, and, moreover, were thought to constitute an offence against the natural order. Women found guilty of spousal murder, for example, were found guilty of petty treason and sentenced to death at the stake.<sup>14</sup>

Before looking specifically at dramatic representations of domestic violence, it is first necessary to examine the domestic context in more detail. In his disquisition upon Christian economy, the Puritan preacher William Perkins states that '[a] family is a natural and simple society of certain persons, having mutual relation to one another under the private government of one' (1609: 1). The family unit generally consisted of a mother and children, subject to the authority of the husband/father. However, during the Renaissance domesticity was not synonymous with ideas of privacy which we would now consider central. Lawrence Stone observes, '[t]he most striking characteristic of the ... family, at all social levels, was the degree to which it was open to external

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<sup>14</sup> See Dolan (1992: 317-340).

influences, a porosity that is in contrast to the more sealed off and private nuclear family that was to develop' (1979: 69). Homilies and conduct manuals stressed an image of the family as a microcosm of the wider overarching structures of state. Utilising an extremely common metaphor, Thomas Smith offers an idealised account: 'in the house and family is the first and most natural ... appearance of one of the best kinds of commonwealth ... for it is but an house, and a little spark, resembling as it were that government' (1589: 12-14). Consequently, disruptions to this order were communal concerns.

Marriage was considered a woman's primary vocation, but was often seen as a disadvantage to men. However, as the mainstay of family life, it was upheld as an 'honourable estate'<sup>15</sup>, the closest one could come to achieving paradise on earth. The Puritan theologian, William Perkins, states that marriage 'is a state ... far more excellent than the condition of single life ... ordained by God in paradise, above and before all other states of life' (1609: 10). But the prevailing arguments in favour of marriage were, as Catherine Belsey points out, fraught with contradictions and paradox:

Marriage is Paradise, but Paradise is the place of loss; Adam was created happy, but not happy enough to manage without a help meet for him, a mate like him; the woman God made to supply what Adam lacked endangered and destroyed his God-given happiness; marriage both repairs and reaffirms the originary loss (1999: 75).

The vision of marriage expounded by the church was indebted to the gender hierarchies set forth in the *Old Testament* book of *Genesis* as women were told

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<sup>15</sup> 'The forme of solemnization of matrimony', *The Book of Common Prayer* (1559)

that 'thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee' (*Genesis* 3.16)<sup>16</sup>. In the main, conduct manuals, sermons and homilies were structured around this central point, unilaterally asserting that the woman 'submit herself and be obedient' (Dod & Cleaver 1614: 217). For example, in the popular wedding sermon, *A Bride Bush*, Whately explains that '[t]he whole duty of the wife ... is to acknowledge her inferiority, the next to carry herself as inferior' (1617: 36) and William Gouge warns against the 'fond conceit that husband and wife are equal' (1634: III.4). But although preachers and writers cited the scriptures as the incontrovertible basis for their exhortations, there was an underlying anxiety about the disruption of this 'pre-ordained' hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> The position maintained by many of the writers of conduct literature was perhaps too severe, belying the precarious moral high-ground from which they pontificated. The ideals of femininity they discussed at length were, after all, the products of a patriarchal discourse rather than articulations of ontological truths.

It was a popular assumption that the female partner was, inherently, most likely to undermine the institution of marriage. Unchastity, purported to be an exclusively female vice, was proclaimed the foremost danger to marriage. What is more, this assumption was reified in law, as Gowing explains: '[e]ffectively,

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<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, all references to the Old and New Testaments are taken from the *King James Bible* unless otherwise stated.

<sup>17</sup> For examples of scripture used to justify patriarchy, see Ephesians 5: 22-24, which states 'Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject to their husbands in everything'. See also, 1 Corinthians 11: 3, 'But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of every woman is the man'.



only women could be penalized for extramarital sex and only men could be guilty of violence. The meanings of these two offences were central to the gender relations of marriage' (1996: 180). This was compounded by the fact that, in practice, adultery was far easier to define, and was therefore, ostensibly easier to establish, than violent or cruel behaviour. Gowing observes that '[m]ost couples had a servant or apprentice who was usually in the house; walls were thin, keyholes large, and partitions of cloth easy to pull aside ... Clearly, some holes in the walls may have been legal fictions: there were particular conventions for testifying to adultery' (1996: 190). As I have noted above, the home did not allow for privacy as it is understood today, and the opportunities created by the physical layout of the household were open to exploitation. Frequently, these opportunities did not work in women's favour, as living conditions and legal conventions conspired to perpetuate the myths of female conduct.

Conduct manuals were addressed almost exclusively to men, on the assumption that they had responsibility for their wives, sisters and daughters. Those sections of sermons and manuals designed for the specific instruction of women emphasise the significance of modest and temperate speech. William Gouge counsels that '[a] wife's outward reverence consisteth in her reverend ... speech' (1634: III.9). Patriarchal culture located the outward signs of a woman's chastity in her discourse and although women were linked with words in a sense that suggested inaction, this association also had material implications. Henry Smith suggested that a woman 'may learn her duty out of

her names' (1591: 69), names such as 'goodwife', 'yokefellow' and 'comforter'. But although women were to 'perform' the designations attributed to them by a masculine discourse, they were discouraged from exercising linguistic independence. Rather, a woman must 'hold the peace to keep the peace' because 'it becometh her to keep silence' (Smith 1591: 69). Samuel Rowlands even condescends to reveal that women's 'hearts are sorry for their tongues, God knows' (1617: A4<sup>v</sup>ff.). In his discussion of *The English Gentlewoman*, Richard Braithwait informs his male readers that the '[t]ruth is, their tongues are held their defensive armour: but in no particular detract they more from their honour than by giving too free scope to that glibbery member ... It suits not with her honour for a young woman to be prolocutor'. 'Silence in a woman', he opines 'is a moving rhetoric, winning most, when in words it wooeth least' (1631: 88-90). Because of shared concerns about the effects of dilation, loquacity and uncontrolled speech were tacitly linked to unchasteness in a misogynistic conflation of the mouth and sexual organs.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as Boose asserts, '[a] discourse that locates the tongue as the body's "unruly member" situates female speech as a symbolic relocation of the male organ, an unlawful appropriation of phallic authority in which the symbolics of male castration are ominously coimplicit (1991: 204). A woman's honour was thought to inhere within her speech and, for women, skill in rhetoric or eloquence, the structured and persuasive use of speech associated with masculine virtue, was considered incompatible with feminine virtue.

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Erasmus *Lingua* (1989) and Plutarch (1939). See also Paster (1993).

During the period there was an increase in the number of cases of marital litigation which provided an unprecedented platform for women's speech. Gowing provides a comprehensive discussion of the way in which gendered stereotypes were both constructed and reconstituted in the narratives of marital conflict. Although women were required to assimilate stereotypes of femininity within their testimony, they were also engaged in a subtle process of reconfiguring the meanings ascribed to wives and female litigants. In particular, documentation from local Ecclesiastical courts comprises a substantial body of contemporary evidence detailing violence within marriage. Despite positing women in a legally disadvantageous situation, the courtroom did allow women a prominent position that was precluded in every day life, affording their words verifiable agency. Gowing demonstrates that narratives of abuse and adultery were adapted to conform to the conventions of the legal system, as well as to withstand the scrutiny of the local community. In order for complaints to have both legal and communal currency they were bound by the precepts of oral *and* print culture. Indeed, Gowing states that the function of the stories of abuse 'lay as much in their very telling, as in the decision they were meant to win' (1996: 232).

The domestic sphere was increasing in significance around the turn of the seventeenth century. In the fifty years between 1560 and 1610, the population of London had doubled, transforming the urban landscape (Ackroyd 2001: 102). As a result London became seriously overcrowded; disease spread rapidly, crime was rife and there were concerns about the availability of basic

provisions. Many attempts were made to address the problems spawned by the population explosion; in 1580 Elizabeth I issued a proclamation that prohibited any new buildings within three miles of the gates of the city, and in addition, she prohibited more than one family from occupying each house. The increasingly prescriptive nature of conduct literature focused specifically upon this evolving domain, and upon the institution of marriage and the 'fundamental' tenets of household government. The family unit was of considerable political value, as it was an expedient method of exercising social control at a domestic level which replicated the structures of the governing authorities. Men were encouraged to manage their families as a little commonwealth, ensuring that the sphere of patriarchal influence was widespread and diffuse. However, there were tensions underneath the surface.

*Arden of Feversham* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* provide dramatic representations of the ideology of family life in crisis. The Renaissance theatre, and domestic tragedy in particular, adapted to confront and explore the tensions that intersected the institution of marriage and people's experiences of family life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Women's Aid affirms the importance of accessible cultural representations of domestic abuse, explaining that 'Today, the issue of domestic violence has become increasingly prominent ... it is ... discussed by politicians and legislators, and in the media. Public interest in the issue has grown significantly, as indicated by the presence of domestic violence as a key storyline in all the major British soaps in the last few years. Hardly a day goes past without a mention of domestic violence ... in the press, on the radio and the television. It is a regular topic for discussion in the women's press, daytime television and chat shows (<http://womensaid.org.uk>: *Women's Aid, A Brief History*). Scriptwriters' discussions of a high profile storyline involving domestic violence for the soap opera *EastEnders*, illustrate the importance of popular representations of social issues. Alison Graham writes of the 'singular responsibilities placed on soap bosses who inhabit a genre that can seem only too real to certain sections of its audience' (*Radio Times* 26 Oct – 1 Nov 2002: 21). Louise Berridge, executive producer of *EastEnders*, explains, '[w]e did a lot of research and one of the facts that kept recurring, one of the reasons women stay with abusive partners, is the belief that they will reform. My concern ... was that if we tried to redeem Trevor [the violent husband] and let him settle down to a happy life, then we were actually sending out the wrong message. Potentially you could have a woman saying, "He will change, because Trevor did"' (26 Oct – 1 Nov 2002: 21). This demonstrates that representations of social problems produced for popular

Legislative procedure and the workings of the state were obscured from public view, and, therefore, the instrumentality of the debate effected perceptual rather than statutory changes that affected people's everyday experiences.

The fashion for sensational stories from the domestic sphere reached its peak between 1590 and 1610 in domestic dramas that engaged with the anxieties generated by the circulation of stories of violence within the home. The source material of domestic drama was most commonly the work of writers of broadsides, ballads and pamphlets. Accounts of the trials and executions of those guilty of infanticide or spousal murder made extremely popular reading and in some instances were even included in collected works such as Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Their frequent basis in truth rather than in myth or literature produced dramas with a distinctive affective power. Attending to the 'middling sort' of people rather than the nobility, the plays deviated self-consciously from their classical antecedents. *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is a self-professed tragedy, but without doubt, a very different kind from that developed in plays such as *Dr Faustus*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. A definitive definition of tragedy has proved notoriously problematic, and as a result, it is difficult to provide an explanation of domestic tragedy in terms of its deviation from conventions. However, beginning from Aristotle's assertion that 'tragedy is an imitation of people better than we are' (1996: 25), perceptible differences begin to emerge. This is, in part, a consequence of the plays' composition of characters from 'ordinary life' – not the 'usual' subjects

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consumption play a pivotal role in stimulating debate and allowing for the renegotiation of societal attitudes and responses to these problems.

of tragedy. In his discussion of Shakespeare's imitation of the world, A.D. Nuttall explains that 'proper' tragedy is concerned with events that have serious and far-reaching consequences; in contrast, domestic tragedy deals with 'murder on a level which involves no repercussions among nations' (1983: 132). There is, therefore, an important distinction between the public and private spheres. Indeed, as Eagleton observes,

the fortunes of the great are thought to be of more public or historic moment than the affairs of the lowly. The high/low distinction is thus a private/public one too: the illustrious are symbolic representatives of a more general condition, and can thus catalyse a more world-historical tragedy than their more parochial, less well-connected inferiors (2003: 85).

In contrast with the aesthetic ideals that characterise Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, domestic tragedy was informed by distinctive cultural imperatives. Analysis of the proliferation of domestic drama has identified a number of significant influences. Keith Sturges suggests that '[a] domestic tragedy ... is a play with a sad end which seriously depicts crime and punishment in the lives of ordinary men, often dwelling on the disruption of normal family relationships' (1985: 14). However, as Nuttall observes, 'in the common run of Elizabethan domestic tragedy there is admittedly little sense of tension between the idea of tragedy and the idea of domesticity' (1983: 133). This is suggestive of the status afforded to the institution of marriage and the family unit, which, as Belsey argues, 'becomes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the site of a paradoxical struggle to create a private realm and to take control of it in the interests of the public good' (1985: 130).

Critics such as Alfred Harbage have emphasised the homiletic content of domestic drama as one of its distinguishing features, and there is no doubt that the abundant instructional material upon marriage was a pivotal aspect of domestic drama. But although paradigms of domestic patriarchy lie at the centre of these plays, they are not deployed uncritically. A variety of societal factors combined at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century to put the institution and the ideology of marriage under pressure. Unprecedented population growth and the emerging possibilities of social mobility created a pervasive sense of unease concerning the sustainability of the social order. As a replica in miniature of the hierarchies of state, the family was considered to be of paramount importance for the continuation of social stability. Indeed, an engagement with the institution of marriage as an ideological structure sets apart the domestic from other forms of drama that deploy an urban setting: domestic drama focused on the family in particular, rather than urban life in general. Reflecting and renegotiating social attitudes to domestic crime, dramatic representations in particular reveal a fascination with the impulse to articulate stories of violence, and with the limitations of language that any attempt to do so discloses.<sup>20</sup>

*Arden of Feversham* provides a representation of domestic murder perpetrated by a woman. Belsey notes that '[a]t a time when all the evidence suggests that

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<sup>20</sup> The pamphlet, *Two Most Unnatural and Bloodie Murthers* (1605), which provides the source for the play, explains that: 'There hath happened of late within the county of York, not far from Wakefield, a murder so detestable, that were it not it desires record for example sake, humanity could wish it rather utterly forgot, than any Christian heart should tremble with the remembrance of it' (Sturges 1985: 303).

crimes of violence were by no means uncommon, Alice Arden's crime was cited, presented and re-presented, problematized and reproblemated, during a period of at least eighty years after it was committed' (1982: 83). Its undoubted appeal is derived, at least in part, from its representation of female culpability. Ostensibly, the play reinforces gender stereotypes with a portrayal of an adulterous woman governed by her sexuality. However, as Vivianna Commensoli contends, '*The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* invites the spectator to confront the possibility that, as collective obligations, civility and domestic patriarchy are neither unchangeable nor metaphysically ordained' (1999: 84). The characters resist reductive stereotyping, and Alice cannot be considered simply as an adulteress any more than Arden can be regarded principally as a cuckold. Easy distinctions prove untenable, as the audience is privy to information about Arden's chequered past and current unethical business dealings. We are invited to consider the possibility that Alice Arden may function as the agent of providence, exercising God's vengeance. In the epilogue, Arden's friend Franklin remarks,

Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground  
Which he by force and violence held from Rede;  
And in the grasse his bodyes print was seen  
Two yeeres and more after the deed was done.  
*(Epilogue 10-13)*<sup>21</sup>

Arden's avariciousness is stressed throughout the play, and the unnatural mark left by his corpse suggest that he too has violated the natural order.

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<sup>21</sup> All quotations are taken from *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham*, (Tucker Brooke 1967).





*Yorkshire Tragedy* functions as the embodiment of the male ideal of women's speech.

In the opening scene of *A Yorkshire Tragedy* the serving man, Samuel, arrives 'Furnisht with things from London', with an almanac in his pocket and three ballads in his codpiece. He declares 'I am the true picture of a Common servingman ... hanged after the truest fashion' (I.26-36). His burlesque habiliments – three hats, two glasses, rebato wires and a capcase – render the actor's 'picture' of a fashionable serving man palpably mimetic. Moreover, the contents of his pocket and codpiece serve to situate the play within an expanding network of plays, publications and rumour involved with the dissemination of information, gossip and scandal. Although a character within the play, and therefore a representation, Samuel is also figured as a representative consumer of the sensationalist printed materials that provided the source of plays such as *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. Consequently, the play focuses reflexively upon the conditions of its production and reception within a wide cultural contexture. In their discussion of the 'the news from London' the three serving men open the play by sharing and exchanging gossip, which provides the audience with a perspective on the Calverlys' marriage. Calverly, although previously engaged to another woman, is now married to another woman, 'beates his wife, and has two or three children by her' (I.52-53). The serving men pun upon the sexual connotations of beating and inflicting blows, remarking 'you must note that any woman beares the more when she is beaten ... for she beares the blowes' (51-56). However, they report, with obvious



trouble! Three children like three evils hang upon me. Fie, fie, fie, strumpet & bastards, strumpet and bastards!’ (106-110). But his disillusionment reaches crisis point when he identifies with the experience of the scold or shrew: ‘that mortgage sits like a snaffle upon mine inheritance, and makes me chaw upon Iron’ (II.50-51). He believes that marriage and primogeniture have, as Francis Bacon warns, ‘given hostages to fortune, for they are impediments to great enterprises’ (1985: 81). Realising his feelings of impotence through the metaphor of the bridling scold, he envisions himself emasculated by patriarchy. The methods of physical correction cultivated to address the problems of women’s wayward speech now function as a metaphor for his financial estate. The unashamedly phallic spike of the bridle – a signifier of patriarchal power – is metaphorically turned inward, penetrating and deflating all vestiges of male authority.<sup>22</sup>

His ‘feminisation’ is further emphasised by the peculiarities of his speech. Women’s language was, as I have shown, subject to rigorous controls that were established upon the premise that their language would betray their lubricity and ultimately disturb the social order. The husband, however, displays all the characteristic linguistic excesses attributed to women. His insults are uttered unchecked: he lacks the qualities of restraint, and thereby exemplifies the notion of ‘dilation’ associated with feminine speech. His

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<sup>22</sup> Interesting parallels may be drawn with Scarborough’s feminised perception of himself in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* 1607, a play based upon the same events: ‘Here she remembers me I am a man,/ Black whore with perjury, whose sinful breast,/ Is character like those cursed of the blessed’ (II.i.99-104). See also Sir Francis Ilford’s description of him as a woman giving birth: ‘How now my young bully, like a young wench forty weeks after the loss of her maiden head, crying out’ (II.i.105-106).

repetitive utterances such as ‘bastards, bastards, bastards’ and ‘mony, mony, mony’ devalue the meanings ascribed to his words, and the sense of what he says becomes lost in the way in which he says it. Principally, however, his verbal and financial incontinence debases the currency of his family name.

With what would have been understood as characteristically ‘feminine’ injudiciousness, the husband insults his wife and family with no concern about being heard. However, he is overheard by a group of gentlemen, one of whom chooses to speak out against his conduct:

1 GENTLEMAN Still doe those loathsome thoughts  
 Jare on your tongue?  
 Yourself to stain the honour of your wife,  
 Nobly descended! Those whom men call mad  
 That wounds himselfe, whose own wordes do proclaim  
 Scandals unjust, to soil his better name: (111-116)

Expounding an ideological position similar to that described in the writings of William Heale and T.E., the Gentleman develops the recurring metaphor which links words with physical injury, arguing that the husband’s imprecations will impact negatively upon him. In marriage the husband and wife became one, and, therefore, the insults of his ‘own wordes’ ‘wound himselfe’, and in particular, his family name. Indeed, the Calverly name, he suggests, is figuratively bloodied and soiled by the wounds the husband has inflicted. The corporeal imagery is continued as the Gentleman adds, ‘I am sorry for thee: that a man spends with shame/ That with his ritches does consume his name’ (139-145). Here, the family name is pointedly conceptualised as a tangible entity, as mutable as the human body itself. His

declining status is signified by the change in the Gentleman's use of personal pronouns. In the first instance, when he asks 'Still doe those loathsome thoughts/ Jare on your tongue?' he retains the respectful 'your'. The subsequent use of the disparaging 'thee' indicates a marked shift in opinion.

The husband is quick to reduce the sense of the Gentleman's argument to a quibble upon his wife's chastity. When the Gentleman states that 'of all the worst:/ Thy virtuous wife, right honourably allied,/ Thou hast proclaimed a strumpet', the husband responds with the deliberately provocative suggestion, 'Thou art her ... privat friend,/ The partie you wot on' (II.159-164). However, it is the husband's reputation that has been metaphorically violated by the expediencies of a patriarchal authority he no longer has any claim upon. Injured in the fight which follows their argument the husband complains, 'My strumpet wife,/ It is thy quarrel that rips thus my flesh,/ And makes my brest spit blood, but thou shalt bleed.' Reifying the verbal dispute over his wife's imagined infidelity in terms of his own wounds, the husband explicitly acknowledges the violent potential of language. But because he conceives of the injuries he sustains as a cause to impose further violence upon his wife – vowing 'thou shalt bleed' – he denies his own agency by refusing to accept responsibility for his speech. The Gentleman proposes, 'Strike thine own follies, for it is they deserve/ To be wel beaten' (II.138-139), but the husband pursues his violent course.

The husband's boundless capacity for inflicting violence is demonstrated when, in an attempt to improve her husband's dire financial situation, Mrs Calverly, with her uncle's help, secures for him a place at Court. Enraged by her failure to raise money from the sale of her dowry, the husband kicks her, for the second time, then threatens her with a knife:

HUSBAND	Money, whore, money, or Ile – ( <i>Draws his dagger</i> ) <i>Enters a servant very hastily.</i>
SERVANT	What the devel? how now? thy hasty news? ( <i>to his man</i> )
HUSBAND	Maie it please you, sir – ( <i>Servant in a feare</i> )
HUSBAND	What? maie I not looke upon my dagger? Speake villain, or I will execute the point on thee: quick, short ...
WIFE	Was ever wife so wretchedlie beset? ( <i>Wif. Alone</i> ) Had not this newes stept in between, the point Had offered violence unto my brest. That which some women call great misery Would show but little here: would be scarce be seene Amongst my miseries. I maie Compare For wretched fortunes with all wives that are. Nothing will please him until all be nothing. <span style="display: block; text-align: right;">(III.76-93)</span>

The initial insults and demands are followed by physical threats which leave the wife powerless to contend with his violent and destructive impulses. Significantly, at this particular moment of potentially murderous action, the implied relationship between words and wounding is reversed, so that verbal utterance now becomes a barrier to the threat of bodily harm, rather than its agent. Here, the motion of the dagger is halted by the arrival of the servant with news.

The play as a whole traces a complex and powerful relationship between language and violence, linking the effects of words metaphorically with the

infliction of physical violence. As the play progresses, however, it becomes clear that the link is not simply metaphorical, and that language has the potential to inflict material harm. For the husband, language is, paradoxically, both a means with which to effect violence, and the site upon which his agency is forfeited. The wife experiences the insidiousness of a widespread cultural restraint upon women's free speech which is actualised in her articulation of a language which is not her own: her verbal response to the violence she suffers at the hands of her husband is restricted by the terminology available to her.

Scarry's study of the body in pain explores the implications of the inexpressibility of physical pain. She writes that in the case of pain the 'objectlessness, the complete absence of referential content, almost prevents it from being rendered in language' (1985: 162). Testimonies such as Margaret Farmer's reveal the inherent difficulties of talking about the physical pain of abuse. Acting as a witness, her neighbour paraphrases her story in court, detailing the moans and cries, and the points at which Margaret had relied simply upon showing her bruises. Unable to find words, she lets her injuries signify the pain she was experiencing. Our contemporary understanding of violence within the home is informed by the term 'domestic violence' which we now ascribe to it. In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, the available vocabulary for naming domestic violence oscillated between two extremes, as it was conceptualised either as extreme cruelty or as legitimate discipline. Although the aesthetics of violence may be culturally determined, the reality of



physical pain remains, and, as Scarry argues, the purposeful infliction of pain is 'inextricably bound up with the generation of a political "fiction"' (1985: 161). The family was the locus for the inculcation of women, children and men with the ideologies of male dominance and female subjection. The long tradition of male violence used to aid this process meant that pain was implicitly considered instrumental in the construction of pervasive 'fictions' of male authority.

In *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, however, the husband's initial violence cannot maintain the fiction of male power. His violence becomes progressively more pronounced when the fiction of his authority, symbolised in the Calverly name, is exposed. His anxieties are revealed as his utterances become repetitive and lose grammatical coherence:

My Lands shewed like a full moone was mine; Mine and my fathers, and my forefathers – generations, generations: downe goes the howse of us, down, downe it sincks. Now is thy name a beggar, begs in me! that name, which hundreds of years has made this shire famous, in me, and my posterity, runs out. (IV.94)

Calverly recognises the repercussions of his actions and realises that his name is of particular significance because it functions as a contraction of the self outside the self. Moreover, he is aware that there is a significant gap between the name, or sign, and what is signified: 'Now is thy name a beggar'. Žižek, in his discussion of the verbal sign, contends:

The Word is a contraction in the guise of its very opposite, of an expansion – that is to say, in pronouncing a word, the subject contracts his being outside himself; he 'coagulates' the core of his being in an external sign. In the verbal sign, I – as

it were – find myself outside myself, I posit my unity outside myself, in a signifier which represents me (1996a: 43).

He elaborates:

The fundamental paradox of symbolization – the paradox the term ‘symbolic castration’ aims at recapturing – is that Nature can attain itself, its self-identity, only at the price of a radical decentrement: it can find itself only in a medium outside itself. A father becomes a father ‘as such’, the bearer of symbolic authority, only in so far as he assumes his ‘castration’, the difference between himself in the immediate reality of his being and the place in the symbolic structure which guarantees his authority: the father’s authority is radically ‘decentred’ with regard to father *qua* flesh-and-blood person – that is, it is the anonymous structure of the symbolic Law which speaks through him (1996a: 47).

Calverly can no longer posit his unity outside himself in a signifier – ‘Calverly’ – that can be said to represent him. His surname proves to be his linguistic undoing. What previously functioned as a symbol of enduring patrilineage and patriarchal authority now signifies the collapse of one man’s coherent sense of self. Paradoxically, this is also the point at which he comes to understand his symbolic importance as Father, and therefore the point from which he derives true symbolic authority. It is only through the experience of loss that he gains a sense of what he once represented. As the flesh-and-blood father, he is now unable to provide for his children. In this respect, he has assumed his castration – that is to say, he has acknowledged the ‘difference between himself in the immediate reality of his being and the place in the symbolic structure which guarantees his authority’ – and we see this process, and his recognition of it, verbalised in the metaphor of the emasculating snaffle of patriarchal obligation.



(ii.1-21)

During her enumeration of her husband's many vices and their impact upon the family, he returns. In accordance with her wifely duties, she pledges, 'now in despite of ills/ Ile speake to him, and I will hear him speake,/ And do my best to drive it from his heart' (ii.22-24). In his *Of Domestical Duties*, Gouge asserts that '[r]everence hath respect to the titles whereby a wife nameth her husband: meekness to the manner of framing her speech to him' (1634: III.14). In *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, the wife's location of the fulfilment of her obligations in her prudent choice of words is demonstrated through the textbook reverence of her communications to her husband. Greeting him as 'Deere husband', despite his violent outburst of cursing and blaspheming, she wonders that he is 'so much unlike/ Him selfe at first, as if some vexed spirit/ Had got his form upon him' (ii.37-39). She responds to his virulent denunciation with the defensive admission that her own language has always been dutiful: 'He saies I am the cause; I never yet/ Spoke lesse than wordes of duty and of love' (41-42). She maintains a respect and reverence, audible in her use of the more formal personal pronoun 'you'.

When the husband returns home, having lost five hundred Angels at dice, his wife asks the cause of his bad temper and is told, 'Mony, mony, mony, and thou must supply me' (II. 61). Without demur she assents, saying, 'what is mine, either in rings or Jewels,/ Use to your own desire' (II.62-63). The law dictated that, although '[t]hat which the husband bath is his own ... if before

marriage the woman were possessed of ... money, plate, and jewels, all manner of moveable substance is presently by conjunction the husband's to sell, keep or bequeath if he die' (T.E. 1632: III.ix). Upon hearing her husband declare 'thy jewels I will play as freely/ As when my state was fullest', she says simply, 'Be it so.' Men's financial obligations to their wives and family were clearly defined, although Mrs Calverly displays an understandable degree of anxiety about her husband's reckless spending habits. However, despite the fact that she is eager to preserve her lands, she confirms her adherence to conjugal law, saying 'what the law shall give me leave to do/ You shall command' (II.96-97). A model of wifely compliance, she submits without objection to the material demands made of her, working within the limited means at her disposal to ensure the financial stability of their family.

Calverly's abhorrent murder of his two sons provides the tragic climax of the play, and these murders are shown to have been motivated by a combination of male anxieties. The husband claims he does not want to see his family reduced to beggary: he has squandered the monetary value of their estate and with it, exhausted the currency of their family name.

SON	Mother, mother; I am kild, mother.
WIFE	( <i>Wakes</i> ) Ha, whose that cride? oh me, my children! Both, both, both; bloody, bloody [ <i>catches up the youngest</i> ]
HUSBAND	Strumpet, let go the boy, let go the beggar.
WIFE	Oh my sweet husband!
HUSBAND	Filth, harlot.
WIFE	Oh what will you doe, deare husband?
HUSBAND	Give me the bastard.
WIFE	Your owne sweete boy!
HUSBAND	There are too many beggars.

WIFE                    Good my hus-band --  
 HUSBAND            Doest thou prevent me still?  
 WIFE                    Oh god!

(V. 14-28)

He attempts to justify his actions on the grounds of his children's future poverty, arguing that 'There are too many beggars'. Harrison describes the 'thriftless poor' such as 'the rioter that hath consumed all, the vagabond that will abide nowhere' in his discussion of the provision made for the poor (1994: 180-186). The 'Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes and for the Relief of he Poore & Impotent', of 1576, stated that the punishment of rogues and vagabonds was to be 'grevously whipped, and burnt through the gristle of the right Eare with a hot Yron of the compasse of an Ynche about'.<sup>23</sup> Although the severe treatment of beggars and the contempt in which they were held goes some way to suggest Calverly's motivation, additional concerns underlay his explanation. Even with an exemplary wife, who genuinely has 'never yet/ Spoke lesse than wordes of duty and of love' (41-2), the husband is unsure that he is their father. This doubt exposes one of the fundamental anxieties at the heart of patriarchy: men had no means of verifying the physiological paternity of their children. Indeed, Ben Jonson's remarks in 'To Penshurst' draw attention to this: 'Thy lady's noble, fruitful, chaste withal./ His children thy great lord may call his own;/ A fortune, in this age, but rarely known' (1954: 79). Although conduct literature and marriage manuals maintained an unrelenting focus upon the importance of women's chastity, the prescriptive formulations they sought to enforce were directed almost exclusively at women's speech: they did not explicitly address the reproductive

<sup>23</sup> The act went through a series of revisions in 1572, 1576 & 1584-85.

process. The patriarchal ideologies underpinning the institution of the family were unable to definitively establish the physical reality of patrilineal filiation. In order to be 'chaste', the wife must speak a language that men considered to be synonymous with chastity. In doing so, she exercised control over her own language on behalf of the patriarchal social order. Therefore, she becomes the agent and administrator of the violence directed at her language, a violence that is required by, and yet insufficient to fully maintain, the patriarchal regime.

It is the husband, however, who most fully discloses the fundamental weakness of this regime's foundations. The play illustrates the way in which men fall victim to the so-called 'feminine' language that they seek to subdue. The husband turns against the dominant patriarchal ideology, and in particular, the institution of marriage. He reasons, 'If marriage be honourable, then Cuckolds are honourable, for they cannot be made without marriage. Foole! What meant I to marry to get beggars?' (II.43-46). His language, repetitive and transgressive, is an attempt to rebel against his role as husband and father.

Michel Pecheux discusses this process of counter-identification:

the subject, a 'bad subject', a 'trouble-maker', *counteridentifies* with the discursive formation imposed on him by 'interdiscourse' as external determination of his subjective interiority, which produces the philosophical and political forms of *the discourse-against* (i.e., *counter-discourse*) (1982: 157).

In this way, the husband debases their family name, permanently altering the meanings attached to it. But despite his counter-identification and the resultant erosion of his social status, he retains the capacity to exert an influence over

the semantic value of the name he confers upon his wife and subsequent children through marriage.

Throughout the play, it is the husband who provides a commentary upon his own actual and intended acts of violence, offering pithy, misogynistic wisdom in the process. During his attempts to kill the second son, he threatens the maid, saying, 'Ile breake your clamor with your neck: down staires! ... The surest way to charme a womans tongue is break her neck' (V.11-13). The play is replete with violent imagery, as well as explicit representations of violent acts. But despite its candour, the effects of the husband's violence remain largely unspoken. In the aftermath of the murders, the husband asks that he be allowed to talk with his wife:

*Enter his wife, brought in a chaire.*

GENTLEMAN    See heer she comes of her selfe.

WIFE            Oh my sweete Hus-band, my deere distressed husband,  
Now in the hands of unrelenting lawes!  
My greatest sorrow, my extremest bleeding,  
Now my soule bleeds.

HUSBAND      How now? kind to me? did I not wound thee, left thee  
for dead?

WIFE            Tut, farre greater wounds did my brest feele:  
Unkindness strikes a deeper wound than steele  
You have been still unkinde to mee.

(X.1-14)

In the dialogue, it is significant that the description of the wife's injuries is given, not by her, but by her husband: 'did I not wound thee, left thee for dead?' 'Silence in woman', Braithwait has argued, 'is a moving rhetoric, winning most, when in words it woeth least' (1631: 90). Indeed, the stage



direction, which states that she is brought on stage in a chair, effects a powerful non-verbal depiction of the wounds she has sustained, and suggests the pain she is experiencing. In this way, the play performs what is inexpressible in language. The wife talks metaphorically of bleeding, but on no occasion does she articulate her actual pain. Scarry explains that '[t]he failure to express pain ... will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power' (1985: 14). However, in drama, silence does not always signify either the appropriation or the conflation of pain with the absent voice of debased patriarchal power. In fact, it can be a consciously defamiliarising and subversive gesture.<sup>24</sup>

The wife's moments of silence are her only gesture towards deliberate non-compliance because their meanings are unknowable. Of particular significance, however, is the way in which these moments are appropriated by and incorporated into the dominant discourse. The wife remains silent about the violence she has suffered, bypassing any discussion of her physical pain, and as a result, her experiences and responses are open to a process of regulation and reinterpretation. The play persistently explores the gaps that both threaten and, to a large extent, structure the patriarchal order. Towards its close, we begin to see the ways in which the dominant order attempts to recuperate meaning from the wife's silence. These elusive silences are co-opted by the dominant discourse, as meanings are ascribed to them, first by the Mr. who will 'ever praise a woman' for her sake, and then by her husband, in his

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *Measure for Measure*. Isabella's silence at the end of the play contrasts with the performative speech required for the wedding vows, and hints at her non-conformity.

confession of guilt. He expresses his deep regret, saying 'I of thy wrongs repent me with my harte ... Let every father looke into my deedes,/ And then their heirs may prosper, while mine bleeds.' (X.57-63). The husband uses his wife's silence as a means of recognising his own mistakes; because she has acted as the catalyst for his re-capitulation to the ideals of patriarchy, her support of the established social order is assumed to be a corollary of her silence.

In addition to her muted gestures towards non-compliance, however, the wife's too literal identification with the male-sanctioned ideals of femininity serves to highlight the fact that patriarchy is in crisis. The effects of the wife's identification with patriarchal ideals are thrown into relief at the close of the play when, after having been severely abused physically, emotionally and financially, she articulates a seemingly wholehearted backing of her husband. Provoking a profound sense of unease, she says publicly 'Oh my repentant husband ... Thou shouldst not (be assured) for these faults die,/ If the law cold forgive as soon as I' (X.29-33). At the close of the play she asserts,

WIFE	More wretched am I now in this distress, <i>Exeunt Husband with halberds.</i> Then former sorrows made me.
MR.	Oh kinde wife, Be comforted. One joy is yet unmurdered: You have a boy at nurse; your joy's in him.
WIFE	Dearer then all is my poore husbands life: Heaven give my body strength, which is yet faint With much expense of bloud, and I will kneele, Sue for his life, number up all my friends, To plead for pardon (for) my deare husbands life. (X.64-73)

Here, in a recuperative gesture, Mr. suggests that the wife will take comfort from her remaining live male child, who will perpetuate the Calverly name. At this profoundly ambiguous moment, however, the wife maintains that her husband is her priority. Because of her vocalisation of her unadulterated support for him, the choric Mr. proclaims 'Ile ever praise a woman for thy sake' (X.75). Adherence to the linguistic codes of feminine obedience appears to result in the wife's enforced complicity with the political fictions that develop to explain the violence she endures. In fact, the wife's uncritical voicing of the male ideals of female speech works to radically destabilise its ideological grounding. Whilst she stays faithful to the doctrine of wifely subjection, the imperatives of marriage and patrilineal filiation separate, and are no longer mutually constitutive. Patriarchy appears, therefore, to fall victim to its own logic. As Drakakis notes, in tragedy, the possibility of resistance to the dominant discourse involves the

transformation of symbolic structures as the ideologies which hold them in place are no longer able to disguise the material contradictions which the confrontation throws up. In this respect, tragedy retains its ambivalence in that it uncovers the very contradictions that it sets out aesthetically to domesticate, and those contradictions are located at both the personal and the public levels of communal experience (1992b: 18).

Throughout the play there is no gap between expectations of female behaviour and the wife's behaviour and this seamlessness is one of the fundamental ways in which the play challenges the ideals of domestic patriarchy. Žižek states that 'distance is ideology'. Indeed, he goes on to say that, 'an ideological edifice can

be undermined by a too literal identification, which is why successful functioning requires a minimum of distance towards its explicit rules' (1996b: 85). Unlike her husband, the wife never appears to 'counter-identify' with the dominant patriarchal discourse: on the contrary, she is its greatest exponent. But by sticking to the letter of the law too closely, she undermines the very position she is advocating.

The popularity of domestic tragedies such as *A Yorkshire Tragedy* was due in large part to their relationship to actual events. This relationship also had an effect upon the dynamics of spectatorship, in that it influenced people's understanding of the mimetic quality of the drama. Simultaneously more 'real' and more obviously a re-presentation of events, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is structured by the relationship between language and violence. In particular, it identifies and explores women's complex relationship with the language they are expected to speak, and considers its impact upon the positions they must inhabit, in relation to men. At one level, the play demonstrates that the husband's verbal utterances, as well as his acts of physical violence, constitute coercive and controlling behaviour. Moreover, it demonstrates that men's coercive and controlling behaviour can be levelled at women's speech, and that this can have far-reaching consequences. The husband is also subject to the material consequences of language, a fact which is emphasised by the recurring metaphor of the physically damaging effects of words. At another level, language is shown to be a limited system of signification, which, as a result of its limitations, imposes severe restrictions upon the speaking subject.

The wife, bound by expectations of reverence in her communications with her husband, and abused nevertheless, is precluded from fully expressing her own experiences. The hierarchical system, which imposes prohibitive codes of conduct upon her, also denies her an effective means with which to articulate the experience of violence. By giving voice to the ideals of the system that has oppressed her, she is forced into a situation where she must act as the agent of much of the violence she suffers. Scarry argues that 'the obsessive display of agency that permits one person's body to be translated into another person's voice ... allows real human pain to be converted into a regime's fiction of power' (1986: 18). The demonstrable absence of the wife's individual voice – a result of the obsessive display of patriarchal agency – goes some way towards highlighting these fictions. Her silence constitutes a subtle, limited form of resistance. She not only has to endure the violence enacted against her and the fatal violence vented on her children, but she must also undertake the process of translation: *she* must produce and articulate the fictions of male power. Clearly there is an inherent violence in this. As Armstrong and Tennenhouse remind us, 'the words we use to represent the subjects and objects of violence are part and parcel of the events themselves' (1989: 24). However, the rigour with which the wife approaches the process of translation actually serves to expose and discredit these fictions. Tragedy, therefore, can be both ideological and counter-ideological. Indeed, for the play to be able to contest the meanings of violence, it must be both. *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is an attempt to represent the unrepresentable, and, whilst the way in which the drama negotiates these difficulties is important, the attempt itself is significant.

## Conclusion

Bataille suggests that 'violence ... clings to a silent contempt for the words used about it' (cited in DeBoer 1999: 5). This study emerged out of a longstanding personal fascination with the way that violence seems peculiarly resistant to language. For its victims and its perpetrators, the experience is singular and intense, the effects instantaneous and often enduring, but in many ways, violence remains unspeakable. This fascination, and consternation, has developed and expanded into a deeper understanding of, and continued preoccupation with, the intimate and indivisible relationship between violence and language. An undergraduate encounter with Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* consolidated these interests and helped to situate them, as an area for academic study, in the Renaissance. My aim throughout this dissertation has been to demonstrate that language and violence are inextricably linked, and to explore this connection in relation to representations of violence in Renaissance England. It was not my intention here to construct an argument that would lead to a definitive conclusion, but rather to set out this thesis and to pursue its implications for an understanding of language and violence in the Renaissance. Concentrating on selected works of Shakespeare, I have explored the way in which language figures acts of violence, whilst maintaining that language is in itself an agent of violence. Language works performatively to effect violence. But more than this, at the most basic level, it inheres within the structures of language.

The scope of this study is necessarily limited, and the choice of texts for close examination necessarily effects a form of exclusionary violence. I have not, for example, undertaken a sustained analysis of any texts by women. Nor have I looked at any texts written by those marginalized on the grounds of religion. In addition, the discussion of language has remained a discussion of English as it was used in England. The argument advanced throughout the dissertation is, however, applicable to a discussion of language as the agent of violence in the colonising ventures of the period. Language, as Lecercle reminds us 'is both the locus of and the means of historical (political) intervention' (1990: 179). There are a number of directions in which this study could be extended; however, any discussion of these issues will itself constitute a political intervention.

In Shakespeare's representations, we encounter the difficulties that Bataille draws attention to: in many ways, violence seems to resist language. In *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus*, Lucrece and Lavinia both struggle to articulate their experience of rape, and in each instance, their words are displaced by the words of men. After her assault, Lucrece's determined but ultimately futile speech contrasts pointedly with the rousing and politically effective language of the men who avenge her assault. Lavinia is doubly degraded by rape and by her subsequent reliance upon men who must speak for her. Throughout *Coriolanus*, the pain caused by violence can only be articulated figuratively in the metaphors of the bear pit, and in *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Mrs Calverly says nothing of the violence she has suffered. Indeed, a great deal of what violence achieves is achieved precisely because it cannot be shared. But violence inheres within language, and it is not

correct to say that violence necessarily resists articulation. What I have shown, however, is that usually it is not the victim of violence who has control over the way in which it is linguistically encoded. Often, the power that enables a group or individual to inflict violence goes hand in hand with the ability to influence the way in which it is represented. It follows on from this that the efficacy of violence is, in large part, derived from the language used to talk about it.

Lecerle notes that language is 'pervaded not only by the violence of affects but by the symbolic violence of institutional struggle' (1990: 107). In all of the texts under consideration here, acts of violence initiate the symbolic violence of institutional struggle within the structures of language. In chapter three, the patriarchal organisation of family and governmental structures, which is thrown into crisis by the violation of the female body, is subsequently reaffirmed as a result of the violent contestation and ultimate recovery of the meanings of sexual assault for the political order. In the following chapter, I show that representations of military and judicial violence are central to the ideology of monarchical rule, and are deeply bound up with the production of historical narratives. The metaphors of bearbaiting examined in chapter five acknowledge Christian paradigms of violence, but do not ultimately resolve the tensions between the teleological impetus of the tragic form in which they are embedded and the experience of continual violence that they represent. Similarly, through Mrs Calverly's too-literal identification with the masculine discourse, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* exposes profound weaknesses in the ideology of domestic patriarchy which remain unresolved. In



each of these texts, the patriarchal order works to contest the meanings of violence, which are produced at the level of the signifier.

Language is the place in which the subject is produced: it is language which constructs and institutes the limits of the self, effecting a radical, but formative violence. From the point of his/ her entry into language, the individual is subject to its structures, and to the ideologies – which collectively form ‘culture’ – embodied within it. The meanings of violence are produced in ideological conflict at the level of the signifier, and are registered in the symbolic order to which we are all subject. However, because language is a dynamic system of signification, in which signifiers are meaningful because of their (continually changing) relationships with other signifiers, the meanings of violence are neither fixed nor stable. By drawing attention to a range of violent practices in Renaissance England, I have shown that violence was integral to ‘culture’, operating both overtly and covertly at the level of language. In doing so, I have endeavoured to return Shakespeare, and specifically his works, to context, and to demonstrate that their ‘language exquisite’ (Kermode 1965: 38) is stratified at all levels by violence.

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