SHAKESPEARE AND MODELING POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY

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This dissertation examines the role of aesthetic activity in the pursuit of political agency in readings of several of Shakespeare’s plays, including Hamlet (1600), A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1595), The Tempest (1610), the history plays of the second tetralogy (1595-9), Julius Caesar (1599), and Coriolanus (1605). I demonstrate how Shakespeare models political subjectivity—the capacity for individuals to participate meaningfully in the political realm—as necessitating active aesthetic agency. This aesthetic agency entails the fashioning of artistically conceived public personae that potential political subjects enact in the public sphere and the critical engagement of the aesthetic and political discourses of the subjects’ culture in a self-reflective and appropriative manner. Furthermore, these subjects should be wary auditors of the texts and personae they encounter within the public sphere in order to avoid internalizing constraining ideologies that reify their identities into forms less conducive to the pursuit of liberty and social mobility. Early modern audiences could discover several models for doing so in Shakespeare’s works. For example, Hamlet posits a model of Machiavellian theatricality that masks the Prince's interiority as he resists the biopolitical force and disciplinary discourses of Claudius's Denmark. Julius Caesar and Coriolanus advance a model of citizenship through the plays’ nameless plebeians in which rhetoric offers the means to participate in Rome’s political culture, and Shakespeare’s England for audiences, while authorities manipulate citizen opinion by molding the popularity of public figures. Public, artistic ability affords potential political subjects ways of not only framing their participation in their culture but also ways of conceiving of their identities and relationships to society that may defy normative notions of membership in the community.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare offers a catalogue of possible models for political participation in the public sphere. Works like *Hamlet* (1600), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595), *The Tempest* (1610), the *Henriad* (1595-9), *Julius Caesar* (1599), and *Coriolanus* (1605) stage several approaches to political action that belie Shakespeare’s traditional reputation as an apolitical author, despite his apparent reticence to endanger his social position. Audiences have long recognized something subversive and empowering in his plays. Most famously, perhaps, the Earl of Essex and his supporters commissioned a performance of *Richard II* (1595) on the eve of their rebellion, presumably because Bolingbroke offered a model for claiming political authority from the monarch.¹ In staging Richard’s deposition, Shakespeare helps audiences imagine how depositions might occur, how such events are possible, and how people might accomplish them. The play’s narrative offers ways of imagining one’s relationship to a sovereign distinct from the normative, conservative views advocated during Elizabeth I’s reign, or so the rebels may have hoped. Essex’s supporters discovered a possible model for political subjectivity—the capacity for persons to act within the public sphere in pursuit of their political will—in Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke and adapted this model to their ends. While this framework was highly radical, concerned with political regime change, the models Shakespeare offers are not limited to this kind of extreme activity.

My purpose in this dissertation is to examine several possible models of political subjectivity in a selection of Shakespeare’s works to show how they afford subjects ways of conceiving alternatives to existing models of citizenship and political participation. The ability to adapt to and to reframe one’s symbolic place in the social order demands an awareness of aesthetics and an ability to use art and artifice within the public sphere. Political power is typically symbolic in nature and oftentimes a specific application of aesthetic principles. While Shakespeare himself offers no concrete declaration of a political philosophy, his works can inspire audiences towards political acts by modeling how those kinds of action often originate from aesthetic modes. In doing so, Shakespeare fashions various ways persons can negotiate the divide between private and public life. Different chapters focus on Shakespeare’s treatment of the biopolitics and political radicalism of Hamlet, the use of scopic desire and magic in his A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Tempest, storytelling as political enterprise in the Henriad, and the representation of rhetoric and popularity in Julius Caesar and Coriolanus. Shakespeare does not offer these models unambiguously, let alone explicitly, for he demonstrates a persistent concern for the perils that this subjectivity can create for both the state and the individual.

Political subjectivity is a pragmatic form of subjectivity that emerges from the history of political thought since at least Machiavelli. As Jacques Lacan argues, subjectivity and agency (instance) derive from a subject’s capability to “[act] upon” other persons or other things. People exercise agency to fulfill “biological needs,” which vary from person to person.² All subjects conceive of and understand themselves through language, so subjectivity is symbolic in nature. Consequently, subjectivity is inherently a linguistic, aesthetic, and often theatrical construct.³ Potential subjects fulfill their perceived lacks—things they desire but do not possess—through

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exercises of power. My interest in political subjectivity emphasizes subjects’ capacities to act within the public sphere on their own terms. They can do so to satisfy “biological needs,” like the plebeians threatening revolt who seek food that the patricians hoard in 1.1 in Coriolanus. Political subjects may also move to address other perceived wants in their lives, like the desire for justice and freedom from ideological control that motivates Hamlet. Political subjectivity includes a broader concern with persons’ relationships to sovereignty and the state as well as the form the state should take, such as Hamlet’s concern over what kings, and by extension states, should be like. Often, this subjectivity is in direct response to pressures the state imposes upon persons. This pressure can take the form of what Giorgio Agamben terms biopower, the state power that acts upon citizens to regulate their bodies and actions. This pressure can also manifest through subtler means, such as through internalizing regulatory discourse that encourages citizens to control themselves so the state does not have to do so, which Michel Foucault terms discipline. Although Shakespeare’s interest in emerging modes of political subjectivity in the period’s discourse or in ways of resisting these pressures are noteworthy, he is perhaps more notable for the models of this subjectivity he offers, articulating, experimenting with, and evaluating means of relating the self to the public sphere.

Within the framework of biopower, political subjectivity develops in response to the legal and extra-legal force of the state upon the body. This subjectivity is always in flux and a matter

of a person’s capability to enact agency or not. Agamben terms this phenomenon potentiality, which I examine in more detail in chapter 2 in addressing Shakespeare’s treatment of the concept in Hamlet. Subjectivity can actualize when people—from royals like Hamlet to the nameless plebeians in Coriolanus—set aside their capacity “not to be” agents and their potential not to act of their own accord. Once this potential actualizes, persons can become “sovereign subjects” through resistance to the state’s subjection of their lives so that they can exercise political agency over their bodies and their private and public lives. As Sergei Prozorov notes, freedom emerges as the “subject of resistance,” coming into being in “the act of resistance” against exterior control over one’s life. One is not born free, so potential subjects only achieve freedom and political agency when they resist the state consciously and deliberately. This resistance can take subtler forms, including defying the ideological representations of selfhood and citizenship found in the early modern period. For example, the First Citizen of Coriolanus’s opening scene appears to resist this ideology as found in Menenius’s fable, which James I echoes in his consistent framing of his subjects as extensions of his royal body and of himself as the state’s head and will. The pursuit of freedom includes not only physical liberty but also mental and aesthetic liberty. Freedom includes the ability to think and imagine beyond the strictures imposed by a dominant discourse. Towards this end, Bottom’s experiences with fairies help expand his imagination, leading him to conceive of alternatives to life as a rude mechanical. Shakespeare’s plays afford audiences opportunities to think in these ways. My enterprise centers not on Shakespeare’s personal politics, but on the ways in which his works make available models of political behavior.

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10 Agamben, 46.
11 Sergei Prozorov, Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 35.
in the interest of greater political subjectivity and freedom, in resisting the state and its discourses in some manner.

Shakespearean political subjectivity often exists in its potential, and in many instances, that potential actualizes when characters recognize the use of state power against them or others within the community, leading those characters to take some action against that power. Many of the characters who most successfully realize political subjectivity do so to gain outright sovereignty, such as Machiavels who use theatricality to their advantage, like Richard III and Claudius. Figures like Bolingbroke and Hamlet also deploy theatricality as a means of contending against tyrants. As I show, these Shakespearean tyrants often abuse what Carl Schmitt and Agamben term the *sovereign exception*. Unforeseen circumstances not already delineated by the law require sovereigns to exercise their discretion; this power over what Schmitt calls the “exception” to the normal rule of law defines sovereign authority.¹³ Agamben expands upon Schmitt’s claims, situating sovereignty in state control over the bodies of the people, regulating and redefining their bodies through juridical and linguistic means, rendering persons as exceptions to the law and its protections.¹⁴ For example, Richard II exercises this power of the sovereign exception against Bolingbroke in exiling him, forcing Bolingbroke to adapt and to re-represent himself as a victim of Richard who seeks justice.¹⁵ Claudius also singles out Hamlet, forcing him to remain in Elsinore rather than return to Wittenberg, and placing Hamlet under surveillance. Claudius’s actions spur Hamlet to adapt and to represent himself as mad. Affecting madness helps protect Hamlet’s interiority from observation, for if Claudius were to discover Hamlet’s real feelings, then Claudius could then act more decisively

¹⁴ Agamben, 18-21.
against the threat to the throne. These political reactions in Shakespeare are responses to sovereign excesses that endanger the bodies and welfare of the state’s subjects.

While Bolingbroke and Hamlet pursue political subjectivity, arguably to seek redress against the unjust acts of sovereigns, even nameless characters act to address perceived wrongs on the part of authority in Shakespeare’s canon. The rioters in Coriolanus who seek out Martius at the beginning of the play do for perceived wrongs committed against them by the patrician authorities of Rome. Those authorities, who have hoarded food and left the populace famished, inspire these unnamed citizens to resist not only Rome’s legal authority (its defenders, such as Coriolanus) but also its official discourses, such as Menenius’s rhetoric and fable of the belly. In locating a capacity for political action in these citizens, Shakespeare invites audiences to reflect on the potential that other mobs and nameless characters in other plays might demonstrate, like the plebeians in Julius Caesar. Shakespeare’s audiences can apprehend this capability for resistance in their counterparts on stage, by evaluating how characters respond to political crises.

Antitheatricalists attacked the theater for offering spectators aberrant models of behavior, but while these attacks often focused on morality, their criticisms point to political concerns about what form the public sphere should take, for theater offered ideological resistance to normative discourses. Most populous amongst the playgoers of the period were likely the lowest orders of London society.16 The authors of Th’overthrow of Stage-Playes (1599) had this kind of person in mind when they situated their arguments against the theater in moral terms. They argued that the theater offered spectators models for the “hypocriticall faining of lyes” and other vices.17 However, these attacks against theater’s immorality masked political concerns.

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Antitheatricalists argued that classical authorities recognized that theater should be “destroyed” for the theater’s “gainsa[ying]” and satirizing of the law and its enforcers. While Philip Stubbes accused the theater of creating “confusion” and “disorder” by blurring social distinctions, Stephen Gosson focused on the theater allowing audiences to “judge” the “faultes” of figures of authority. As Peter Lake and Steven Pincus argue, early attempts at shaping the public sphere originated from the state when early modern authorities sought to mobilize public opinion. These shapers of discourse hoped to do so “closed off from the gaze of the multitude.” However, by the early Stuart era, the enterprise of public making had expanded because of the rising use of media like theater to appeal to audiences, leading to a public who could “judge” the matters presented before them, onstage and off. Antitheatricalist writings show that many distrusted presenting public policy to commoner audiences for precisely this reason. Doing so recentered authority away from established sites and into the hands of the people while suggesting alternative ways of imagining the public sphere and participation within it. The theater offered audiences models for political subjectivity—for participating meaningfully within the public sphere—while also granting them opportunities to consider a variety of political topics traditionally kept away from their gaze.

In addressing how audiences could draw upon Shakespearean models for political subjectivity, my work participates in the critical debate about how discourse shapes the public sphere. Publics emerge in response to discourse, organizing themselves as a reaction to whatever discourses they encounter, whether that of Shakespeare’s works or of the sources from which

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18 Rainoldes, Gager, and Gentili, 20.
20 Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” in The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England, eds. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 3-6.
Shakespeare borrows. The “self-organizing” nature of publics and public making contribute to audiences’ potentials to form what Michael Warner calls “counterpublics” at odds with mainstream society and its ideologies. An audience is not a “public” in the sense Jürgen Habermas argues, for audiences represent momentary gatherings of persons to witness a specific discourse, not the broader community Habermas describes. However, those audiences’ circumstances are conducive to forming new publics. As Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin argue, sites of early modern cultural production like playhouses helped foster new ways of conceiving of membership in the public sphere beyond those officially sanctioned by the state and its various doxies. Furthermore, theaters commingled the social strata of Shakespeare’s London, especially the outdoor amphitheaters that encouraged an inclusive theater experience. Insofar as plays addressed public policy, spectators gained access to alternate viewpoints that expanded their political discursive possibilities. In these ways, theatrical audiences fulfill Habermas’s preconditions for a public to emerge, for playhouses served as sites for spectators to experience discourses that could then spread into the broader public sphere.

Theater offers an aesthetic frame for audiences to encounter and critique a variety of aesthetic constructs: tales, literary genres, performances, and other theatrical and fictive texts. That frame also mediates audience reception of putatively non-aesthetic discourses, including political ideology, religion, topical events, and history. Spectators can then contribute to the making of a public by discussing their responses to the aesthetic representations of these discourses relating to life under the law.

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Active political participation requires potential political subjects to be active aesthetic agents, and Shakespeare often associates artistic skill with a capacity for political subjectivity. Although theorists have often seen aesthetics and politics as separate concerns, Hannah Arendt advocates a model for political engagement driven by “action and speech” that is fundamentally aesthetic and narratively driven. Human work and labor require a public space where persons can endow their actions and lives with “meaning” through the performance of pre-existing works: performative works of art and performative political action. Art can often be political then in that art aids persons’ framing of their self-representation in the public sphere. Aesthetics helps people bridge the divide from interiority to exteriority, aiding persons in conceiving of their place in the world and in articulating their will. As Hugh Grady notes, art often possesses a utopian character, offering audiences “imaginary solutions to real problems” that can include how to resist the imposition of ideologically constraining modes of being and how to participate in public life. Towards these ends, Shakespeare demonstrates that his aesthetically engaged characters are better prepared for responding to attempts to constrain them.

Although Shakespeare’s examples are typically theatrical in nature, offering ways of performing roles before others, they also include visual art and magic, storytelling, and rhetorical invention and delivery. For example, Hamlet searches for empowering models for action in the theater while trying to determine how he should perform the roles of son, prince, and Christian in rational and advantageous manners. In 1 Henry IV, Falstaff’s skill as a storyteller allows him to resist Hal’s attempts to rein in the old man so that Falstaff would act in a more socially

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25 Hugh Grady, Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4-17.
acceptable manner. His fictive ability allows Falstaff to gain the honor of defeating Hotspur through “the strangest tale” Lancaster has heard, not through actually doing the deed (5.4.146-54). Hamlet and Falstaff demonstrate that representing a subject’s relationship to the public sphere requires recourse to aesthetic modes, pre-existing role models, examples, or symbols of one’s status in the state. Political subjectivity may entail a performance of a version of the self in the public sphere, but doing so requires the ability and opportunity to fashion persons’ roles on their terms, drawing upon aesthetic models for examples or elements of persons’ social performances. Shakespearean characters who resist aesthetic self-representation, such as Coriolanus, risk allowing others the opportunities to do so instead. Passive participants cede aesthetic and political authority over their public roles to others, endangering their liberty and capacity for social agency.

Although several critics have recently examined the intersection of aesthetics and politics, I emphasize the performative applications that audiences can discover in Shakespeare and the aesthetic models that audiences can use to resist constraining ideologies. As Grady notes, aesthetic elements in works illumine “what is repressed elsewhere” in social discourses, demonstrating that aesthetics can have political motivations and consequences. Critics like David Scott Kastan show how “representation...became subversive” in the early modern period and undermined authority by allowing audiences to judge kings, for example, or by exposing the realities of power politics. However, this potential for subversion in representationality extends beyond authority to all persons within the public sphere, necessitating an awareness of the aesthetic nature of selfhood and its performance. As Christopher Pye and Julia Reinhard Lupton

28 Grady, Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics, 4-21; and Hugh Grady, “Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics: The Case of A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Shakespeare Quarterly 59, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 274-6.
29 David Scott Kastan, Shakespeare after Theory (New York: Routledge, 1999), 111-5.
argue, this awareness leads to the rise of the “citizen-subject” whose subjectivity emerges from the self’s symbolic relation to other forces. 

Audiences can find models for participating within the public sphere in Shakespeare, and examining how characters bridge the domestic and public spheres has been a continuing project for Lupton. 

Aesthetics offers audiences what Lupton terms configurations, “social scripts,” but these models can go beyond showing audiences specific “formulas” for performing selfhood. Potential political subjects should be aesthetically astute. They should be able to play and perform, adapting as necessary to circumstances while also resisting competing social forces interpellating them to their disadvantage. The models I examine in this dissertation afford audiences ways to conceive of themselves distinctively from traditionally acceptable roles, let alone stable, concrete identities. For example, Prospero is aberrant as a magician, but this role allows him to use his “art” to perform many roles—tyrant, father, and playwright—for what are ultimately political ends. Examples drawn from aesthetics allow audiences to consider their place within the public sphere, their participation within it, and their choices of models to adopt in different circumstances.

In examining the models audiences can find in Shakespeare’s works, I begin in chapter 2 with Hamlet’s radical political inclinations and its self-consciousness about this modeling process. I start with this play because I see Shakespeare engaging in an extended treatment of fundamental questions of political subjectivity in Hamlet. My examination of the play focuses on how Shakespeare views the intersection of aesthetics and politics. The political concerns in Hamlet are biopolitical in that the state directs force against the bodies of its citizens and in that

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32 Lupton, Thinking with Shakespeare, 14-9.

Hamlet overcomes the Foucauldian self-regulatory discipline that would lead him to subjugate himself. Furthermore, Hamlet’s proclivity for theatricality allows him to strive for greater political subjectivity and resistance. In *Hamlet*, a Shakespearean meta-aesthetics emerges that stresses art’s potentiality for freedom through the creative act itself. The political concerns in *Hamlet* also recur in the works I treat in later chapters.

Shakespeare invests *Hamlet* with an obsessive concern over bodies and their subjection to state power as well as the discourses that inhibit a person’s political participation. *Hamlet* registers its critically commonplace concerns over interiority and subjectivity in opposition to political influence and control. Shakespeare develops his own political model of subjectivity in the face of sovereignty. Hamlet sets aside his potential “not to be” in order to establish his tenuous subjectivity as what Prozorov would term a “sovereign subject.” Hamlet’s soliloquy in 3.1 serves as the crux upon which his potential for personal freedom—the freedom to act and to decide—depends, which Shakespeare represents using the cultural codes of early modern England in a biopolitical manner.

The play’s concerns with morbidity become a reflection on Hamlet’s potentiality not to be free. Suicide becomes a lure to subjection and political and personal despair that would advance Claudius’s interests at the expense of Hamlet’s freedom. Suicide may have radical political associations, for ending one’s life can be a means of establishing momentary sovereignty over one’s body. However, suicide is a desperate choice that ultimately makes things easier for the oppressor. After all, Claudius’s life would be simpler were Hamlet to kill himself. Shakespearean potentiality necessitates a setting aside of this kind of despairing decision making if one wishes to participate meaningfully in the public sphere.
Becoming a successful political subject through Shakespearean potentiality requires one to adopt Machiavellian theatricality in order to mask one’s true interiority from the state. States conduct surveillance of their citizens to gain intelligence of possible threats against their authority, and Denmark through Claudius is no different in Hamlet, working to gain access to Hamlet’s thoughts and motivations. Shakespeare demonstrates that to assert oneself against this form of state power, potential political subjects must adopt theatrical masking in order to hide their political aspirations until they can enact some form of agency. Hamlet adopts the mask of madness to hide his interiority from Claudius, but Hamlet also works to find models for action in the theater, seeking masks and inspirations that would allow him to pursue better his potentiality as a political subject.

In chapter 3, I examine how Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare both use theater and magic as avenues towards political aspiration and power. I move to A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Tempest from Hamlet because I see these plays and their emphases on magician-playwrights as advancing the active aesthetic enterprise that Hamlet explores. I use Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus (1594) as a touchstone against which to compare Shakespeare’s treatment of magic and theatricality. Critics have often compared Prospero to Faustus as examples of early modern magicians onstage, and I adopt a similar strategy here, using Doctor Faustus to examine magic’s aesthetic and political associations. Given the play’s popularity in the period, Doctor Faustus’s approaches to these discourses inform any contemporary reception of Shakespeare’s use of occultism. Marlowe approaches the topic of political aspiration in Doctor Faustus through the thematic device of the occult, wherein the premise of magic is that magicians can make real

what they imagine. The theater’s charm results in part from its magic: the imagination of a playwright can manifest—if only in play—onstage. I emphasize the scopic quality of the imagination in the sense that imagination requires persons to create an image in their minds, and people often imagine what they lack or desire. A capacity for imagination reflects a capacity for both subjectivity and interiority: in order for what exists only inside subjects’ minds as desires to actualize, subjects must enact their agency through exterior action. Magic offers Faustus an aesthetic means for actualizing his potentiality to be a political and sovereign subject. Faustus rails against a world that constrains his imagination and ultimately dooms it, but his failing is perhaps more properly that he turns away from aesthetic engagement towards mere entertainment.

Shakespeare’s use of magic and scopic desire in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* is more pronounced than Marlowe’s usage, given the plays’ persistent invocations of theater and control over spectators’ gazes. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Bottom’s imagination and desires—typically represented as he speaks of visions he imagines—suggests someone who aspires to rise above being a “rude mechanical,” and thus his station, to become an artist and dramatist of reality itself (3.2.9). In a sense, Bottom desires to become like Oberon and Titania, who ultimately control the fortunes, royal and otherwise, of Athens, and who drive the aesthetic action of the play. Shakespeare’s treatment of scopic desire assumes its most overtly political dimensions in *The Tempest*, as Prospero’s magic and art provide him with the means of achieving the political transformations Faustus vainly seeks. Shakespeare builds from Marlowe’s use of scopic desire through the aesthetics of the occult to represent the potential for

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political subjectivity as having a foundation in imagining a better world than the one within which people may live.

I also situate Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s use of occultism within the context of early modern magic, especially the occultism of John Dee. Dee practiced magic as a means of pursuing political subjectivity himself. The aesthetics and theatricality of Dee’s occult investigations, especially those conducted with Edward Kelley, become apparent in the extant archives of his conversations with supposed angels. Rather than investing magic itself with theatrical associations, Marlowe, and through him Shakespeare, recognize how magic offered persons like Dee a theatrical model and mask through which they could imagine, if not pursue, power and authority.

I then turn from Shakespeare’s use of the occult to his uses of storytelling in the *Henriad* and its political dimensions in chapter 4, as I examine more mundane and everyday sites of aesthetics in the public sphere in the form of storytelling. Over the course of the four plays of the *Henriad*—*Richard II*, *1 and 2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*—the characters onstage often stop the action to tell stories. Alternatively, they gesture towards those narratives that structure and inform their lives and participation within the social order. Shakespeare demonstrates in these plays the importance of storytelling and judging the narratives that constitute persons’ lives, offering yet another potential model of political subjectivity. In halting the trial by combat between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Richard II upsets the storytelling environment that exists at the beginning of the *Henriad*, for the duel between the two nobles should determine which storyteller lives to disseminate his narrative about himself and the other man. Consequently, Bolingbroke begins crafting a political story in which he is dominant and kingly in contrast to Richard. However, though he will enjoy storytelling dominance for a time, Bolingbroke soon
finds himself in a chaotic narrative environment in which he is but one voice in a politically-
charged narrative free-for-all. This storytelling strife coincides with the civil strife in the plays.

I then examine Hotspur’s use of storytelling and his weaknesses, for Shakespeare
demonstrates how the asocial Hotspur’s narrative fixation allows others to manipulate him. In
contrast, Falstaff is a canny and cunning storyteller, willing to and capable of adapting and
integrating the stories of others into those he weaves. Both Bolingbroke and Hal seek to
constrain the narrative potential in England by fashioning unifying, dominant stories for the
country. In particular, Hal works to impose a specifically English war story in his campaign
against France that should unite the English narratively and politically against an outside foe
while also changing the story of England from one of civil strife to fraternity. Shakespeare
critiques Hal’s pursuit of his dominant, nationalist narrative by emphasizing its artificiality and
by offering counternarratives.

Storytelling offers a model for political subjectivity in the *Henriad* for aristocrats and
other, more marginal, subjects. Aristocratic storytellers like Bolingbroke, Hotspur, and Hal show
the potential for narrativizing, both in terms of representing themselves and as a means for
maneuvering for political position. Beyond these aristocrats, Shakespeare demonstrates how
other storytellers can use narrative to political advantage. If storytelling allows nobles like
Bolingbroke and Hal to pursue Machiavellian ends, then Shakespeare shows how lesser nobles
and commoners can appropriate this skill for their own purposes. For example, Falstaff occupies
a liminal position between the nobility and commoners. Though he is a knight, he is on the
lowest tier of the nobility, and his association with similarly unscrupulous gentry like Justice
Shallow and with the Eastcheap regulars highlights his ability to negotiate various strata of
society. Falstaff navigates those strata in part through his adaptive use of storytelling—telling
stories of himself and others—depending on exigent circumstances. In particular, Falstaff demonstrates how one can appropriate the dominant political narratives nobles like Bolingbroke or Hal disseminate and fashion variations that both undercut those dominant discourses and offer a means of gaining power. Falstaff’s storytelling canniness also underscores his ability to judge the merits and uses of storytelling by others in order to avoid disadvantageous narratives. In *Henry V* after Falstaff’s death, Shakespeare situates this lower class storytelling in the Eastcheap regulars, who offer a counter-narrative to Hal’s heroic war story.

In chapter 5, I turn my attention from storytelling to rhetoric as a means towards political subjectivity in Shakespeare’s Roman plays, specifically *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, and in doing so, I shift towards perhaps the most accessible and populist sites for aesthetic engagement in the public sphere. Early modern treatments of mobs have tended to be interpreted as negative: crowds are rowdy, unorganized, and easily swayed through appearances and sophistry. However, in representing this stereotype on the stage, Shakespeare engages in a reversal of the early modern *Mirror for Magistrates* genre. In holding the public up to the theatrical mirror of their stage representations, Shakespeare invites audiences to question their reactions to political rhetoric and power. Audiences should judge gullible Roman plebeians against their experiences with rhetoric in early modern London. Shakespeare uses Rome in these plays as a vehicle for audiences to engage in critical reflection on their assumptions about aristocracy and its political ideologies while also suggesting popular forms of political subjectivity for the people.

Shakespeare does not locate rhetoric solely as the province of the patrician elite. Indeed, both plays begin with authorities of some kind attempting to sway plebeians through rhetoric, but these citizens include persons who are themselves rhetorically capable and critical. For example,

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36 For example, see Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye’s Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance*, eds. Troni Grande and Garry Sherbert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 262.
the First Citizen in *Coriolanus*’s opening scene counters Menenius’s commonplaces and fable with logos. The Cobbler at the beginning of *Julius Caesar* also helps call attention to the tribunes’ uses of manipulative rhetoric against the plebeians preparing to celebrate Caesar’s return to Rome.37

Shakespeare’s use of rhetoric in these plays offers the patricians as a model for potential political subjectivity, but Shakespeare also grants a measure of potentiality to the plebeians. While early modern England was by no means a republic as we might conceive of it, the model of republican Rome continued to have significance, especially given the common formulation of London as a latter day inheritor of Rome. In particular, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* explore how power arises from the polity and how abuses of rhetoric can sway the people. Much like the storytelling I examine in chapter 4, rhetoric affords a means for shaping discourse in the public sphere as well as determining who can speak, and therefore mold, that discourse.

One approach unethical rhetors like the tribunes and Antony use in these plays is the manipulation of other persons’ popularity, and Shakespeare shows how Antony reframes the popularity of Caesar and Brutus to exalt those men and, through proximity, himself. A similar shaping of popularity threatens Coriolanus, but his tenacity to control his self-representation offers him as a model to audiences for negotiating one’s place in the public sphere against abuses of rhetoric. Shakespeare’s examination of rhetoric in these plays helps expose the vulnerability of political thought to manipulation, with the implicit hope that more substantive and less destructive uses of rhetoric could improve life for citizens and afford a path towards political subjectivity.

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This dissertation constitutes only a limited examination of the models of political subjectivity in Shakespeare, given the scope of his works. These works engage with questions of persons’ relationships with the state, like those of many philosophers who have also used dialogues. However, Shakespeare does not offer monological or even dialogical treatments of early modern political theories. He instead offers his audiences fictive communities responding to a broad variety of political perspectives, radical and traditional, while individual subjects within the plays struggle with their desires and their will towards political power. My aim is not to constrain the political potential of Shakespeare into specific ideologies or declarations of Shakespeare’s politics. Instead, I work to uncover possible models for political participation that emerge in these plays, models that audiences could adopt for their own purposes, much as Shakespeare adopts and appropriates existing theatrical and social models to fashion his works.
CHAPTER 2

HAMLET AND SHAKESPEAREAN POTENTIALITY

In *Hamlet* (1600) Shakespeare makes it plain that, just as Machiavellians like Claudius rely upon theatricality to mask their interiorities, so too must potential political subjects mask themselves and evade assignations of identity that help subjugate them to prevailing authority structures. In a world dominated by Machiavellian sovereigns, resisting subjects must rely upon Machiavellian means to achieve any measure of political subjectivity. Claudius, of course, is in many ways a model prince as he strives to seem a virtuous and powerful sovereign, for as Machiavelli recommends, Claudius must keep others from “know[ing] what [he is].”¹ Hamlet, in turn, must obscure what he is so that he “seem[s] to be” someone against whom Claudius does not have to act.² The theatricality of early modern sovereigns requires theatricality on the part of dissenters and rebels to achieve the measure of anonymity or secrecy that is vital for enacting any form of effective political resistance. In this chapter, I explore this model of political subjectivity: being an actor or player in a theatrical context, turned towards political purposes.

I use *Hamlet* as a general case to argue that Shakespeare recognizes also the biopolitical constraints imposed upon subjects’ bodies and the doctrinal discourses that hamper the subversive imagination. These forces inhibit whatever power Hamlet might have to participate in the public sphere on his terms, and Hamlet sets aside his impotentiality, the lures to inaction and loss of power that state force and master discourse array against him. He instead chooses to pursue his potentiality before he turns the focal points for state force back upon the state as he adopts the tools Claudius embraces. In doing so, I show how Hamlet offers a general

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² Machiavelli, 49.
Shakespearean treatment of these political concerns as Hamlet uses aesthetics to model and enact his political subjectivity.

Towards this end, “To be, or not to be” serves as the crux of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, marking a turning point from Hamlet’s earlier passivity to an activeness that, while not always focused or effective, does result in Hamlet resolving the revenge tragedy plot. After 3.1 Hamlet begins engaging in active resistance. Rejecting his potential “not to be,” Hamlet begins taking action against Claudius and his state while using Machiavellian, theatrical masking to achieve his goals. Hamlet’s actions culminate in the ultimate act of political resistance: regicide. The Hamlet who “suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” before 3.1 transforms into a revolutionary Hamlet who not only defies the state but also destroys it, choosing instead in his last act of political will to give his vote to Fortinbras and whatever future he may inaugurate in Denmark. The Prince’s newfound activity brings him much more directly into conflict with the state of Denmark than during his earlier melancholy. He kills Polonius, mistaking him for the King in an act of failed regicide. Hiding Polonius’s body, Hamlet refuses to hand over the corpse to the King and his henchmen. The Prince taunts Claudius all the while, releasing Polonius’s corpse only after he has mocked Claudius’s reign in a display of open verbal resistance where previously Hamlet had only offered ironic commentary on the court. On the voyage to England, Hamlet defies Claudius’s authority by opening the King’s sealed letter and replacing it with a forgery. In doing so, Hamlet avoids Claudius’s attempt to have the English execute him and appropriates the power that sought to destroy him. This power Hamlet directs instead against Claudius’s co-conspirators. While Hamlet’s dilemma is a personal one—a dead father, an incestuous mother and uncle—Shakespeare emphasizes that the dilemma is also inescapably political. The implications of Hamlet’s actions reverberate throughout the state, and politics and
family in the Renaissance are never separate to any great degree in the first place. After all, Claudius deploys all the tools of state power at his disposal to rein in his rebellious nephew.

The model I identify in *Hamlet* is a form of meta-aesthetics, and the play constitutes a discourse in which Shakespeare suggests political applications for aesthetic activity grounded in theoretical concerns that he addresses elsewhere in the canon, including those plays treated later in this dissertation. These theoretical concerns include the ways in which the state deploys overt political force—biopower—and subtler means that enjoin persons to subordinate themselves to authority willingly. To pursue political subjectivity is to resist the structures of the state in some manner, but doing so requires an understanding of *how* the state constrains citizen subjectivity and liberty as well as *how* one can resist that constraint. Resistance of any kind requires potentiality. Towards this end, I situate *Hamlet*, the 3.1 soliloquy, and Hamlet’s political action in the play in terms of what “to be, or not to be” means, or potentiality. The study of potentiality—the manner in which the potential somehow becomes the actual—has occupied thinkers since Aristotle, and Shakespeare is no exception. Hamlet struggles to embrace his own potentiality through manifold uses of aesthetics. He uses theater in particular to engage in judgment on, reflection on, and engagement with the public sphere. Using aesthetics as his principle means of resistance throughout much of the play, Hamlet uses theater as the path through which he can attain the power necessary to act in what Julia Reinhard Lupton calls “the public space” in an “inherently dramatic” fashion that accounts for “the unpredictable plurality of” other social actors as he pursues political subjectivity. The model Shakespeare advances in this play as a template for pursuing political subjectivity then is Hamlet himself, Hamlet the

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player and playwright, who examines the constraints and forces surrounding him and the
motivations of others even as he uses aesthetics to frame his participation in the public sphere.

In *Hamlet*, questions of potentiality parallel questions of subjectivity: the potential of
persons is my focus rather than the potential of events, as in more ontological or scientific
approaches to this subject. Hamlet addresses what kind of man, son, and prince he is and wants
to be, and these roles become aesthetic opportunities that he experiments with and evaluates. In
confronting such questions, Hamlet’s conundrum demonstrates profound concern with political
subjectivity, his capacity to engage meaningfully in the public sphere, as he works to fashion his
own modes of engagement with society. This concern parallels the play’s emphasis on bodies
and their subjection to the state and political power, such as Hamlet’s own agonizing over the
status of his body—the “sallied flesh” he wishes “would melt, / [t]haw and resolve itself into a
dew” (1.2.129-30).4 *Hamlet* registers its preoccupations over interiority and subjectivity in
specific opposition to political influence and control, and the play does so through the focal point
of the human body. Hamlet sets aside his own potential “not to be” to establish his tenuous
subjectivity as a resisting subject in pursuing his liberty. The general meta-aesthetics and their
political associations that Shakespeare develops in this play will remain pertinent in the chapters
that follow.

In making my biopolitical argument about *Hamlet*, I participate within the critical
discourse of early modern embodiment and how it intersects with subjectivity, but my approach
focuses on Shakespeare’s political usages of these tropes. The Galenic model located subjectivity
in terms of persons’ control over their own bodies. As Michael C. Schoenfeldt argues, early

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Shakespeare, 2006), 1.2.129-30. All references to *Hamlet* use this edition and appear parenthetically, unless
specifically stated in citations or otherwise. Some editions opt for “sullied flesh” rather than “sallied” as the Arden
dition does, and the Folio edition opts for “solid.” “Sallied” suggests a sense of being “assailed” or “besieged,” as
Thompson and Taylor gloss the term (175n129).
moderns conceived of embodiment in terms of self-regulation, especially in regulating consumption, for early modern subjects needed the discipline to manipulate “carefully” their bodies in the pursuit of “soundness of mind and body.” This sense of self-regulation encourages personal control over oneself, for physiological regulation required attention to the particulars of an individual since each person’s bodily situation was distinct. Health, mental and physical, and the power to control one’s body become measures of one’s capacity for subjectivity. However, as Schoenfeldt suggests, this form of embodied agency also has an oppressive dark side, for early modern authorities also advocated institutional correction of excesses through medical and dietary practices. While Schoenfeldt gestures towards Hamlet as a site for discussion of Shakespeare’s use of “physiological terminology” as a means of representing character, I offer a more extended analysis of the play on this topic and reframe his notions of regulation in a Foucauldian light with an eye towards how Shakespeare uses this theory of embodiment to help make political points.\(^5\) If one could work to self-regulate the body and mind in the pursuit of a healthy subjectivity, then outsiders could work to undermine that subjectivity by influencing and controlling one’s body. As Gail Kern Paster argues, the Galenic model forces Hamlet to strive towards “bodily agency” against forces that block such agency. While Hamlet seeks to manipulate his own body’s passions through the influences he desires, other forces in his environment frustrate these attempts. Hamlet feels “too open and vulnerable to influences” upon his body and his will.\(^6\) Rather than Paster’s primarily apolitical account of Hamlet’s subjectivity, I argue Hamlet’s anxiety regarding his body’s status stems in part from a desire to isolate his body from outside forces that threaten his liberty and identity.

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Critics have examined the play’s engagement with aesthetics and theatricality, but I diverge from them in the ends I see audiences being able to glean from the play and the specific aesthetic models for political action explored. While Hugh Grady has advanced an extended analysis of *Hamlet’s* intersection of aesthetics and politics, that analysis tends to fixate on what Grady describes as Shakespeare’s Montaignean skepticism of using aesthetics to achieve political ends. Hamlet’s aesthetic sense allows him opportunities for “role-shifting” and to gain access to Claudius’s interiority while showing possible avenues for resisting being shaped by outside agencies, like Claudius and Denmark attempt to do to Hamlet. While Grady points to how Shakespeare complicates and seemingly rejects Machiavellian instrumental reason and its reification of subjecthood, audiences can see in Hamlet a possible Machiavellian model towards political subjectivity, informed by Montaignean role-playing. Election as an aesthetic motif leads Lupton to point to Horatio as a model for a more Arendtian and civic mode of political participation that emerges in response to the monarchical system that self-destructs in the play. While Lupton and I address different models that become apparent in the play, we nonetheless see Shakespeare’s concern with potentiality and positive political ends. As I build on these critics, my approach centers on how the play exposes concerns about state power and the necessity for skeptical individuals to question their relationship to the state in order to attain political subjectivity, setting aside lures towards inaction and subjection. In this manner, *Hamlet* offers a possible model for that kind of subjectivity.

In the first section of this chapter, I examine Claudius as a Machiavel and argue that Claudius’s tactics tend to rely upon sovereignty and biopower, the state force used against

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citizens’ bodies described by Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben. In considering how someone like Hamlet can act as a free person against this kind of political power, questions of potentiality and questions of the nature of concrete freedom need addressing. Freedom requires active resistance against overt and subtle forms of state control, which often take the form of inducing persons to police themselves, through what Foucault terms discipline. Hamlet encounters various forms of this control that he resists, and he acts to protect his interiority from public or state-sponsored scrutiny. Hamlet adopts Machiavellian theatricality to gain a measure of secrecy as he resists Claudius. In the second section, I argue the soliloquy of 3.1 in terms of Hamlet’s recognition of the state power arrayed against him and in terms of his rejection of his impotentiality, his capacity “not to be.” Suicide becomes one possible means of asserting Hamlet’s self-sovereignty, but to do so would result in a larger submission to Claudius and his authority. Hamlet chooses “to be”: to be free, to do, and to resist. In doing so, he negotiates his own moral and ethical path rather than accept the path prescribed by social institutions that would instead support Claudius. In the concluding section, I emphasize that Hamlet serves as less a manifesto than a meditation upon potentiality and freedom on Shakespeare’s part. The model for political subjectivity that Shakespeare stages in Hamlet is nothing less than theatricality and the stage player.

Machiavelli, Control, and Freedom

Claudius has attained the throne through theatrically Machiavellian means. Having become sovereign, Claudius uses many of the strategies Machiavelli delineates in The Prince to secure his authority and to bring stability to the state: he must seem virtuous rather than impious, and he should neutralize potential enemies. On his first appearance in 1.2, Claudius works to
resolve several potential threats. Although gaining the Danish throne requires only his successful election, Claudius still cements his position by marrying Gertrude. Claudius, standing with Gertrude presumably by his side, begins his speech by collapsing Gertrude and him into one royal person through his use of *our*: “our dear brother’s death” (1.2.1) and “our whole kingdom” (1.2.3). Claudius’s language also calls attention to the union of his and Gertrude’s bodies: “our hearts in grief” (1.2.3) and “in one brow” (1.2.4). As the “imperial jointress” (1.2.9), Gertrude retains a connection to the body politic of Old Hamlet through marriage; this connection in turn becomes her effective dowry, which Claudius claims. When he derides Fortinbras’s ambitions against Denmark, Claudius calls attention to the joining of bodies—political and physical—in describing Fortinbras’s contrary view that Denmark is “disjoint” (1.2.20) or dis-joined in regards to the state of its political body after Old Hamlet’s death. Claudius works to cement his authority through the application of biopower: force deployed by the state against the bodies of persons in order to compel submission to the sovereign’s will. He also works to instill self-control and discipline in his subjects to avoid obvious displays of biopower and biopolitics on his part.

Biopolitics concerns itself not only with what happens to those affected by biopower but also with the source of that subjection: sovereignty, whether Claudius’s or another’s. Carl Schmitt situates a sovereign’s authority in the power of deciding the “exception.” The exception includes unforeseen situations, typically events that threaten the existence of the state itself, that fall outside the normal legal framework of society. These circumstances necessitate that sovereigns determine when such an event is taking place and determine what to do to resolve the problem.9 For example, in *Hamlet*, Claudius understands that Hamlet’s actions—the murder of Polonius and Hamlet’s reckless disregard for Claudius’s authority as stepfather and king—

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represent an unusual political situation. Accordingly, Claudius makes Hamlet an exception to the normal laws of Denmark in first exiling him to England to have him executed and then in conspiring with Laertes to poison Hamlet after his return. Claudius’s treatment of Laertes also constitutes an instance of the sovereign exception, wherein Claudius must adapt to the attempted coup by Laertes. Claudius does not try and execute the revolutionary, but instead he brings Laertes into his confidence as a de facto aide.

The sovereign exception ultimately leads to sovereigns making persons exceptions to the normal rule of law, and Claudius works in the play to render Hamlet such an exception. Giorgio Agamben develops Schmitt’s theories to what Agamben sees as their logical conclusion. Agamben argues that the law interpellates the “bare life,” or the individual existence of a person (zoē), into its role as a body within the social realm (bios) while also determining who the citizens and the law-biding members of society are. The sovereign exception becomes another means of assigning significance to bodies in their political lives, through the power of discourse, through legal interpretation, and through juridical representation. The sovereign’s power is ultimately one of force, often linguistic in nature, Agamben argues, and that force affects the bodies and lives of those living in relation to the state. A person excluded from the law is a person rendered into an exception. One result of this power is the transformation of persons into non-persons who exist at the whim of the sovereign and who are without civil rights or liberties, which is what Claudius attempts to do to Hamlet in sending him to England. Claudius’s secret missive to the King of England reinscribes Hamlet as a non-person deserving only state-sanctioned death.

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Subjectivity within the framework of biopolitics develops in response to the legal and extra-legal force of the sovereign and the state upon the body, and Shakespeare presages Agamben’s insights on how potentiality emerges as a response to the law’s subjection of bare life. As Agamben suggests, political subjectivity is always in flux and a matter of one’s potentiality to enact this form of agency or not:

Potentiality (in its double appearance as potentiality to and as potentiality not to) is that through which Being founds itself *sovereignly*, which is to say, without anything preceding or determining it...other than its own ability not to be. And an act is sovereign when it realizes itself by simply taking away its own potentiality not to be, letting itself be, giving itself to itself.\(^\text{12}\)

Agamben’s language here—“Being” and “not to be”—echoes Hamlet’s own “To be or not to be” (3.1.55), though Agamben does not address Hamlet’s specific situation. Potential subjects can only actualize their subjectivity when they set aside their potential “not to be.” Agamben grounds being not only as existence but also as “to do,” to choose an act to commit. Founding one’s subjectivity in this fashion grounds freedom in contingency.

Freedom is an abstraction and arguably something that Hamlet strives towards. One’s capacity for freedom stems directly from one’s potentiality to have and not to have freedom. In our own modern political discourse, various political orders have appropriated the abstraction of *freedom* as their “master signifier” while divorcing *freedom* from being an “existential-ontological condition of human being.”\(^\text{13}\) Freedom is not an anterior, essential state of humanity. States and sovereigns often interpellate citizens as being “free persons” within society, but this process is an ideological construction by the state with the intent of subjecting and regulating citizens so that they prefer the political order they live in rather than another represented as “unfree.” Freedom, or at least a truer sense of it, emerges in the “subject of resistance,” coming

\(^{12}\) Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 46. All further references to Agamben in this chapter use this text, unless otherwise specified.

into being in “the act of resistance” against exterior control over one’s bare life. Potential subjects, like Hamlet, only achieve freedom, and therefore agency, when they resist the state consciously and deliberately. Such persons are what Sergei Prozorov calls “sovereign subject[s]” who strive to maintain sovereignty over their persons, countering the power over their bodies the sovereign wields through active resistance. The level of resistance necessary to accomplish such an end varies in relation to how persistent the state power that bears on the individual body actually is, and true freedom becomes more a hope and aspiration rather than a definite, attainable end. The potentiality for freedom necessitates a resistance originating from one’s potentiality to be free against one’s potentiality not to be free.

In determining how to be free, Hamlet finds himself in an ethical conundrum throughout the first half of the play that emphasizes the play’s concern with political subjectivity in terms of having both free choice and free action. The ethical problems with killing Claudius gnaw at Hamlet’s conscience while masking the political dimensions of that potential regicide. Other men, like Kyd’s Hieronimò, the Argive Pyrrhus, or even Laertes in Hamlet, would rush to execute this kind of vengeance. Hamlet discovers that an evil has occurred in Denmark, unacknowledged and unpunished, at the very highest levels of the political order. He finds himself caught between two competing ethical systems. In the first, he finds himself obligated to fulfill his filial duty in seeking blood vengeance upon his family’s enemies in the here and now. This almost tribal doctrine embraces notions of face and honor in a matrix that includes constructions of normative masculinity and of normative behavior for sons: a real man and a real son would take direct and immediate action against Claudius. The Ghost deploys this kind of

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14 Prozorov, 35.
15 Prozorov, 35.
pressure against Hamlet in 1.5, telling Hamlet that if he “didst ever [his] dear father love,” then he should seek revenge for his father’s murder, playing upon Hamlet’s filial duty and his concern over what constitutes a proper son (1.5.23-5). Hamlet’s response, that he will be “swift” in his revenge, satisfies the Ghost: “I find thee apt,” he tells Hamlet. Were Hamlet not, he would be “duller…than the fat weed,” the implication being that to be otherwise would make Hamlet a passive, vegetative thing rather than a man (1.5.31-2). The nature of the crimes the Ghost describes should, he suggests, spur any reasonable person, let alone the son of a father so wronged, to take action in the name of vengeance and justice.

In the second ethical system that derives from early modern Christian doctrine, Hamlet should remain passive, accepting Claudius as his nominal sovereign and father and deferring any punishment or correction until after Claudius’s death. This doctrine is in accordance with the Elizabethan *Homily against Disobedience* and represents yet another level of self-control and Foucauldian discipline. In the *Homily*, “obedience is the principall vertue of al vertues,” even for persons confronted by evil sovereigns who nevertheless “do raigne by [God’s] ordinaunce.”17 Rebels, in turn, embrace “the worst of al vices,” for God may have appointed an “euyll prince” as punishment for the “wickednesse of the subiectes.”18 Though Claudius may indeed be guilty of his crimes against Denmark, he has become its new sovereign, ordained by God. Any act of vengeance on Hamlet’s part would then constitute rebellion. Instead, he should obey Claudius as a faithful son and servant until God determines the end of Claudius’s reign and Hamlet’s likely accession. To do otherwise, the *Homily* states, is to choose Lucifer’s path and to side against God.19 Hamlet finds himself torn between these two doctrines, both of which ground themselves in obedience to fathers. The present King of Denmark and Hamlet’s stepfather, Claudius, is one

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18 *An Homily*, B1v-2r.
of these fathers whom Hamlet should obey while the Ghost of Old Hamlet represents yet another father demanding obedience.

To be free, Hamlet works to fashion a new alternative to these constraining ethical systems. As Eleanor Prosser argues, Hamlet’s deliberation in the soliloquy of 3.1 is not upon suicide—that is not the question—but upon “‘being’ and ‘non-being’…a metaphysical issue” concerning how humans ought to be. Hamlet cannot be true to himself or act honorably by adhering to “an ethic of passivity.”20 Hamlet’s “question” addresses action, specifically persons’ capacities and responsibilities in choosing to take action, which participates in early modern debates concerning “the active and contemplative lives.”21 While Tudor Christian doctrine states Hamlet should defer any action or correction until after Claudius’s death, Hamlet recognizes that in not acting his dilemma becomes a matter of his freedom to choose and to act, his freedom “to be.” The soliloquy posits a Hamlet who becomes less fixated upon personal revenge than upon correcting injustices perpetuated at the highest echelons of the state.22 While Prosser grounds her reading in ethical considerations, those concerns lead Hamlet to attempt to fashion his own path towards participating meaningfully in the public sphere.

Furthermore, Hamlet’s potential for freedom and political liberty arises in part from resisting the state itself in various manners. Beyond the more mundane and expected forms of resistance—armed rebellion, tyrannicide, and other forms of political violence—Foucault and Prozorov argue that resistance can take the form of rejecting a state-delineated identity. Biopower does not typically manifest overtly, such as in Claudius’s plans for Hamlet in England,

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22 Prosser, 163-4.
an obvious instance of Agamben’s sovereign exception. More often, the sovereign works to enjoin people to subject themselves rather than resorting to obvious displays of power. This state power is most efficient when citizens adopt the subjection and reproduce it within themselves.

In *Hamlet*, this call towards self-subjection occurs in several places. For example, Claudius guides Hamlet in 1.2 to accept socially normative modes of grief and also to subject himself to Claudius as his son so that the “duties” Hamlet renders unto his dead father will be directed towards Claudius instead (1.2.87-117). More overtly, in 4.5, Claudius calls for Laertes to leave off his “giant-like” rebellion, framing Laertes’s actions as a product of unregulated anger while calling for Laertes to submit to the “divinity” within Claudius (4.5.120-6). Even Claudius’s attempt to rein in Fortinbras’s ambition in 1.2 relies upon enjoining Fortinbras to remember his role as nephew and subject to the aged king of Norway (1.2.25-39). Foucault terms this phenomenon *discipline* in its dual meanings of both correction and punishment of error and self-control. When individuals control themselves according to the dictates of the state and its dominant ideology, the impetus upon the state for more overt forms of biopower diminishes. Since the people choose to adopt such forms of self-control themselves, the state maintains the outward appearance of “freedom.”

This self-control finds more direct expression in the early modern period through the constructions of self-regulation that Schoenfeldt and Paster address. Where medical authorities of the period posited regulation as a means towards what audiences could consider healthy mental and physical states and appetites, this self-control also had the effect of normalizing certain behaviors while categorizing aberrant behavior as flawed, anti-social, and selfish.

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Such flawed discipline, then, invites societal judgment and critique upon the malefactors, and Shakespeare deploys this kind of judgment often in Hamlet. Claudius and Gertrude chastise Hamlet for his “heart unfortified” and “mind impatient” and for his general lack of emotional discipline in continuing to mourn Old Hamlet (1.2.95-7). Hamlet, in turn, criticizes Claudius and Gertrude’s speedy marriage as a fault of their unregulated (sexual) appetites: Claudius is a “satyr” while Gertrude lacks the emotional discipline “a beast” would demonstrate (1.2.140-51). Hamlet also judges Claudius’s drinking games as a further failure of Claudius’s self-regulation of his “complexion,” the balance of his humours (1.4.23-36, 204n27). As Shakespeare makes clear, the surveillance of persons extends to the judgment of public bodies while also inviting observation and judgments on the interiorities of persons, as well.

Hamlet becomes well aware of how subjugated to the controls of the state of Denmark he actually is. In the soliloquy of 3.1, he catalogues the adversities he faces:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office … (3.1.69-72)

Although “the whips and scorns of time” can refer to personified Time, many editions gloss “time” here as referring to one’s social world (285n69). The “whips and scorns” then function as both physical coercion and interpellations of control by society. The other problems Hamlet enumerates all fall within the realm of public control over bare life: the oppressors, the law, and the state that exert control over his body. Indeed, the use of whips underscores the direct influence these state apparatuses impose on the body. Even his desire for Ophelia works against Hamlet as “the pangs of despised love.” Using Ophelia as a means of discovering and controlling Hamlet, Claudius and Polonius observe the Prince from behind an arras while Ophelia waits in

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24 See also G. Blakemore Evans et al., eds., The Riverside Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1208n69.
the wings to confront her beloved. Polonius positions his daughter’s body to maximize her usefulness as a tool in observing Hamlet unawares: “Ophelia, walk you here….Read on this book” (3.1.42-3). Claudius ostensibly engages in this espionage to “frankly judge” if Hamlet’s troubled psyche stems from “th’affliction of his love” (3.1.33-5). The King seeks knowledge of Hamlet’s interiority to control his “wildness” (3.1.39). Whatever love Hamlet bears for Ophelia becomes an instrument of political control over the Prince, perhaps explaining his choice to distance himself from her. Hamlet attempts to retain his adopted opacity, his theatrical secrecy, in dealing with Ophelia after the soliloquy ends, but doing so forces him to push the woman he supposedly loves further away.

The play’s concern with sexuality also intersects with its concern with political freedom within the context of subjectivity and early modern constructions of youth. As Lupton argues, freedom in the political sphere necessitates sexual freedom. Children, as pre-sexual beings, exist as “citizen[s] in potentia,” and child-like persons serve as nominally adult demonstrations of this notion in early modern patriarchy.25 Patriarchal sovereigns render subordinates into childlike subject positions, leading Lupton to suggest that potentiality and freedom come through autonomy from both parents.26 Claudius tries to constrain Hamlet’s potentiality in this fashion in 1.2, rendering Claudius’s critique of Hamlet’s lack of emotional discipline a paternal rebuke of Hamlet-as-a-child. Having interrupted the succession in which Hamlet, as Old Hamlet’s only son, would most likely have become the new sovereign of Denmark, Claudius tells the Prince to “think of us [Claudius] / As a father” while announcing that Hamlet is “the most immediate to our throne” as Claudius’s new son and heir apparent (1.2.107-9). Claudius makes these declarations immediately after chiding Hamlet before the court for his “impious stubbornness,”

26 Lupton, Citizen Saints, 143.
“unmanly grief,” “incorrect” willfulness, “unfortified” heart, and “impatient” mind in continuing to mourn for Old Hamlet (1.2.94-6). Claudius’s rebukes are those he might give to a child or one acting like a child. This diminution of Hamlet also reflects ageist political maneuvering on Claudius’s part. Elder early modern authorities defined youth to their advantage to help “infantiliz[e]” younger rivals. Furthermore, Claudius has cemented his new roles as king and father in marrying Gertrude, and many of his attempts to rein in Hamlet partake of the joined registers of the royal sovereign and the father-as-sovereign. This element of Claudius’s discourse reflects that found in texts such as the Homily against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion (1570) and James I’s Basilikon Doron (1603).

Even Hamlet’s potential sovereignty over Denmark affords the state yet another means of controlling Hamlet through his body and sexuality. In 1.3, Laertes warns Ophelia to avoid Hamlet’s affections, telling her:

His greatness weighed, his will is not his own.  
He may not, as unvalued persons do,  
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends  
The safety and health of this whole state,  
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed  
Unto the voice and yielding of that body  
Whereof he is the head. (1.3.17-23)

Laertes speaks of Hamlet’s duty as a prince to enter into a politically advantageous marriage for Denmark in the future, but the image he creates stresses the control the state possesses over Hamlet’s private body. Hamlet’s “will”—both his own sexual will as a desiring subject as well as his volitional will—“is not his own.” Although Linda Charnes suggests that Hamlet appears to be the only character who fails to recognize the limitations imposed on his behavior, this reading ignores the restrictions on Hamlet’s behavior apparent in the previous scene and expanded upon.

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in 1.3. Bodily metaphors dominate this passage, as well. Hamlet’s inability to “Carve for himself” glosses as a culinary trope, removing his ability to sustain his body from his agency to that of the state (191n19). In describing this political power, Laertes invokes the theory of the king’s two bodies. However, where the monarch would normally rule the body politic as its head, here the body of the state tyrannically usurps the will of the sovereign. Hamlet may be the head in Laertes’ speech, but the rest of the body, the state usurped by Claudius, “circumscribe[s]” Hamlet’s choice and forces him to “yield” to its desires. The image that develops reflects Hamlet’s own subjection to the state, with Hamlet’s political life and body dominating his own subjectivity as represented in the figure of the head.

Hamlet succinctly defines the oppression of his life by the state by analogizing it as that most overt of state controls over the body: the prison. Hamlet does not disagree with Rosincrance’s rebuttal that the world is a prison if Denmark is one, but obviously the Prince does not mean a literal dungeon. Although John E. Curran argues Hamlet alternatively advocates the potential of the mind to triumph over worldly adversity and undercuts those sentiments, what partly confounds Hamlet here is the constraining nature of Denmark’s politics that affects his body and subjectivity. What Hamlet describes is akin to Foucault’s conception of the “carceral system.” Although Foucault examines the rise of the prison system in the nineteenth century, Hamlet anticipates such a system in his imaginative complaint to his two friends. As Foucault argues, the prison-like nature of society presupposes the actual constraint of the body and the

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29 Shakespeare, 466 (lines 1-13). The Arden places Hamlet’s description of Denmark as a prison from 2.2 into an appendix since it appears only in the First Folio.

continual surveillance of it.\textsuperscript{31} Hamlet’s prison metaphor is appropriate. Claudius has sent Rosincrance and Guildensterne to spy on Hamlet, “to gather” information from him and to report their observations, much as he and Polonius observe Hamlet in 3.1 (2.1.14-18). Hamlet even questions the two courtiers about the nature of their visit, wondering whether they have come of their “own inclining” for a “free visitation” or if they were “sent for” by “the good King and Queen” (2.2.240-7).\textsuperscript{32} Rosincrance and Guildensterne become jailers in Hamlet’s imagination, foreshadowing their role as warders on the voyage to England, and they become subject to Hamlet’s resistance as well. What Hamlet recognizes in Denmark and the world being prisons is just how little freedom he or anyone else possesses in society. Denmark is merely a particularly bad case in Hamlet’s opinion.

The surveillance inherent in prisons like Denmark derives in part from the confessional culture of western civilization that emphasizes knowing persons’ interiorities, including Hamlet’s. Machiavelli understood that one should guard one’s interiority in his argument that it is better to seem virtuous (or normative) than to actually be virtuous.\textsuperscript{33} The state and its culture encourage persons to volunteer access to their inner selves as a way of expressing their supposed freedom while in actuality diminishing that liberty.\textsuperscript{34} As Prozorov argues, governments promote forms of subjection that encourage citizens to “contract” and shape their interiorities and identities into modes easily manipulated in terms of political freedom.\textsuperscript{35} To avoid this shaping and surveillance requires that subjects resist being constrained within supposedly fixed identities

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Visitation} in this instance partakes of both its common meanings for a \textit{visit} as well as some form of inspection. “visitation, n.” \textit{OED Online}, September 2011, Oxford University Press.
\textsuperscript{34} Prozorov, 7. But see also 57-8.
\textsuperscript{35} Prozorov, 34.
and maintain a level of anonymity or secrecy over their interiorities. Although choosing one’s fixed identity may seem like an act of personal liberty, the dominant culture of the state determines which normative identities are available for people to choose from while also encouraging persons to volunteer information about inner thoughts to the public and, therefore, the state. Subjected citizens and the state can regulate and police those inner thoughts to encourage normativity. Guarding one’s interiority, in turn, becomes a marker of suspicion to the state and those advancing this form of discipline. In the early modern period, this idea of anonymity finds expression in theatricality. Towards this end, Hamlet’s “antic disposition” reflects the very simple truism that one’s enemies should not know one’s thoughts or feelings.

Shakespeare enacts in Hamlet his own model of the anonymity that those who resist state power need. Confessing one’s interiority has become one of the more common methods for transforming “the passion for the knowledge of ‘who one is’” into willing subjection to state power. As Prozorov argues, anonymity is much more useful for potential subjects striving towards something resembling “concrete freedom.” Hamlet’s attempts to obscure his motivations from Claudius and the court reflect his own understanding of the value of anonymity. After his encounter with the Ghost, Hamlet demands that Horatio and Marcellus swear never to “make known what [they] have seen” (1.5.143). Furthermore, Hamlet also tells them that he shall “put an antic disposition on” to render himself more opaque to scrutiny (1.5.170-5). His goal in doing so is to promote secrecy, to obscure the interiority he gestures towards over the course of the play, so that others—most notably Claudius—will have less opportunity to react against Hamlet and his plans. Where later conspirators against state power might rely on outright anonymity to pursue their agendas, Hamlet relies on that most

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36 Prozorov, 63.
37 Prozorov, 62-3.
Shakespearean of means, theatricality. Hamlet assumes the theatrical mask of madness in an attempt to deny Claudius and his agents insight into his identity. Where stage tyrants often use Machiavellian theatricality in acquiring power, Hamlet appropriates those skills to resist the power of Claudius.

In this sense, the model for political subjectivity Shakespeare fashions in Hamlet and that audiences witness is the actor/player. The antitheatricalist arguments against the theater would appear then to have some merit in this play’s case from a conservative perspective. If Phillip Stubbes worries that playhouses serve as mimetic sites for spectators to watch how to be a “Hipocrit” and to “learn to rebel against Princes, [and] to commit treasons,” then such is very much the potential for audiences of Hamlet. While Grady and Lupton observe the overt political emphases of the revenge plot and its Machiavellian dimensions, the political discourses underlying Hamlet shape a very different public than those that witness the spectacles in Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy (1587) or Thomas Middleton’s The Revenger’s Tragedy (1606).

Although Grady juxtaposes Machiavellian and Montaignean ideologies and argues that Shakespeare complicates the traditional narrative and character arc of the revenge tragedy hero, Machiavelli and Montaigne do agree on the use of theatricality and dissembling for political purposes. Machiavelli and Montaigne anticipate modern understandings of subjectivity and “resistance to power” in the early modern period, and this notion of resistance presages the “subject” and “act of resistance” I advance in this chapter. The Machiavellian and Montaignean discourses within which Hamlet participates help shape what Michael Warner calls a “counterpublic” as the audience responds to and organizes around those contexts and the context

39 Grady, Shakespeare, Machiavelli, & Montaigne, 249-50; and Lupton, Thinking with Shakespeare, 71.
40 Grady, Shakespeare, Machiavelli, & Montaigne, 249.
41 Grady, Shakespeare, Machiavelli, & Montaigne, 1-5.
of the play. While the counterpublic may learn to emulate the violence that Stubbes sees in the theater, that emergent public also has the opportunity to consider how to make sense of the radical discourses Shakespeare deploys and their effects on spectators’ lives away from the stage.

The radicalism of Machiavelli and Montaigne reflects that of other early modern political thinkers, suggesting that the need for theatricality in the pursuit of political subjectivity was very much a part of Shakespeare’s cultural discourse. Machiavelli and Montaigne reflect similar reasoning in these regards as Philip Sidney, Christopher Goodman, and John Poynet. Many of these writers stress the need for theatricality, as evidenced in Machiavelli’s distinction between seeming and being, Montaigne’s use of role-play and theater, Sidney’s idea of poetic creation and imagination, and Poynet’s acknowledgement of its use by commoners to avoid censure from authorities. These early modern writers also agree that a willingness to judge the actions of the political elite and to take action to correct abuses of power is necessary, whether this action manifests as critique and reform or tyrannicide. Each of these writers, save Sidney, suggests that abuses of power that require political action often stem from the application of state power against the bodies of the people. These discourses of political resistance from the early modern period, discourses in line with the modern political theories of Agamben and Foucault in many instances, force audiences of the play to conceive of Hamlet as not merely a revenge model but as a model for political engagement, critique, and resistance against unjust authority. While

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44 Montaigne, “Our feelings reach out beyond us,” 9; Sidney, 75-82; Christopher Goodman, How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed..., EEBO Editions ([Ann Arbor, MI]: ProQuest, 2010), 33, 59, 63, 146-7; [Poynet], A4v-A5v, C6r, D7r, G3r, H1r; and Machiavelli, 45-69.
45 Montaigne, “Our feelings reach out beyond us,” 9; Goodman, 61-2; [Poynet], G.2-3; and Machiavelli, 66, 70.
revenge can be a form of political resistance and subjectivity, the actor model that develops from 
*Hamlet* also emphasizes an awareness of the consequences of how one chooses to participate in 
the public sphere.

Hamlet resorts to theatricality and becomes an actor/player to obscure and to protect 
himself as he slowly finds the will to resist the state force of Denmark. In this sense, Shakespeare 
uses theatricality in accordance with Stephen Greenblatt’s representation of it. Shakespeare, like 
Hamlet, offers “no central, unwavering” presence, and the truth of Hamlet is “radically unstable 
and yet constantly stabilized,” deferring Claudius’s and our reception of Hamlet’s potentiality 
and subjectivity to mediated performance.46 However, as Tom McAlindon suggests, Greenblatt 
sees theatricality as “power, deceit, and subjection” to larger political structures that constitute 
and “undermin[e]...identity.” 47 Hamlet guards himself from these larger political structures that 
Greenblatt argues helped enforce the “subversion and containment” paradigm. These 
governmental structures, exemplified in *Hamlet* through Claudius’s regime, indicate Hamlet’s 
subjection to them and inform Hamlet’s conception of his identity, his subjectivity, and his 
potentiality. Hamlet’s recourse in the face of this power is to obscure who he is in order to 
safeguard and to develop some form of resistance in the pursuit of his political subjectivity. For 
much of the play, Hamlet exists in a liminal state in which he remain torn between being and not 
being, for Hamlet’s identity is unstable and unknown even to him as he struggles to develop it. 
Claudius and the haunting of the Ghost have overthrown the normative order of Hamlet’s life: 
being a Wittenberg university student with a distant father and distant affairs at home in 
Denmark. It is not until the soliloquy of 3.1 that Hamlet reaches an understanding of the

46 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of 
biopower he has been subjected to and afterwards begins to resist in order to attain some form of personal sovereignty.

Choosing Resistance and Rejecting Impotentiality in “To Be or not to Be”

The traditional interpretation of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy is that it is wholly about his contemplation of suicide. These morbid readings, like those of John Dover Wilson and A. C. Bradley, likely influenced cinematic adaptations of this scene by Laurence Olivier and Franco Zeffirelli. Both directors reframe the surrounding context to stress Hamlet’s morbidity. As Douglas Bruster notes, the soliloquy also stresses questions of action or inaction against Claudius or against Hamlet himself, or even Hamlet accepting or refusing inaction. Hamlet rejects his impotentiality and chooses potentiality, which will entail conscious resistance on his part against the biopower and self-control Claudius seeks to impose upon him. Towards these ends, the play’s concerns with action and death have decidedly political registers. Recent adaptations have also embraced the quandary of action in this scene. Directors Kenneth Branagh (1996) and Gregory Doran (2009) adhere to Shakespeare’s scene structure, and while their Hamlets consider suicide, the framing of the soliloquy imbues their scenes with political charge.

For example, Branagh’s Hamlet faces a mirrored wall in Claudius’s court, behind which Claudius and Polonius watch. Hamlet addresses not only himself but also them as he moves

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50 Bruster, 19-20.
closer to the mirror as the soliloquy progresses, seemingly challenging himself, as well as Claudius, towards action of some kind. Branagh’s performance is less a meditation on suicide than a reflection on action and selfhood. What Hamlet considers in this soliloquy are fundamentally questions of how to act in the public sphere in pursuit of his political subjectivity.

While this soliloquy has no first person pronouns, no I, unlike the other soliloquies Hamlet delivers, this impersonality is necessary for Hamlet, for doing so allows him to evade the social constructedness of his identity that has dominated him throughout the first half of the play. Hamlet has become too mired in trying to negotiate his various identities as son of Old Hamlet, as prince of Denmark, as son of Gertrude, as “son” of Claudius, as avenger, as philosopher, as student, as Hecuba or Pyrrhus, or as whoever else. He recognizes on some level that he should abandon a stable or even singular notion of his subjectivity, of his identity. He recognizes and rejects his impotentiality, his potential not to be, not to live, not to do or to act, and he does so as a philosophical challenge to himself in the soliloquy rather than framing the problem as yet another personal meditation. In leaving off the I, Hamlet slides towards anonymity, or at least works to conceal his interiority, which is especially important if Claudius and Polonius are listening in and Hamlet is at all aware. If Hamlet knows Claudius and Polonius are watching, then the political topoi of the soliloquy specifically target these two auditors. Even if he is unaware, his impersonality lends the soliloquy a manifesto-like quality—a manifesto of political subjectivity and potentiality.

51 Hamlet, directed by Kenneth Branagh (1996; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD.
52 See also Bruster, 45, who also observes the soliloquy has no first person pronouns.
53 See also Dennis McCarthy, “A ‘Sea of Troubles’ and a ‘Pilgrimage Uncertain’/Dial of Princes as the Source for Hamlet’s Soliloquy,” Notes and Queries 56 (254), no. 1 (March 2009): 57-60. McCarthy makes a similar observation, but he does not expand upon it.
54 Such a reading is arguably the case in Branagh’s and Doran’s adaptations. See Hamlet, directed by Kenneth Branagh; and Hamlet, directed by Gregory Doran (2009; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.
Shakespeare emphasizes Hamlet’s potentiality in the soliloquy in that he decides whether or not he wishes to be free, to possess and to pursue political subjectivity while setting aside his potentiality not to be, his potentiality to cast aside his life and flee the subjection he knows now.

The Prince begins immediately with the question of potentiality:

To be, or not to be – that is the question;
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing, end them; (3.1.55-9)

Infinitive constructions—to be, to suffer, to take arms, to die, to sleep, to say, to be wished, to dream, to grunt and sweat—occur thirteen times. Infinitives represent verb forms in their most abstract, as potential actions that persons can conjugate into actuality as they enact them.

Whether he considers life or suicide, or action or inaction against Claudius, Hamlet perceives himself in a liminal state between action, “tak[ing] arms,” and inaction, “to suffer.” The debate rests entirely within the intellectual domain “in the mind,” for Hamlet has yet to set aside his own potential “not to be.” Furthermore, his perception of the choice before him—“to suffer” or “to take arms” and to oppose—situates Hamlet’s decision within the realm of political freedom. If Hamlet chooses to remain passive, suffering instead of opposing, then he defers any hope for freedom to an indeterminate afterlife that might be better. He would remain subjected to whatever forces array against him in the present. In contrast, even if the choice of opposition proves fruitless on a practical level—taking “arms against a sea of troubles,” with its image of futility in fighting against the sea—Hamlet still sees such an act as capable of “end[ing]” such subjection. Once again, freedom is not a preexisting state—freedom emerges only in “the act of resistance” against exterior forces active against one’s body and life.55 Hamlet, then, debates whether to try to be free. He decides that he has no other alternative other than confronting and

55 Prozorov, 35.
resisting Claudius and the problems he faces in Denmark, adversities that are ultimately political in nature.

The omnipresent controls the state exerts over Hamlet’s life lead him to consider suicide as a means of attaining subjectivity and a kind of freedom, but the potential for eternal subjection in his next “life” leads him to dismiss this option. After enumerating the aspects of state control over his body, Hamlet considers his nihilistic alternative in making his own “quietus… / With a bare bodkin”:

Who would fardels bear  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life  
But that the dread of something after death  
(The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveler returns) puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of. (3.1.74-81)

Hamlet’s use of *quietus* calls attention to the cessation of political influence over one’s life. The *OED* identifies three relevant meanings for the term. The first, meaning to settle one’s accounts and debts, carries with it juridical associations, almost as if suicide were a loophole in the law to escape its influence. The second meaning, originating with this soliloquy, glosses merely as ending one’s life. The third definition, entering use a few years later in 1635, is also noteworthy and perhaps originates with Hamlet’s use of the term: “a discharge or release from office or duty.”

Suicide becomes a means of severing the self from its bondage to the state. Hamlet continues grounding the state’s control over him in terms of his body, bearing up *fardels* while grunting and sweating “under a weary life.” Taking one’s life becomes the ultimate means of exercising sovereignty over one’s body and of reclaiming the body from being a political object rather than an individual’s life.

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56 “quietus, n.,” *OED Online*, September 2011, Oxford University Press.
While suicide does have these self-assertive associations as a form of resistance against subjection, Shakespeare represents this view of suicide as a self-defeating lure towards impotentiality that ultimately benefits oppressive states by eliminating dissenters and deviants. Early modern attitudes towards suicide stress both its intentionality and its willfulness against divine providence and sovereignty, whether in terms of Christian legal doctrine or classical conceptions of the act. Suicide is “an offence against God, against the King, and against Nature.”

This Christian view of suicide contrasts with the older, classical view that regained some cultural currency during the Renaissance. Critics have emphasized classical suicide’s use as a means of protest and of exercising personal agency over one’s body and life. Michel de Montaigne suggests suicide can be an act of personal sovereignty, arguing that “[l]ife depends on the will of others” while “death [instead depends] on our own” will and that “[l]ife is slavery if the freedom to die is wanting.” Although Montaigne acknowledges this line of thinking, he also argues that suicide “is an act of cowardice, not of virtue”: resistance and “fortitude in wearing out the chain that binds us” are nobler, better solutions than self-slaughter. Choosing suicide, he argues, relies upon “a lack of judgment and of patience.”

Although suicide offers Hamlet a means of establishing control over his body, reclaiming it from Denmark and Claudius, suicide represents only a flight from his ills and leaves Hamlet vulnerable to another state, that of the “undiscovered country.”

This “country” refers, of course, to the afterlife, but Hamlet politicizes that which comes after death so that little difference exists between the afterlife and life under the law, rendering

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suicide a path to further subjection and biopower. *Country’s* most common associations emphasize the word’s use in terms of political division (and thus control) of land, a reading highlighted by Hamlet’s use of *bourn*, which refers to boundaries—yet another political imposition of control (286n78). Furthermore, given that the “ills” Hamlet has spoken of previously, the implements of control over his body, parallel the unknown ills of the “undiscovered country,” the afterlife may offer nothing more than new impositions upon Hamlet’s spiritual body, as the Ghost’s purgatorial torments suggest. The Ghost’s corporeality in the play helps explicate the potential subjection after death that Hamlet considers in 3.1. As Susan Zimmerman stresses, the Ghost appears onstage as a “dead corpse” (1.4.52), “a guilty thing” (1.1.147) “in complete steel” (1.4.52): the Ghost is “a material revenant,” not a phantom. Even Hamlet views the Ghost as a bodily entity, the physical corpse of his father that has “burst [his] cerements” and is “cast…up again” from “the sepulchre” in his armor (1.4.48-51). Old Hamlet as the Ghost is not merely a spectral “apparition,” an immaterial phantom without concrete form, but instead a physical body who walks across the stage. This corporeality arises in part from the practical demands of having an actor represent the Ghost. The Ghost and its body, then, are “[d]oomed for a certain term” and “confined,” subjected to “fires” to burn and purge his spiritual body (1.5.10-3). The sovereign of the “undiscovered country” has locked the Ghost away in a “prison-house” (1.5.14), anticipating Hamlet’s description of Denmark as a prison. The possibility that the afterlife may only magnify the pains and subjection of this life leads Hamlet to reject this option in the soliloquy: better to resist the adversity he faces now than to become subject to others he has no control over.

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61 “country, n.,” *OED Online*, September 2011, Oxford University Press.
63 See also Paster, 25-76, where Paster notes early modern humor theory posited spirits as substantive beings.
While Hamlet does meditate upon suicide, Shakespeare represents suicide as a lure of impotentiality against biopower, for even though suicide can be an act of resistance and self-sovereignty, it is a final, desperate invocation of that sovereignty and an abnegation of personal responsibility. Were death merely annihilation, as Milton’s devils hope in *Paradise Lost*, suicide would be a final and ultimate act of self-sovereignty. However, even death exerts its biopower upon the potential subject in that the dead are bounded within yet another country. While Hamlet initially frames the question as one of action and inaction, to suffer or to take arms, he briefly redirects that idea towards taking arms against himself. However, even given the radicalism of suicide in the early modern period, the political order (Claudius) would value Hamlet removing himself from the situation. Hamlet would effectively submit to Claudius’s authority by removing himself as a potential actor against Claudius. Religious doctrine and the supernatural reality of the play—the presence of a ghost signaling that within the setting of the play, the supernatural is real—make it plain to Hamlet that impotentiality is self-defeating. If Hamlet cannot kill himself, if he recognizes and, on some level, rejects his impotentiality, his potential “not to be” and to submit to Claudius, then he should choose what course of action remains. His actions after the soliloquy make it plain that he does not merely choose “to suffer” but to take arms and to resist. While the image of taking arms against a sea of troubles does carry with it an image of futility, this almost quixotic choice on his part carries him into the realm of potentiality. This potentiality allows him to pursue his political subjectivity through resistance of various kinds.

In performance, the soliloquy can emphasize this potential for resistance, even in the face of Denmark’s carceral nature. Branagh’s adaptation of *Hamlet* locates the Prince’s soliloquy in a hall of mirrors at Denmark’s court with Polonius and Claudius observing Hamlet from behind a one-way mirror. In doing so, the scene construes Denmark as a surveillance state, in which the
government uses covert means to apprehend its subjects for signs of trouble, to know their interiority. Hamlet delivers the soliloquy as he faces his own reflection. The mirror’s double role as both a surface for reflection and an observational tool for Claudius anticipates Hamlet’s view of “playing” as holding “the mirror up to Nature”—his and Claudius’s nature in Branagh’s scene—for critical purposes (3.2.22).  

Hamlet considers acting or not acting in this scene, and as he does so, Branagh frames the scene to emphasize the political nature of Hamlet’s choice. While suicide is a consideration for Hamlet, the soliloquy becomes a speech against Hamlet’s own impotentiality and for action against Claudius’s tyranny.

Apprehending one’s potentiality can be difficult, and Hamlet’s early approaches in the play represent a limitation he surpasses. As Agamben argues, many persons deploy reason, ideas of the will, and essentialist logic in an attempt to make sense of their personal potentialities. Critics like Richard Halpern and Roy Ben-Shai have observed that thought becomes for Hamlet “[n]o longer an...instrument of action” while “[p]ersonal decisions...are replaced by ‘everlasting discussions.’” Indeed, Hamlet follows this pattern early in the play, probably because of his university education and intelligence, but doing so hinders him. In “know[ing] not ‘seems’,” Hamlet argues to the court that his interiority is a matter of being rather than representation (1.2.76). He also suggests (and perhaps believes) that the potentiality of him not mourning his father’s death cannot be. Hamlet expresses a similar belief after his first confrontation with the

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64 See Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, 172, where Grady suggests that art in *Hamlet* is a mirror “that alludes to but is Other than the society that gave it birth,” allowing spectators to use the aesthetic to evaluate the real.

65 *Hamlet*, directed by Kenneth Branagh.


67 Halpern, 469; and Roy Ben-Shai, “Schmitt or Hamlet: The Unsovereign Event,” *Telos* 147 (Summer 2009): 78.
Ghost as he inscribes the Ghost’s words over “the table of [Hamlet’s] memory” (1.4.98). Even the question—“To be, or not to be”—reduces the potentiality of the moment to a simple, logical, binary choice, a choice he seeks to resolve through reason and his will alone as opposed to fashioning alternatives to the false dichotomies of the ethical systems that constrain his ability to imagine other options.

Hamlet’s refusal to be the traditional revenger leads him to seek alternative forms of resistance, marking him as a more contemplative, actorly model for political engagement who is also willing to stage his own aesthetic moments against the Machiavellian theatricality of Claudius. Hamlet begins this process of resistance in his soliloquy of 2.2, wherein he declares that the “play’s the thing / [w]herein [he’ll] catch the conscience of the King,” indicating a general will towards resistance that becomes more specific after his articulation of potentiality in the soliloquy of 3.1 (2.2.539-40). In 3.2, he presents *The Murder of Gonzago*, representing Claudius’s murder of Old Hamlet on-stage in what Grady sees as being the play’s crux wherein Hamlet uses theater and aesthetics against Claudius. Claudius, of course, finds “offence” in the play, recognizing that it touches too closely upon recent events in Denmark, even as Hamlet sarcastically reassures him that the players “Poison in jest” (3.2.226-8; 313n226, n229). The indecisive and passive Hamlet of the first half of the play has given way to a more active Hamlet, and while Claudius and others seek to know Hamlet’s interiority, so too does Hamlet seek to penetrate Claudius’s Machiavellian, theatrical screen. Hamlet’s active use of creative imagination in revising and adding to *The Murder of Gonzago* to fashion *The Mousetrap* is an instance in which his verbal resistance takes on added significance even as it anticipates more physical forms of radicalism. Hamlet has set aside passivity in favor of resistance where he

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68 For Grady’s reading of this scene as emphasizing the deferral of symbolic tasks, see Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, 163-5.
masks his interiority not necessarily to hide from scrutiny, but to provide himself with a
distraction to keep others off-balance.

Hamlet further demonstrates his active resistance in going to meet Gertrude in her closet,
for Hamlet hopes to recruit others against Claudius, including his mother. He plans to work upon
her conscience, to help his mother see what he has discovered about Claudius. In this sense, he
shows a willingness to defy the Ghost’s earlier command to “leave [Gertrude] to Heaven”
(1.5.86). Hamlet *tries* to rely upon verbal rather than physical resistance again in this scene, even
if the scene concludes with his murder of Polonius. The “daggers” he speaks to his mother do not
serve as a form of vengeance, for he intends no true violence against Gertrude (3.2.386-9). These
daggers serve a rhetorical function, for Hamlet seeks to turn Gertrude to his cause. He seeks to
recruit an ally against what should be a mutual foe, Claudius, and not merely to inflict upon her
what Grady calls “his vision of the fallen world and her contribution to it.”

Although the Ghost reappears to keep Hamlet in check and to remind him of his commands, Hamlet would
nonetheless seem successful in doing so in some versions of the play. In a scene from the First
Quarto, Horatio relays to Gertrude that Hamlet has escaped Claudius’s trap in England, and
Gertrude sides against Claudius at this point. She decides to put on the mask of faithfulness,
adopting theatricality herself now, to allay any suspicions Claudius may have, suggesting a
willingness to resist Claudius’s power on her own part. This generally omitted scene, while
amplifying Gertrude’s subjectivity and diminishing the nuance and humanity of Claudius, does
suggest that the Closet Scene serves as a further means of resistance on Hamlet’s part against his

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70 Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, 175-6.
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1241. Included in the *Riverside* as a textual note, this scene nominally appeared
as 4.6 in the play.
uncle through Hamlet’s undermining of the queen’s support and sympathy for Claudius. Hamlet also becomes a model for Gertrude in how to resist Claudius.

Gertrude’s resistance against Claudius, spurred by Hamlet, culminates and becomes most potentially visible in the final scene. The question of Gertrude’s resistance rests upon her capacity for interiority and subjectivity in the play. While Janet Adelman argues that Gertrude’s choice in this scene is secondary given her role as “a screen” for Hamlet’s maternal fantasies, Maurice Hunt argues that Gertrude demonstrates numerous “explicit dramatic indicators” of interiority that complicate Adelman’s cynical reading. The textual cues are unclear about whether Gertrude accepts the cup of poisoned wine knowing it is poison or not. Claudius tells her not to drink from the cup, but Gertrude’s response—“I will, my lord. I pray you pardon me”—leaves her awareness and the nature of her defiance ambiguous and open to onstage interpretation. For example, the Zeffirelli and Branagh adaptations render her refusal of Claudius as a simple misunderstanding on her part. However, the Olivier and Doran adaptations make it clear that Gertrude recognizes something is amiss with the cup, and her defiance of her husband is decidedly intentional. In trying to recruit his mother against Claudius, Hamlet demonstrates his own program in countering the king that shifts from verbal to overt forms of resistance.

The graveyard scene further resituates Hamlet as an active, aggressive agent, defiant of others’ authority, as he begins to shed his theatrical mask in favor of acting as a resister of Claudius’s regime. Hamlet assertively announces himself as “Hamlet the Dane” to the mourners as he leaps into Ophelia’s grave with Laertes, a stark contrast to his earlier, unheroic self-representation (5.1.246-7). He warns Laertes not to take him lightly as they wrestle, for Hamlet has in him “something dangerous” that Laertes should fear (5.1.251-2). While Ophelia’s death

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and “the bravery of [Laertes’] grief” provide the occasion for this display, the Hamlet of the last act is a radically different character than the brooding figure of the rest of the play (473). Hamlet’s identification of himself as “the Dane” echoes his earlier identification of the Ghost as “Hamlet, / King, father, [and] royal Dane,” suggesting that Hamlet has found political empowerment in his nominal, if deferred by Claudius’s usurpation, identity (1.4.44-45). Hamlet has become something greater than merely himself or “Forty thousand brothers” (5.1.258). The “something dangerous” within Hamlet that Laertes, a subject, should fear is not “just” madness but the essence of the body politic that Fortinbras describes as “most royal” (5.2.382). This essence also appears in Claudius’s admonition to Laertes during his brief revolt, and the “divinity” Claudius invokes against Laertes is the transcendent nature of the body politic within the monarch as well as Claudius’s sovereignty (4.5.123). Notably, both Claudius and Hamlet warn the same person, Laertes, of this power within them. In Claudius’s case, he seeks to “calm [Laertes’] rage” (4.7.190). Claudius’s words serve primarily as rhetoric to persuade Laertes of the futility of acting against his king. As Old Hamlet’s murderer, though, Claudius understands just how vulnerable the king is to treason, especially as he calls for his Swiss guard to protect him (4.5.97). In contrast, Hamlet’s words to Laertes carry the weight of a threat he may act upon if Laertes does not stop.

Hamlet goes on to associate himself with Hercules for the first time in the play, a figure he had previously associated only with Old Hamlet, demonstrating Hamlet’s embrace of his potentiality. In 1.2, Hamlet uses Hercules in a comparison between Old Hamlet and Claudius: “My father’s brother, but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules” (1.2.152-3). In this analogy, Old Hamlet and Hercules occupy the same, privileged tier while Claudius and Hamlet occupy the inferior position. By the end of the graveyard scene, Hamlet revises his self-analysis,
associating himself with Hercules even as he reduces Laertes and others to mewing cats and dogs (5.1.280-1). Most editors choose to gloss these lines as Hamlet identifying himself with the cat and dog while associating Laertes with Hercules, but as Walter N. King notes, Hamlet’s allusion is important, pointing to Hamlet’s self-identification with the demigod and the jealousy of others that doomed Hercules. Hamlet’s rhetoric to this point in his confrontation with Laertes emphasizes the superiority and grandness of Hamlet in comparison to Ophelia’s brother. Hamlet is more than the “sum” of “Forty thousand brothers”—or Laertes, in this instance—and he promises to match Laertes point-by-point in demonstrations of grief (5.1.260). Hamlet even offers to take on a Herculean labor. Where Laertes asks to rest beneath enough “dust” until “a mountain” formed “[t]’ o’ertop old Pelion or the skyish head / [o]f blue Olympus,” Hamlet offers to dwarf such an accomplishment (5.1.240-3). The image Hamlet creates evokes Hercules holding the world aloft from Atlas with Hamlet under “[m]illions of acres” that reach the sun itself, a world of earth upon Hamlet’s shoulders, reducing Laertes’ earlier boastful claim to insignificance (5.1.269-73). Even if Hamlet does identify Laertes as Hercules, that identification is ironic in its application. Like his earlier characterization of Old Hamlet as a Herculean figure, Hamlet’s personal sovereignty and resistance against biopower leads him to consider himself Olympian as well.

Towards a Shakespearean Theory of Potentiality

The model for political subjectivity that Shakespeare advances in *Hamlet* reflects several overarching concerns, amongst them a general skepticism regarding the realities of political

74 Walter N. King, *Hamlet’s Search for Meaning* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 145. *The Riverside Shakespeare* glosses the last two lines as meaning “nobody can prevent another from making the scenes he feels he has a right to” (1228n291-2). *The Norton Shakespeare* glosses these lines as “Despite Laertes’ Herculean ranting, my day will come” (1746n4). The Pelican glosses the latter lines as meaning that “even the least creature will have a turn at success and happiness” and that “Hamlet views himself as cat and dog” (133n282).
power and authority. Sovereign subjects should remain skeptical of institutions and the assumptions that underlie them. Hamlet may find himself caught between competing ethical systems, but he is also skeptical of the ideologies that formulate the ethical systems between which he finds himself torn. The Ghost spurs him to see the situation as a matter of Oresteian revenge, but Hamlet remains on some level suspicious of this perspective. Traditional hallmarks of heroism demand he take action against Claudius, but he finds the choler of Pyrrhus and others unsuited to the enterprise at hand. Even the Christian doctrine of leaving off taking action himself in favor of leaving it to heaven and God deserves his close scrutiny, for while in confronting Gertrude he does declare himself heaven’s “scourge and minister,” he does so with some reluctance (3.4.173). Hamlet questions because not to question would subject him to ideologies that either serve Claudius’s purposes or would otherwise hinder Hamlet’s potentiality for personal freedom and sovereignty over his life.

Shakespeare recognizes the biopower arrayed against Hamlet in its subtler and more vulgar forms. *Hamlet* is a play obsessed with bodies and their dispositions, their subjection, and the sources of that subjection. Shakespeare’s perception of these phenomena reproduces what Ponet, Goodman, Machiavelli, and Montaigne understood about political oppression, and which has in turn informed twentieth-century biopolitical theory. Tyrants work to control the conditions of existence of citizens’ bodies and the interpellation of those bodies as members and subjects of the state. Any form of political subjectivity or freedom necessitates an active reclamation of one’s body from the power of the sovereign: one must work to make one’s body one’s own again.

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75 Curiously, Soviet and Eastern European productions of *Hamlet* emphasized Hamlet’s role as that of a “self-sacrificing hero who could cleanse the state of corruption and oppression” (351n173).
Finally, Shakespearean potentiality requires an understanding and rejection of one’s capacity “not to be.” Shakespeare recognizes that no one is born free. Even sovereigns often times find themselves subjected to the state they nominally command. All persons have the potentiality to be and not to be free, and that freedom derives from a negotiation between the public and private spheres. Political subjects must recognize this distinction between “to be, or not to be” and ultimately reject their potentiality not to be free. This choice should culminate in resistance against state power. After a fashion, Hamlet rejects seeing his dilemma as one of vengeance, since accepting a role of “mere” avenger would contract him into a limited subjectivity that precludes other forms of identity for him. Hamlet understands that the problem ultimately concerns his freedom and that through resistance he comes closest to being free.

It is a critical commonplace that Hamlet remains early modern in temper while looking forward to so much of our own modernity. Shakespeare appears to anticipate many of the biopolitical theories of the twentieth century, but Shakespeare’s version of these theories of personal liberty, subjectivity, and political resistance register in a manner distinctly his own. Hamlet’s tragedy stems not only from the murder of his father, the old King of Denmark, and Hamlet’s duty to avenge that death but also from his own subjection to the state he might have inherited. Sovereignty does not allow a desiring subject truly to be free any more so than a peasant could be. What would arguably be an ideal and modern act of agency, marrying for love in a companionate relationship as Hamlet wants with Ophelia, cannot occur within the bounds of law and custom since the prince of a state should marry to strengthen that state. Even the idea of a companionate marriage is ambivalent in terms of personal liberty given its use historically to
reinforce normative behaviors and socialization. Even Claudius, who supposedly marries Gertrude out of love, faces proscription for the incestuous nature of that marriage while he does so to solidify his claim to the throne.

Shakespeare locates the influence of the state over that most pivotal of sites of control in politics: the body. Hamlet strives throughout the play to police the borders of his own humoral and social body from his family, the Ghost, and Denmark’s environment even as he seeks to manipulate his body and mind to do what he needs to do. At the same time, Shakespeare recognizes that freedom remains only a possibility until enacted through resistance: everyone, sovereign and subjects of the sovereign, are born into the roles providence and nature have provided. The potentiality of individual subjectivity necessitates a setting aside of one’s impotentiality—one’s potential “not to be,” so that in the end, one can strive “to be” free. However, Shakespeare remains skeptical of the prospects of liberty, at least through the means Hamlet uses. While Hamlet may have known a kind of freedom, he goes to the grave in subjection to the “soldier’s music and the rite of war” (5.2.383). The new King of Denmark, Fortinbras, appropriates Hamlet’s dead body. The only resolution Shakespeare offers us in the end is not the fantasy of freedom or even the freedom of death but the choice of resistance.

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CHAPTER 3
MAGIC, AESTHETICS, AND POLITICAL IMAGINATION

Where Hamlet uses aesthetics in pursuing political subjectivity for ambitious, highly radical ends, responsive to biopolitical and disciplinary constraints on his potentiality, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595) and *The Tempest* (1610) emphasize the use of aesthetics for subtler ends. Occultism offered early modern subjects an aesthetic path towards political subjectivity and for reorienting their places within the public sphere in the interests of social mobility and of resisting constraining ideologies. The allure of magic shares the appeal of the theater. Just as magicians purportedly gain power over reality through arcane rituals and communion with spirits, so too does the theater offer playwrights and companies the ability to determine what happens onstage through scripted action carried out by players and stagehands. Magic offered its practitioners a means towards political agency, as well. Magicians imagined themselves as having forms of power that political authorities did not possess, attained through education in occultism and early modern science. As John Baptista Porta states in a translation of his *Naturall Magick* (1558), magic can be either good or bad, and good magic is “the very highest point…and the perfection of natural Sciences.”¹ Magic thus represented one variation on the humanist ideal, for with such “knowledge,” one could improve oneself and attain “princely qualities” through “knowledge and study of Divine things.”² Court figures such as John Dee (1527-1609) used magic for their own political purposes. Being a magician offered Dee an ethos that attracted attention from Elizabeth I and others amongst the elite while he used his specialized knowledge of what we would term magic and science to advance their agendas. While Dee likely accepted the reality of magic, his occult experiments suggest the aesthetic and

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² Porta, 2.
theatrical dimensions of magic that playwrights like Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare recognized and took advantage of onstage. In this theatrical sense, the role of magician lent Dee, at least with some parties, a gravitas he would otherwise lack and allowed him access to the political decision makers of his day.

For audiences of magic and theater, part of the appeal derives from an expectation of spectacle, that what will appear onstage or through the magician’s agency will be better than mundane reality. Both crafts participate in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “grotesque realism” and the “carnivalesque.” Just as Bakhtin argues about the early novel, they are grotesque in that “the body and bodily life have...a cosmic” yet everyman quality. Magic and the theater’s preoccupations with larger than life figures and manifestations of fictiveness suggest a version of reality better and grander than what people can normally access. Magic and theater afford this spectacle to all audience members, rich and poor alike. These crafts are also carnivalesque in that they represent sites in which the rules of everyday life are relaxed and even undercut through laughter, parody, and celebration of the grotesque. The magician flaunts the limitations that constrain others while playwrights can do whatever they and their companies like onstage.

Although patronized by authority to varying degrees, magic and theater remained nonetheless also “unofficial” sites that “resist official culture” through their carnivalesque natures and associations with devilry and sin. Both magic and theater are aesthetic sites and activities that stand out as Other to normative discourses.

Rather than being merely subversive, though, I argue that magic offers its practitioners a model for pursuing political subjectivity through imagination and scopic desire. Scopic desire

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4 Bakhtin, 18-9.
requires potential subjects to visualize what they desire in their minds in the hopes that they can then actualize that image. A capacity for imagination reflects a capacity for both subjectivity and interiority, grounded in the aesthetic realm. For what exists only inside subjects’ minds as a desire to actualize, subjects must enact their agency, rejecting lures towards inaction or impotentiality while embracing potentiality through aesthetic means. This phenomenon suggests something akin to Walter Benjamin’s theories regarding scopic desire. Benjamin distinguishes “mechanical reproduction” of images through photography from artistic paintings, arguing that photos “[reduce] the scope for the play of the imagination” while art encourages persons to experience “‘something beautiful’” so that art continually fuels and amplifies the imagination.6

Where Benjamin focuses on scopic desire in terms of consumption of images and symbols rather than concrete things, my interest is primarily in how the aesthetic practice underlying scopic desire allows magicians and playwrights to move actively towards greater political participation. The model I identify in Shakespeare in this chapter is aesthetic and political in nature, for it relies upon the creative faculties of the magician and artist. For The Tempest, this magician-artist is Prospero; for A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Bottom takes on this role, though not as successfully or as masterfully as more obvious and serious magician characters. I focus on Bottom in A Midsummer Night’s Dream instead of Oberon because of Bottom’s class-centric political aspirations, for I see Oberon’s aesthetic activity in the play as more of a narrative tool on Shakespeare’s part than as overt commentary on aesthetics and politics. Shakespeare uses the occult and its associations with theater to offer a model of political subjectivity that emphasizes creative independence for artists who imagine realities better than those existing under their current political conditions.

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In examining this model, I situate Shakespeare’s use of occultism in these plays in terms of the influence of John Dee and Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. Dee’s magical practice was the most overt display of his intellectual occultism, which otherwise also included his oft reproduced preface to H. Billingsley’s 1570 translation of Euclid’s *Elements*, a foundational text on geometry, and Dee’s navigational work, which helped make colonization of the New World possible. This research on Dee’s part served more than a hermetic, philosophical, or even intellectual end. Magic afforded Dee political and social opportunity. His breadth of knowledge led him to become one of Elizabeth I’s advisors and to form a likely association with the so-called “School of Night,” which included Sir Walter Raleigh, Christopher Marlowe, and others. In the period, Dee also provided likely inspiration for Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus*. Dee offered a site for cultural production for uses of scopic desire and aesthetics in that he used magic to imagine quite literally phenomena that otherwise did not exist. With Dee’s example in mind, I argue magic and scopic desire afford the author-magicians of *Doctor Faustus, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *The Tempest* opportunities for social mobility and political change. I use *Doctor Faustus* as a generic touchstone against which to compare Shakespeare’s thematic use of magic. Faustus succumbs to the dangers of reckless subordination to the power of others’ imaginations, and he allows these forces to isolate him from the public sphere. Shakespeare proffers much more hopeful outcomes for Bottom and Prospero in which this form of imagination succeeds through their engagement with the social realm, enabling them to pursue political subjectivity.

Critical approaches to magic in these plays typically focus on the Reformation crisis of meaning and on meta-theatricality, but I emphasize the political dimensions of occultism in

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which the aesthetics of magic offer avenues towards political participation. Reformation-centric readings like Bruce Boehrer’s and John D. Cox’s approach magic as an allegorical proxy for Catholicism in a thematic commentary on Protestant approaches to language and meaning.⁸ In these kinds of readings, magic is not an end in and of itself so much as a symbol critics use to comment on the English Reformation, its social consequences, and its consequences for personal subjectivity. While Barbara L. Estrin and John S. Mebane link magic and theater to examine literary aesthetics, the political ramifications of that aesthetic enterprise receive little attention from them.⁹ Critics like Christopher Kendrick and Benjamin Bertram acknowledge how magic highlights concerns about religious controversy and social mobility, but I emphasize Shakespeare’s use of magic as political enterprise and the scopic impulse that spurs Faustus and Shakespeare’s magician figures.¹⁰ While Hugh Grady argues for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a site for developing a Shakespearean theory of meta-aesthetics, I focus on the overt occultism in these plays, which he does not.¹¹ The aesthetic and historical framing of magic in the early modern period receives attention from Genevieve Guenther and Barbara A. Mowat, but the


political ends that characters use magic to achieve also requires attention. For example, while Mowat approaches Renaissance magical grimoires from a colonial perspective, I underline magic as an avenue for persons to strive after political subjectivity on their own terms. Magic offers characters like Faustus a means of rejecting the orthodoxies of their day in favor of personal power and subjectivity. Not only does magic offer the ability to do fantastic feats or miracles, but magic also allows magician-figures to reconceptualize who and what they are within the public sphere, and Creation itself. Magic affords persons a means for resisting biopower and Foucauldian discipline.

In the first section of this chapter, I examine Renaissance occultism in England, focusing primarily on Dee’s experiments in magic. Dee’s use of occultism serves a two-fold function. It provides Dee a means to imagine a better world for humanity and himself. Magic offers Dee an aesthetic basis for his political aspirations and a medium through which he can exercise scopic desire. Occultism serves a theatrical function for Dee, as an examination of Dee’s conversations with spirits makes clear, for these conversations emphasize magic’s aesthetic enterprise and its applicability to the theater and public sphere. With Dee’s example arguably in mind, Marlowe and Shakespeare take advantage of the overlap between occultism and the theater in a subversive, political manner. In the second section, I examine Marlowe’s use of scopic desire in Doctor Faustus, wherein Faustus represents a scholar frustrated by the constraints of early modern political culture. While Faustus attempts to use magic as an aesthetic tool to actualize a better world he imagines, he instead trades one form of subjection for another. He allows mere entertainment to constrain him, his scopic desire, and his political aspirations. In the final section, I contrast Faustus as a failure of the imagination with Shakespeare’s Bottom and

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Prospero, wherein imagination triumphs by avoiding the lures of impotentiality. While Bottom and Prospero are not engaged in overt resistance, they resist being constrained within the discourses that would limit them and their political subjectivity. In confronting the supernatural, Bottom finds himself in similar circumstances to Faustus. Where Faustus’s hubris contributes to the corruption of his imagination and his subjectivity, Bottom’s earnestness and nascent understanding of theatricality allow him to emerge to a much more positive outcome. Bottom resists the social forces that would render him only a rude mechanical, leading him to achieve improved social standing and access to the public sphere through theater, even if Athens’ nobility gently mocks him. For Prospero, he engineers reentry into the public sphere through the aesthetics of magic and theater. Prospero overcomes the hubris of his imagination and his political tyranny to avoid sliding into Faustian levels of despair and arrogance. The Duke sets aside his tendencies for tyrannical behavior to resolve the underlying and preexisting political problems of *The Tempest*.

**John Dee, Political Aspiration, and the Aesthetics of the Occult**

Although Dee’s reputation has come to emphasize his activities as an astrologer and magician, his scholarly achievements remain significant. A mathematician, Dee viewed numbers and numbering as God’s act of Creation and a means for humanity to commune with the divine.  

14 He was famous for possessing a substantial library of over 4,000 volumes, of which the so-called “*Externa bibliotheca*” was open to visiting scholars interested in Dee’s broad collection.  

15 Furthermore, Dee was instrumental in early exploration of the New World by the

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English, championing the search for the Northwest Passage while providing a “constant output” of navigational aids that spearheaded English colonialism in the Americas.\textsuperscript{16} His scholarly work thrust him, for a time, into Elizabethan politics. He chose the day of the young queen’s coronation using astrology, demonstrating how his occult practice earned him Elizabeth’s ear. Dee would also gain access to powerful courtiers and councilors such as the Earl of Leicester, Sir Francis Walsingham, and Raleigh.\textsuperscript{17} Dee’s persistent interest in the occult has colored modern perceptions of the man, somewhat reductively given his various interests. In contrast, Isaac Newton (1642-1727) enjoys a better reputation even though he had a similar belief in alchemy. Newton possessed one of the largest alchemical libraries in England at the time and conducted experiments in his garden, but his reputation emphasizes his scientific and mathematical studies that remain commonly taught today.\textsuperscript{18} Dee’s more negative reputation may stem from the public nature of his occult endeavors and modern scholars’ tendency to look down on what they perceive as non-scientific ideologies. Accounts of Newton’s life can more easily ignore his occult pursuits, but doing so is impossible with Dee given his public, if never official, role as astrologer to Elizabeth. Nonetheless, both Dee and Newton viewed occultism as a legitimate form of inquiry and a pursuit worthy of educated gentlemen.

Dee’s magical leanings extended from his humanist inclinations, for in their most idealistic expression, Christian Cabala and Hermeticism served as mystical expressions of humanism in that magic should serve as a means for improving one’s self. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine Dee’s philosophy in depth, but I can offer a brief overview of it. The Christian Cabalistic and Hermetic thought of the early modern period correlates to some degree

\textsuperscript{16} Elton, 334, 348.
\textsuperscript{17} Szönyi, 2.
with the human-centered religious philosophy of the age. \(^{19}\) Created in God’s image, humanity had the capacity and, arguably, divinely-sanctioned responsibility to manipulate Creation to humanity’s ends. The metaphor of the garden—which Shakespeare would deploy often, including in *Hamlet* and the *Henriad*—served as a persistent frame for understanding humanity’s place in Creation with its emphasis on nurturing and developing the whole world. \(^{20}\) Indeed, one could understand the garden literally or figuratively, such as in Montaigne’s view of his life as a garden he cultivates. \(^{21}\) In pursuing their “Great Work,” magicians sought communion with the divine and spiritual development in God’s and Christ’s name: a mystical cultivation of the garden of the soul.

Here it is perhaps appropriate to offer several working definitions since most modern scholars have only a popular understanding of the lexicon of the occult. The Christian Cabala appropriated and adapted traditional Hebrew mysticism, which grounded itself in an understanding of the Hebrew language as God’s holy language. Occultists used this language for understanding the arcane nature of the world and for more pragmatic, talismanic purposes. \(^{22}\) A syncretic collection of beliefs, cabala offered adherents a primarily aesthetic means of structuring their worldviews, influencing Renaissance Neo-Platonism, medicine, and political thinking. \(^{23}\) Occultists in the Agrippan tradition often intermingled Christian Cabala with Hermeticism: a series of beliefs that posited “the ‘divinity’ of man untrammeled by Christian…duties and guilts”


\(^{23}\) Beitchman, xii.
that could culminate in supposed “miracles” and “wonder-working.” Occult practice, in turn, could take three primary forms: *theosophy*, gaining insight into God and the universe through mysticism; *theurgy*, invoking or conjuring spirits for various purposes; and *thaumaturgy*, performing miracles or working wonders. The modern depiction of magicians like Merlin or Harry Potter tends towards thaumaturgy: they create magical phenomena themselves through occult knowledge or birthright rather than relying on spirits. Thaumaturgy represents ultimate agency in that subjects enact their literal wills, no matter how impossible doing so should be. In contrast, theurgy has become, popularly, the province of melodramatically evil demonologists and similar figures, generally in the horror genre. Of course, theurgy is also the basis for praying for God or his servants to accomplish some miraculous end. Dee viewed his use of Christian Cabala and Hermeticism as a tool for apprehending mystical and pragmatic knowledge, with mathematics and geometry being the best expressions of a divine language in his opinion. Occultism afforded Dee a schema for conceiving of and perceiving the world while offering him a symbological framework within which he could guide his imagination in terms of scopic desire.

The expressions of this imagination for Dee possess an aesthetic dimension, quite literally through visual art. Dee’s *Sigillum Dei* (see Figure 1) serves as a representative magician’s device. This sigil shows a pentacle surrounded by several seven-sided figures with the names of various spirits with whom Dee and Kelley communicated. The geometric simplicity of this kind of design allows magicians to create and use symbols like them even if they lack more developed artistic ability, such as that possessed by painters.

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24 Beitchman, 216.
25 Examples are numerous, such as the antagonists from the *Hellraiser* series or the cultists of H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos.
26 Beitchman, 242-3.
A wider array of occultists can therefore use these kinds of designs. In contrast, alchemical texts such as Mellon MS 41 by George Ripley and Richard Carpenter (c. 1570) use extensive and far less geometric illustrations. For example, one page features a “dragon [that] occupies all of [the page] and reposes on an orb divided into three parts onto which its blood drips.”

The abstract quality of symbols like the Sigillum Dei offers more of a blank slate upon which the magician can project or imbue meaning. The circles and imagery of magic are allusive and writerly texts, intended to be suggestive to the imagination of magicians and, by extension, almost anyone. Magic circles also suggest a geometric simplicity and precision that magicians can project onto

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27 Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, descriptive bibliography for Mellon MS 41, Yale University, accessed January 10, 2013, http://brbl-net.library.yale.edu/pre1600ms/docs/ pre1600.mell041.htm.
the universe, in general, resolving the ambiguity and indeterminateness of Creation into geometric perfection. The Sigillum Dei serves as an ordered representation of the metaphysical cosmos with an originating principle at its center radiating outward, and Dee assigned divine names to what he felt were the proper places within that symbolic cosmos. The Sigillum Dei and similar devices allowed magicians like Dee to reorder reality according to their understanding of it, at least within the symbologies they would develop.

These occult symbols could also serve as ways for magicians to reframe and conceive of themselves as persons more significant and empowered than their ordinary lives might suggest, as Dee would do with his hieroglyphic monad. Dee describes the monad in his Monas Hieroglyphica (1564) (see Figure 2), but Dee used it in other texts he wrote as a kind of personal sigil, such as on the title page of his astrological treatise Propaedeumata Aphoristica (1558).28

Figure 2: John Dee’s hieroglyphic monad as found in this detail of the title page of Propaedeumata Aphoristica (London, 1558), courtesy of Early English Books Online

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Monas Hieroglyphica has become Dee’s most iconic occult text, and Elizabeth I discussed the text with Dee “at her request, in private audience,” demonstrating profound interest in its esoteric meanings, which Dee explained to her himself. And while, like the Sigillum Dei, the monad represents a kind of cosmic unity and order, Dee internalized the symbol as a representation of himself and his work, using it almost like a signature. The monad offered Dee a framework to imagine himself as something more than a middle class scholar and mathematician.

These circles and signs mark liminal spaces where the use of arcane symbology places magicians into the seeming role of jailer and bounder rather than being constrained by mundane society. The magician fashions these spaces, and the symbols serve not only as suggestive décor but also indicate a space as being specifically the magician’s property. Denoting a sense of ownership and authority on the magician’s part, these signs represent an uncanniness and othering of form into libraries and homes that helps destabilize these spaces’ normal associations. Marlowe deploys this form of liminal space in Doctor Faustus. For example, Faustus sees his library and study as a kind of prison, a cell within which he is bound. Even books are bounded domains of information and memory. While Faustus is constrained within his study—and his studies and role as an academic—the books represent bound things subject to his will, now commodified for him. They are his books just as Dee’s extensive library was his own. Faustus and Dee create liminal domains of their own in their studies: the magic circle Faustus uses to summon Mephistopheles and what Benjamin Woolley terms Dee’s “Interna bibliotheca,” where he conducted his occult studies. In these spaces then, arcane symbology offers magicians one tool to reframe themselves as freer agents than they might be in their everyday lives.

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29 Beitchman, 243-4.
30 Woolley, 85.
If arcane sigils afforded Dee a means to imagine his place in Creation in new ways and to fashion representations thereof, then Dee’s angelic conversations with his assistant Edward Kelley served as an even more evocative and dramatic aspect of his scopic desire. Dee possessed several mirrors and other reflective objects used in divination, including one distorting mirror Elizabeth I saw in 1575 as well as a black obsidian mirror and crystal ball now in the care of the British Museum. Despite his hopes, Dee could see nothing special in these mirrored objects—no signs of the supernatural world with which he desired contact. He relied upon others— mediums and clairvoyants—who would relate what they saw to Dee. By 1582, Dee had begun working with one clairvoyant in particular, Edward Kelley. The two men engaged in a series of sessions from 1582-7 in which Dee worked to conjure spirits that Kelley then saw in the shew-stone and related to Dee. Dee’s contemporaries were likely aware of these sessions since Dee questioned the supposed angels on matters such as the Northwest Passage and the process of converting heathens in the New World.31 In the 1659 account of Dee’s experiments, though, the depths of his occult endeavors and reputation become explicit.

If Dee’s fascination with mirrors and crystals indicates an obsession with vision, then the rituals he performed with Kelley carry that obsession to a level that may have informed Marlowe’s Faustus or Shakespeare’s Prospero. After all, these special mirrors were not important for the mundane images they reflected, but for their potential to excite the imagination of those who looked into them. The arcane characters Kelley saw in the shew-stone and related to Dee (see Figure 3), for example, are evocative in appearance, exciting the imagination with possibilities much as the “Lines, circles, signs, letters, and characters” of magicians do for

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Faustus. Indeed, this “Enochian” or “Angelical” language, as modern occultists call it, remains in use today.  

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3**: “The Holy Table” with its occult characters, in John Dee, *A True & Faithful Relation*, ed. Meric Casaubon (London, 1659), courtesy of Early English Books Online

One of Dee’s early sessions with Kelley yielded the following result, perhaps informing the magical works that appear in *Doctor Faustus* or *The Tempest*. In this session, Kelley relates to Dee the appearance of a figure “like a woman” wearing “a red kirtle” and “a white garment like an Irish Mantle,” who will later reveal her name as “Ath.” On this figure’s head rests a “thing like a Garland, green and like a Coronet…but not perfectly to be discerned.” She wears two precious stones “of white colour,” one on her breast and the other on her back, both of which are

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32 For example, see Gerald Schueler and Better Schueler, *Enochian Magic: A Practical Manual*, rev. ed (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1993), which purports to reveal the “Angelical Language” that had been “rediscovered” by Dee and Kelley. In particular, the Schuelers reproduce Dee’s own “angelic” alphabet and sigils.

33 John Dee, *A True & Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Yeers between Dr. John Dee (A Mathematician of Great Fame in Q. Eliz. and King James their Reignes) and Some Spirits…*, ed. Meric Casaubon, EEBO facsimile ed. ([Ann Arbor, MI] ProQuest, 2010), B3v-B4r, C1r.
“set upon a Crosse.” Dee and Kelley pay particular attention to the visual details of this
daughter of light,” especially her “external apparel” which Dee notes to the “spirit” before proceeding to inquire about her “internal vertue.” Dee’s account of their interaction with Ath, though, carries his experimentation into the realm of theater.

Dee, Kelley, and Ath’s conversation produces a scene that suggests not only the aesthetic limitations that Dee’s occultism strove against but also antitheatricalist arguments against spectacle. Eventually, Ath begins telling the two men of the sin of pride in a scene reminiscent of Lucifer’s theatrical display of the seven deadly sins before Faustus in 2.3:

E.K. Wherein am I proud?
She. In the same wherein the Devil was first proud.
   Who glorified the Devil?
E.K. God.
[Dee] God glorified not the Devil, but before he became a Devil he was in glory.

Where Lucifer’s display illustrates the sins, Ath glosses the sin of pride and counsels Kelley in particular to avoid it. Dee’s account is like a theatrical script with conversational turns indicated in the text as well as what could be descriptions and stage directions. Antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson associated occultism and theater in a similar vein, and Gosson situates both in terms of devilry rather than the Christian Cabalism and Hermeticism that Dee drew upon. Gosson connects attending theater to sitting “at the table of Idolators,” imbuing symbols and persons with fictive significance just as, arguably, magicians do. In turn, the dialogue and “Poetrie” in plays comes from “the deuill” using verse to most “wonderfully tickle the hearers[‘] eares.” As Gosson argues, the devil uses “the eye[s]” of audiences to lure them in through “the beautie of the…Stages,” as well as entertainments like “maskes, vaunting, [and]…daunsing of gigges,” all

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34 Dee, A True & Faithful Relation, B3v-B4r.
35 Dee, A True & Faithful Relation, B3v-B4r.
with the intent of luring observers to the “vanetie of pleasure” and to become “carnally minded” and thus drawn from Christ. For Dee, this theatricality and its attendant imagery remain mediated by Kelley. Unlike Prospero who, as a magician, will script spectacles for his audiences to witness, Dee the magician sees and hears only what Kelley relates to him. In this sense, Faustus is like Dee in that Faustus ultimately only sees and hears what Mephistopheles coordinates at Faustus’s behest.

Dee’s imagination as a magician was, unfortunately for him, not up to the task he sets before it, and he becomes dependent upon men of questionable virtue like Kelley. The ability to visualize and actualize what one imagines, in a manner akin to a playwright or artist, is something Dee desires, as his work with shew-stones and magic mirrors demonstrates. Dee was an adept mathematician and geometer, and while the simplicity of occult sigils lends itself to use by a broad base of individuals, Dee’s imaginative faculties did not seem up to the task. In describing the basis for his hieroglyphic monad, Dee relies upon tables of arcane correspondences and the kind of geometrical discourse still in use today in schools with descriptions based on the alphabetically labeled points in geometric figures. Hungry for visions of the fantastical, Dee found himself relying upon Kelley, whose reputation was more that of a con man and charlatan than as a serious occultist. For example, one of these spirits they summon, Madimi, appears early in Dee’s experiments with Kelley and returns often, first as a little girl and later as the figure that commands Dee to share wives with Kelley. Kelley’s capacities to act, improvise, and concoct characters and visions for relation to Dee suggests a greater capacity for imagination on his part. That is, Kelley becomes in Dee’s experiments the playwright and even

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37 Gosson, E1r.
38 Dee, The Hieroglyphic Monad, 43. Dee’s language here essentially reproduces what any geometry student in a modern high school might encounter.
39 Dee, A True & Faithful Relation, E2r, Bbb2.
artist, responsible as he was for the more evocative and less geometric image that Dee embraced (as in Figure 3). Kelley’s supposed ability for magic and his skill in theatricality is perhaps closer to what Marlowe shows in Mephistopheles’s relationship with Faustus, or Shakespeare develops in Prospero and in figures like Bottom or Oberon.

Marlowe, Entertainment, and the Failure of Imagination

In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe explores the failure of this kind of imagination and the attendant recourse to relying upon others to mediate occult experience and, by extension, subjectivity. Where the historical Dee finds himself dependent upon Kelley, a man Dee first knew by an alias (Mr. Talbot) and who worked to fuel Dee’s delusions of supernatural ability, Marlowe grants Faustus a theatrical world in which spirits and magic do exist as attainable ends. Like Dee, Faustus seeks to gain power and political agency through his occult practice. For Marlowe (and Shakespeare), scopic desire and the aesthetic enterprise of the occult require a theatricality and creativity that Faustus lacks, leaving him at the mercy of Mephistopheles and his entertainments.

Before I turn to Shakespeare’s treatment of aesthetics, magic, and politics in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, I explore Christopher Marlowe’s treatment of these subjects in *Doctor Faustus* because I see Shakespeare building upon the occult and theatrical aesthetic frameworks Marlowe fashions in his play. The tragic dimensions of *Faustus* are well known, but Marlowe’s representation of the kind of aesthetic enterprise that Dee pursues in his magic and that Faustus attempts in the fictive world of the play emphasizes the lures of impotentiality that persons should overcome in the pursuit of political subjectivity. Faustus’s pursuit of magic stems from his rejection of abstract concepts and disciplines in favor of concrete images and desires he wishes to actualize. His relationship with the supernatural derives in part
from the theatricality of the occult, for Faustus seeks the ability to set aside his limited identity and to apprehend something greater than the everyday for himself. Logic, Faustus complains, offers only argument, and theology only a tautological “What will be, shall be” (1.1.8-9, 50). However, Marlowe refuses to show the audience what the play’s characters imagine, for while Faustus insists that the audience “See, see, where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament,” they have only Faustus’s call to do so (5.2.74). This refusal demonstrates Marlowe’s ambivalence about fulfilling this kind of agency and about using aesthetics to achieve positive political results.

The political and personal promise of magic in Doctor Faustus gives way to mere entertainment. When turned to diversion, Faustus’s scopic desires cannot help but fail, leading to his subordination to infernal powers. Whatever aspirations the magician may have had at the beginning of the play, Mephistopheles turns them towards self-serving and distracting fantasies instead. Magic and its theatricality in Doctor Faustus become a means to control Faustus. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno argue regarding modern capitalism, the “culture industry” provides entertainment that removes spectators’ needs to think for themselves, for this industry suppresses subjectivity, constantly deferring actualization of desire in favor of more entertainment. Ultimately, this industry fashions and disciplines the “needs of consumers” while serving “as society’s apologia,” for to “be entertained means to be in agreement” with the dominant social system. Entertainment is what Mephistopheles convinces Faustus to accept instead of becoming a magician-playwright himself. Marlowe reinforces Faustus’s “powerlessness,” since entertainment becomes not an “escape from bad reality but from the last
thought of resisting that reality.” Gosson’s warnings about the theater convey similar concerns with spiritual corruption and subjection caused by what are ultimately the purely entertaining aspects of the theater. In Gosson’s view, the artifice of the theater can lead spectators into “a dead sleepe,” creating a form of the negation of subjectivity and powerlessness that Horkheimer and Adorno address. Spectacle replaces critical engagement and participation.

Gosson’s concerns suggest he saw theater as shaping a kind of public focused on its appetites, but Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s treatments of magic and theater help shape a counterpublic that could embrace more beneficial forms of subjectivity. While Gosson bases his objections on moral and religious grounds, the spiritual malaise he associates with theater becomes a problem in that this kind of entertainment encourages passive consumption and undesirable behavior. The theater-going public that may emerge is a kind of what Michael Warner calls a “counterpublic” at odds with normative culture, organizing itself around the spectacles and vices Gosson associates with the stage. Although perhaps desirable from the perspective of theater owners and staff, this counterpublic could become troublesome for conservative authorities. However, Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s critique of passive consumption of entertainment and Shakespeare’s valorization of the active, creative imagination help shape a contrary counterpublic. This public is “counter” in that their discourses still advance a resistance to normative ideologies while also emphasizing an active aesthetic engagement that distinguishes their potential audience from mainstream culture. The ends towards which audiences could direct these aesthetic and political discourses also suggest greater political

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41 Gosson, D8r.
participation and subjectivity for those active in the public sphere. Persons can turn to magic and theater for political subjectivity, but entertainment does not afford these kinds of possibilities.

Entertainment becomes a lure of impotentiality, and Faustus succumbs to this lure. In contrast, Hamlet vigorously experiments with various aesthetic frameworks and theatrical roles, but where Hamlet is active in their fashioning, Faustus leaves the creative agency for his use of aesthetics in the devils’ hands. Although Hamlet calls for the First Player to give him “a passionate speech,” Hamlet directs the players how to perform while also planning to use his own additions to *The Murder of Gonzago* for his political purposes. Faustus is a passive consumer of the entertainments Mephistopheles scripts for him, and while he may offer themes or topics for Mephistopheles to work with, Faustus is not their author.

The disciplines that Faustus rejects in 1.1 are abstract and unsatisfying, largely relegated to an interior world of thought whereas magic offers Faustus concrete ideas and visions to feed his imagination while also promising him the fulfillment of those desires. Faustus rejects logic, medicine, law, and theology as “[a]fford[ing] no greater miracle” than argument, as too ephemeral, as a “[petty] case of paltry legacies,” or as passive disciplines that disregard personal agency in favor of divine decree or fate (1.1.8-50). However, magic entices him with its “[l]ines, circles, signs, letters and characters,” and “these are those [things] that Faustus most desires” (1.1.53-4). In particular, Faustus dubs this knowledge the “metaphysics of magicians,” a term editors and the *Oxford English Dictionary* gloss as “occult lore” (1.1.51). The *metaphysics* also has associations with the *mathematics*, which the *OED* notes originally included an understanding of “geometry, arithmetic, and certain physical sciences involving geometrical

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44 See, for example, the gloss in the Norton edition of the play and the *OED*’s note that *metaphysics* is “Marlowe’s name for: occult or magical lore.” See “metaphysics, n.,” *OED Online*, December 2012, Oxford University Press.
Faustus’s interest in the occult suggests an interest in mathematics, specifically with applied mathematics, the use of math towards specific, pragmatic ends. The “necromantic” art that Faustus wishes to pursue is a kind of superior mathematics through which Faustus can not only understand his universe better but also better or manipulate it. As Andrew Sofer argues, magic is uncanny as a “performative speech act” that erodes the distinction between representation and actuality, or “doing.” Dee’s knowledge of applied mathematics—such as his use of math in creating navigation charts for New World exploration—and occult symbology suggest one way to view Faustus’s desire for arcane knowledge and for the ability to affect the world in profound ways. For instance, Dee’s map of the supernatural universe (Figure 4) designates cardinal directions and a general understanding of the locales for the entities with whom he and Kelley communicated.

Figure 4: Dee’s map of the supernatural universe, *A True & Faithful Relation*, courtesy of *Early English Books Online*.

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45 “mathematics, n.,” *OED Online*, December 2012, Oxford University Press.
46 Sofer, 2.
Such a map fulfills a similar role to the pages in the grimoire Mephistopheles offers Faustus after their bargain in which Faustus can find “all characters and planets of the heavens, that [he] might know their motions and dispositions” (2.1.171-3). Dee also pursues this form of occult knowledge. Early in their sessions, Dee and Kelley communed with a spirit calling itself Murifri who gave them a design for an astrological charm (Figure 5). This design with its circle, numbers, and heptagon is inherently mathematical and geometric in focus, suggesting that with the right knowledge of applied mathematics, one can achieve wondrous, material ends. The potentiality and power that magic offers Dee is precisely what Faustus desires.

In magic, Faustus desires an apparatus through which he can actualize his personal and political desires and break from the cultural restraints to which he finds himself subject. These constraints are classist and ideological in nature, and Faustus’s resistance against them reflects a desire for social mobility. Christian doctrine is a boundary and limitation for Faustus, evidenced in part by his preference for a pagan or pre-Christian reality that he finds comforting and empowering rather than a Christian system that hinders and more narrowly defines him (1.3.58-61). Faustus strives to reclaim his bare life from the Church, Germany, and God. He seeks sovereign power over his life, struggling to become the subject of resistance through attempts to
actualize his scopic desire by envisioning alternatives to the Christian worldview within which he finds himself. Faustus desires to share the bounty of his political fantasies early in the play in an attempt to actualize the world he imagines, for he envisions erecting, through supernatural means, a wall around Germany even as he clothes the university students in rich silk (1.1.84-98). These fantasies suggest that the ends he would turn his magic emphasize his political subjectivity, his active engagement with the public sphere. His concern for the defense of Germany represents a nationalist agenda of some kind, at least as far as the security of his homeland is concerned. Adorning himself and others at the university in riches implies a desire for social mobility that goes beyond merely finding the favor of the nobility. Faustus’s vision would change existing social frameworks so that intellectual and academic merit is the marker for social power and authority. These populist conjectures on Faustus’s part quickly turn despotic, though, as he imagines himself having “the seigniory of Emden” and becoming a “great emperor of the world” who would exercise the sovereign exception against the “Emperor” and “any potentate of Germany” (2.1.23, 1.3.104-11). Social mobility and determining one’s place in the public sphere remain interests for Faustus after his pact with Mephistopheles, but his desires become more mundane as he courts the favor of the Emperor, especially in the B-text.

Mephistopheles works to enjoin Faustus to accept subjection and constraint on his political subjectivity by turning Faustus’s aspirations towards far more distracted ends. The devils insure that the things that Faustus imagines are only his idle fancies rather than public deeds with lasting consequences. In having Faustus envision erecting a magical barrier around Germany, Marlowe alludes to Robert Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589), where “England, and the court of Henry [say]” that Bacon intends “[to] compass England with a wall of
brass” (2.24-30). The difference between Bacon and Faustus is the social space within which their aspirations occur. Bacon’s desires and power as a magician exist within the public sphere already, his plans a matter of court gossip, and Bacon emphasizes “the force of his pentageron [pentagram]” and therefore his political agency (2.51). This agency is so powerful that his “frown doth act more” than others’ magic in a display of theatrical and magical might that valorizes the English over other states (9.137). Greene represents the political aspirations of magic as being a public, visible, and accepted enterprise. Unlike Bacon, Faustus expresses his nationalistic desires only within his study. Where Bacon uses magic as a means to advance his personal agency in the public sphere, Faustus mediates his agency through Mephistopheles and the other devils.

This mediation leads to Faustus’s aspirations becoming mere appetites as he turns his vision and imagination towards passive consumption, for the active impetus his imagination has turns towards the pursuit of entertainment. Marlowe strongly suggests Faustus is not up to the task of being an active magician-playwright in 2.1—and thus someone who could successfully use aesthetics in the pursuit of political subjectivity—when Faustus admits to himself that the “god [he serves] is [his] own appetite” (2.1.11). Wagner’s bestial offer to Robin anticipates the baseness of Faustus’s imagination:

**WAGNER**  I will teach thee to turn thyself to anything: to a dog, or a cat, or a mouse, or a rat, or anything.

**ROBIN**  How! A Christian fellow to a dog, or a cat, a mouse, or a rat! No, no, sir; if you turn me into anything, let it be in the likeness of a little pretty frisking flea, that I may be here and there and everywhere. O, I’ll tickle the pretty wenches’ plackets! I’ll be amongst them, i’faith.

**WAGNER**  Well, sirrah, come. (1.4.60-7)48


48 The B-text version of this exchange is much the same, but Robin’s fantasy of climbing onto women as a flea is missing.
While Wagner assures Robin that they could transform themselves into “anything,” the most either of them can imagine is bestial in nature. Robin’s appetites immediately lead him to fantasize about how he can use such talents to rape women. Wagner’s offer presages also Robin and Rafe’s transformations into an ape and dog by Mephistopheles, but both men recognize that at least they will not go hungry (3.2.45-50). Marlowe frames Faustus in much the same way.

In the Seven Deadly Sins pageant, Lucifer entertains Faustus with reflections of himself to mock him in his subjection, even as Marlowe reminds audiences how these theatrical displays by the devils serve to distract and diminish Faustus. The entertainment Lucifer provides Faustus in 2.3 serves as a gloss on Faustus’s corrupt and limited nature. Faustus has Pride through his ambition, hubris, and intellectual obstinacy. His desire for slaves demonstrates Faustus’s Sloth while his Lechery finds expression through his “wanton and lascivious” nature (2.1.46, 95-99, 137). In seeking physical violence against the Pope and the Church and revenge against the Emperor’s knight, Faustus shows his Wrath (3.1, 4.1). Similarly, his theft of food and drink in the Pope scene makes his Gluttony apparent, and his desire for wealth, gold, and riches demonstrate his Covetousness (2.1.21-2). Mephistopheles turns Faustus’s desire to produce substantive change towards more banal ends, much as Deborah Willis argues that Faustus ultimately approaches magic as an addiction to the stimulation that Mephistopheles, his “pusher,” provides him.49 Magic becomes a spectacle to distract Faustus so that he becomes complicit in his subjection to the systems from which he has sought reprieve, which Horkheimer and Adorno argue about the culture industry and which Gosson argues about early modern theater. Furthermore, Faustus’s demand to “be a spirit in form and substance” serves as a more supernal echo of Wagner’s offer of bestial transformation, for Faustus declines from his

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humanity to something closer to the devils (2.1.95-6). The B-text emphasizes this baseness in Faustus. The knight Benvolio removes Faustus’s head, momentarily triumphant in his revenge against the sorcerer until Faustus rises, unconcerned with the decapitation as he orders Mephistopheles to deal with Benvolio and his men (B.4.2.44-106). The Horse-Courser will later accidentally pull off Faustus’s leg while the doctor sleeps, but he replaces it within six lines, laughing at the Courser’s panicked reaction (B.4.5.35-41). Faustus has transformed himself into something inhuman and less than human, becoming a doll of a man rather than a man.

This reduction of Faustus from his humanity to objectification echoes Faustus’s commodification of his agency and bare life, for rather than pursuing political subjectivity, he mistakes the devil’s entertainment for empowerment. Faustus is willing to subjugate and diminish himself into a mere possession with his soul nothing more than property that he deeds to Lucifer through a “bill” (2.1.65). The language Faustus and Mephistopheles use in their negotiation is telling on this subject. Faustus must “buy [Mephistopheles’s] service with his soul” through a “deed” so that Faustus may “bequeath” and “bind” his soul to Lucifer while granting Lucifer “security” for his investment (2.1.30-109). The deed is a contract, for Lucifer gains Faustus’s soul “conditionally” so long as Mephistopheles and Lucifer fulfill “[all] articles” of said contract (2.1.91). Obviously, Lucifer views Faustus as a commodity to acquire. While it is tempting to think that God views pre-contract Faustus as more than an object, this perspective is not necessarily true, given the text. In response to Faustus’s question of why Lucifer wants his soul, Mephistopheles replies that souls “[enlarge] [Lucifer’s] kingdom” (2.1.39). This enlargement suggests that another kingdom is diminished in turn, implying that God’s kingdom also relies upon souls. The *OED* defines *kingdom* in regards to God and Heaven as the “spiritual sovereignty of God or Christ” in comparison to the “spiritual rule or realm of evil or infernal
powers.” Reduced to property, Faustus’s soul becomes a commodity to transfer from himself and ostensibly God’s sovereignty to Lucifer’s possession.

Faustus does not merely offer his soul to Lucifer, though; his bargain is much more all-encompassing. While it is tempting to view Lucifer’s desire as being for the wholly spiritual aspect of Faustus’s being, Faustus demonstrates that the corporeal aspects of soul are also in play in his bargain. His “deed of gift” is of his “body and...soul,” and in reading aloud the contract’s articles, he offers “both body and soul” and finally “body and soul, flesh and blood, or goods” to Lucifer (2.1.89-107). Faustus offers and Lucifer accepts not only spiritual subjection but also corporeal subjection, absolute biopower over Faustus. If Hamlet must recognize the use of biopower over him if he is to pursue his political subjectivity, then Faustus fails to reach this understanding. The strange doll-like corporeality of Faustus in B.4.2 and B.4.5 further stresses the role of Faustus’s body, while the devils’ presence in B.5.2 reinforces their biopower over Faustus. As Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Mephistopheles observe from above, Faustus tells the scholars meeting with him that the devils “[stay his] tongue” and “hold” his hands down to prevent Faustus calling upon God” (B.5.2.55-60). His claim may literally be true given the devils’ presence on stage. Finally, the B-text leaves Faustus dismembered in his study in B.5.3, the final reduction of Faustus to a thing rather than a human.

As Faustus retreats within his fantasy world through Mephistopheles’s entertainments, Marlowe demonstrates how this entertainment contains Faustus’s early radical longings while heightening the anxiety of pursuing magic and theater as means of actualizing one’s political subjectivity. In despair, Faustus asks Mephistopheles to “glut the longing of [his] heart’s desire” with “[t]hat heavenly Helen...[he] saw of late” (5.1.82-4). Marlowe stresses Faustus’s scopic desire, calling attention to seeing Helen. The image that best identifies Helen as Helen for

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50 “kingdom, n.,” OED Online, December 2012, Oxford University Press.
Faustus, her face, spurs him to forget everything else in favor of abandoning his subjectivity. Faustus would rather forget himself and become a version of Paris than to be an active agent in pursuit of his redemption. In this instance, the early scopic desire Faustus wishes to actualize through magic, as a means to envision and actualize a better world for himself, becomes a means of distracting himself into accepting his subjection to the devils. While the Helen of Troy scene appears to be an instance in which Faustus can actualize what he sees and imagines in his mind, an image Marlowe shares with the audience, we do not see what Faustus sees. We only hear it. Faustus sees Helen; we see a young man in costume from a distance. The magician’s imagination does not externalize, and we, the audience, must rely upon a second-hand account. While this scene with Helen can seem affecting and perhaps inspiring onstage—a moment that suggests aesthetic triumph on Faustus’s part, given the poetry he speaks—the scene nonetheless marks Faustus’s final fall. As Walter Stephens argues, the Helen scene is a culmination of Faustus’s “desire to see hell,” and whatever aesthetic qualities the scene may possess, the audience should realize that Faustus is not with Helen but a devil. In accepting Helen from Mephistopheles, he sets aside his subjectivity one last time in favor of entertainment and subjection.

Rather than becoming a magician-playwright and having some means of effecting change in his world, Faustus allows himself to become a spectator and consumer while Mephistopheles remains the theatrical impresario who manipulates his audience to his profit, much as Kelley did to Dee. After a fashion, Faustus becomes a member of the audience of the play, for he watches the entertainments of Mephistopheles with the same interests as those who watched Doctor Faustus. Like Marlowe’s audience, Faustus desires spectacle and, as antitheatricalist William

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Prynne remarked upon the play’s performance history, the hope for some “visible apparition of the Devill on the stage.”

Shakespeare and the Triumph of Aesthetics in Politics

Where Faustus becomes distracted by the spectacle and by the theatrics of the occult in *Doctor Faustus*, Shakespeare affords subjects like Bottom and Prospero far more aesthetic agency in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*. Faustus never quite comes to terms with his subjectivity, seeking escape in fantasy and entertainment. However, Bottom and Prospero are far more active and successful in terms of their occult activities—even if those activities are accidental on Bottom’s part—and their uses of theater to achieve political subjectivity. Marlowe represents Faustus’s pursuit of magic and his scopic desire in tragic terms. While his aspiration and ambition rises above his lot in life, Faustus ultimately cannot escape the limitations placed upon him. Indeed, he fails to transcend the system that so limits him, trading subjection to one set of masters (God, the Church, and the sovereigns of early modern Europe) for another (Lucifer). In comparison to Marlowe’s cynical treatment of these themes, Shakespeare opts for a more optimistic, if guardedly so, approach. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare represents magic, theater, and scopic desire as politically charged forces that demand potential playwright-magicians transcend convention and seek solutions beyond the systems within which they find themselves bound.

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* turns upon the idea of love as magic, and the first scene emphasizes that love is a matter of controlling the gazes of others, a form of magic or an “art” as Helena terms it to Hermia. The opening of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* focuses on Hermia’s

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love for Lysander (and Helena’s for Demetrius, and to a lesser degree Theseus for Hippolyta),
and Shakespeare predicates this love on vision and controlling gaze and sight. For example,
Helena may posit that

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is wing’d Cupid painted blind;
Nor hath Love’s mind of any judgment taste:
Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste. (1.1.234-7)\(^{53}\)

However, Helena has just complained that Demetrius “errs, doting on Hermia’s eyes” and that
before he “look’d on Hermia’s eyne” he cared only for Helena (1.1.230, 242-3). She resolves to
“have his sight…again” (1.1.251). She asks Hermia to “teach [her] how [Hermia] look[s]” to
help “sway” Demetrius’s devotion (1.1.192-3). Helena is not the only lover obsessed with sight
and desire in this scene, though. Hermia notes that Athens “[seem’d]…as a paradise” before she
“did Lysander see,” and she and Lysander must “starve [their] sight / [from] lovers’ food” until
they meet again in the woods (1.1.204-5, 222-3). Indeed, Hermia says that it is “[hell] to choose
love by another’s eyes” (1.1.140). Even Theseus accepts this scopic view of love, urging Hermia
that “[her] eyes must with [her father’s] judgement look” (1.1.57). Controlling gaze, it seems,
means controlling desire.

Love, in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, or at least romantic desire, relies upon vision, and
prospective lovers hope to control where their paramours’ gazes go. The “art” of controlling this
gaze, as Helena phrases it to Hermia, becomes a kind of magic she wishes to learn. Indeed,
Helena expresses perhaps the play’s first instance of magical transformation in the form of
something she imagines: “Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated, / The rest I’d give to be
to you translated” (1.1.190-1). Helena states that she would give up dominion over everything if

\(^{53}\) All references to \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} reference the Arden edition and use parenthetical citation
unless otherwise noted. William Shakespeare, \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Arden
Shakespeare, 2007).
only to become transformed into Hermia. Even the magical herb Oberon has Puck acquire enacts
its power through its control over gaze and sight (2.1.170-2). As Gabriel Rieger argues,
Shakespeare is very much concerned in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with the nature of erotic
desire and “its close linking with control,” for “erotic desire is...a form of control,” as Helena’s
desire to manipulate her beloved makes clear.⁵⁴ Magic becomes a pragmatic means to achieve
such ends: it controls the gaze and, therefore, desire.

Bottom’s wish to control vision and spectacle through theater mark him as participating
in this magical enterprise, leading him to become a Faustian figure in *A Midsummer Night’s
Dream*. Generally speaking, critics have treated Bottom as a figurative ass who gains a literal
ass’s head thanks to Puck. ⁵⁵ Some have seen something more substantive in Bottom’s aesthetic
role in the play; for example, Bottom can serve as what Grady calls the “privileged vessel of [the
secular, aesthetic, and magical] experience” he has with Titania. Bottom works to make sense of
his time with the fairies in such a way that he aestheticizes that encounter and uses it in the
*Pyramus and Thisbe* drama, which becomes a “gloss on Bottom’s dream.”⁵⁶ Like Faustus,
Bottom desires a protean, transformative nature. As Quince assigns roles to actors for *Pyramus
and Thisbe*, he assigns Bottom the role of Pyramus (1.2.18). Bottom also offers to play Thisbe
and the lion, and for the lion’s part, he offers to “roar...as gently” as a “dove” or as a
“nightingale,” reiterating his protean and aesthetic drive (1.2.47-50, 66-78). Of course,
Shakespeare represents Bottom in part as a bumbling over-actor prone to malapropisms.
Nonetheless, Bottom understands the magical nature of theater. He recognizes its ability to

⁵⁴ Gabriel Rieger, “‘I Woo’d Thee with My Sword, / And Won Thy Love Doing Thee Injuries’: The Erotic
⁵⁵ John A. Allen, “Bottom and Titania,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 107-17; J. Dennis
Huston, “Bottom Waking: Shakespeare’s ‘Most Rare Vision,’” *SEL* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1973): 208-22; and Lina
Perkins Wilder, “Changeling Bottom: Speech Prefixes, Acting, and Character in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,”
*Shakespeare* 4, no. 1 (March 2008): 45-64.
transform himself and others, in playing different roles in *Pyramus and Thisbe* or in the notion of transforming himself into an “Ercles” (Heracles) (1.2.25). He recognizes his potential power to “move storms”—whether figural storms represented onstage or to spur tears from an audience in sympathetic grief. Recognizing that there is a kind of magic in the theater, Bottom understands that it is a means to gain prestige with princes. Much as Faustus does with his theatrical displays of magic before the Emperor, Bottom imagines how he can gain the Duke’s favor through performance and theatrical magic (1.2.67-9). Bottom wants to become a magician-playwright while Oberon, the play’s consummate magician-playwright, already is so.

Shakespeare elevates Bottom and his political aspirations through his interaction with the fairies, unlike Marlowe’s treatment of Robin’s interaction with devils in *Doctor Faustus*. Like the clowns in *Faustus*, Bottom desires elevation and some measure of social mobility. He imagines gaining the Duke’s favorable attention through performance and otherwise entreats his fellows to “be perfect” (1.2.101). His excursion into the theater is a chance to “[labour] in [his mind]” as someone of a different station rather than having to labor with his hands as a mechanical (5.1.73). Bottom’s colleagues recognize that should they succeed in their interlude, they will become “made men,” with their fortunes assured (4.2.17-8). Like Faustus and Robin, Bottom desires to have social mobility and to avoid having his craft and economic function as just a member of “A crew of patches, rude mechanicals” define him (3.2.9). Bottom and his fellow artisans surpass Robin and his company of rogues who engage in thievery and parasitism, while Bottom himself, with his “most rare vision,” demonstrates a greater awareness of the experience he has had than any of the young lovers in the woods (4.1.203). Most critics and editors may treat Bottom as a simple clown, but as Lina Perkins Wilder argues, Bottom is not

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57 The Arden Shakespeare edition glosses Snug’s comment here as meaning “men with our fortunes made” (101).
only “[embedded] in social and dramatic relationships” but also embraces a protean, actor-like nature.\(^58\) Like Robin, Bottom negotiates various estates. Robin moves from Faustus and Wagner’s middle class world to the rough and tumble trade of thieving from taverns to standing before the Duke of Vanholt, as well as dealings with one of Hell’s ministers.\(^59\) In turn, Bottom shifts from his craftsperson associates to the Queen of the Fairies to the aristocracy of Athens. Where Robin proceeds always as an outsider seeking to take selfish advantage of circumstance, Bottom instead seeks to be polite, to adapt to his new environs as appropriately as possible, and to strive to become something more than the parasite that Robin is or the clown Shakespeare initially represents Bottom as.

If Bottom is a Faustus-figure in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, then Titania is Bottom’s Mephistopheles. Where Mephistopheles is Lucifer’s minister, bound to Faustus for a period, Titania is Oberon’s wife, bound to Bottom for a period by Puck’s mischief and Oberon’s schemes. Like Mephistopheles, Titania is “a spirit of no common rate,” and her offer to Bottom mirrors much of Faustus’s pact:

> I’ll give thee fairies to attend on thee;  
> And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,  
> And sing, while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep:  
> And I will purge thy mortal grossness so,  
> That thou shalt like an airy spirit go. (3.1.147-54)

Much as Mephistopheles and his devils attend on Faustus, so too will Titania and her fairies attend Bottom. The offer of jewels mirrors the riches that Faustus lusts after while the song and luxuriant rest Titania offers Bottom echo the entertainments and fancies Mephistopheles uses to delight Faustus’s mind. Perhaps most notably, Titania renders Bottom into “an airy spirit” much as Faustus becomes “a spirit in form and substance” (*DF*, 2.1.95-6). The introduction of

\(^{58}\) Wilder, 45-6.  
\(^{59}\) Robin and the other clowns come before the Duke and his Duchess only in the B-text. In the A-text, Robin and Rafe’s last appearance is at the tavern in their confrontation with the Vintner.
Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed proceeds in a fashion akin to Lucifer’s presentation of the Seven Deadly Sins to Faustus. Where Faustus mocks and derides the sins, failing to see how they reflect his own fallen nature, Bottom sees some measure of commonality and even community with these fairies, telling each one that he “shall desire…more acquaintance” (3.1.175-89). Bottom’s experience in this fairy world is much more positive than Faustus’s in the witch world of Mephistopheles while demonstrating the aesthetic and political limitations of the Heaven-Hell model.

Shakespeare traffics not in devils but in more congenial beings, entities who represent an aesthetic alternative to the spirits of Heaven and Hell in Doctor Faustus. While Marlowe posits a world of devils and no God in Doctor Faustus, Shakespeare posits a world of fairies and no God or devils in a triumph of the classicism and aesthetics that Faustus desired but was denied. Marlowe limits Faustus’s potentiality to a false dichotomy between Heaven and Hell in that Faustus trades one master for another. Faustus inhabits a universe where he cannot break from the Christian system and its choice of service to Heaven or Hell, for no other option exists. Shakespeare makes mention of darker, more evil spirits in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and these include the product of fevered imagination, as Theseus suggests that the mad see “more devils than vast hell can hold” (5.1.9). Puck also describes the shades of suicides, “[damned] spirits,” that must hew close to the night (3.2.382-7). “But we are spirits of another sort,” Oberon tells Puck, emphasizing that the fairies are not infernal beings nor the unblessed dead (3.2.388). While Puck is perhaps the closest to an “evil” spirit in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, he is more a mischievous agent of change than a devil.

In particular, Oberon occupies a prestigious position in the occult lore of the Tudor period that signals his presence in the play as being more a thematic device than as a distinct
character. Described historically in 1444 as a “wycked spyryte” and later in 1510 as a “demon,” Oberon becomes by the Tudor period the “kinge of the fayries,” associated with Cardinal Wolsey as a familiar spirit Wolsey consults with and uses for magical purposes. In the folklore, Oberon begins as a figure from medieval romance, a fictional magical figure who makes the leap from romance to occult conjuration. While conservative authorities viewed Oberon and similar entities as little more than devils, he accrued cultural cachet in England with its curious occult interest in fairies. As “airy spirits,” they are very much akin to Shakespeare’s Ariel, a non-infernal being partly responsible for the maintenance of the universe in some manner, but at the same time, beings like Ariel are not “perfectly inhuman thing[s].” Fairies, with their association with imagination and fancy, represent intrusions from the realm of aesthetics into the material world, spiritual and artistic aids who help manifest the magician-playwright’s potentiality into the public sphere. While Oberon could serve as a magician-playwright in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, he acts more as enabler and facilitator of action for others. I focus on Bottom as this kind of figure instead because his conflict with making sense of the aesthetic, fairy realm renders him a more compelling example of the kind of character Faustus and Prospero represent, rather than Oberon. The spiritual and aesthetic natures of these beings render them outside normal physical and social constraints, qualities they can lend to others.

Both Doctor Faustus and A Midsummer Night’s Dream feature subjects who transform into spirits, who become like the supernatural entities they consort with, and this transformation represents potential liberation from biopolitical constraint. In Faustus’s case, he includes this transformation as part of his pact with Lucifer, and he sees it as a means towards power and agency, as a means to escape or transcend biopolitical subjection. The OED very broadly defines

60 Mowat, 14-9.
61 Mowat, 13-4.
spirits like Mephistopheles and others as being “incorporeal” and visible to humans at their whim.63 That is, to “be a spirit in form and substance” as Faustus demands renders one unbound by one’s body and its limitations and restrictions (2.1.95-6). The biopolitical power a mortal sovereign might levy against the man Faustus is ineffectual at controlling an “incorporeal” Faustus. He can move without being noticed unless he chooses to be visible, much as in his scenes with the Pope. To be a spirit is to be beyond the corporeal power of the state to restrain or to observe. Being a spirit also liberates one from the typical limitations of spacetime. As a spirit, Faustus can travel from “the bright circle of the hornèd moon / [even] to the height of Primum Mobile” (B.3.Chorus.8-9). In rendering Bottom “like an airy spirit,” Titania affords him similar advantages (3.1.154). Titania orders her servants to treat Bottom as a “royal paramour” with the attendant “honours” associated with a prince waking in the morning or going to bed in the evening, a definite elevation over his normal estate, as he sports in her “consecrated bower” (3.1.157-64, 3.2.7, 61n164).64 Much as the spirits of Doctor Faustus, the fairies of A Midsummer Night’s Dream are not burdened by the limitations of space or scale: they travel “[swifter] than the moon’s sphere” and can stand as tall as “cowslips” (2.1.7-10). Becoming spirit-like offers definite advantages for both Faustus and Bottom within the framework of biopolitics and their physical freedom.

In both cases, though, becoming spirits risks the danger of subjection to other powers. For Faustus, the danger is quite literally damnation and subservience to infernal powers. The Evil Angel tells Faustus, “Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee” (2.3.13). Faustus threatens to “persever” in his offense “like a devil” (B.5.1.38). Though not in danger of damnation in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Bottom does become subjected to Titania, as Rieger suggests about

63 “spirit, n.,” OED Online, December 2012, Oxford University Press.
64 Harold F. Brooks, the editor of the Arden edition, chooses the terms couchée and levée, which I have defined instead.
Titania’s urge to control Bottom’s erotic desire or as Ania Loomba situates Bottom’s capture within a world of overpowering women.\(^{65}\) Titania commands Bottom to “go with [her]” because she loves him, and she becomes responsible for feeding him and for regulating his rest (3.1.149, 159-66). She silences him, ordering her fairies to “[tie] up [her] love’s tongue, [and] to bring him silently” to her bower (3.1.194). Titania addresses Bottom directly in the imperative mood five times while he only attempts to do so twice, and on both occasions, Bottom uses the polite and formal *let* construction: “Let’s have the tongs and the bones” (4.1.28–9); “But I pray you, let none of your people stir me” (4.1.37).\(^{66}\) Although Titania’s commands are those of a lover to a beloved, she is nonetheless the person in charge of their relationship.

Of course, Bottom is a farcical character, even if he is sympathetic and perhaps even a bit (mock) heroic. While he may represent a Faustus-like figure in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, his experience with the supernatural world is brief, and his gestures towards social mobility through theater and the supernatural are humble in comparison to Faustus. More often, as I have noted, critics have compared Faustus to Shakespeare’s ultimate magician-playwright: Prospero. *The Tempest* foregrounds its political concerns from the very beginning.

The storm that opens *The Tempest* represents the ineffective power of politicians and kings in the face of the elements, evoking the limits of biopolitical power, especially given that Prospero controls the storm through his art and magic. Gonzalo threatens the Boatswain with the power held over him by the sovereign after being ordered below decks, reminding him of the king’s presence (1.1.19).\(^{67}\) Gonzalo goes on to suggest that the Boatswain will not die in the


\(^{66}\) Titania commands Bottom specifically in 3.1.145, 3.1.146, 3.1.149, 4.1.1, and 4.1.39.

storm but on the “gallows” (1.1.29-30). After calling upon “good fate” to insure that the Boatswain lives long enough to see “his hanging,” Gonzalo offers to “warrant [the Boatswain] for drowning” (i.e., to protect from drowning) to make sure he hangs instead (1.1.29-45).

Antonio’s curses against the Boatswain continue the threats of hanging while Sebastian’s curses him with “A pox o’ [his] throat” (1.1.39-42). The aristocrats never venture far from the Boatswain’s neck in terms of the threats of biopower they deploy.

Even as the aristocracy threatens the Boatswain with the fullest extent of biopower, he and the mariners pay them no heed. The Boatswain recognizes that in the face of the storm, “these roarers” can do little but threaten (1.1.16-7). He goes on to challenge the nobles present:

You are a councillor; if you can command these elements to silence and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more. Use your authority! If you cannot…Out of our way, I say! (1.1.20-6)

Whatever power the nobles may normally hold is nothing presently, in the face of the storm. Indeed, the Boatswain and the mariners are the characters with whatever power over life and death may exist onboard the ship. The Boatswain is defiant of the storm and the aristocrats, shouting for the storm to “[blow] till [it bursts its] wind,” while also defying those who “mar” his crew’s “labour” and “assist the storm”: the nobles who interrupt him and his men (1.1.7-8, 13-4).

While the storm may ultimately be the work of Prospero, demonstrating his power and agency over the elements while those on the vessel are defenseless, the opening scene sees the leveling of the mariners and nobility in the face of mortality and skill. It is perhaps notable, though, that Prospero does not know whether the ship’s crew and passengers are safe until hearing so from Ariel, suggesting that the extent of the storm and its ultimate consequences still lie beyond Prospero’s direct power (1.2.217). Nonetheless, the biopolitical power of the sovereign and state is impotent before the elements and Prospero.
Prospero’s island further provides impetus to juxtapose an imagined world where biopower does not exist with the realities of early modern European culture, for Prospero’s art and mastery over the island provides an aesthetic domain within which Gonzalo can imagine a better world. Upon arrival on the island, Gonzalo engages in an extended meditation that famously alludes to Michel de Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals”:

I’th’ commonwealth I would by contraries Execute all things, for no kind of traffic Would I admit; no name of magistrate; Letters should not be known; riches, poverty And use of service, none; contract, succession, Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard – none; No use of metal, corn, or wine or oil; No occupation, all men idle, all; And women, too, but innocent and pure; No sovereignty – (2.1.148-57)

Although Kenji Go examines the scope of Shakespeare’s debt to Montaigne in this passage from a textual studies perspective, Shakespeare’s biopolitical emphases also become apparent in this borrowing from Montaigne. Gonzalo imagines a world without economic “traffic” and thus without class division: a communal existence that presupposes no need for the politics of everyday life, for the land fulfills all the wants the populace might desire. Or, at least, the land would fulfill all their wants in terms of their bare life. Gonzalo's vision of a utopian “commonwealth” also suggests that he imagines a realm far more situated around the interests of the people than those of the sovereign or ruling elite. He imagines something closer to a republic than the monarchy of which he is a nominal defender.

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68 Kenji Go, “Montaigne’s ‘Cannibals’ and The Tempest Revisited,” *Studies in Philology* 109, no. 4 (Fall 2012), 455-73.
In envisioning a world without sovereignty or biopower, Gonzalo imagines a world of bare life unfettered. He foresees a world lacking “[sword], pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine” to deploy against one’s fellow humanity (2.1.162). In such a world, even gender imbalances can be forgotten since the impetus for that imbalance—primogeniture—are cast aside as all folk become materially equal. Gonzalo conceives of a celebration, a fantasy, of a free bare life, for life under the law is lacking in his view. His utopia admits no work, nor labor. Gonzalo thus denies the economic and political lures of sovereignty. During his reverie, his compatriots spot the paradox of Gonzalo’s perfect vision, though: “Yet he would be king on’t,” Sebastian comments (2.1.157). Indeed, sovereignty remains in Gonzalo’s fantasy—the fantasy of his supremacy: “I would with such perfection govern, sir, / [t]’excel the Golden Age” (2.1.168-9). Sebastian and Antonio recognize Gonzalo’s hypocrisy, mockingly shouting “’Save his majesty!” and “Long live Gonzalo!” immediately after his hubristic declaration. Even in the primeval, seemingly prelapsarian domain of the island, the specter of sovereignty and biopolitical power is never far away, whether it is through Gonzalo’s musings or through the plot to kill Gonzalo and the King. But Gonzalo does imagine a better world nonetheless.

The magic Prospero wields allows him the opportunity to deploy biopower over others on the island, men who have previously rendered Prospero a sovereign exception and forced him bodily from the community. Prospero’s magical power trumps not only the elements but also the men who venture to the shores of the island. In his only soliloquy, Caliban catalogues the means through which Prospero exerts sovereign authority over him: Prospero’s spirits “pinch” him, frighten him with illusions, “pitch [him] i’th’ mire,” lead him astray “in the dark,” “bite” him, taunt him, and otherwise injure him mentally and physically (2.2.1-14). While one may argue that Caliban’s treatment is in some way justified by his attempted rape of Miranda, the fact
remains that Prospero enslaves Caliban, exerting his control over him through the most overt forms of biopower at his disposal. Caliban is not alone in this treatment either. In his cynical plan to wed Ferdinand and Miranda in order to control the succession of Naples, Prospero enslaves Ferdinand for a time, telling him:

I'll manacle thy neck and feet together;  
Sea water shalt thou drink; thy food shall be  
The fresh-brook mussels, withered roots, and husks  
Wherein the acorn cradled. (1.2.462-5)

Prospero has Ferdinand do labor as a test of his character as well as a means of humbling him, of rendering Ferdinand down to his bare life as what Giorgio Agamben calls the *homo sacer*, a sovereign exception that is a bare life without rights at all, living at the whim of the sovereign. This treatment is ostensibly a show for Miranda, to manipulate her and Ferdinand’s feelings for each other, and as Prospero claims, to make “the prize” all the sweeter by making the challenge “uneasy” (1.2.452-3). However, the reality is that Prospero is all too willing to inflict biopower on others, whether the seemingly deserving Caliban or the undeserving Ferdinand. These demonstrations of power and sovereignty on Prospero’s part do not otherwise include his use of magic—and Ariel—for more occult manifestations of biopolitical power.

Shakespeare makes something clear through Prospero that Faustus failed to understand: any act of creative, scopic desire—any act of art or magic—requires the aims and agenda of the magician-playwright to be grounded in the social realm to avoid that art becoming mere entertainment. Prospero’s magic is much more cynical and pragmatic than Faustus’s distractions, Bottom’s clumsy imagination, or Dee’s pursuit of supernal wisdom for England’s sake. The extent of Prospero’s power, though, depends upon his isolation from the mundane social world of Renaissance Europe. Although James Kearney sees Prospero renouncing not his sins but his

“potent art” that places him above others and therefore outside the human domain, the island serves as the aesthetic space within which Prospero can deploy that art to achieve his political ends while his adversaries are at a disadvantage.\(^71\) The island is the theater that Prospero controls, and through that aesthetic control, he influences the perceptions of the spectators upon that island. The island-theater becomes Prospero’s exclusive political space. In his exile to the island, Prospero reproduces a social world. While he enjoys magical and political sovereignty on the island, he sacrifices that power to return to civilization with his daughter. The magic he performs on the island is not so much transformative—he is not focusing on becoming a spirit or transforming persons like Bottom experiences via Puck—but on persuasion and misdirection. Prospero strives to use his magic for rhetorical purposes in an attempt to convince the powers of Naples and Milan to allow him and his daughter to return. And his chief player in these staged performances is Ariel.

Prospero’s art and pursuit of political subjectivity are not without their unethical dimension, for Prospero cannot achieve his art without servants and coercive methods that diminish the liberty of others. For example, Ariel is bound to Prospero’s service for a period, an airy spirit subordinate to Prospero’s sovereignty over the island. Ariel represents what Faustus imagined Mephistopheles to be: an otherworldly entity summoned and bound to the magician’s will. Ariel’s history is one of servitude, having been bound to Sycorax’s will in the past until Ariel’s “too delicate” nature led him to rebel against “her earthy and abhorred commands,” so she “did confine” Ariel in the pine Prospero discovered the spirit within twelve years later (1.2.271–93). Even under Prospero, Ariel is “[his] slave,” like Caliban, bound to “more toil” and “pains” while Prospero threatens to act as Sycorax did and bind him within “an oak” for “twelve

[more] winters” (1.2.270, 309, 242, 294-6). Unlike the contract between Faustus, Lucifer, and Mephistopheles, Prospero and Ariel appear to have more of a verbal agreement. Ariel likely could flee the island and his period of slavery to Prospero, but Prospero could likely call him back and enact his revenge upon the spirit. Faustus’s contract requires enforcement of a very conventional kind: other servants of the superior party of the contract take hold of the body or essence of the inferior party in a display of power. For Faustus, the action ends when devils enter and carry him from the stage in 5.2, and the B-text emphasizes the physicality of enforcement of the contract as the scholars discover “Faustus’ limbs / All torn asunder” (B.5.3.6-7). A similar fate befalls Ariel in defying Sycorax, for “her more potent ministers” aid her in binding Ariel (1.2.275). Often represented as a carefree being, Ariel puts on airs of “spriting gently” to avoid drawing Prospero’s wrath (1.2.298). Ultimately, Ariel wants what any reasonable person would desire in such a situation: their liberty.

Given the extant analogy between magic and the theater, it is appropriate to consider Ariel an actor bound to a contract to Prospero, a theatrical impresario of the supernatural world, and their relationship reinforces the social dimensions of art in relation to its political uses. As a contract-bound player and stagehand in Prospero’s employ, Ariel coordinates, prepares, and enacts the spectacles that Prospero authors for use against others on the island, for Prospero must control not only their bodies but also their vision and other senses. For instance, Ariel draws Ferdinand with Ariel’s music into the presence of Miranda and Prospero while preparing Ferdinand psychologically, so he expects “no mortal business nor no sound / That the earth owes” (1.2.407-8). In such a state, Ferdinand sees Miranda not as a young woman but as “the goddess” of Prospero’s island when he first meets her (1.2.423). Prospero has also controlled Miranda’s vision over the course of her short life so that she has only encountered her father,
Caliban, and the spirits in her father’s service. In showing her Ferdinand for the first time, he frames the experience in almost theatrical terms, telling her, “The fringed curtains of thine eye advance, / And say what thou seest yond” (1.2.409-10). She sees “a spirit,” a “thing divine” in viewing Ferdinand for the first time (1.2.410, 419). Prospero rejoices at his spectacle proceeding and having the effect he intends, praising Ariel as he does so for his good work in producing Prospero’s theater (1.2.420-1). Prospero’s magic and stagecraft have as much depth as the displays of the Seven Deadly Sins, Alexander the Great, and Helen of Troy do in Doctor Faustus. He understands that although controlling vision creates strong first impressions, effective theater and, therefore, effective magic and manipulation require something more.

Prospero’s stagecraft and magic succeed in structuring new bonds—social and political—for himself, his daughter, and the other humans on the island, and in doing so, Shakespeare implicitly refutes Gosson’s criticism of the theater. Although Prospero’s spectacles and stage-managing are despotic in nature in that he subjugates others on the island in the interest of his art, Prospero understands that artists can turn the coercive aspects of aesthetics towards constructive ends. If I may borrow Gosson’s framing of the theater, Prospero may use “the eye[s]” of his audience to draw them into speculation of “the beautie” of the scenes he stages, but Prospero does not do so merely for entertainment, for the “vanetie of pleasure” or for carnal responses.72 Prospero does so to shape a public that will have a place for himself and his daughter within it. In this sense, Prospero uses magic to help participate in the public sphere, to find community again. Almost immediately after enchanting the vision of both Miranda and Ferdinand, Prospero forces a deeper connection to form. Prospero enters into his own stagecraft as a senex figure, the blocking character in romantic comedy, while using his magic to prevent Ferdinand from escaping the role and play Prospero has assigned to him (1.2.465-70). Prospero’s

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72 Gosson, E1v-r, D8r.
enslavement of Ferdinand becomes a means of entreating sympathy for him from Miranda while her sympathy spurs Ferdinand’s affection in return.

In separating Ferdinand from his father Alonso and intimating their deaths to each other, Prospero also renders Alonso sympathetic to him while affording Prospero the opportunity to stage a wonder that sways the king to Prospero’s favor. After admitting the loss of his “dear son Ferdinand,” Alonso hears that Prospero has lost his daughter in the same “tempest” that claimed Ferdinand (5.1.137-53). Prospero invites Alonso to have compassion for both fathers, or more specifically, *compassio*, to suffer together in their shared grief. This compassion leads Alonso to imagine his son and Prospero’s daughter “living both in Naples, / The king and queen there!” (5.1.149-50). Having lured Alonso into desiring such a vision, Prospero obliges him and makes his vision reality. After all, he has lost his daughter in the same sense that any father loses a daughter in romantic comedy: she marries another man. Prospero’s revelation of Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess—“A most high miracle!” as Sebastian suggests—grants Alonso’s desires and fulfills his vision. Doing so shocks him with the spectacle of a living son into acquiescence to Prospero’s desire to return to Italy while securing his political position once more (5.1.177). In *The Tempest*, human empathy helps recuperate Prospero’s tyrannical aesthetics and politics, and the ends that Prospero turns his magic towards are compassion and empathy, not force or tyranny.

Unlike Faustus, Bottom’s and Prospero’s magics succeed because they do not subordinate their imaginations to other powers even as they ground their art in the public sphere. Although Bottom may be *physically* subjected to Titania for a time while in her bower, his imagination and aesthetic engagement do not become subjugated to her. Magic becomes a metaphor for theater, and as a model for potentiality and resistance, magicians strive to redefine
the ways they conceive of themselves as aesthetic and political subjects. Like Hamlet, Bottom and Prospero choose to resist forms of discipline and discourse that would subject them to others, but unlike the Prince of Denmark, Bottom and Prospero’s resistance is more aesthetic than physical. While Hamlet pursues what might amount to a revolution, masked by his theatrical guises, Bottom and Prospero use aesthetics in an attempt to reorient their places in the public sphere, reframing themselves as imaginative beings who can, at least in part, assert their own public identities.

In contrast, Faustus is a negative model as a magician, for he isolates himself and allows himself to be isolated by the devils, turning his imagination inwards towards trifling and ultimately self-destructive ends. Doing so distances Faustus from other voices or opportunities to recognize his subjection to infernal and other powers. Faustus’s imagination is limited, reliant upon Mephistopheles’s manipulation and creativity, and therefore dependent and subordinate to the infernal imagination. The model of Bottom emphasizes how he imagines and gains a better social position through his theater, but Shakespeare also allows Bottom to enjoy royal privilege for a time with Titania in the woods. While he does not achieve greatness, he does achieve perhaps the greatest aesthetic awareness in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. As a model, Prospero insures that he regains his dukedom and secures his place as the father of the future Queen of Naples, using magic and art to shape the public world he wishes to inhabit. Where he had existed in power and isolation, much like Faustus, before the events of *The Tempest*, Prospero recognizes that what he has lost in being away from public and political life is far more damaging to him than what he gains through his art. Prospero uses his magic to earn newfound political status by engaging with the social order and working to transform it from within.
CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL STORYTELLING IN THE HENRIAD

In *Hamlet*, onstage storytelling is generally subordinate to the play’s thematic concerns with theatricality and power, but instances of narrativization are apparent. The Ghost’s tale of his murder and purgatorial torments establishes a relationship of dominance and obligation between him and Hamlet, for the Ghost fashions himself as Hamlet’s dead father and king while framing Hamlet as son and avenger. The Ghost successfully does so through his tale to Hamlet despite questions about the Ghost’s provenance. In *The Tempest*, Prospero’s magic and playwriting (see Chapter 3) serve narrative purposes, as well. The exiled duke constructs a political story that, if he is successful in convincing others of its validity, results in his and Miranda’s return to European civilization with some measure of political authority. In these examples, storytelling serves definite political ends, working to establish and to reframe relations amongst persons on the stage while investing meanings the storytellers desire into those relations. In this chapter, I examine the narrative abilities of characters in the *Henriad* and the political ends towards which they direct those skills.

The plays of the *Henriad*—*Richard II* (1595), *1 and 2 Henry IV* (1596-7), and *Henry V* (1598-9)—include many instances of storytelling, and those instances typically focus on definite political ends. *Richard II* begins with the competing legal stories that Bolingbroke and Mowbray tell. The adjudication of their stories requires some consensual mechanism for determining whose narrative the public should treat as valid. In the formal, juridical, if feudal and chivalric, context within which Bolingbroke and Mowbray tell their stories, trial by combat should serve as the means for determining whose tale England should accept. Richard’s interruption of the process for determining accepted narratives disrupts more than aristocratic notions of honor and
chivalry. His actions arrest the normal methods for determining the validity of persons’ stories, opening the narrative field for those who can best tell politically-motivated stories and who have the power to make those stories accepted as truth. Ultimately, Bolingbroke emerges as the better storyteller than Richard, especially the better political storyteller in being able to fashion an appealing nationalist narrative. However, his victory will further expand who can form political narratives and what kinds of stories they can tell.

In this chapter, the model for political subjectivity I explore is storytelling and self-narrativization as this model develops in Shakespeare’s *Henriad*. Princes like Bolingbroke are concerned with the narratives that justify or even call their authority into being. Michel Foucault’s argument that power originates “through the production of truth” has pertinence here: power exists only if people believe and accept its truth, if they are persuaded through whatever means that it is truth.¹ These means include aesthetics insofar as a well-fashioned and palatable fashioning of truth can be more believable and preferable than uglier ones, but the means can also include demonstrations of naked force intended to silence alternative sites for the production of truth and to enforce acceptance of official narratives. Indeed, the truths that authority fashions take narrative form. One means of producing truth comes through what Foucault terms master or “true discourse,” the master narrative by which a society operates. Within this discourse, the upper echelons of society work to control the kinds of political narratives that circulate as they seek to shape the public sphere to their advantage.² In the early modern period, Machiavelli seems to anticipate Foucault’s theories on discourse and its political utility in *The Prince*, but Machiavelli situates the concepts as a matter of constructing appearances. As Machiavelli avers,

princes must control how they and their authority appear to the public, and sovereigns craft stories for the consumption of their subjects in which these princes seem virtuous, religious, and unassailable, whatever the reality may be.\(^3\)

The so-called Tudor Myth serves as one example of this principle, which Shakespeare borrows from for the underlying plot of the *Henriad*. Tudor monarchs used the myth to frame their dynasty’s relationship with England, offering them a means for representing their sovereignty as providential rather than because of human agency. The Myth posited their rule as preferable to alternatives, and the Tudors contextualized their reigns as blessings of peace in contrast to the strife of the Wars of the Roses.\(^4\) As Peter Lake and Steven Pincus note about early modern public-making, nascent attempts at shaping the public sphere in the period often took the form of “appeals...to the people” by “the centre of the regime,” which sought to mold public policy by mobilizing opinion. The Tudor Myth worked to shape an English public compliant to the Tudors’ ends through the strategies that Lake and Pincus describe: through “appeals to the notion of the commonwealth,” or the public itself as a body.\(^5\) Using historiographers like Polydore Vergil and Edward Hall, Tudor monarchs sought to produce several supposed truths about them for their subjects to internalize: the Tudors were virtuous, religious, and unassailable because of providence.

However, my interest is in how subordinate storytellers—like Falstaff, the Eastcheap regulars, and other marginalized persons in the *Henriad*—pursue their political subjectivity within the discursive limitations of official narratives, not so much the use of official political

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\(^5\) Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, eds. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 3-4.
narratives like the Tudors’ mythology or how Shakespeare deploys those myths. These citizens use storytelling to participate within the public sphere, appropriating official narratives for their own advantage when they can and molding their reputations and biographies for their benefit. Their narrative canniness helps make them critical participants within the public sphere, for they can judge the various normative fictions they encounter, using them or discarding them as necessary. In looking to these subordinate storytellers, though, I feel it useful first to establish how storytelling works for the aristocracy in the *Henriad*. Understanding the stories that society’s elites accept and propagate is essential for storytellers who hope to revise or to add to that narrative for their benefit. Where Foucault and Machiavelli see the normalizing usages of narrative and discourse—using storytelling to maintain established political ideologies and hierarchies—storytelling can also be a means for pursuing political subjectivity. Political stories create a means for imagining ways of participating in the public sphere, evaluating the narratives citizens negotiate in envisioning how they exist within that sphere, so that they may work towards actualizing their potentiality to be political agents of some kind.

Many critical approaches to the *Henriad* focus on royal performance and theatricality, but critics have generally ignored the notion of self-narrativization as political enterprise and have focused on aristocratic characters. The use of popularity to acquire power through staged theatrical encounters has received some attention; Jeffrey S. Doty argues, for example, that Bolingbroke’s rise to power in *Richard II* comes through his cultivation of popularity.⁶ Theatricality as a means for “the acquisition of legitimacy” for royal authority has received attention from critics like Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin while the undermining of that

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legitimacy through theatrical representation has been of interest to David Scott Kastan. Critics like Rackin and Hugh Grady have also addressed how Shakespeare subverts historical narrative and aristocratic ideology while pointing to the ways that royals in the plays manipulate public discourse. However, my emphasis is on the actual act of narration, when players literally stop the action to tell a story. Beyond these explicit instances of storytelling, the Henriad includes several points with implicit narratives that often butt up against more foregrounded stories. These juxtapositions require Shakespeare’s characters and audiences to determine the merits of the narratives they encounter. When characters like Falstaff and Pistol engage in storytelling, these acts suggests that narrativization offers opportunities to participate in the construction of Tudor political reality beyond those that the crown officially sanctions. Storytelling also offers more marginal persons, like Falstaff and the Eastcheap regulars, the means to interrogate official narratives and to take advantage of those stories. Shakespeare advances a model of political subjectivity in the Henriad in which public persons must work to fashion competent narratives as part of a broader enterprise that extends to all strata of English society, not just the aristocracy.

In the first section of this chapter, I establish how storytelling functions in the aristocratic world of Richard II. The traditional, consensual means for resolving disputes between different persons and the public narratives they advance relies upon martial ability, not storytelling skill. Richard disrupts this system, forcing Bolingbroke to adapt to previously unknown contingencies. Bolingbroke adapts and prospers by re-narrativizing his position within England’s public sphere:

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9 See Rawdon Wilson, Shakespearean Narrative (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), who observes that Shakespeare often has characters do so across the canon.
he reframes himself not as an exiled noble but as England’s savior. Other noble characters like Northumberland take advantage of this narrative disruption, disseminating and adding to Bolingbroke’s nationalist tale of England’s redemption. Richard’s and Bolingbroke’s actions create a narrative free-for-all in England, and Hotspur’s involvement in the Percy rebellion has its roots, in part, in his resistance to Bolingbroke’s preferred narratives. As aristocrats struggle to impose their most personally advantageous stories on England, Shakespeare advances a populist model for narrative ability as a means towards pursuing political subjectivity for commoners through Falstaff and the Eastcheap regulars. In the second section, I argue Falstaff’s narrative skill enables him not only to tell stories for gain within the public sphere but also to adapt to exigency and to recognize the storytelling agendas of others. Hal and Bolingbroke both recognize that their rule would best benefit from a unified, English narrative, so they seek to impose such a tale on the English. Through the heroic and just war stories Hal authors in his campaign in France, he works to rein in the narrative free-for-all at home. Shakespeare complicates this royal agenda, using the Eastcheap regulars and the structural devices of 2 Henry IV and Henry V to underline for audiences the narrative frame and artifice of Hal’s stories. The regulars undermine the valorous depiction of war Hal advances, but Hal is successful onstage in eliminating the regulars and Falstaff as competing storytellers. Pistol and Williams, a commoner soldier in Henry V, demonstrate that non-aristocratic storytellers must bend in the face of royal narratives and not break against their legal and social power even as these commoners recognize that fictions about royal authority are just stories.

Aristocratic and Normative Narratives in the Henriad

The Henriad begins with an assumption of what constitutes the normal state of England.
The status quo at the beginning of Richard II supposes a chivalric, feudal environment. Critics like Howard have questioned just how truly chivalric this environment is, for Richard’s “actorliness” reveals the hollowness of his titles and the notions that justify them. Several characters in Richard II also view this environment as already damaged in some way when they lament a lost, “idealized, masculine past.” Nonetheless, narratives that work within those chivalric modes have the most cultural currency and credibility, at least amongst the noble participants. These narratives and the generic conventions they include help determine the aesthetic opportunities that noble characters can draw upon in imagining how they can act and represent themselves within the public sphere. Aristocratic storytelling is knightly in nature in Richard II, focusing on heroic exploits and concern for honor and reputation. The narrative of kingship, in turn, is one that emphasizes the sovereign’s role as God’s representative on Earth. In this kind of publicly-accepted story, Richard and his scepter should inspire “awe” with his “sacred blood” and “upright soul,” for his place is “to command” and receive obedience (1.1.118-21, 196). Richard’s authority, in these kinds of chivalric stories, should extend to the land he rules, “[his] earth,” which should not “Feed…[its] sovereign’s foe” and should “Throw death upon [its] sovereign’s enemies” (3.2.10-22). But by canceling the trial by combat of Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Richard disrupts the means through which persons mediate competing narratives, at least amongst aristocrats.

Doing so fosters a chaotic storytelling environment that compels Bolingbroke to reframe his public biography so he becomes the kind of person against whom Richard’s authority cannot operate. While the narrative chaos that develops enables Bolingbroke to rise to power, that

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10 Howard, 141; and Howard and Rackin, 141-7, 153. See also Grady, 71-3.
environment provides other aristocrats opportunities for public, political storytelling at odds with Bolingbroke’s official narrative. One notable example is Hotspur, whose reasons for resisting Bolingbroke mirror Bolingbroke’s complaints against Richard while using similarly masculine narratives. Both Bolingbroke and his son, Hal, recognize that England needs a new, unified narrative, and Hal pursues the imposition of this narrative in his war on France and the war story he authored.

People use storytelling and narrative to construct their realities, to make sense of their everyday lives, and the overall arc of the *Henriad* reflects this concern as Richard’s and Bolingbroke’s actions lead them and other characters to adapt narratively to the civil strife that emerges. In his examination of the psychological uses of narrative, Jeremy Bruner observes how stories often start with how things *ought* to be, a normative order that is implicitly conveyed in a narrative that is upset in some way in what Aristotle, in reference to drama, terms the *peripeteia*. In the *Henriad*, Richard’s actions culminating in his deposition constitute the disruption for how things ought to be in England. The remainder of the tetralogy works narratively towards restoring or forging a new story of England, much as Bruner argues stories do in general. People perceive reality as though their lives were narratives of some kind. Towards this end, persons impose narrative frames and expectations upon reality and like to believe themselves to be “free-willed protagonists” in their life stories, “cling[ing] to narrative models of reality...to shape...everyday experiences.” Individuals like to think of themselves as the heroes and main characters in their personal stories. The use of stories to anticipate potential problems and to prepare for those upsets, emotionally and intellectually, Bruner terms

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13 Bruner, 5-7.
“narrativization.” Competing narratives resulting from individuals contending against each other require some means for resolving that conflict and some means for adjudicating whose story is valid.

The competing legal stories of Bolingbroke and Mowbray open Richard II, but rather than mediating these narratives through their relative validity or the claimants’ verbal skills, chivalric culture finds resolution through knightly trials in which strength of arms establishes narrative supremacy. Even in this chivalric context, though, a fair court of law, to “be accepted as authoritative and legitimate,” must convince audiences and parties that the agents of the court are “fair and disinterested.” The legal “process” must “[sanitize],” Bruner argues, the rhetoric, and the stories that convey that rhetoric, to maintain the court’s legitimacy. For Bolingbroke and Mowbray, the legal process that should sanitize the rhetoric of their competing narratives is trial by combat in an impartial setting. The ostensibly “impartial” chief officer of the law, Richard, ceremonially identifies the claimants and determines whether the case before him is a valid legal accusation or a matter of revenge, some “ancient malice” and therefore fabrication, on Bolingbroke’s part (1.1.115, 3-11). The present trial seeks to establish whose story is valid. In a knightly trial, the man still standing after their duel tells the triumphant narrative. Legal systems gain their legitimacy by making violence the prerogative of the state. Chivalric contests, like that between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, ritualize that violence while locating ultimate authority over its outcome, and accordingly the judgment over whose story is valid, to God.

More is at stake in the dispute between Mowbray and Bolingbroke than whose accusation is valid. Narrativization serves an interpellating function by fashioning and calling into being social relations as individuals author public biographies (or narratives) that particularize and

14 Bruner, 25-8.
15 Bruner, 37.
16 Bruner, 42.
assign significance to their actions, such as Bolingbroke and Mowbray try to do in their trial. As Erving Goffman notes, all persons develop a “record” of their life events and become “object[s] for biography,” which, as narratives, are subject to after-the-fact interpretation and revision. From a political perspective, biographies represent accounts of the actions of individuals within the public sphere. Action only attains human significance when persons frame the meaning of an action through speech of some kind, and storytelling one’s experiences within the public sphere demonstrates one such approach. As Paul A. Kottman argues, speech helps particularize human agency and concerns in politics rather than through unspoken and abstract “philosophical fictions like ‘Man,’ ‘citizen,’ ‘the state,’ and so forth.” Politics has no human meaning until individual agents articulate their relations and positions to each other. As persons assign significance to their actions through speech, they can “distinguish themselves instead of merely being distinct” so that persons reveal “who they are” in the public sphere. For example, Bolingbroke and Mowbray try to frame themselves as virtuous agents while denigrating the character and actions of the other. Speech becomes “the action of speaking” when it fashions new or reframes existing relationships, and this action necessitates a measure of “initiative...the impulse to make oneself heard” and to open oneself to the responses of others. Where Kottman uses the term initiative in addressing Arendtian speech in a theatrical context, I focus on political subjectivity as it applies more broadly to strategies for participating meaningfully in the public sphere. In the Henriad, these strategies include narrativization. This kind of speech exists in intense competition, often against normative, royal narratives. Speech as action requires a measure of political subjectivity and an embrace of one’s potentiality, and that subjectivity becomes

contingent upon its reception and performance in the public sphere through instances of storytelling.

In *Richard II*, the legal contest between Bolingbroke and Mowbray shows that both claimants’ public biographies are at stake in the form of their honor. Mowbray expresses the chivalric commonplace that his “honour is [his] life,” for without a “spotless reputation... / Men are but gilded loam and painted clay” (1.1.177-83). A man’s value and social position depend on the public narrative ascribed to him, and Mowbray makes this point clear when he speaks of his fame and esteem, the “general opinion or estimate of [his] character.” Mowbray means the manner in which others—specifically the aristocracy—tell stories about him, and the current court case will determine the nature of those stories. In the early modern period, rhetorical manuals like Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560) link successful persuasion in court environments with narrativization, and this scene suggests the classes of judicial argument Wilson describes. Both claimants contend about whether or not Mowbray committed crimes and whether or not those crimes remain prosecutable if Mowbray committed them at Richard’s behest. Much as Wilson recommends to courtroom orators, Bolingbroke addresses whether Mowbray has the “will to do evil” and the “power to do” so, with Mowbray’s colorful biography suggesting he could on both counts. Mowbray understands that language is responsible for what Grady calls “the social network in which one lives life and finds purpose and meaning.” Mowbray’s specific understanding of the use of language comes through his understanding of how his honor, the public narrative of his character, situates him within those social networks. Without an honorable narrative, Mowbray may as well not have a life, at least one not worth

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19 “reputation, n.,” *OED Online*, June 2012, Oxford University Press.
21 Grady, 69.
living, for that life would be bereft of the purposes and meanings to which Mowbray has grown accustomed for defining himself. Towards this end, he must assert his assignation of significance for his actions as Richard’s vassal against Bolingbroke’s counternarrative. The surest way to establish and maintain either man’s honor is through the knightly trial they both embrace.

Richard disrupts the established, consensual manner for determining the validity of such stories, arbitrarily assigning equal footing to both tales in the process and creating an unstable storytelling environment within which Mowbray must adapt. This environment is anomic in the sense Émile Durkheim defines as “awake[ning] all kinds of longings” and resulting in circumstances in which “traditional rules have lost some of their authority.”22 Forced into the biography of being a knight banished for life from his homeland, Mowbray has no frame of reference for his predicament. Instead, he seeks to make sense of his situation by comparing himself to other, now similar, things, so he refashions his story of himself in the process. Mowbray is like something “cast forth in the common air” while his tongue is now “like a cunning instrument cased up” or like one he has no experience using (1.3.157, 161-5). Mowbray accepts exile but begins fashioning new stories to help make sense of what has happened to him. Rather than embrace a similar fate, Bolingbroke quickly begins to take advantage of the narrative rupture Richard creates.

Bolingbroke tries to make sense of his new reality, but he also works to empower himself politically by fashioning narratives in which he possesses political agency rather than being Richard’s subject. Richard’s disruption of the trial by combat has the effect of subverting the underpinnings of his authority, as Howard and Rackin observe.23 While Doty notes that Bolingbroke’s nationalism offers him an alternate source of authority, that nationalism develops

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23 Howard and Rackin, 149.
as part of the narrative Bolingbroke fashions because of Richard’s actions.²⁴ Alone with his father, Bolingbroke tries to make sense of what has happened, for he finds himself so uncertain that he is unsure how to say goodbye to his father (1.3.255-7). Gaunt encourages his son to reframe the story of exile into something more pleasant, “a travel…[Bolingbroke] tak’st for pleasure” or that his time away could make his return that much more wonderful (1.3.262-7). In an act of narrative treason, Gaunt encourages his son to revise his account of what has happened so that Richard did not banish Bolingbroke “[b]ut [Bolingbroke] the King,” narrativizing Bolingbroke into the superior social position (1.3.279-80). In these suggestions to his son, Gaunt demonstrates just how unstable and radical Richard’s actions have made the storytelling field by pointing to the possible stories that Bolingbroke could create, should he have the potentiality to do so. Gaunt encourages his son to tell stories in which Bolingbroke casts the king aside, and not vice versa, while also working to fashion a new story of honor and reputation for himself. While Mowbray appears to take his banishment with sorrowful obedience, Bolingbroke is far more resentful, yet adaptive. He bids farewell to “England’s ground,” his “mother” and “nurse that bears [him] yet,” framing himself at the end of 1.3 as “banished, yet a true-born Englishman” (1.3.306-9). Bolingbroke begins crafting a tale for himself that situates him not as Richard’s subject but as a nationalist redeemer, and that nationalist narrative helps Bolingbroke shape the public sphere to be willing to accept his authority, not Richard’s.

Bolingbroke fashions himself narratively as England’s savior, leading his allies in England to disseminate this narrative and to include themselves within it. This story succeeds in part because it “stirs affections” as exhortations should, by praising Bolingbroke, by establishing expectations for how Englishmen should act, by encouraging hopes for victory and renown, and by using other appeals that make this narrative what Wilson might describe as “pleasant” and

²⁴ Doty, 195-6.
persuasive. Northumberland tells his compatriots he has “received intelligence” that Bolingbroke has departed Brittany for England with his allies in defiance of his banishment and the king (2.1.277-84). Beyond merely reporting these events, though, Northumberland fashions a heroic narrative, for Bolingbroke’s vessels are “well furnished… / With eight tall ships, three thousand men of war,” representing Bolingbroke as a mighty prince and leader of armies (2.1.285-6). Northumberland then shifts towards a liberation and reformation narrative:

If, then, we shall shake off our slavish yoke,  
Imp out our drooping country’s broken wing,  
Redeem from broking pawn the blemished crown,  
Wipe off the dust that hides our sceptre’s gilt  
And make high majesty look like itself,  
Away with me in post to Ravenspurgh. (2.1.291-6)

Northumberland’s narrative in this scene presents the problems in England as something requiring the action of good men, led by Bolingbroke, to correct. Bolingbroke rationalizes his return from exile using the “feudal logic” of patrimony, as Howard and Rackin observe, but he reframes his reasons “as service to the ‘commonwealth’” (2.3.166-7). Northumberland’s storytelling aids Bolingbroke’s larger narrative aspirations for framing himself as England’s nationalist savior and leader, and this knight serves as Bolingbroke’s most visible ally in taking the crown.

Northumberland’s narrative appeal to his fellow knights stresses how they can choose either feminine servitude under the current leadership or they can choose heroic, masculine roles within the story Northumberland and Bolingbroke author. If they join Bolingbroke, Northumberland tells them, then they would help fashion a new, redemptive narrative for England that recalls its past glories, and they would have significant roles within that story. This logic encourages the listening nobles to see themselves as protagonists within a shared, national

narrative. Northumberland’s recourse to the subjunctive “if” emphasizes the kind of narrative logic Bruner describes in how people choose to cope with or to resolve the peripeteia, in this case the decline England has suffered under Richard (2.1.291). If these lords are content with the state of affairs in England or are “faint” or “[fear] to do” as Northumberland suggests, then they should “Stay and be secret,” adopting a feminine and passive role in the story that develops (2.1.297-8). Adopting such a course also instills a “fear of shame” that Wilson notes can be effective in exhortations. If instead they wish to help restore England, then they should accompany Northumberland and join Bolingbroke in the active and knightly challenge they pursue. The three lords in 2.1 are individuals with choices to make about the current public narrative who have their own opinions on how England ought to be and how things have gone awry. Northumberland represents himself and his friends as slaves to Richard and his flatterers while pointing towards Bolingbroke as the heroic redeemer figure who can help make them free men again while restoring the nation’s health and reputation. That Northumberland disseminates this narrative about Richard and Bolingbroke demonstrates that the number of persons capable of helping author England’s story has expanded beyond the monarch and his immediate rivals.

Other agents quickly recognize that with the dissolution of consensual means of resolving narrative disputes, the field opens for all stories. This tendency becomes apparent at first in 4.1 as Bagot, Fitzwater, Harry Percy (i.e., the Hotspur of I Henry IV), and “Another Lord” all present slightly varying accounts of Aumerle’s alleged complicity in Gloucester’s murder while

28 Bruner, 13-4.
29 Thomas Wilson, 100.
Aumerle rejects all of their stories (4.1.8-56). Surrey, in turn, rejects not Aumerle’s guilt but specifically Fitzwater’s account of it (4.1.61-71). Where Mowbray and Bolingbroke had exchanged gages in a formal manner that would have resulted in their dueling stories being resolved through honorable trial by combat, in this scene seven gages are thrown while Bolingbroke defers resolution until he determines “[their] days of trial” (4.1.106-7). As Marjorie Garber notes, Shakespeare emphasizes the farce of these cast gages through Aumerle having to borrow a gage from someone in the room (4.1.84-6). Narrative chaos has resulted from Richard and Bolingbroke’s rivalry, and Bolingbroke can only hold onto power by resorting to force to silence competing storytellers. In this sense, Bolingbroke works to curtail the aesthetic responses of the rest of England, for these other narratives include alternative ways of conceiving of England’s political reality at odds with Bolingbroke’s authority. Ultimately, he recognizes that he should rein in the out of control storytelling in England, which Bolingbroke tries to do through a master narrative of a united, English crusade at the end of 5.6. Rival interests frustrate Bolingbroke’s narrative hopes, though.

Hotspur becomes one such storyteller concerned not only with the stories he tells but with the kinds of stories others tell about him, reproducing the anxieties about biography and action Bolingbroke had occupied himself with in Richard II. Hotspur represents to Bolingbroke, Kastan observes, a recognition that his “illegitimacy” and “his conception of sovereignty opens a space for resistance, empowering precisely those whom it would subject.” Hotspur’s ambitions reflect Bolingbroke’s “asserted aristocratic privilege against the” traditional narratives of absolute authority that kings supposedly possess. Hotspur first appears in 1 Henry IV presenting a legal accounting to Bolingbroke of his actions in battle while building his ethos as a heroic, chivalrous

30 Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare after All (New York: Anchor, 2005), 267.
31 Kastan, 139-40. See also Grady, 134-6
knight in contrast to the courtiers found in Bolingbroke’s court. Hotspur seeks to particularize his actions and his view of his brother-in-law Mortimer. Mortimer’s “mouthed wounds” give “tongue” to his loyalty in war, Hotspur stresses in a metaphor Shakespeare returns to in *Julius Caesar* (1599) and *Coriolanus* (1605) (see Chapter 5) (1.3.95-6). Hotspur resists the narrative about himself and Mortimer that Bolingbroke advances, a narrative in which Hotspur and Mortimer are foolish and treasonous. Bolingbroke stresses his preferred narrative about Mortimer, though, claiming Hotspur “dost belie [Mortimer]” while Bolingbroke “tell[s]” Hotspur that Mortimer and the rebel Glendower are allies (1.3.113-6). The King warns Hotspur to “speak” no more “of Mortimer” (1.3.118). Bolingbroke forecloses Hotspur’s ability to represent himself and his family through speech or narrative, spurring Hotspur’s decision to rebel.

Hotspur chooses to resist in the pursuit of his own political subjectivity and potentiality by authoring a counter-narrative to Bolingbroke’s, for Hotspur has an obsessive need to revise the narratives of others that do not accord with his own. Stories consume Hotspur’s attention. His father Northumberland tells Worcester how Hotspur’s “Imagination… / Drives him beyond the bounds of patience” (1.3.198-9). Hotspur turns this proclivity for storytelling against Bolingbroke, much as Bolingbroke did against Richard. The knight asks his father to consider the kinds of stories told about Northumberland (and, by extension, Hotspur): how they shall “be spoken” of and appear in “chronicles in time to come” (1.3.169-70). With these concerns in mind, Hotspur strives to perform the kind of heroic character that he wants to be and that would empower him politically. He also internalizes this narrative in an attempt to believe and become that heroic character, not just perform it.

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Hotspur’s storytelling fault, though, is that he is not adaptive or innovative, nor is he willing to admit contrary or potentially conflicting narratives into his carefully woven plot. As Rackin argues, the knight is the only person in *1 Henry IV* “thoroughly animated by the old feudal values.” He rebels against Bolingbroke in the name of those values. While Rackin feels the play never questions Hotspur’s honor, his dogged adherence to that honor—what I term the non-collaborative public narrative he authors—ultimately undermines it, through his “slightly comical enthusiasm” and through his honor dubiously leading him to rebellion in the first place. Hotspur’s honor also serves to undermine “[r]oyal authority,” for the king and Hal have little apparent honor in comparison to Hotspur, leading Hal to appropriate the honor Hotspur possesses. Although Hal and the royals commodify that honor, so that Hal and Hotspur’s “chivalric battle” becomes what Rackin calls “a closely calculated financial transaction,” I situate Hal’s appropriation of that honor in the heroic biography he works to fashion for himself.33 Hotspur remains asocial in his storytelling, refusing to accommodate others. Like Faustus, Hotspur pursues his aesthetic enterprise in a manner that is not socially inclusive or interactively imaginative. From a rhetorical perspective, Hotspur fails to “delight” his audiences with his narrative delivery, choosing instead to belabor his storytelling in a manner that becomes adversarial rather than “pleasant.”34 Lady Percy calls attention to her husband’s monomaniacal and tyrannical approach to narrative when he rejects courtly or romantic love in favor of war stories that feature only him as the hero (2.3.36-63, 86-108). This tendency towards maladaptive storytelling recurs later after Northumberland’s letter explaining his withdrawal from the battle.35 Where Worcester fears how Northumberland’s absence makes others think of the rebels, Hotspur can see only a chance for a heroic, against-all-odds kind of narrative that exalts him (4.1.31-52).

33 Rackin, 77-8.
34 Thomas Wilson, 46-7, 164, 167.
35 Rawdon Wilson, 96.
Hotspur fails to use storytelling as a means for anticipating and dealing with potential problems, and this failure becomes most apparent in Hal’s appropriation of Hotspur’s heroic biography.

The prince demonstrates what a proficient storyteller can do with masculine narratives. In manipulating their publicly perceived roles, capable storytellers should keep the audiences that see the performance of those roles segregated. If these storytellers can do so, then as Goffman notes, they can “quite handily sustain different selves” and narrativize alternative biographies distinct from the accepted story people know.36 Shakespeare implements examples of these multiple biographies through Hal’s and Falstaff’s mutable public lives. Hal recognizes the storytelling efficacy of manipulating his story as a prodigal son while Falstaff refashions his biography for different audiences at different times, from Hal in 1 Henry IV to the Lord Chief Justice in 2 Henry IV.37 In Hal’s case in 1 Henry IV, he schemes to take “all the budding honours on [Hotspur’s] crest” and make them part of his story instead (5.4.71). What Hal takes from Hotspur is ultimately the heroic narrative Hotspur has worked to fashion.

This appropriation comes full circle for Hal at the end of Henry V as he works to woo Katherine, for Hal specifically frames himself as an unlettered, uncourtly soldier who does not know how to woo a princess or to “plead his love-suit to her gentle heart” (5.2.99-277).38 Hal needs that part of Hotspur’s biography that Rackin and Howard argue the public respects—Hotspur’s honor—for Hal’s roleplaying. Where they point to Hal’s versatility as a player, I point instead to Hal’s narrative adaptability and his capacity to appropriate those narrative elements

36 Goffman, 62-3.
that are advantageous for him to perform. Hal’s successful theatricality necessitates fashioning narratives as a precondition for whatever role he chooses to perform. Towards this end, Hal begins authoring a version of his biography that will best suit his purposes of securing authority as King Henry V and of providing stability for England. He incorporates elements of the parable of the prodigal son, plotting out part of the redemptive narrative he fashions for himself. Hal’s soliloquy in 1.2 of *1 Henry IV* shows that he has been crafting his narrative in advance of its performance. In looking to the future “when [his] loose behaviour” amongst the Eastcheap regulars he will “throw off,” Hal shows that he already conceives of the narrative he performs at Shrewsbury and beyond, giving England what he believes is the kind of story people want (1.2.198). Recognizing that he should also frame himself as a sincere, chivalric warrior, Hal claims Hotspur’s honor to help him author and enact this martial narrative. Indeed, Hal represents himself as a knight unaccustomed to wooing or love—a biography suggestive of Hotspur’s—as a means of drawing Katherine into the larger, royal story Hal constructs. Recognizing that his reign and England need a sense of stability and legitimacy, Hal fashions a heroic war narrative that culminates in his victory and his successful marriage to the King of France’s daughter. He incorporates others into narratives that he adapts to circumstances as necessary, and he can then direct the performance of those stories.

Not only does Hal determine how best to perform kingship, but he also works to tailor the narrative framework within which his version of kingship participates. The stories of Bolingbroke and Hal help shape the broader, national narrative, and both men understand that they must fashion their biographies so that the English story they seek to author is, amongst other considerations, publicly palatable. Doing so has rhetorical benefits, for as Wilson argues, rhetoric should “cheer” with its beauty so the audience “take[s] pleasure” in one's rhetoric and engages

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39 Howard and Rackin, 189-92.
it. As Howard argues, Bolingbroke misunderstands what is required for kingship, believing that carefully managed and limited public appearances are necessary, but this form of kingship requires constant use of force to sustain. Hal recognizes that kingship requires continual public performance of the role of monarch, “staging [himself] advantageously before the eyes of the many publics whose allegiance [the king] would woo, rather than coerce.” While Howard emphasizes Hal’s “heroic” “role” in performing kingship, the formation of that role originates from Hal’s ability to construct narratives of political power. He must limit competing narratives, for he “knows,” as Howard avers, that he cannot allow Hotspur to rival him as a beacon of heroic warrior values in England. Where Howard situates Hal’s enterprise as a matter of theatricality in that Hal’s concern is who “play[s]… the role of Prince of Wales,” my emphasis is on Hal fashioning himself as the only chivalric, aristocratic knight in England’s narrative. Hal eliminates Hotspur not only as an actor but also as a storyteller, for Hotspur’s contrary narratives about Hal’s martial prowess detract from those Hal advances. To Hotspur, Hal is “The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,” not the “feathered Mercury” on Pegasus Vernon recounts (4.1.94, 105-8). In defeating Hotspur, Hal reframes himself in the same aesthetic terms that Hotspur uses for imagining his place in England’s narrative. Storytelling as political enterprise entails framing the roles persons perform in public, determining what kind of king, husband, or knight one is. Hal fashions a version of kingship and himself-as-king that his public supports.

Bolingbroke also understands that he should fashion a version of kingship that best legitimizes his reign, and he relies on existing narratives about Crusading and repentance to do so. In reframing himself in these terms, he would situate himself as a good, Christian king within the public sphere in an attempt to counter the poor reputation Richard’s death causes. After

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40 Thomas Wilson, 47.
41 Howard, 143-9.
Exton’s news of Richard’s death, Bolingbroke first utters his desire to “voyage to the Holy Land
/ To wash this blood off” his “guilty hand” (5.6.49-50). Bolingbroke contextualizes these closing
lines in Richard II as a penitential desire, but he also terms Exton’s actions as “A deed of
slander… / Upon my head and all this famous land” (5.6.35-6). Exton’s deed harms the
reputations of Bolingbroke and England. The Crusades become a means for appending a
narrative of redemption and Christian duty to the stories Richard’s murder helps fashion about
Bolingbroke. On his deathbed in 2 Henry IV, though, Bolingbroke tells Hal “By what bypaths
and indirect crook’d ways” he became king and how he

had a purpose…
To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state. (2H4, 4.3.314-5, 339-42)

Near death and alone with his oldest son and heir apparent, Bolingbroke tells Hal that the
Crusading story was to be a distraction, a means to keep the nobility occupied with war against
foreign and non-Christian forces, not idle and interested in Bolingbroke’s crown and estate. In an
instance of cynical realpolitik, the king counsels Hal “to busy giddy minds / With foreign
quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days” (4.3.343-5).
The ultimate outcome, or so Bolingbroke hopes, would be to replace the story of Richard’s fall—
its memory in the minds of the people—and Bolingbroke’s role in that narrative with more
advantageous, more immediate stories of a united England against outsiders.

While Bolingbroke seeks to use Christendom and the Crusades as a unifying narrative,
Hal opts for a more nationalist story in his campaigns against the French. In Henry V, Hal frames
the traitors Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey as “English monsters,” who turned against their king’s
affections and sold their souls in an almost exemplary English manner for “a few light crowns”
(2.2.85-144). Hal represents himself as willing to spare these traitors save that, as he presents it
in his account, their plotting endangered the English and England more than his person (2.2.167-82). In doing so, Hal suggests that England matters far more than himself, a narrative counter to his earlier days of lawlessness and his father’s ego and ambition. Hal’s speeches about the traitors serve as rhetorical exhortations for his subjects, for he reasserts the honorable expectations of his subjects and the “fear of shame” they should inculcate. Hal also uses the traitors’ example to manipulate the “affections” of his subjects.\footnote{Thomas Wilson, 100.} Doing so positions Hal as a champion of the commonwealth, shaping the perception of his rule and popularity within the public sphere.

Hal works to frame the action and narrative he develops as less a matter of his leadership and skill than a matter of English exceptionalism. In the assault on Harfleur, Hal’s “Once more unto the breach” speech exhorts the English army through heroic, nearly mythic terms, for both commoner and noble alike. Hal tells a story in which his men are tigers who are “noble English” descended from multiple Alexander the Greats. These men fight to avoid dishonor and to honor their fathers, fighting not just for their king but also “England and Saint George” (3.1.1-34). He encourages all English men, noble and commoner alike, to participate in this English war story as nominally equal protagonists. Hal also understands the value of a strategically horrific war story during wartime, especially for the consumption of one’s enemies, and the story he tells as he urges Harfleur to surrender is such an example of this kind of narrative. Hal tells the besieged city that he barely controls his army, who are a pagan, violent horde that will utterly despoil and rape the city. Framing his forces as barbaric and unchristian, Hal’s storytelling at Harfleur is, Donald Hedrick suggests, a “violent...[leveraging] of rhetoric.”\footnote{Donald Hedrick, “Advantage, Affect, History, \textit{Henry V},” \textit{PMLA} 118, no. 3 (May 2003): 475.} The English, Hal warns, can act much like the Argives did at Troy or as mercilessly as any number of Herods might, and thrice
he threatens that the city’s young maidens will be raped by the English mob (3.3.5-41). Hal’s forces are no such beasts, but his tale frames the English in exceptional terms, like his earlier monologue. This terrifying story of the English is useful in avoiding further bloodshed and destruction while amplifying the morale and willingness of his soldiers to fight on. Hal uses fiction to accomplish the same ends that martial ability could have accomplished.

Hal recognizes the necessity of controlling his war narrative, for he constrains how the English and the greater world perceive him and his enterprise. He compels his army to act in honorable and courteous ways while in France on pain of death to avoid the English and his war story being seen in cruel terms (3.6.106-12). The extended legal stories of 1.2, led by Canterbury, further seek to ground the planned campaign in legal precedent and lawfulness—as well as the heroic English history of Edward III and Edward the Black Prince (1.2.9-234). The intent in doing so is that the campaign is a just war story and not a story of Hal’s rapacious ambition, which would work counter to his political interests. Hal works to create a war story that unites the British rather than divide them. As Christopher Dowd suggests, Hal uses metaphors of brotherhood to foster a sense of unity among the British forces against the outsider French, as well as against those who will not fight by their king’s side. With this end in mind, Hal provides a means to read the Battle of Agincourt as a master narrative to his soldiers. Agincourt can be a “story” that will be retold repeatedly while those involved “shall be remembered” as those “few, [those] happy few, [that] band of brothers,” not as competing factions or rivals but as those who triumphed together by the side of their king (4.3.56-60). Shakespeare does not represent this story of British nationalism unequivocally, though, for he calls repeated attention to the fictiveness and constructedness of all of these stories, as I argue in the next section.

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This attention to storytelling, especially for the political purposes Bolingbroke, Hal, and other aristocrats turn it towards, underscores how narrative can limit the potentiality and political subjectivity of persons in order to establish state authority. This use of narrative is akin to how authority attempts to constrain Hamlet within a politically-advantageous and concrete identity (see Chapter 2). The forms of resistance that Hamlet engages in—as well as figures like the magician-playwrights, who use occultism as a means towards breaking out of the intellectual and social limitations imposed upon them (see Chapter 3)—have their narrative equivalents in the *Henriad*. The focus of the second tetralogy and Hal’s personal narrative, Grady suggests, is an exploration of how the prince’s “unrealized potentialities” are ultimately constrained through the power politics that seek to impose “a stable identity,” a reified public identity, upon Hal.45 I would add that Shakespeare sees nearly every person in the *Henriad* in danger of a similar reification. The queen wishes for the Gardeners to be just gardeners, subservient and silent, doing their job and fulfilling their established social roles. Instead, they tell their own stories about recent events in the kingdom, likening them to narrative and social conventions they are familiar with: gardening.46 Bolingbroke wishes for Hotspur to be merely a paragon of knightly virtue and not a potential usurper like the king has been. He wishes for Hal to be a virtuous knight and son and prince. Hal wishes to impose a singular identity upon the English in *Henry V* and at the end of *2 Henry IV*, and in doing so, he wishes Falstaff and the Eastcheap regulars to become what Hal wants or needs. Storytelling and the recourse to the aesthetic become means to resist this reification of subjectivity, not just for Hal or Falstaff but for the Eastcheap regulars, Hotspur, and everyone else. If storytelling allows Machiavellians to legitimize and pursue power,

45 Grady, 172-3, 185.
46 The Gardener’s story “interprets” recent political events “and offers his own commentary” on those events, but Doty sees Bolingbroke’s political language as influencing the Gardener’s choice of metaphors, the kind of story being told. See Doty, 197.
then it can also serve as a means for other Machiavellians to contest that power or to seek their political subjectivity in the public sphere.

Falstaff and the Commoners as Models for Political Storytelling

Although the *Henriad* privileges aristocratic narratives and voices, the tetralogy also subverts them through structural devices, like the choric figures found in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, and through Falstaff and the Eastcheap regulars. The last two plays in the *Henriad* emphasize the narrative frame of the history plays and draw audience attention to the fictiveness of the action onstage. The Chorus from *Henry V* may be an attempt on Shakespeare’s part to mediate the play as a form of royal pageantry or to mediate it for a courtly audience.47 As Rackin argues, choric figures like Chorus and Rumour also help “disrupt, parody, and interrupt the historical action to undermine the authority of historical representation,” for these figures demonstrate to the audience their mediated experience of the narrative as a matter of staging and scripting.48 These figures reflect an intrusion of the audience’s present circumstances into the supposed historical action, encouraging spectators to consider the kinds of stories performed onstage. On their own, these choric figures would emphasize the narrative frame, but not necessarily subvert it. Shakespeare juxtaposes the Eastcheap regulars’ subaltern storytelling against the heroic, serious narratives Bolingbroke and Hal advance. Falstaff and the regulars more pointedly undermine the normative storytelling that the main heroic plots advance, specifically through the regulars’ narrative commentary and the storytelling in which they themselves engage.

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48 Rackin, 29. See also Howard and Rackin, 186; Meredith Evans, “Rumor, the Breath of Kings, and the Body of Law in *2 Henry IV*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1-24; and Blinde, 34-54.
Critics emphasize Falstaff’s theatricality rather than his storytelling ability, and they do not link Falstaff’s and the Eastcheap regulars’ subversiveness with the narrative frame the choric figures highlight for audiences. Falstaff’s resistance to any “defined” role in society leads Rackin to observe his similarity to the “chameleon players” antitheatricalists attacked.\(^4^9\) The subversiveness of Falstaff develops in part through his theatricality, which he uses in part “to invert and resist” the same political pressures that Grady argues seek to fashion Hal into a single, normative identity.\(^5^0\) While Grady notes Falstaff’s “ability to create and live within…fictions,” this aesthetic skill also offers audiences a model for political subjectivity that shows the means through which persons may fashion their public biographies.\(^5^1\) Falstaff’s fictions afford audiences a more familiar context than examples from traditional, aristocratic characters, given Falstaff’s ability to negotiate multiple strata of English society. Although Falstaff is not present in *Henry V*, the Eastcheap regulars continue this aestheticenterprise while undermining Hal’s unifying war narrative. Responses to the regulars center on their farcical characterization or on theatrical alienation as a strategy on Shakespeare’s part through them. Critics like Rackin and Grady see the regulars as anachronistic, theater-savvy characters that are closer to the audiences’ lives than any historical character.\(^5^2\) This audience familiarity helps highlight, with the choric devices of the play, the narrative frame upon which Hal’s story in *Henry V* relies. The regulars also allow audiences to imagine alternate interpretations of that official narrative. Although none of the regulars has the narrative *sprezzatura* that Falstaff possesses, let alone Falstaff’s popularity as a character, they can be sympathetic and nonetheless popular, as title page advertisements

\(^4^9\) Rackin, 234-5.
\(^5^0\) Howard, 142; and Grady, 143-4.
\(^5^1\) Grady, 143-4, 148.
\(^5^2\) Rackin, 139-42; Grady, 190-1; Howard, 140; and Crunelle-Vanrigh, 369-71.
suggest for characters like Pistol. The regulars demonstrate possible opportunities of which potential political subjects can take advantage.

The lesson Bolingbroke and Hal teach England in these plays is that, if popularity is a means towards public power of some kind, then the manipulation of one’s popularity and the popularity of others becomes a necessary skill. While aristocrats understood the necessity for propagating useful public narratives about themselves and the institutions that sustained and justified their authority, they were by no means unique in knowing this. Popularity offers persons one avenue towards fashioning their public biographies. As Doty notes, early modern attitudes about popularity reflected authorities’ anxieties on the subject, for popularity invited critique and judgment on public figures and “matters of state.” In the *Henry IV* plays, though, Bolingbroke takes his son to task for being popular, Kastan argues, because “Henry [believes]…‘popularity’ enslaves” a prince to the public. Bolingbroke’s version of kingship relies upon “sovereigns…‘dazz[ing]’ their public audiences.” Royal power may result from “the effect of [its] representation and its authorization” rather than its concrete actuality, but storytelling offers Falstaff and others opportunities to use representation in the pursuit of power themselves. Storytelling affords Falstaff and company the power to determine to some degree how they participate within the public sphere.

Shakespeare underlines the arbitrariness and artifice of these stories in the latter half of the *Henriad* through his use of choric figures. Unlike *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* frame their plots through monologues presented by Rumour, Epilogue, and, in *Henry V*, Chorus. Rumour and Epilogue in *2 Henry IV* invite audiences to evaluate the many stories that circulate on the stage—and by extension the rumors and literary stories that Shakespeare offers.

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53 Doty, 189-98.
54 Kastan, 138-40.
us in the *Henriad*—with suspicion even as these figures remind audiences of the power that stories offer. The presence of prologue figures is not unusual on the early modern stage, and Rumour in particular had an established symbology in the period to which Shakespeare adheres (*2H4*, 117n0.1). As an allegorical figure, Rumour exemplifies the constructed nature of the narratives and storytelling that Shakespeare and his subjects engage in as Rumour appears onstage “*painted full of tongues*” and calls on the audience to “Open [their] ears” (*2H4*, 117, 0.1). Rumour’s design and invocation to its audience emphasize the consumption of stories. The display of tongues, the apparatus for both speech and taste, highlights these acts, and the call to open the audiences’ ears primes them to take in that which Rumour offers them. Rumour gives the audience a gloss on its nature: it is quick and wide-ranging and “Upon [its] tongues continual slanders ride” providing “the ears of men with false reports” (0.3-8). However, Rumour is paradoxically forthright with its audience.

Shakespeare uses Rumour and Epilogue in *2 Henry IV* to invite audiences to judge the narratives these choric figures present, and Rumour’s truthfulness and attention to storytelling emphasize the narrative frame for audiences. Rumour provides a traditional description of itself, as Shakespeare draws on Virgil’s account of “Fama” from the *Aeneid*, before recounting an accurate summation of the Battle of Shrewsbury as Shakespeare scripted it in *1 Henry IV* (117n0.1, 0.23-7). Rumour does acknowledge the question of its veracity, asking, “But what mean I / To speak so true at first?” (0.27-8). It outlines the major, false stories circulating in Shakespeare’s version of post-Shrewsbury England, especially the tales of Hal’s and Bolingbroke’s deaths in battle (0.28-32). In reminding audiences of the competition between stories and their tellers, Rumour encourages them to judge the merits of these stories and to recognize their fictiveness. The Epilogue, in turn, begins in a traditional, apologist mode the
period’s drama evinces but concludes by pointing to stories. “If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat,” Epilogue tells the audience, “our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it” (Epilogue.25-7). Epilogue points to Falstaff as a main attraction for storytelling, but it also points to future stories with “fair Katherine of France,” that is the story of *Henry V* and the tale of Hal’s wooing of the French princess (Epilogue.27-31). While serving as an ad for *Henry V*, the Epilogue reinforces the audience’s sense that they are watching stories, fictions, rather than some historical truth.

The narrative structure of the plays of the *Henriad* grows more episodic in nature as the tetralogy progresses, and this structure presents Hal’s heroic narrative in *Henry V* as a series of loosely connected, mediated tales for the audience to consume. *Richard II* possesses a comparatively conventional narrative structure. In contrast, *1 Henry IV* with its splits in action from the court to the tavern world to Wales and beyond suggests a far more episodic structure that grows more distinctive as the *Henriad* progresses. *2 Henry IV*’s structure is even more episodic, emphasizing Falstaff’s misadventures, schemes, and storytelling before we reach the overtly vignette-driven structure of *Henry V*. The concluding play consists of collections of stories connected together by onstage storytellers, the Chorus, who call attention to the fact that what audiences watch is not history while emphasizing the frames mediating those stories. The use of the Chorus for *Henry V* suggests very particular kinds of stories: heroic tales that call on the audience to internalize the English myths offered to them. The Chorus points towards epic genres, especially given the Chorus’s invocation of “a muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention” (0.1-2). Serving this mythic, Hal-centric narrative, the Chorus opines how much more glorious the stage would be “should the warlike [historical] Harry… /

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55 This passage also calls attention to the name change from Oldcastle to Falstaff, perhaps a public concession and gesture to assure the Lord Chamberlain that Shakespeare had indeed worked to change Oldcastle’s name. See Kastan, 93-106.
Assume the port of Mars” (0.5-6). The audience must marshal their “imaginary forces” even as they supply their own imagined military forces given the limitations of the physical stage (0.18, 120n18).56 The Chorus calls on audiences to accept these mythic English narratives and to realize those stories through their imaginations. Shakespeare also provides spectators with an alternative and more subversive chorus in the Eastcheap regulars and Falstaff. In his confrontation with Coleville in 2 Henry IV, Falstaff associates himself with Rumour in particular: “I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name” (4.2.18-20).57 Indeed, Falstaff identifies himself as being a large enough bulk to hold a chorus of his own.

As a choric figure, Falstaff straddles multiple levels of society, his gentle associations defying attempts to render him as exclusively a commoner character. The character’s aristocratic and cultural associations grow out of his original attribution as Sir John Oldcastle in early productions of 1 Henry IV, with Kastan arguing that, even after the name change, the persona of Falstaff demonstrated his “popularity...[to be] virtually proverbial” and capable of “captivat[ing] an audience.”58 Critics have otherwise associated Falstaff with Shakespeare’s representation of royals like Richard III and Richard II and observed topical associations between Falstaff and Elizabeth’s aging court favorites.59 Furthermore, Falstaff’s girth arguably marks him as upper-class, for he can functionally afford, through his wealth or through his cunning, to eat as much as he does. His noble position as a gentleman distinguishes him from the other Eastcheap regulars, none of whom rises above the rank of lieutenant. Despite these markers of a high position, his

57 Philip Hardie also examines this passage, but he frames the association of Falstaff with Rumour within representations of Fame in the early modern period. See Philip Hardie, Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 506.
58 Kastan, 105.
59 Howard and Rackin, 166; and Jacqueline Vanhoutte, “‘Age in Love’: Falstaff among the Minions of the Moon,” ELR 43, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 86-127.
lewd appetites and obsession with pleasure suggest that he is ungentle, or at least call into question his suitability for the aristocracy.

Indeed, early modern audiences aware of the character showed a willingness to use Falstaff for political and narrative purposes offstage, demonstrating that Shakespeare’s character served as a model for behavior while helping shape public discourse on a variety of topics. The Earl of Essex and others used Falstaff as a mocking nickname to stain the reputations of their rivals, such as Lord Cobham, and Essex invoked Falstaff as a negative model for behavior to avoid. However, as Charles Whitney suggests, Falstaff also became an emblem of “affirmative comedy” and “conjugal affection,” as Elizabeth Wriothesley, Countess of Southampton’s invocation of the name in a private letter to her husband suggests. Falstaff offered a narrative example of “triumph[ing] over scandal,” and Wriothesley’s use of the name is affectionate when she wrote it in reference to Cobham as she informed her husband of Cobham’s wife’s pregnancy. Falstaff’s example may have also reminded Wriothesley of her own recent problems with sexual scandal as one of Elizabeth’s ladies-in-waiting. As Whitney argues, this more positive association showcases how Falstaff helps “expose and resist” the assignation of concrete identity, encouraging audiences to question “who imposes identity on [them].” As a model, Falstaff can show how one can be “an erotic, self-possessed partner” and “triumph over scandal.”60 If Hamlet resists in part the control of his physical desires and impositions upon his body to pursue his own freedom (see Chapter 2), then Falstaff occupies a far freer position from the outset of 1 Henry IV. Hal’s and others’ attempts to rein in Falstaff’s “trunk of humours” represent attempts to discipline and constrain the old man (IH4, 2.4.437). Falstaff’s

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carnivalesque qualities and his overall success provide audiences with a potential model of action. That model, while unhealthy and lewd, resists attempts at constraining personal liberty while demonstrating the theatrical and narrative canniness necessary to find advantage in early modern England.

That Falstaff could serve as a model for common citizens becomes more apparent in the figure of the projector, which emphasizes his performative mutability and narrative dexterity as advantageous traits. The projector satirized these kinds of public storytellers, persons like Falstaff but who were commoners, by linking them with Machiavelli even as they were distinctly unprincely figures. Indeed, the projector demonstrates how many, including antitheatricalists, might feel about characters like Falstaff, who could inspire commoner spectators to imitate the old man’s qualities, thus treating him as a model for behavior within the public sphere. Thomas Heywood connects theater and commercial enterprise through these projectors in his *Machiavel, as He Lately Appeared to His Deare Sons, the Moderne Proiectors* (1641). As Douglas Bruster argues, authors of satires referenced the theater and imagined “canny reader[s]” familiar with London’s “public spaces” and who were capable of recognizing the allusions, misquotations, and references of theatrical productions. Satires assumed their readers would be familiar with the individual styles of playwrights, whether that playwright was Robert Greene or Shakespeare.61 Heywood likens projectors to players whose “scene was the whole Kingdome,” and his extended character sketch of the projector evokes Falstaff as an exemplar of this type. A projector is a commercially-minded fellow whose “Education” begins with poetry that “infect[s] [him] with strauge raptures…and whimsies.”62

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the *Henry IV* plays that hawk “the humorous conceits of Sir Iohn Falstaffe.” What these title pages advertise is Falstaff’s capacity for fictiveness, his “conceits” and “humorous” qualities, the fanciful judgments and ideas he articulates that are, ultimately, stories he tells about others and himself. Projectors, and more specifically Falstaff, were storytellers—or liars from a more conservative perspective—who disrespected and judged their betters through their actions, even though those actions might be popular amongst audiences.

This capacity for judgment, and its encouragement for spectators through the potential for imitation, drew antitheatricalists’ ire against theater and figures like Falstaff who could shape the public sphere. Stephen Gosson attacked the theater in 1582 for transforming “an assemblie” of commoners into “the judges of faultes” of the aristocracy. Others, like the authors of *Th’overthrow of Stage-Playes* (1599), argue that acts onstage that showed “hypocritcall faining of lyes...beggerie, wrath, and shedding of blood” acquainted players with such vices. The act of mimesis could inspire and instruct players—and spectators—“how [they] might wreake [their] anger,” and where some players and audiences might “be the woorse for beholding or playing of the best partes,” the virtuous protagonists, these critics worried about “what harme might [audiences] receaue by the parts of” the villains and clowns. Heywood arguably models his projectors on Falstaff’s example. While Rackin associates Richard III’s theatricality with the projectors and implies a similar connection for Falstaff, the life of John Taylor suggests a more

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64 “conceit, n.,” *OED Online*, June 2012, Oxford University Press; and “humorous, adj.,” *OED Online*, June 2012, Oxford University Press.


direct connection between Falstaff and the projectors. A prolific, popular, and diverse writer of the early 1600s who associated with many playwrights, Taylor was a commoner who Nigel Wheale notes would have made “a useful study for the role” of Falstaff for John Heminge, who may have played Falstaff onstage. Taylor wrote such pamphlets as *Laugh, and be Fat* (1612) and praised Falstaff’s favorite drink, sack, in his *Drink and Welcome* (1637). Taylor “used publication to create and promote himself as a celebrity” in a manner that Wheale connects directly with Falstaff and in a manner that suggests the manipulation of biography I associate with the projectors. Falstaff becomes a realization of antitheatricalists’ fears of commoners using the models they saw onstage for public behavior at odds with normative expectations.

Indeed, projectors are mutable personalities given to the same kinds of craft and cunning for which Falstaff grew famous. In Heywood’s account, the projector studies “Lawyers Lattin,” much as Justice Shallow recounts of Falstaff at the Inns of the Court in his legal training. While the projector may seem “honest…and politicke” at first glance, he is ultimately a con artist who relies on “Aiery hopes” and “his mouth” for funding, rather than an honest trade. Social shapechangers, projectors can adopt any guise they desire, becoming any number of character types—“a decayed Merchant, a broken Citizen, a silent Minister,” amongst other examples—and the projector “hath more wit than honestie.” Such a description certainly seems Falstaffian while suggesting that Falstaff himself, through his popularity in the period, may have inspired commoners to adopt similar strategies as they sought social mobility in early modern England.

For projectors and persons like Falstaff, theatricality is only one skill that they should cultivate; narrative ability and adaptability are necessary skills to develop in order to be

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67 Rackin, 73-4, 234-5.
69 Heywood, B3v-4v.
successful in the public sphere. Projectors need to shape the discourse about who and what they are to garner the best opportunities for advancement. As Rackin notes, what Heywood satirizes are the “new men” of the Renaissance and the forms of self-representation in which they necessarily engaged. 70 These persons should become Falstaffian commoners. While the projector’s performative associations are obvious, Goffman’s arguments about biography are pertinent. Pretending to be something other than what one actually is in the short term is perhaps easy enough. To sustain what Goffman calls “different selves,” the various identities Heywood says projectors can assume, requires the fashioning of believable and appropriately detailed biographies. 71 These personal narratives inform a projector’s ability to inhabit different roles theatrically while providing their audiences a social framework for inserting the projector into the network of associations audiences know and recognize. Successfully performing social roles, including authority, requires an understanding of the stories and narrative logic that undergirds those roles, which Falstaff possesses.

Where Heywood satirizes the projectors and figures like Falstaff for their fictiveness, Wilson notes that successful orators should cultivate many of these qualities, especially laughter and storytelling ability. The ability to cause laughter is very important for an orator to avoid tedium and to “quicken” listeners so they remain engaged. The ability to move people to laughter, “to cheer men,” is a rare “gift” according to Wilson that orators should cultivate, and despite the opinion of some that such a gift is “a trifle,” the wit to spur others to laughter offers rhetors a powerful tool. To cause another person to laugh is to overcome and master momentarily the bodies, minds, and passions of an audience. If orators can make their audiences laugh, then they control their audiences and can direct that laughter against rivals. Otherwise, “pleasantness”

70 Rackin, 74-5.
71 Goffman, 62-3.
in rhetoric develops often from storytelling, as Falstaff often does, and these stories fashion an aesthetic version of a person or character that audiences can easily imagine as being “lively done,” that takes on imaginative life in the minds of listeners. Wilson terms this a kind of “counterfeiting” that requires the storytelling rhetor not to belabor the tale to the point of tedium or foolish “bibble-babble.” 72 From a rhetorical perspective, what projectors actually craft through their playing and storytelling are aesthetic versions of themselves that should be persuasive and believable to those who encounter them. Storytelling, wit, and humor serve rhetorical purposes, purposes that encourage the kind of critical reflection that Joel B. Altman locates in rhetoric’s use by playwrights and in its use onstage. 73 The playfulness with language that orators should develop and use to delight audiences also helps train orators to be adaptable to their audiences and circumstances.

Falstaff’s narrative play progresses over the Henry IV plays as a means of adapting himself to the exigencies of the moment, and even when caught in his lies, the skill he demonstrates in his storytelling is enough to entertain his audience and ameliorate the consequences, in most cases. For example, after the Gadshill robbery in 1 Henry IV, Hal penetrates Falstaff’s fictional account and hears alternate tales from Bardoll and Peto, as well.74 What is notable in Falstaff’s accounts of the robbery is his narrative (and theatrical) sprezzatura in storytelling. Falstaff frames Hal’s supposed absence at the robbery as cowardice before launching into his fabricated story of his battle against the increasing numbers of foes that beset him (2.4.119-241). Hal sought to trick Falstaff in the first place and exposes his fiction, but the gentleman effortlessly and instantly revises his story. Falstaff knew it was the Prince, but he did

72 Thomas Wilson, 164-70.
74 For Kastan’s commentary on the naming of Bardoll’s character in 1 Henry IV in comparison to “Bardolph” in the later plays that include the character, see 1H4, 138n19.
not want to harm Hal, the heir apparent, or so he frames his actions (2.4.259-67). Falstaff uses his storytelling prowess to recover from the exposed lie while seeking to present himself not as a rogue and coward, but a loyal subject who set aside his own ego to play along with Hal’s jest. Indeed, Falstaff’s narrative skill is what satisfies Hal in this scene. “What trick, what device, what starting-hole,” he asks Falstaff, “canst thou now find to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?” (2.4.255-7). Hal wishes to see how spontaneously adept Falstaff can be with narrative. Ultimately “content” with Falstaff’s story, Hal may confirm Falstaff lies in questioning Bardoll and Peto, but he values Falstaff’s narrative and theatrical ability, asking Peto “in earnest” about the specifics of Falstaff’s preparations for his fiction (2.4.271-2, 294). His questioning suggests a fellow storyteller’s and player’s professional interest in the devices and techniques of an old master.

Where young and physically capable men like Hotspur create and live out heroic stories to elevate themselves, Falstaff understands that persons often only need to tell good stories to achieve similar ends, subverting the Henriad’s early emphasis on martial ability. He does nothing if not tell stories about himself, always to his credit if he can help it. Falstaff may be an impoverished knight, “as poor as Job,” but he is just as virtuous, he suggests, having fought for his king and country while striving to be “a careful friend and a true subject” to Hal, despite his faults (2H4, 1.2.123-7, 161-72, 181-90, 201-14, 319-20). In stealing Hal’s triumph over Hotspur, he frames Hal’s account as “lying” before launching into his own version, “the strangest tale that I ever heard,” Lancaster observes (5.4.146-54). Hal seems to acquiesce to Falstaff’s storytelling as they stand before Lancaster, and Hal offers to “gild” Falstaff’s “lie,” supporting it with “the happiest terms [he] has” (5.4.157-8). In doing so, Hal recognizes that questioning Falstaff’s account would diminish his own claims for Hotspur’s honor and place Hal in direct narrative
competition with an old, fat man. Hal realizes that such a situation would not augment his reputation or self-narrativization, so he must content himself with his heroic defense of the king against the Douglas, which serves a similar, though not identical, narrative purpose for Hal. Falstaff exaggerates his battle prowess so that the story grants him the rewards without the sacrifices others like Hal might make, for he weaves tales of heroism to his political and social advantage. In this sense, what Falstaff does is no different than what Hal does at Harfleur in *Henry V* with his tale of potential English savagery. Falstaff gains honor from claiming Hotspur’s defeat, and Falstaff defeats Coleville by virtue of the false reputation his storytelling prowess has inhered in his name (*2H4*, 4.2.10-20). Storytelling and verbal ability have triumphed over the martial skill that the aristocratic world, exemplified through Mowbray and Hotspur, valued earlier in the *Henriad*.

As much as Falstaff engages in fictionalizing himself, perhaps just as important is his capacity to recognize the fictions of others. Falstaff recognizes and reflects upon “his fictionality” as well as his “representationality [and] his true-to-lifeness,” and he is Hamlet-like in that he detaches himself “from [the] action and comments upon it.”75 In contrast, even as Hotspur weaves his narratives of epic heroism, he believes his stories are truer than they actually are. Hotspur’s belief is such that Northumberland and Worcester exploit his narrative obsessiveness, for they tell Hotspur the kinds of stories he wants to hear that benefit their purposes. For example, Northumberland’s tale of his “inward sickness” to Hotspur frames his father’s absence while encouraging his son “To see how fortune” treats his battle against Bolingbroke (*1H4*, 4.1.31-52). In turn, Worcester lies to Hotspur, telling a story of Worcester’s parley with Bolingbroke different from what the audience witnesses (5.2.3-25, 36-88). In

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75 Rawdon Wilson, 163; and R. W. Desai, *Falstaff: A Study of His Roles in Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Delhi: Doaba House, 1976), 133.
contrast, Falstaff understands the fictionality of many forms of social interaction, especially the fictions used to justify war. As Doty argues, Shakespeare encourages audiences “to understand, reflect upon, or resist how” social elites manipulate the public through “emotional appeals.”

Falstaff fulfills this role in the Henry IV plays by countering the stories Hal and Bolingbroke offer. From a rhetorical perspective, Falstaff recognizes the nature of amplification, the increasing of the significance of elements in an oratory to further a cause, and amplification often relies upon what Wilson calls “exaggerat[ion]” to help frame what is supposedly important. For example, after Hal utters a heroic couplet—“The land is burning, Percy stands on high, / And either we or they must lower lie.”—Falstaff gently mocks his bombast (3.3.202-3). Falstaff identifies that what Hal invokes is a kind of story: “Rare words!” (3.3.204). The old knight renders Hal’s heroic war story into the mock heroism of “breakfast” and recasts the “tavern” as Falstaff’s “drum” (3.3.204-5). Exposing the prince’s language as artificial, Falstaff easily directs that language towards other, humbler ends, exposing the artificiality of Hal’s amplification.

In critiquing war stories as a political tool, Falstaff points to the consequences and artifice of heroic storytelling at Shrewsbury, suggesting that Shakespeare sees capable political storytellers as needing the ability to judge the stories they encounter. When Hal and Hotspur engage in their long-expected battle, Falstaff exposes the artifice of what is happening on stage by reminding audiences of the performative frame. While the two knights fight, Falstaff cheers on Hal: “Well said, Hal! To it, Hal! Nay, you shall find no boy’s play here, I can tell you” (5.4.74-5). Almost immediately, the Douglas enters and “fighteth with Falstaff, who falls down as if he were dead” (3.3.329). In performance, audiences would likely compare the seriousness of

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76 Doty, 185.
77 Thomas Wilson, 147-9.
Hal’s encounter with Hotspur to Falstaff’s with the Douglas. The farce of his confrontation with the Douglas tarnishes Hal’s duel while calling attention to its staging. Beyond this scene, Falstaff has no misapprehensions concerning war and war stories. Falstaff’s soliloquies and speeches suggest that, beyond the heroic stories persons like Hal and Hotspur tell about themselves, other doomed and far humbler men populate most war narratives. Storytelling ability and adaptability matter significantly when dealing with war.

In recognizing the conventions of war stories and the narratives that men craft in order to justify or to escape war, Falstaff can better frame his narratives and outmaneuver his storytelling competitors. Falstaff demonstrates that, in order to avoid being taken in by the stories of others, whether those stories come from con-men or nobles, he should recognize the kinds of narratives disseminated around him and adapt his tales to best take advantage of the situation. Even as Falstaff abuses his powers by impressing men into military service for monetary gain, the wealthy, he tells us, are cowards when it comes to war and “have bought out their services” (4.2.22). The only remaining potential soldiers are “slaves as ragged as Lazarus...unjust servingmen, younger sons to younger brothers,” and similarly haggard men who must fill the ranks (4.2.23-8). The majority of men who go to war and populate Hal’s war story serve as faceless background characters who can “fill a pit as well” as anyone else, for they are “mortal men” (4.2.65-6). Falstaff juxtaposes the conventions of war narratives in which one side triumphs over the other, making heroes of the victors, with the reality that men will die. War stories often represent these deaths as heroic sacrifices or as the horrid, but necessary, price of war. Falstaff undermines these conventions of the genre in calling attention to the pitiful soldiers he recruits and those who escape war. Only those who entirely avoid the war and the story that
unfolds from it, like the wealthy men who buy exemptions from service, can escape the potential of dying in battle that claims not only commoners but also nobles like Blount.

In 2 Henry IV, Falstaff revisits this theme, and Shakespeare shows how most commoners are likely to narrate themselves into acquiescing to authority and official narratives. As Mouldy and Bullcalf tell their own tales in an attempt to escape military service—Mouldy’s mother (or another woman) needs him while Bullcalf has been ill lately and feels unfit for service—Falstaff allows those men who can buy their way out of the army to do so (3.2.109-13, 173-80). Others, like Feeble, can only narrate their way into joining the war willingly, for Feeble frames himself as a free agent who accepts the responsibility to fight for his king (3.2. 220-9). Falstaff assures Justice Shallow that “spare men” (i.e., superfluous but also lean and thin men) are the best to recruit for war for they have the best chance at living, if not fighting. They “will do well” in playing their assigned roles in the battles and stories to come (3.2.247-76). Though Falstaff is noble himself, his liminal social position calls attention to the stories that the nobles and commoners tell. Falstaff is not the only vehicle Shakespeare uses to do so.

The narrativization the Eastcheap regulars engage in most often is gossip, but even this seemingly idle form of storytelling serves important political functions, especially for subaltern speakers. Gossip can be a kind of “distilled malice” that “plays with reputations, circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods” about the actions and motivations of persons, Patricia Meyer Spacks notes. For those with “political or social ambitions,” gossip offers means to “manipulate[e]…reputation.” Gossipers can work against rivals, can engage envy or rage “by diminishing another,” and can “generate [a]…sense of power” in themselves through this form of storytelling. Shakespeare often uses gossip for these purposes in the Henriad, even calling

79 “spare, adj. and adv.” OED Online, June 2012, Oxford University Press.
explicit attention to the concept through Rumour at the beginning of 2 Henry IV. In Richard II, nobles engage in gossip, especially when they feel too subjected by the king. For example, the Duchess of Gloucester gossips with John of Gaunt in 1.2 about Richard’s complicity in Gloucester’s death. This gossip affords the Duchess the opportunity to “complain” of her mistreatment and to frame her narrative of what has befallen England’s aristocracy since Richard’s accession (1.2.42). More importantly, though, is how gossip affords commoners opportunities for narrative participation in the public sphere in the Henriad.

Gossip allows for self-reflection through stories about others, allowing gossipers to learn from others’ examples and to adapt to emerging social circumstances, and this use appears in the tetralogy through the Eastcheap regulars, Falstaff, and even Hal. In particular, gossip is a tool for the “subordinated” to express themselves in a safe context and to demonstrate “solidarity.” This use of gossip appears in Henry V as Pistol and his companions reflect on the war’s effects on the soldiery. Gossip has a dramatic component, for gossipers not only relate supposed events but they also often speak “in the voice of an individual’s imagined opponent, thus embodying the force [the gossiper] fears.” This impersonation allows gossipers an opportunity, Spacks observes, to “manipulate[e]…power relations” by “taking imaginative possession of another’s experience.” Such is arguably the case when Hal role-plays as his father with Falstaff or impersonates Hotspur’s histrionic heroism in 1 Henry IV (2.4.373-468, 99-108). Although Hal is the heir apparent, at this stage of his life, he occupies a subordinate position in comparison to many of his peers because of his association with the tavern world. This performative storytelling allows Hal opportunities to anticipate potential problems while affording him a chance to confront his own feelings and motivations in a controlled context.

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81 Spacks, 4-5.
82 Spacks, 8, 20-2.
For the Eastcheap regulars, gossip allows them to advance a counternarrative at odds with the unifying English stories that*Henry V* otherwise advances, for the regulars consistently defy the narratives that Hal seeks to impose on Britain. In addressing the language orators should use, Wilson consistently advocates the use of “plain words” to convey the substance of one’s argument or the narration of the matter at hand clearly, concisely, and pleasantly, in a manner of “speech as most men [use].” The regulars’ gossip has the advantage of engaging the audience within a familiar discursive context that helps to expose the artificiality of onstage aristocratic storytelling, spurring critical engagement with it. The regulars first appear in*Henry V* in 2.1, after the announcement of the campaign, and Bardolph tries to reconcile Nym and Pistol so they may “be all three sworn brothers to France” (2.1.12-3). Here the discord between Nym and Pistol compares to the “Confirmed conspiracy” of the traitors Scroop and company, suggesting that, while Hal may desire a united English peoples, the reality is otherwise (2.0.27). The traitors are not the only ones resistant to such a unification narrative, though.

That narrative includes Hal’s treatment of Falstaff at the end of 2*Henry IV* and before the action of*Henry V*begins, and the regulars first begin countering Hal’s narrative in*Henry V* as they mourn Falstaff’s passing. Critics like Rackin and Howard have noted that Hal must banish Falstaff and those “who challenge the heroic story” Hal fashions and “who do not assent to the king’s logic,” which attempts to make “the interests” of the English elite “the interests of all.” Where they use *logic*, a particular mode of reasoning, I situate Hal’s enterprise in his narrative and its dominance. Hal works to impose a master narrative on England, and Hal must eliminate competing stories, competing logical systems, like Falstaff’s, or reframe them into acceptable

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84 Rackin, 240-3; and Howard and Rackin, 179.
versions. In commenting upon Hal’s treatment of Falstaff, the criticism from the regulars is pointed, but gentle. The Hostess observes that “The King has killed [Falstaff’s] heart” through Hal’s rejection of Falstaff at the end of 2 Henry IV (2.1.88). Nym and Pistol criticize Hal’s role in Falstaff’s decline, with Nym noting “The King hath run bad humours on the knight,” suggesting Hal has not treated Falstaff as the friend he once was and should be, though this criticism is guarded and mild, given Pistol’s social position (2.1.121-6, 166n121). Nonetheless, in critiquing Hal’s treatment of Falstaff and recounting the tale of his last, pathetic days, the regulars invite audiences to sympathize with one of their favorites and to mourn his absence. They remind spectators how Hal has chosen to reframe himself from his earlier, wild days with Falstaff while the king now fashions a narrative for himself as a just, enlightened sovereign.

Pistol further undercuts Hal’s heroic English narrative by framing the nation as cutthroat and treacherous in his gossip with his wife, in contrast to the king’s preferred story of national fraternity. Critical approaches to Pistol typically take a dim view of him, seeing the character as representing a “woeful English condition” that needs correction or as a clown Shakespeare uses to parody histrionic 1590s acting styles. Despite this view, the attention given to Pistol, and his popularity as a member of the regulars, situates him as a less successful, less canny commoner version of Falstaff. Like Falstaff in the Henry IV plays, Pistol was popular enough to merit appearing on the title page of Henry V after mention of Hal’s “battell fought at Agin Court,” and he appears again on the title page advertisements for The Merrie Wiues of Windsor. Pistol is like Heywood’s projectors, given his appropriations of various theatrical and literary stories,

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even if he is not always clear or successful in doing so. Before the regulars depart for war in *Henry V*, Pistol counsels his wife, the Hostess, how to comport herself during his absence in France: “Let senses rule. The word is ‘Pitch and pay’. / Trust none” (2.3.47-51). Notably, Pistol’s normal Marlovian manner is less evident in this passage, though he still affects the poetic style that is his staple. That style, though, helps draw emphasis to elements of this passage. He tells her to be wary in a practical vein, trusting to common sense and to avoid granting credit (185n47).\(^{87}\) Pistol’s rhythm, syncopated through its stops and syntactical divisions, forces him and his audience to dwell on each piece of advice. The first line remains iambic pentameter, but the very short line, “Trust none,” constitutes a single iamb (the accent falls on *none*).

Alternatively, and more likely in performance given the emphasis the short line produces, the line is a spondee in which both syllables are stressed. Isolated in terms of rhythm, the standalone line “Trust none” pushes Pistol’s meaning beyond pragmatic advice concerning customers to a more general and emphatic *trust no one at all about anything*. After all, he tells the Hostess, “oaths are straws,” despite the heroic narratives Hal tries to impress upon England (2.3.49). These counter-choric moments only grow more insistent in the battles in France.

For all the calls to heroism and fame that Hal heaps upon his soldiery, the Eastcheap regulars defy Hal’s sentiments at every opportunity, offering audiences a counterpoint to the nationalist frame upon which Hal insists. Immediately after Hal’s “Once more unto the breach” speech and his call for the armies to fight for him, Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, and the Boy rush onstage (3.1.34). While Bardolph nominally calls on them to press “On, on, on, on, on, to the breach,” Nym notes “the knocks are too hot” and that he does not “have…a case of lives,” to which Pistol agrees (3.2.1-7). The reality of war, here offered by three rogues, is that “God’s

\(^{87}\) See “† cense, v.2,” *OED Online*, June 2012, Oxford University Press; and “common sense | common-sense, n.,” *OED Online*, June 2012, Oxford University Press.
vassals [i.e., men] drop and die” (3.2.8). The Boy ultimately offers the common person’s most sensible appraisal of the situation: “Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety” (3.2.12-3). Driven to short, simple, extempore verse by the situation, in contrast to his usual bombast, Pistol responds with “And I” to the Boy’s wish (3.2.14). The Boy becomes an additional choric figure in the wars, in some ways replacing the deceased Falstaff as the plain-speaker about the reality of war.

Shakespeare grants the Boy a privileged storytelling role in the play, which the Boy uses to undermine the narratives of gallantry attached to Hal’s forces. The Boy has as many soliloquies as Hal in Henry V, both of which occur in 4.3. In stark contrast to Hal’s “Once more unto the breach” speech, the Boy’s first soliloquy undercuts the valorous ideals of Hal’s monologue by telling how cowardly and boastful Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol are and that the Boy hopes to escape becoming like them (3.2.27-53). The Boy uses his self-reflective storytelling here to model the kinds of behavior he wishes to perform within the public sphere. Later, he narrates the ends of Bardolph and Nym and the cowardice of Pistol, who refuses to steal like his two accomplices did to avoid falling prey to Hal’s death edict for those who violate his narrative of a just war (4.4.67-76). The privileged position of the Boy subverts the war story Hal tries to tell, for the role emphasizes the Boy’s youth, making the Boy’s demise a subtle, pathetic moment as it happens offstage (117). Shortly after the Boy’s final soliloquy, which he concludes by noting he must “stay...with the luggage of [their] camp,” Fluellen rails against the French for having “Kill[ed] the poys [boys] and the luggage” (4.4.74, 4.7.1). The Boy, the audience must presume, has died with his young fellows, his plain-spoken wisdom going to the grave with him, a casualty of Hal’s war. By the end of the play, Pistol is the only survivor of the regulars, for his
wife has died at home (5.1.82-3; 343n82). His humiliation at the hands of the Hal-worshipping Fluellen marks the ultimate triumph of Hal’s English war stories and the total excision of counter-narratives by the end of Henry V.

Hal recognizes that, for his narrative to triumph, he must remove and fully criminalize the regulars, like Falstaff, to rein in their storytelling subversiveness. The criminalization of the Eastcheap crew over the course of 2 Henry IV and Henry V reflects Hal’s attempt to re-center narrative authority. Doing so allows Hal to reclaim legal, juridical, and sovereign authority away from the margins it has veered towards over the course of the Henriad, since Richard’s disruption of resolving competing stories and Bolingbroke’s appropriation of narrative power. Hal must steer his story away from the narrative environment Shakespeare’s London audiences would embrace through their affinity with Falstaff and the Eastcheap regulars, and he wishes Falstaff and the regulars to become what Hal wants or needs them to be: loyal, law-abiding soldiers who are willing to die for him. His language towards these ends suggests his exclusionary agenda. Bardolph and other “offenders” should be “cut off,” for Hal sees the war as not merely between England and France but between “lenity and cruelty” (3.6.106-12). The king’s recourse to the subjunctive and royal “we would” in this passage suggests that Hal’s concern is about what kind of war story others tell about his campaign, and he wants others to see him not as cruel but as lenient and “gentler” (3.6.111). His rejection of Falstaff centers on appearances of gentleness. Hal avers, in his rejection of the old man, that he “know[s Falstaff] not]” (2H4, 5.5.46). King Henry’s narrative of Falstaff becomes a bad “dream” that he has “awake[ne]d” from, not a formative experience of his youth (5.5.46-50). Hal sees this royal version of his biography as more advantageous, but as Goffman’s argument about multiple

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88 Pistol and the copy texts are ambiguous about whether the Hostess or Doll Tearsheet has died back in England, but T. W. Craik emends the passage to favor the reading that the Hostess has died.
biographies suggests, Hal must work to manage his audiences. Hal excludes Falstaff from his reality, for Falstaff would complicate this new biography. As king, Hal orders the old man to go “hence,” “banish[ed], on pain of death” from being “near [Hal’s] person” (5.5.51, 62-4). Just as Falstaff’s presence would taint and undermine Hal’s reformation narrative, so too would allowing the Eastcheap regulars to continue, as part of England, subverting his heroic, nationalist, war narrative.

The most overt critique of Hal’s heroic narrative occurs in his confrontation with Williams before the Battle of Agincourt, for while Hal argues for his logic of war and sovereign responsibility, doing so exposes Hal’s personal responsibility for the war and its consequences. Williams, in particular, speaks plainly against the master narrative that Hal and English authority would advance. While Rackin notes that Williams “gives voice to the forgotten casualties of Henry’s great historical enterprise” and “against war itself,” Williams also continues the subversion of Hal’s authoritarian logic and narrative begun by Falstaff and the regulars. Unlike the regulars, Williams and his fellows confront the sovereign as soldiers untainted by the lewd associations of the tavern world. In meeting Williams, Bates, and Court, Hal initially posits that “the King is but a man” amplified by “his ceremonies” to appear kinglike, who nonetheless may have cause to fear the outcome of the looming battle (4.1.102-5). However, Hal begins to abandon this relatively populist vision of kingship when Bates and Williams advance the narrative of obedience advocated in the Homily against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion. Should the king’s actions in bringing the army to war “be wrong,” the army’s “obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of [them]” while the king assumes full responsibility for any wrongdoing the soldiers committed (4.1.130-46). Hal refuses Williams’s reasoning that the king

89 Goffman, 62-3.
90 Rackin, 243-4.
has responsibility for soldiers dying in battle, engaged in the business of killing others on the
king’s behalf (4.1.140-3). Unwilling to bear such responsibility as a king, Hal argues that
sovereigns are not responsible for their “servant’s damnation” or their “particular endings”
(4.1.154-6). He defers responsibility to God instead, for whom “War is his beadle, war is his
vengeance,” that God visits upon the soldiers for their crimes (4.1.168-9). The potential crimes
Hal imagines, though, are crimes for which he is arguably guilty.

Hal moves beyond Williams’s argumentative topics, with the result that their argument
becomes not a discussion of the nature of warfare and kingship but an instance of dramatic irony
as the scene reminds audiences of Hal’s troubled, multitudinous biography. As Bolingbroke’s
son, he inherits “the guilt” for Exton’s “premeditated and contrived murder” of Richard, which
his later soliloquy-prayers demonstrate he believes (4.1.161-2). Hal has made “the wars” his
“bulwark,” much as his father urged him to in 2 Henry IV to distract the nation to secure royal
authority (4.1.163-4; 2H4, 4.3.341-5). Hal has helped “gor[e] the gentle bosom of peace with
pillage and robbery,” as his jests and participation in the Gadshill crime demonstrate, even if he
returns the money in the end (4.1.164-5). Where Williams argues about the king’s responsibility
for the wrongs done during war, Hal instead argues that the king is not “guilty of their
damnation” for whatever sins they had when it seems his own sins are on his mind (4.1.173-5).
Williams and Hal are not arguing about the same things, but Hal’s extended rhetoric exposes to
the audience just how culpable Hal is for the deaths and destruction his heroic war story causes.
If Williams appears to acquiesce in this argument, then he does so perhaps because Hal is
suspiciously far too eager to argue the king’s case. Indeed, their quarrel about the king’s ransom
only resolves because Williams recognizes, at the end, that he must bend before the sovereign’s
will in order to survive.
Pistol, too, recognizes that he must adapt to the exigencies of royal power and narrative, but he does have one final story to tell onstage, a final antistrophe to Hal’s triumphant war story, that demonstrates storytelling’s usefulness for commoners like Pistol. In recounting his fallen fortunes and how he has lost his home and friends in his only soliloquy, he establishes the peripeteia of his own life story: he should have a wife and colleagues, especially as he grows “Old” (H5, 5.1.81-5). Fluellen has literally beaten “Honour” from Pistol, calling to mind Mowbray’s and Gaunt’s uses of the word in Richard II (5.1.86). However, Pistol is adaptable, for while Hal’s narrative gains dominance amongst the English, Pistol sees opportunities to take advantage of the war story that has unfolded. Pistol resolves the peripeteia of his story by narrating his future plans. He decides to become a “bawd” and a “cutpurse,” turning to a life of thievery (5.1.86-8). Finally, he chooses how he may use Hal’s war narrative. After Pistol receives treatment for the “cudgelled scars” he gains from Fluellen, Pistol frames those scars as war wounds earned in battle, a tactic Gower anticipates earlier in the play (5.1.89-90; 3.6.66-80). Much as Hal promised his army that Agincourt would be a “story” for them to claim, Pistol does so for less than honest reasons (4.3.56). Although Pistol is comparatively plain-spoken in the soliloquy, he finds the inspiration for a new story within which to position himself. He will “swear [he] got” his wounds “in the Gallia wars,” alluding to the stories of Julius Caesar’s Gallic Wars while possibly suggesting a recovery of his earlier theatricality that he lost briefly to Fluellen’s violence (5.1.90). Pistol appropriates Hal’s nationalist, unifying narrative for his own purposes, working to tell a new story from Hal’s material. Pistol has been a coward and plans to be a thief, but he, like Falstaff—or Bolingbroke or Hal—tells the right stories to get ahead.

Shakespeare understands the appeal of Hal’s heroic narrative, both for its realpolitik purposes and for its populist, nationalist sentiments. The triumph at Agincourt remains a point of
pride for the English today. However, Shakespeare is ambivalent in his celebration of that story and in the larger narrative of the Tudor Myth. His Richard II may be sympathetic, but Shakespeare critiques his kingship as flawed and vulnerable to someone of Bolingbroke’s political skill and ambition. Bolingbroke can be sympathetic in the *Henriad*, and his kingship is as flawed, if not more so, as Richard’s. Throughout the *Henriad*, Shakespeare emphasizes storytelling as political enterprise. The Tudor Myth’s representation of Richard’s deposition and its effects, which Shakespeare appropriates and revises in these plays, and the framing of Hal’s war against France are obvious examples. The *Henriad* is not quite propaganda and exaltation for Henry V; Shakespeare works to make the plays more an *English* story in general. He emphasizes the use of storytelling as a tool, for not only the nobility but also more so for the popular audiences the plays had in the period. The nobility already has a good idea how public storytelling works. The *Henriad* helps expose royal and aristocratic narratives as just that: stories they tell that are in competition with other peoples’ stories. In performing the story and deposition of Richard II, Shakespeare invites audiences to sit in judgment of kings and those who would be kings. In telling a version of the start of the Tudor Myth—how the death of Richard II brought God’s wrath onto England, abated for a time by Henry V’s just war in France—Shakespeare demonstrates the arbitrariness of those kinds of narratives.

In the void that the dissolution of divine kingship produces in the *Henriad*, the subjects onstage and the audiences that watch them must conceive of new ways to narrate their selfhood, their nation, and their social relationships and responsibilities. Stories of knightly valor and medieval nostalgia are just that: old stories some factions like to keep telling. Commoners and nobles alike must consider the kinds of stories they tell about themselves, that they use to fashion themselves as a public. This awareness of public making and self-narrativizing in the *Henriad*
arguably only becomes apparent when audiences can consider the tetralogy as a whole collection of stories. Taken on its own, English authorities have often appropriated *Henry V* as nationalist propaganda, for Hal’s army’s miraculous triumph against seemingly unbeatable forces offers an appealing narrative in wartime. In World War II, Laurence Olivier’s adaptation of *Henry V*—and other appropriations of the play—were used to help ferment an “ideology of national unity which the leading sections of British society...[fought] to forge and perpetuate throughout the war.”91 In World War I, celebrants of Shakespeare’s tercentenary used *Henry V* as evidence for “Shakespeare the Patriot,” with Hal otherwise represented as an exemplar of pragmatic, English patriotism.92 The epilogue spoken by the Chorus in *Henry V* helps make Shakespeare’s perspective a little clearer, though. While Hal’s triumph may be a rousing story, the Chorus reminds its audience that they have already seen what happens after this victory in the first tetralogy: Hal’s death, his son Henry VI’s weak reign culminating in the War of the Roses, and Richard III’s rise and fall (Epilogue.5-13).93 In essence, Shakespeare reminds his audience that this story is only a part of a much broader narrative that concerns all English persons, not just kings and clowns.

Storytelling affords persons like Falstaff and Pistol ways to cannily recognize the artifice of the narratives and logic of the ruling authority. Where Falstaff fails is in underestimating Hal’s cynical Machiavellian ambition. The old man does not recognize how Hal manipulates his biography, specifically that of the wayward, prodigal son who becomes an exemplar of his father’s values. Hal successfully isolates the various audiences for the personae he develops so that Falstaff only knows a version of Hal that is enough like Falstaff to trick him into assuming

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93 See Rawdon Wilson, 192.
he knows Hal’s mind. Perhaps even more cynically, Hal takes advantage of Falstaff’s friendship—even if Falstaff hoped to do so with Hal after the boy became king—and the stories of friendship that Falstaff expects turn against him in the end. Shakespeare, though, frames Hal’s betrayal of Falstaff as just that: yet another story of royal treachery and Machiavellian realpolitik. In framing Hal’s personal biography in this manner, Shakespeare problematizes the larger nationalist narrative of a unified England.

What Falstaff and the commoner storytellers of the *Henriad* offer for a model for political subjectivity is that persons cannot trust the narratives authority propagates and that authority’s justification for itself is just a story. As potential political storytellers, the commoners must be adept at weaving their own biographies, much as the projectors Heywood describes do. Perhaps most saliently, though, is that these projectors must be canny consumers of stories, capable of recognizing when someone else is trying to con them and capable of taking advantage of the stories their cultures accept. In this vein, Pistol may not be an honorable or the most successful projector, but he is perhaps representative.
CHAPTER 5

A MIRROR FOR CITIZENS IN CORIOLANUS AND JULIUS CAESAR

Hamlet, Prospero, and the various storytellers of the Henriad demonstrate ways that individual characters can pursue their political subjectivity. In this chapter, I address how citizens participate within the public sphere through rhetorical discourse and how political authority figures can direct the people’s voices towards uncivil and tyrannical ends. In Coriolanus (1608) and Julius Caesar (1599), Shakespeare turns his attention towards popular governance and its pitfalls, and in doing so, he offers historical models against which audiences can judge their political experiences. Rome offers Shakespeare a conceptual space in a republican or commonwealth context within which he can explore many of the strategies I have explored in this dissertation. The patricians bring theatricality, Machiavellian masking of interiority, and public storytelling to bear as means to advance their agendas and to shape plebeian opinion. Despite the apparent patrician emphases, Shakespeare also gives voice to plebeians, with both works opening with Roman citizens responding to the questionable actions of ruling authorities.

The use of speech, popularity, and rhetoric in these dramas reflects a concern over how power arises from the polity and how politicians can abuse rhetoric in the pursuit of power and tyranny. Rhetoric serves as a republican parallel to the storytelling enterprise I examined in the Henriad. Bolingbroke’s and Hal’s recourse to popularity and nationalism through acts of political storytelling show that they recognize that whoever maintains the support of the commoners has a strong hold over the state. Much as storytelling, occultism, and theatricality have aesthetic components that persons can turn towards political ends, rhetoric is an inherently political enterprise with an aesthetic frame. Spoken rhetoric is performative and therefore
theatrical in nature, and rhetors must fashion as compelling and as persuasive a persona as possible to sway audiences. When deployed responsibly and with the commonwealth’s interests in mind, rhetoric serves as a tool for shaping public discourse and arriving at reasonable resolutions to conflicts. Rhetoric can afford citizens a means of entering the public sphere in an attempt to make their voices heard and to achieve political agency. However, rhetoric also affords unprincipled rhetors a means to pursue demagoguery and personal ambition by manipulating persons’ reputations in the community.

These plays serve as a kind of Mirror for Citizens. The *Mirror for Magistrates* genre sought to educate and forewarn rulers so they could avoid the pitfalls of famous, fallen, historical princes or emulate the qualities of virtuous, exceptional sovereigns. Where the *Mirror for Magistrates* genre taught princes and other politically minded persons about history and its implications for contemporary political topics, Shakespeare uses Rome in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* as mirrors for citizens, not magistrates.¹ The effects of these plays and their portrayals of plebeians can be akin to the uses that Ruth Weissbourd Grant and Stephen Gill attribute to Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1532), which showed the public the ways in which princes maintained power through hypocrisy and violence.² Unlike *The Prince*, Shakespeare’s enterprise exposes not only the political maneuvers of authoritarians but also the commoners’ complicity in their subjugation.

These plays demonstrate the manners through which patricians manipulate citizens. In both plays, the plebeians begin as individual voices, often, and especially in *Coriolanus*, making

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pointed criticisms of authorities. Ambitious, opportunistic persons deploy sophistry and casuistry to subvert plebeian voices. The early modern period evinced anxiety about popular discourse, and authorities used the term *popularity* when discussing any discourse that “offered political content to the people.” As Jeffrey S. Doty argues about *Richard II*, Shakespeare encourages audiences to consider, to question, and to resist how authorities sway the public through pathetic appeals and selective access to certain “political controversies.” 3 Shakespeare does something very similar in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. Through the tribunes in these plays and Antony in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare explores how politicians manipulate the popularity of their rivals and other politically advantageous persons through rhetoric. Antony manipulates Caesar’s and Brutus’s fame in *Julius Caesar*, and the tribunes do so to Coriolanus in his play. The tribunes and Antony amplify their popularity at the expense of figures like Coriolanus and the plebeians. Shakespeare represents these moves onstage partly to expose the vulnerability of the political thought and life of citizens to manipulation from the ruling elite. The onstage representation of these unethical acts encourages audiences to consider aristocratic and parliamentary manipulation of the publics of Shakespeare’s London. The theater serves as an ostensibly apolitical space that allows audiences opportunities to encounter and reflect upon political discourses with the advantage of rhetorical distance.

The model for political subjectivity Shakespeare offers in these plays is that political subjects should be wary of demagogic appeals and avoid the responses that the plebeians in these plays have to Antony’s and the tribunes’ oratory because those reactions can be dangerous and can lead to willing citizen subjection. Shakespeare recognizes that certain citizen reactions to patrician rhetoric can be useful, such as the Cobbler in the opening scene of *Julius Caesar* and

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the First Citizen in *Coriolanus*, who demonstrate rhetorical canniness in responding to the
tribunes’ and Menenius’s attempts to influence them. Potential political subjects should also be
wary of the shaping and appropriation of other persons’ reputations for unethical rhetors’
benefits. For example, Antony’s secular canonization of Caesar serves in part to elevate
Antony’s popularity and prestige while swaying the plebeians to engage in a bloody revolt. In
turn, Coriolanus offers audiences a model for how to resist this kind of social reframing in which
the significance of persons slips out of their control and into the hands of others. In this sense,
Coriolanus becomes not so much an exemplar of patrician and aristocratic values but a model for
republican skepticism and resistance to irrational appeals, though he is by no means a republican
figure. Rhetoric becomes both a political and aesthetic tool for imagining and authoring one’s
position in the public sphere in these plays, and Shakespeare encourages audiences to take
advantage of this tool in making sense of the action onstage and in their lives outside the theater.

Critical approaches to these plays tend to favor patrician perspectives, and while some are
sympathetic to plebeians and address the use of rhetoric and speech for fashioning identity within
the public sphere, those treatments remain focused on patricians. Exemplified by Northrop Frye
and others, the patrician thread of criticism argues that ruling authorities need to control the
unruly mob.4 This viewpoint led early modern authorities to impose what Robert Miola identifies
as Romanness and Roman virtues on subjects for their supposed benefit.5 While Miola and
Robert Ormsby note the presence of plebeian rhetoric in relation to patrician uses of it, citizen

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speech remains a secondary concern for them. In contrast, sympathetic readings for the plebeians have encouraged more overtly political treatments of these plays, like Bertolt Brecht’s recognition of the plebeians’ legitimate grievances. These political associations also suggest the importance of rhetoric to republican thought, such as Andrew Hadfield’s extended treatment of the subject in Shakespeare’s canon. The ways that citizen and patrician speech help to constitute the public sphere and to direct power relations onstage leads James Kuzner to situate Coriolanus’s subjectivity in his control over the significance of his life. Although Hadfield and Kuzner do briefly address citizen speech and rhetoric, Shakespeare shows that the caniness of plebeian rhetors is a concern, and these rhetors are more than a gauge for the effectiveness of patrician oratory. Shakespeare’s plebeians can be canny rhetors, but perhaps not canny listeners. Not unlike the plebeians he despises, Coriolanus’s conflict with Rome reflects the ways in which politicians move to mold participation within a commonwealth. Coriolanus’s actions represent more effective resistance against these forces than Brutus’s oratorical attempts in Julius Caesar. The heroism of Coriolanus emerges in avoiding others fashioning him into something useful for their interests. Shakespeare does not deplore the mobs of the early modern stage. Instead, he demonstrates populist strategies for controlling citizens and the traps that authorities use against commoners, holding this figurative mirror up to his theatrical audiences while using the devices of the theater to call attention to those strategies and to undermine them.

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6 Ormsby, 47-50; and Miola, 188-9.
In the first section of this chapter, I address how *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* help shape the non-aristocratic publics that watched these plays and that these plays help call into being. I situate the several interrelated discourses on Rome, republic, and rhetoric in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* within the *magistra vitae* and the *Mirror for Magistrates* genres that informed Shakespeare’s composition of these plays and audience reception of them. Shakespeare’s works offer audiences opportunities to compare themselves to their representations onstage, especially in the ways patricians manipulate plebeians. In the second section, I examine the unruly citizens that begin both *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* and those citizens’ rhetorical ability as they contend with public officials. These scenes grant voice to commoners, who speak with and against their supposed betters. In both plays, unethical rhetors work to unite and to steal the voices of citizens to advance political ambitions. Shakespeare emphasizes the power of the citizens and the need for the ruling elite to constrain and guide that power. *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* feature the collapse of individual citizen voices into the single voice of the mob, which patricians direct as a weapon against their rivals and against citizen liberty and political subjectivity. In the concluding section, I move on to an examination of fame as it relates to public making and the manipulation of the citizens in these plays. Coriolanus’s fame works against him, for he fails to participate in the true political life of the Roman commonwealth. *Julius Caesar* approaches the topics of fame and political participation in cult-like terms. Antony appropriates the reputations of public figures for his benefit and imperils the liberty of the people of Rome, but Shakespeare positions Coriolanus to resist this kind of appropriation with a determination that recuperates the unpopular warrior hero as a model for resisting unethical rhetoric.
Making a Counterpublic in the Theater

In calling out the sophistry and uncivil rhetoric that orators deploy in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare encourages commoner audiences to compare their experiences to those they witness onstage happening to their theatrical mirror. In examining the discourses audiences draw upon in contextualizing the conflicts in these plays, I examine what Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin term “cultural producers,” those persons who created texts and performances that helped shape the public sphere. These producers include the writers of the histories of Rome and Britain, the rhetoric manuals, and the political tracts that influenced how early modern publics conceived of their political worlds. These plays help shape how publics are “made” in the first place, for in encouraging audiences to engage in self-reflective analysis, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* help create what Michael Warner calls a “counterpublic” at odds with mainstream society and its dominant discourses. The discourses that Shakespeare deploys in these plays include Rome and its aesthetic relationship to London, classical rhetoric and its civic uses, and examples of the *magistra vitae* and the *Mirror for Magistrates* genres that he appropriates for new purposes in offering models for political subjectivity to citizens.

Public making in part arises as a process of forming distinct, though often interrelated, social groupings, and these groupings often serve as sources of social identity and participation. As Peter Lake and Steven Pincus argue, early attempts at public making in the Renaissance emerge from the state itself as it tried to sway Elizabeth I on various matters by mobilizing opinion through “appeals...to the people.” These authorities, often members of the queen’s

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12 Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, eds. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 3-4.
regime, worked to shape an English public compliant to their ends, often through seemingly republican appeals, which in turn helped develop ideas of what the normative public order of Elizabethan England ought to be.\textsuperscript{13} By the early Stuart era, the rising use of various media to reach and influence the population helped fashion a public that could determine the merits of the discourses its members encountered.\textsuperscript{14} In working to mold the culture and its constituent texts, early modern authorities inadvertently created the conditions through which alternative publics and discourses could develop.

In dramatizing matters of public policy and rhetorical appeals to commoner audiences, Shakespeare’s plays expose the emerging discourses of the early modern public sphere to the scrutiny of spectators, including discourses they may not have encountered before. Individual audiences may not constitute a “public” in the sense that Jürgen Habermas describes and upon which Warner, Lake, and Pincus draw since audiences are temporary gatherings of persons. However, playhouse audiences existed within conditions that Habermas argues are necessary for the emergence of new publics. In intermingling the social strata of Shakespeare’s London, outdoor amphitheaters provided sites where status lines blurred as rich and poor gathered for common purpose while the theater also encouraged the inclusivity of shared theatrical experience.\textsuperscript{15} Performances addressing public policy allowed members of the commonwealth to encounter unofficial perspectives, expanding their political discursive possibilities. In fulfilling Habermas’s preconditions for a public to emerge, playhouses serve as sites for theatergoing audiences to encounter onstage discourses that could then disseminate into the culture and help

\textsuperscript{13} Lake and Pincus, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{14} Lake and Pincus, 4-6.
shape the public sphere.\textsuperscript{16} Audiences make sense of discourses like plays by finding commonality with those characters onstage, through identifying with similar social groupings and through activities shared with the audience by characters.\textsuperscript{17} For example, theater audiences could identify with the plebeians in \textit{Julius Caesar} and \textit{Coriolanus} through their similar experiences and social statuses. In being in a play’s audience, surrounded by commoners, criminals, and prostitutes, spectators of amphitheater plays exist already within a counterpublic at odds with normative discourses. This alienation from the dominant culture allows audiences to engage in judgment of policy and of the commonwealth’s interests in ways not ordinarily sanctioned or envisioned by early modern society.

The antitheatricalist writings of the period make it clear that many distrusted putting public policy on display before the audiences of the theaters. Stephen Gosson’s attacks against the theater in his \textit{Plays Confuted in Five Actions} (1582) included accusations that theater transformed “an assemblie” of commoners into “the judges of faultes” of the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{18} In offering audiences a common frame of reference with the theater-savvy London tavern world of Shakespeare’s time, the Eastcheap regulars reflected to some degree the audience that watched them while encouraging the formation of a counterpublic at odds with the official discourses the \textit{Henriad} presents. Shakespeare’s plays contribute to and participate in the discourses of early modern politics while helping make a public who, in giving the plays their attention, must judge the action onstage in relation to their lives and experiences. Where in the \textit{Henriad} those discourses included the Tudor Myth and Tudor constructions of English medieval history,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 36-7; and Warner, 66-7.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Warner, 68-9, 72, 120.
\end{itemize}

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Coriolanus and Julius Caesar participate within several distinct, though related, discourses on governance and identity.

Perhaps primary in the discourses these plays deploy is the notion of Rome, specifically the Roman republic, as an eternal city and a city-ideal present in audience’s minds, even if the commoners had limited understanding of what classical Rome actually was. As a rebirth of classical learning and values, the Renaissance privileges ancient Rome as a model for civilization. A tendency emerged in Renaissance England to represent London as a New Rome. The origins for this association appear in the literary, medieval Brutus legends that begin Arthuriana in Britain. In these legends, Aeneas’s descendant Brutus departs early Rome and leads Trojan survivors to colonize Britain, much as Aeneas led Trojans to colonize Rome as a New Troy. Brutus’s royal descendants would eventually include all of the kings and queens of Britain—from legendary figures such as Leir and Arthur to the Tudors and Stuarts.19 The British used these legends and the islands’ history as a distant province of the Roman Empire as rationales for representing Britain as not only a survivor but also the inheritor of Rome’s mantle as the center of civilization. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore fully the British appropriation of Romanness in the historical arc from the medieval to the early modern period.20 Shakespeare himself addressed the subject of Rome often throughout his career, but his Rome is distinctly his creation.

19 James Carscallen, “How Troy Came to Spenser,” in Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, eds. Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell (Toronto: C.R.R.S., 2004), 15. Elements of this tradition existed before 1136, and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae popularized the Brutus and Arthurian legends as later writers adapted, revised, and expanded Geoffrey’s work. The History served as satire of native Welsh traditions, but the legendary also afforded propaganda for the aristocracy and state.

Shakespeare and other early modern writers appropriated the past on their own terms and for their own purposes, and Shakespeare’s representations of Rome and early modern republicanism participate within the tradition he receives and passes on to his urban audience. Shakespeare’s treatment of Rome draws upon several strands of English Renaissance thought. Rome serves “as a place of order and hierarchy” in juxtaposition to what Miola calls the “primitive wilderness.”21 Shakespeare and other authors also treat Rome and classical history more as fertile, imaginative ground than as rigid, historical truth. Renaissance English humanism took a flexible approach to the idea of Rome, for the English did not concern themselves with historical accuracy as today’s critics and scholars would understand it.22 Rome’s fictive usefulness for Shakespeare comes in part from the suggestiveness Rome offered authors and audiences through Rome’s history, its cultural resonances, and its aesthetics.

Contemporary critics of unrestrained monarchical power viewed republicanism and Rome as related concepts. England’s parliament made “England like the Roman republic,” nominally including all men as members of the commonwealth so that they could participate in governance to varying degrees. Like Rome’s “indirect democracy,” the English commonwealth posited a state in which persons could seek redress for their grievances and expect authorities to treat their concerns dutifully.23 More broadly in the early modern period, the idea of republicanism and what it constituted reflected more a spectrum of thought than a concrete formula for governance. In its broadest conception, republicanism offered a belief that government should serve the commonwealth rather than only the interests of the sovereign or ruling elite. The form of this belief, though, does not reflect the representative democracies we

21 Miola, 37, 40.
22 Demaibus, 29. See also Miola, 14; and Pagetti, 145.
23 Hadfield, 22.
today associate with republicanism. Instead, theorists drew on the Roman rhetorician Cicero. In Sir Thomas Smith’s *A Discourse of the Commonweal* (1549), for example, the community needed leaders who were “learned men,” and thinkers like Smith saw the state as a political body distinct from its governors or members. This view is at odds with commonplace early modern body politic metaphors, such as Menenius’s fable of the belly. In considering republicanism, early moderns in England generally accepted the existence of the monarchy, but the “role and purpose” of the crown were debatable. Representations of Rome, specifically the Roman republic, could then serve as a means for comparing and contrasting English governance with other models or as means for exploring the problems of that governance in a theatrically alienated Roman setting.

Classical rhetoric represents another discourse that these plays draw upon, for rhetoric enjoyed a rebirth during the period that made its practice more immediate for the persons watching these plays, encouraging the formation of different ways of thinking about circumstances for early moderns. Rhetorical studies expanded dramatically during Philip Sidney’s lifetime (1554-86), and between Sidney’s life and George Herbert’s (1554-1633), printers produced more rhetoric textbooks than ever before in England. Education in Latin for writers like Shakespeare “was highly rhetorical,” and characters like Antony and Brutus in *Julius Caesar* “speak the way Elizabethan schoolboys were taught that Romans had spoken.” As Joel B. Altman illustrates, rhetorical invention provided early modern writers a tool for exploring and critiquing topics and discourses, not only to gain “a different perspective” on whatever matter

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24 For arguments on Roman law as precedent of early modern notions of “public welfare,” see Wilson and Yachnin, 16.
26 Hadfield, 51.
28 Wills, 39.
was at hand but also to help “discover the rationale behind” the rhetoric of others. The practice of rhetoric provided authors like Shakespeare with a means to approach any topic from a multitude of perspectives while encouraging audiences to look for underlying motivations for characters given the exploratory nature of rhetorical inquiry. Shakespeare and his contemporaries could use rhetoric as a playwriting tool for generating onstage dialogue and ideological conflict.

Baldesar Castiglione demonstrates the scope of rhetoric’s place in the discourse of the period in his *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) where he addresses rhetoric in terms of general speech. The ideal courtier must speak and write in a manner that suggests “a good order” to his thoughts. He must do so using language and terms “still used by the people” that are nonetheless “elegant…with precision in both words and thoughts.” Castiglione speaks of contemporary uses of classical rhetoric as a matter of “usage.” The usefulness of rhetoric lies not in mere imitation of classical rhetoricians but in the adaptation and application of forms and rhetorical strategies employed since the antique Greeks and Romans. Individual rhetors use these models with their “talent and their…native judgment,” rather than mechanically reproducing specific forms. As Miola argues, the importance of rhetoric in early modern conceptions of Rome arises through how the practice served as the primary method of participating in civic life and helping mold the community. Rome and rhetoric conjoin in Shakespeare’s and the publics’ cultural consciousnesses even as those concepts reflect contemporary realities—Rome standing in for London even as classical rhetoric serves as the basis for Renaissance education.

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30 Altman, 8.
32 Castiglione, 44.
33 Miola, 181.
Rome and rhetoric serve a broader role as adjuncts to the genres of *magistra vitae* and the *Mirror for Magistrates* in these plays. *Magistra vitae* as a term originates in Cicero’s *De Oratore* (55 BCE), where he frames history as “the witness of the ages, the illuminator of reality, the life force of memory, the teacher of our lives, and the messenger of times gone by.”³⁴ The recovery of classical historians and their histories, such as in Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Lives* (1579), spurred Renaissance cultural producers to conceive of history in Ciceronian terms. History did not represent ideal models of humanity now lost, so history’s fuller function was as an instructor for those in the present so they could strive to avoid repeating the errors of the past.³⁵ This view of history underscores the *Mirror for Magistrates* genre, exemplified in William Baldwin’s book of the same name (1559) dedicated to Elizabeth I. This genre represented historical figures to sovereigns who were to learn how to emulate the greatness of those figures and how to avoid their failings.³⁶ That Baldwin’s book found an audience beyond the queen suggests that the period’s audiences and authors could appropriate such texts for broader purposes.

The principle concept of history as a guide to avoiding the pitfalls of the past can apply beyond its original aristocratic audience to Shakespeare’s commoner audiences. For example, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* serves as an example of the *Mirror for Magistrates* genre. Machiavelli chronicles various classical and contemporary leaders’ successes and failures in embodying those traits he defines as essential for successful princes. So too did *The Prince* provide instruction for non-sovereigns—courtiers and others—to understand the nature of instrumental reasoning and the theatricality of public power and authority. Shakespeare appropriates these

discourses to help shape the audiences, often commoners in composition, who witnessed *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. In these plays, Shakespeare uses the history of Rome with its emphases on rhetoric, oratory, political power, and liberty as a way for his audience to compare their experiences to those of their classical predecessors. In this sense, Shakespeare’s theater provides an opportunity for his audiences to fulfill another of Habermas’s criteria for a public to emerge, especially something like Warner’s counterpublic. In encouraging audiences to reflect upon their experiences through the theatrical mirror onstage, Shakespeare encourages what Habermas calls “rational-critical debate” on political topics as opposed to merely internalizing “institutionally authorized opinions,” which Shakespeare often represents onstage in ambiguous contexts.37 The citizens of Rome in these plays often attempt to engage in this form of debate, but Roman authorities repeatedly work to subvert citizen rationality through pathetic appeals.

**Plebeian Voices and Rhetoric**

*Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* begin with unruly plebeians in public spaces onstage, for Shakespeare grants voice to the commoners as they speak with and against their supposed social betters. Several of these plebeians demonstrate rhetorical ability as they encounter public officials who would manipulate them through their own rhetoric. If commoners possess political power, then the ruling elite needs to constrain and guide that power, so patrician and tribune rhetors work both to unite and to steal the voices of the citizens. In representing this manipulation onstage, the plays help create counterpublics through their audiences in that spectators arguably compare their experiences in dealing with public oratory and rhetoric to the experiences of those characters onstage. In this way, Shakespeare spurs playgoers to use “playing” as Hamlet does, with theater “the mirror [held] up to Nature” for self-reflective and

37 Habermas, 247. See also Habermas, 43, 51, 72, 83, 188, 211.
critical purposes. The failings of the historical plebeians of Rome become examples for the commoners of London, just as the successes of those citizens onstage reflect positive models for Shakespeare’s audiences.

Both plays purport that citizens have potential power in the political realm through their collective voices, so citizens should not only be cognizant of this power but also wary of those who seek to harness and direct that power to particular ends. As Maurice Hunt suggests, Cominius takes the citizens in Coriolanus to task for how they use their voices while Menenius does likewise in how the plebeians and the tribunes speak. Coriolanus first calls the plebeians voices, after his soliloquy in 2.3 (2.3.121). Cominius sarcastically locates power in the citizens of Rome’s “voices,” going so far as to term the plebeians “voices” rather than persons (4.6.154). During the original performance period of Coriolanus, voice began to take on increased associations with political authority, dissent, and protest. The term possessed established associations with agency that shift, by the Jacobean period, towards electoral and representational authority. Voice had gendered and age-related associations in early modern England, and as Gina Bloom argues, control over one’s voice and over others’ voices represent ways of demonstrating authority. Voice also suggests public voices, rumors, fame, judgment, and news, calling attention to the potential power of the voice and the means for shaping it within the public sphere. Despite the authority of the patricians, they cannot afford to ignore the plebeians’ voices. The citizens “[m]ust have their voices,” Sicinius tells Coriolanus (2.2.138-

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43 “voice, n.,” OED Online, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
9). When Coriolanus speaks with passing citizens in the forum, he emphasizes that he “require[s] [their] voices,” for he cannot be consul without them (2.3.1). Indeed, Coriolanus tells them that he has “fought” for their “voices,” suffering some “two dozen odd” injuries in doing so, suggesting the value of those voices through the bodily sacrifices he has made (2.3.122-4). In *Julius Caesar*, Metellus points to the power of public voice when he argues for the inclusion of Cicero in the conspiracy, for his participation “[w]ill purchase [them] a good opinion, / And buy men’s voices to commend [their] deeds” (2.1.144-5). Shakespeare does not deny the power of the voices of the common people, but he does question how they form their opinions on what to do and how they use their voices.

Cicero’s presence in *Julius Caesar* highlights the distinction between sophistry and civic-minded rhetoric that should help citizens determine how best to speak. Critics like Hadfield, Garry Wills, and Jeffry J. Yu have addressed Shakespeare’s use of Cicero onstage: Cicero is a “champion of liberty” whose use of rhetoric anticipates the failures of Brutus’s oratory while Cicero’s refusal to join the conspiracy casts it in a negative light. Caska may mock Cicero in 1.2, but Caska’s failure to understand Cicero in that scene marks him as someone lacking rhetorical training (1.2.277-83). Cicero’s representation also participates in public-making by encouraging audiences to juxtapose the prestigious orator’s calm, rational detachment against the impassioned rhetoric many other characters use. In 1.3, Caska relates the various unnatural omens he has seen that evening to Cicero, but he counters Caska’s apocalyptic ramblings through a tacit empiricism. Cicero is well aware of this kind of symbology and the ways rhetors can interpret such signs to their advantage. After Caska relates what he has seen—“a tempest

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dropping fire”—Cicero asks if Caska has seen “anything more wonderful” in a tone implying that the storm does not particularly impress Cicero (1.3.10, 14). He may grant Caska’s description of a tempest full of wonders, but Cicero’s usage of wonderful is ironic. While the storm is impressive, Cicero suggests that it is far from unnatural. Cicero reminds Caska that “men may construe things after their fashion / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves” (1.3.34-5). As editor David Daniell notes, ascribing significance and meaning to such signs would normally be Cicero’s forte, but by having Cicero utter such a perspective, Shakespeare uses the rhetorician to remind his audience something critics know as fundamental (187n34-5). Signs have those meanings that persons give them.

In order to be discerning auditors, citizens must work to untangle the knot of competing associations that rhetors and writers fashion, and such is the case given the rhetoric that the patrician conspirators in Julius Caesar often employ. While Wills notes that critics have often treated Brutus’s rhetoric in the play respectfully and at face value, Brutus is far more cynical a rhetor than audiences generally realize. In the orchard soliloquy, Brutus seems to convince himself through rhetoric to eliminate Caesar before Cassius can invite Brutus into the conspiracy. In actuality, Brutus rehearses how to represent (“fashion”) the elimination of Caesar, not whether he should do so or not (2.1.30). In this sense, Brutus considers the kind of narrative he should disseminate about his plot, how he should frame it publicly, much as the aristocrats in the Henriad frame their actions through storytelling. Brutus repeats this verb again later, assuring Metellus that he can “fashion” Caius Ligarius into someone willing to join their party (2.1.214-9). While Daniell glosses fashion as transform, the word’s senses of molding, shaping, and contriving are applicable given rhetoric’s use in assigning significance to things with the aim of

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46 “wonderful, adj. (and n.) and adv.,” OED Online, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
47 Wills, 54, 61.
persuading others (211n219).\textsuperscript{48} Cicero’s admonition against persons understanding portents “after their fashion” takes on added resonance given this meaning of fashion. These instances of fashioning help demonstrate the continued intersection of aesthetics and politics in rhetoric.

The dramatization of Antony’s rhetoric lets Shakespeare deploy such oratory against the onstage plebeians and the play’s audience, and dramatic irony then undercuts the audience’s initial response to that rhetoric by exposing Antony’s true political motivations. Antony’s private musings after he unleashes the angry citizens in 3.2 makes it obvious that Antony has duped them, in case any of the play’s audience members had also fallen for Antony’s pathos-driven funeral oration. Antony relishes the “Mischief” he has unleashed and feels that the chaos he creates could potentially “give [him and his allies] anything” (3.2.251-7). Although Daniel Juan Gil argues that Antony is “antipolitical,” Antony demonstrates that he is a Machiavellian fox who schemes how best to take advantage of Brutus’s assassination of Caesar and the resulting power vacuum.\textsuperscript{49} Despite Miola’s association of the gang murder of Cinna the Poet in 3.3 with the mob inflicting mindless violence, the murder further taints Antony’s character in the minds of audiences.\textsuperscript{50} While the murder may suggest Shakespeare condemns the mob, the greater indictment is against Antony, whose rhetoric has spurred the mob to that point. The brutal scene forces the play’s audience to see this stage mob, influenced by Antony, murder an innocent man. If the audience did not realize what Antony was doing with rhetoric during the funeral oration, if they found themselves agreeing with Antony, then this scene—after his admission of manipulation, instrumental reasoning, and chaos-making—should arguably upset the audience

\textsuperscript{48} “fashion, v.,” \textit{OED Online}, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
\textsuperscript{50} Miola, 166.
and clearly show them Antony’s manipulation and its consequences. Audiences witness the continued degeneration of the Roman republic in 3.4 and the outlines of what amounts to a *coup*.

Spectators’ responses to Antony’s rhetoric may vary with their awareness of history and theatrical convention, but Antony’s scheming results in civil strife that encourages audiences to see his rhetoric as underhanded manipulation of citizen opinion. One could make the argument that, because the play’s title is *Julius Caesar*, audiences may see Caesar and his allies as the heroes for whom they should root. However, Shakespeare repeatedly demonstrates onstage that Antony’s motivations are the acquisition of power and naked political ambition. Although Caesar’s death may genuinely move Antony, he takes full advantage of his anger and grief to reproduce an advantageous version of those passions in his audience in a tyrannical demonstration of power politics. Antony’s passion about Caesar’s death contrasts with the detachment of the Second Triumvirate as they pick out the names of those who must die, including their own kin. Antony and Octavius quickly accede to such cold calculation in the pursuit of personal power. They demonstrate no passion, no verve in doing so, only an efficiency and ruthlessness that renders Antony’s previous theatrical pathos even more telling as overt manipulation of the public.

Like Antony, the tribunes of *Coriolanus* collaborate onstage about how they can influence the citizens to the tribunes’ tendentious, factional, and demagogic ends. “All tongues speak of” Coriolanus, Brutus tells Sicinius, and they fear that should Coriolanus become consul, their personal authority shall diminish (2.1.201-19). Sicinius reminds Brutus that the plebeians “will forget / With the least cause these new honours” of Coriolanus, suggesting that the citizens are easily distracted (2.1.223-7). Brutus agrees, resolving that the tribunes must suggest the people in what hatred [Coriolanus] still hath held them; that to’s power he would
Have made them mules, silenced their pleaders,
And dispropertied their freedoms, holding them
In human action and capacity
Of no more soul nor fitness for the world
Than camels in the war… (2.1.241-7)

While Kuzner notes Brutus and Sicinius rely on “the cultivation of fashioned selfhood,” the
tribunes also enhance their ethos by working to malign the reputation of Coriolanus, and they use
rhetoric to do so.51 Like the aristocrats in the *Henriad*, the tribunes plan to manipulate the
biography of Coriolanus to their ends, especially as he resists framing that biography through his
own acts of narrativization. Sicinius repeats Brutus’s use of *suggest* in that they should imply
such a reading of Coriolanus’s character at a time when the hero’s “soaring insolence / Shall
touch the people” (2.1.249-51). *Suggest* serves a similar function here in *Coriolanus* as *fashion*
does in *Julius Caesar*. The tribunes amplify Coriolanus’s traits and his situated ethos—the
character he already possesses in the minds of the public—while at the same time ascribing
further significance to the accessible signs of Coriolanus’s personality.

Just as Marcus Brutus considers how to “fashion” the public perception of his planned
action against Caesar, so do the tribunes determine how to fashion Coriolanus so that his actions
and character *suggest* something in particular to the plebeians. Indeed, *suggest* carries with it
associations that call rhetoric’s shaping of meaning to mind and associations where such
suggestions prompt persons towards evil acts.52 The tribunes form this scheme shortly after
Coriolanus’s superheroic battle at Corioles that dominates the first act, culminating in the
soldiers’ cheer for him as he refuses any spoils beyond his fair share: “*A long flourish. They all
cry ‘Martius, Martius!’, casting up their caps and lances*” (201). The soldiery loves Coriolanus,
and this collective cheer contrasts with the later collapse of voices in Rome while paralleling the

51 Kuzner, 100.
52 “suggest, v.,” *OED Online*, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
citizens’ cheer at Coriolanus’s exile: “The Citizens all shout, and throw up their caps” (283). Shakespeare demonstrates to his audience how the tribunes have corrupted the plebeians’ view of Coriolanus while spurring reckless dissension that later threatens the commonwealth when Coriolanus returns in vengeance.

While Shakespeare suggests how the patricians and tribunes manipulate their plebeian audiences, he begins Coriolanus with a plebeian revolt grounded in sympathetic and familiar terms for London audiences. As Clara Mucci notes, Shakespeare reframes the cause of the revolt as the result of famine and high corn prices. The North translation of Plutarch’s Lives, Shakespeare’s likely source, cites the riots developing “because the Senate dyd favour the riche against the people, who dyd complaine of the sore oppression of userers.” In making the rioters act because of starvation and food prices spiking through predatory, speculative practices, Shakespeare projects London topicality—the riots of 1595 in Southwark—into the Roman republic (159n10-11). This topicality arguably leads commoners in Shakespeare’s audiences to compare fairly recent events they have known in London to those onstage, so that audiences may use history as a guide to their own political considerations. Shakespeare makes the actions of the plebeians more sympathetic by grounding their revolt in starvation rather than penury, for North’s translation of Plutarch suggests that the plebeians’ troubles originated in part from their willingness to take on excessive debt in the first place. Where debt suggests that the citizens were active agents in creating their problems, privation and market speculation reorients responsibility onto the patricians, rendering the plebeians more sympathetic and more just in

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53 These stage directions appear in the original copy-text, the First Folio, but I have used Parker’s version in the Oxford edition. For the First Folio version, see William Shakespeare, Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, facsimile digital ed. (London, 1623; Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1999), 316, 322.
56 Plutarch, 239.
their cause. The plebeians have grievances and expect the patricians to hear and address those grievances, just as Londoners did and as is appropriate in a putative commonwealth.

The opening scene grants voice to the plebeians, and they use that voice to debate and to respond to the rhetoric of others, actions that frame them not as a mob but as citizens who seek redress for their concerns. Specific citizens speak here and elsewhere in Coriolanus, but the speech identifiers are ambiguous. The 1623 Folio, which R. B. Parker points to as a source for current editions while commenting on this inconsistency, identifies the citizens by number (e.g., First Citizen, Second Citizen), but the Folio varies this numbering scheme from scene to scene (139, 143). Given the limitations of the text, Shakespeare offers us distinct voices for the plebeians and specific citizens speak in each scene, but they are not distinct as characters, although the recurring faces of the actors may allay the effect. These individual voices work to make themselves heard onstage. The First Citizen begins 1.1 by engaging in call-and-response with his compatriots, reminding them of their plight. They blame Coriolanus for working against their purposes even as the patricians “[account] [them] poor citizens” while hoarding more than enough food to feed the plebeians (1.1.7-9, 14-6). The Second Citizen hopes to maintain the peace by engaging in rhetoric, asking the First Citizen to “speak not maliciously,” for the Second Citizen sees public merit in Coriolanus’s military service “for his country” (1.1.32, 27-8). The First Citizen counters that Coriolanus acts primarily for selfish ends: personal and filial aggrandizement (1.1.33-7). Shakespeare demonstrates that the Citizens are quite capable of discussing the present circumstances, as they debate their plan of action and the motivations of others in a rational manner. They can also debate who is responsible for their plight.

While Plutarch portrays Menenius’s fable of the belly in positive terms, the response from Shakespeare’s plebeians suggests they are far more rhetorically capable than Menenius
credits them. As Ormsby argues, the citizens recognize how they should perform here through public discourse and that they should evaluate their responses to the rhetoric of the First Citizen, but they also evaluate the rhetoric Menenius deploys.\textsuperscript{57} In North’s translation, the Senate chooses Menenius to speak on their behalf to the plebeians. The Senate recognizes Menenius as “the most acceptable” of the patricians “to the people” for making the case to return to the city from where the citizens have retreated in protest. Menenius delivers “many good persuasions and gentle requestes” that “pacif[y] the people, conditionally,” so long as they could choose tribunes to represent their interests in Rome.\textsuperscript{58} Menenius appears to the citizens in 1.1 as they riot and seek out Coriolanus, but the citizens acknowledge that Menenius is “one that hath always loved the people” and is “honest enough” compared to other patricians (1.1.48-50). The citizens are willing to listen to Menenius, and his ethos is sufficient to halt their march briefly. He intends his oration to sway them to the patricians’ perspective. He deflects blame from the patricians to the gods “[f]or the dearth” that afflicts the community while trying to assure the citizens that the patricians “care for [them] like fathers” (1.1.69-74). In engaging with the plebeians, Menenius relies upon what are rhetorical exercises for students—amplifications of fables and commonplaces, in particular—likely because he believes the plebeians can understand nothing more complex.\textsuperscript{59} In contrast, the First Citizen catalogues the examples and signs of behavior from the patricians that support the plebeian view of things, a display of logos and rhetorical skill at odds with Menenius’s tactics.

Where the patrician relies on ineffective rhetoric and character attacks, the First Citizen demonstrates an ability to argue persuasively. The First Citizen enumerates the complaints of the

\textsuperscript{57} Ormsby, 53.
\textsuperscript{58} Plutarch, 239-40.
\textsuperscript{59} For the classical use of amplification of proverbs, fables, and commonplaces as \textit{progymnasmata}, rhetorical training exercises, see Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, \textit{Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students}, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 27-8.
plebeians in clear terms while pointing to those responsible for their plight: the patricians and the rich. First, the citizens continue to experience dearth while the patricians have surplus supplies. Second, the state continues to support usurers at the expense of the poor. Third, the state continues to support the rich with no correction for their excesses even as the state penalizes the poor. Finally, the patricians continue waging wars at the expense of the plebeians (1.1.76-83).

After the First Citizen responds to Menenius’s initial arguments with logos, Menenius shifts to a false dichotomy that also serves as an *ad hominem* attack: “Either you must / Confess yourselves wondrous malicious / Or be accused of folly” (1.1.84-6). He then relates the fable of the belly and his amplification on it, but the First Citizen does not wish Menenius to “fob off [their] disgrace with a tale” (1.1.91). Critics like Wills and Miola have argued for Menenius’s rhetorical ability in this scene, but the citizens’ rejection of Menenius’s fable reflects their ability to counter his rhetoric with their own. Rather than Plutarch’s effective rhetor, Shakespeare’s Menenius engages in tedious delivery with diversions into amplification and allegory, while extolling his storytelling ability (1.1.104-111). These traits make Menenius suggestive of Polonius from *Hamlet*, whose wisdom is arguably banal and tiresome. The First Citizen interrupts the fable, bored with the body politic tropes Menenius deploys even as he catalogues other examples of those tropes, leading Menenius to resort to further *ad hominem* attacks. “Fore me, this fellow speaks,” he complains before resorting to name-calling: [the First Citizen is] “one o’th’ lowest, basest, poorest / Of this most wise rebellion… / [a] rascal” (1.1.118-56). Despite these attacks, the First Citizen’s response demonstrates both his rhetorical skill and his capacity to respond rationally and critically.

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60 Wills, 91-4; and Miola, 182. However, see Hadfield 218-9, where he argues that Menenius’s fable shows the instability of “analogical language.”
The First Citizen’s rhetoric in this scene hews closely to the principles of Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560) and *The Rule of Reason* (1551) while Menenius relies on emotional appeals that seem intended to distract his audience. As Wilson argues, logic affords persons the skill “to reason” towards the truth, combining judgment and rhetorical invention to prove one’s cause while also penetrating “Subtiltees” and sophistry. Rhetoric represents the application of logic to human affairs that rhetors can best argue about using clear and concise discourse. Where Menenius relies upon figures of speech and allegory, the First Citizen deploys Wilson’s “Places of Logic” in defining what the plebeians have suffered, what causes he locates in the patricians, and what effects those actions have upon the citizens. This definition of the circumstances is necessary before one should entertain other rhetorical considerations. Menenius may use what Wilson calls “pleasant” discourse, but he strays from the topic at hand, suggesting Menenius dissembles or is otherwise a rhetor who wanders “from the purpose” with “by-tales.” The First Citizen’s persistence in staying on topic arguably marks him as more successful a rhetor to the audience since he focuses on “bringing all things together to confirm [his] cause so much as [he] can,” unlike Menenius. The First Citizen examines and articulates what he sees as the underlying causes for the present strife in Rome while defining and categorizing the patricians based upon reasonable observations of their behavior. Where Menenius says that the patricians love and help the plebeians, representing them as caring patriarchs, the First Citizen counters by delineating the actions of the patricians and the contempt and disregard those actions demonstrate for the citizens. Just as *Richard II* demonstrates that

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64 Wilson, *Art*, 121.
65 Wilson, *Art*, 122.
judicial rhetoric requires narrativization (see chapter 4), so do the First Citizen and Menenius contend over what narrative to attach to the actions of the patricians and citizens of Rome. In Coriolanus, their argument takes place in the court of public opinion rather than a legal setting. Given the use of oratory onstage in this scene, Menenius shows that he is willing to use artifice and emotional appeals to sway the populace while the First Citizen responds with the plain words and reasoning that Wilson identifies as the hallmarks of rhetoric and logic.

Where Menenius’s argument before the citizens devolves into character attacks, Coriolanus’s characteristic approach to dealing with rhetoric relies on violence and threats. If the citizens have become too rhetorically capable, then Coriolanus demonstrates the authoritative impulse to constrain dissenters through biopower directed against their bodies to control their public actions. Coriolanus recognizes he cannot compete rhetorically, suggesting that through their voices, the citizens exceed Rome’s hero. Where Menenius possessed sufficient ethos for the plebeians to grant him an audience, Coriolanus’s character is far more negative. The First Citizen notes ironically that the citizens “have ever [Coriolanus’s] good word,” but Coriolanus replies that he does not (and arguably cannot) distinguish between those who would “give good words” and flatterers (1.1.163-5). In this encounter on the streets of Rome, Coriolanus clearly has no respect for the plebeians, and his opinion is that their voices and desires are paltry things. Coriolanus tells the plebeians that they seek only to “[rub] the poor itch of [their] opinion” rather than convey anything substantive before he attacks them for not prizing war or martial valor. The plebeians are an underclass who should bow before “the noble Senate” and the patricians who gain their authority “[u]nder the gods, [to] keep [the citizens] in awe” (1.1.183-4). Despite his twenty-line invective against the plebeians, Coriolanus demonstrates a lack of skill with discourse and rhetoric.
Given his disdain and impatience for rhetoric, Coriolanus prefers instead to constrain citizen speech through violence. He often falls back on interjections and curses, most notably in his preference for “Hang ’em!” Interjections, expletives, and curses are interruptions of speech, reflecting a momentary inability or unwillingness to speak substantively. Unsurprisingly, Coriolanus’s response to plebeian rhetoric emphasizes his fundamental distrust of rational discourse, even when that discourse is more effective in its verbal strategies than that deployed by a patrician rhetor such as Menenius. Coriolanus complains that the other group of plebeians he encounters the same evening as the events of 1.1 “sighed forth proverbs” and with such “shreds” persuaded the Senate to grant them “[five] tribunes to defend their vulgar wis...
ostensibly represent the citizens at the expense of their liberty. In 1.1, the tribunes Flavius and Murellus appear to harangue a group of plebeians. Where in Coriolanus Menenius represents the patricians’ attempt to rein in the citizenry, here Shakespeare uses the tribunes to limit and constrain the voices and desires of citizens. These tribunes do so because they fear the power and influence Caesar exerts over the citizens, for they fear Caesar “would soar above the view of men, / And keep [them] all in servile fearfulness” (1.1.75-6). Flavius and Murellus view themselves as a threatened authority within Rome. In harassing the Cobbler, the tribunes feel this citizen is a “naughty knave” who plays rhetorical games with them (1.1.14). If played strictly for farce and the Cobbler unintentionally engages in ironic wordplay, then Flavius and Murellus’s contempt becomes more understandable as they deal with a clown. Indeed, cobbler in the late Tudor period does suggest not only a mender of shoes but also a “mere botcher” of things and situations.67 However, the Cobbler also takes on a subversive role, like the Eastcheap regulars in the Henriad or Bottom in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, speaking against the abuse that the tribunes hurl towards the plebeians whom the tribunes supposedly represent. As Athanasios Boulukos argues, Shakespeare uses the Cobbler’s conversation with the tribunes to emphasize the Cobbler’s philosophical canniness and intellectual liberty, traits that also manifest through the Cobbler’s counter-rhetoric to the tribunes.68 If not played for farce, or if played with knowing irony, then the Cobbler offers a rhetorical counterpoint to the accusations of the tribunes.

The Cobbler’s recourse to arguably ironic rhetoric allows him to undermine the conservative, patriotic oratory of the tribunes in a manner akin to Falstaff’s pleasant storytelling. Much as Menenius does in Coriolanus, Murellus argues from tradition and romanitas as they

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67 “cobbler, n.,” OED Online, September 2012, Oxford University Press. See also 156n11.
take the plebeians and Caesar (*in abstantia*) to task before resorting to *ad hominem* attacks (1.1.33-56). The Cobbler and the tribunes engage in competing forms of amplification, attempts to further their causes through “exaggerat[i]on” that shapes meaning and establishes tiers of significance in their speeches. As Wilson notes, orators often develop amplification through proverbs, maxims, and community commonplaces, such as the tribunes do through ideas of Roman virtue. Amplification helps determine how auditors prioritize the significance of topics within an instance of rhetoric by influencing the emotions of the audience.69 If the Cobbler speaks knowingly, then his recourse to irony, proverbs, and maxims subverts the high-minded rhetoric of the tribunes. The tribunes hope to exhort the citizens to compliance through the fear of shame and through invocations of Roman values. However, the Cobber’s wordplay functions much like Falstaff’s does in the *Henry IV* plays (see chapter four) by deflating elitist emotional appeals by allowing audiences to encounter a different pathetic perspective on the situation.

In both plays, the tribunes try to shape the plebeians to their own ends, replacing whatever voices the citizens might have with the tribunes’ will. Instead of granting the plebeians the freedom to speak as they desire—apparently content with celebrating Caesar’s triumph—the tribunes instead work to move the plebeians to speak as *they* desire. Just as Coriolanus’s presence silences the voice of the First Citizen of 1.1, so do the tribunes in *Julius Caesar* silence the voice of the Cobbler. Flavius scripts a desired response for the citizens and delivers it in the imperative. They should “Go” and “Assemble” others to “Draw them” to “weep” for Pompey and, implicitly, against Caesar (1.1.57-61). The tribunes conspire to construct a public spectacle using the plebeians in an attempt to confound Caesar’s theatricality and his rhetoric that exalts his ethos in the eyes of those same plebeians. In this way, the tribunes use an aesthetic construct, the theatrical performance they script, for their political purposes.

Much as Flavius and Murellus feel that Caesar threatens their authority, Sicinius and Brutus feel that Coriolanus threatens their newfound prestige and power. Menenius reminds the tribunes how fragile their individual power is, their “office,” for they “can do very little alone” and require the “many” (i.e., the plebeians) to support them, especially in comparison to Coriolanus (2.1.218, 33-4). After Coriolanus’s triumph at Corioles, the tribunes recognize that “[all] tongues speak of him” and that he is likely to become consul, the result of which would likely lead to their power “go[ing to] sleep” (2.1.201, 218-9). Like Murellus and Flavius, they begin scripting the citizens (and Coriolanus, in abstentia) to fashion the voices of the plebeians to the tribunes’ ends.

While the citizens speak individually through the first several scenes of Coriolanus when they appear, the goal for the tribunes is to forge them into one voice that, paradoxically, denies them their voices. The plebeians recognize how their voices do have power, for the First Citizen in 2.3 (distinct from the First Citizen of 1.1) suggests that “if [Coriolanus does] require [their] voices[, they, the plebeians] ought not to deny him,” leading the Citizen’s compatriots to remind him that they can do so, “if [they] will” (2.3.1-3). The Third Citizen, in turn, comments upon the limits of Roman republicanism. Although they have this kind of power in their voices, civility and gratitude suggest that they have little choice but to grant their voices to Coriolanus, for “[ingratitude] is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude” (2.3.9-11). Giving their voices to Coriolanus is merely a ceremony, a performance expected of the citizens since the patricians have already chosen Coriolanus to be the next consul. This surrender of their voices requires appropriate ceremonial acceptance on Coriolanus’s part.
The tribunes work to undermine Coriolanus’s reluctant participation in these ceremonies as they move the plebeians to reject Coriolanus as consul by controlling the citizens’ voices. As Ormsby argues, the tribunes remind the citizens of their expectations as spectators and “as witnesses to social performance,” and the tribunes use the plebeians’ knowledge of the “performance frame” to grant them a rationale for denying Coriolanus’s accession as consul. However, the performance frame also applies for the audience as Shakespeare again invokes topicality, encouraging spectators to judge the citizens’ responses by reminding them of that frame through the alienation effect. While the citizens may feel that denying Coriolanus their voices suggests ingratitude, Coriolanus has previously been “[their] enemy, ever spake against / [Their] liberties and the charters that [they] bear / I’th’ body of the weal” (2.3.175-7). While “liberties” suggest freedom in general, the term calls to mind the liberties of the city, the comparatively independent jurisdiction of the city of London—and by projection here, Rome—from aristocratic control. Brutus’s invocation of the “body of the weal” suggests what Hadfield has described about early modern English conceptions of ante-republicanism in general. Although Coriolanus and the patricians may not believe the plebeians’ concerns are worthy of consideration, ample realpolitik precedents exist to make their concerns quite pertinent and important. The tribunes twist these republican and quite pragmatic concerns to their advantage, so that by the time they arrive to arrest Coriolanus, the throng subsumes the once distinct voices of the citizens:

BRUTUS Seize [Coriolanus], aediles!
ALL [THE CITIZENS] Down with him!—down with him!— (3.1.184-5)

The voice of the mob becomes necessarily simplistic and passionate as the citizen’s political agency devolves, and the consideration of the previously articulate citizens becomes mere

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70 Ormsby, 54.
shouting as any hope for rational debate evaporates. The audience witnesses this degradation and the topical and emotional appeals that cause that degradation. This moment of alienation arguably leads audiences to consider how London authorities may have similarly manipulated their affections.

In *Julius Caesar*, patrician attempts to collapse and to control the voices of the citizens while distracting them from critical judgment of the rhetoric they encounter become most apparent in the funeral scene of 3.2, but Brutus fails to turn the citizens to his purposes. Although the scene begins with the plebeians speaking as one—“We will be satisfied: let us be satisfied,” they say to Brutus and Cassius about the murder of Caesar—their voices quickly become distinct again and suggestive that they wish to weigh the reasons for the murder (3.2.1). The First and Second Plebeians decide to hear Brutus’s and Cassius’s separate discourses so that they can “compare their reasons / When severally [the plebeians] hear them rendered” (3.2.8-10). The citizens indicate both a desire for critical inquiry and a rational approach to resolving the conflict in question, reflecting Habermas’s notion of “rational-critical debate” on matters of public import.72 The desire to “compare” Brutus’s and Cassius’s rhetoric also demonstrates that they have some distrust of how authority justifies itself and that they hope to penetrate any obfuscation on the rhetors’ parts. This suspicion suggests a certain level of rhetorical ability on the plebeians’ part, and that suspicion suggests the need to interrogate the stories public figures advance to justify their actions, much as Falstaff does in the *Henriad* (see chapter 5). As he delivers his oratory, Brutus is tedious and egomaniacal, focusing primarily on his situated ethos rather than on delighting, teaching, and persuading his audience, which Wilson identifies as an orator’s aims.73 As Wills argues, Shakespeare has Brutus deploy a variety of rhetorical strategies

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72 Habermas, 247.
73 Wilson, *Art*, 46.
that rhetoricians mocked or warned novice rhetors to avoid. Indeed, Brutus is more concerned about himself and his honor than about assuaging the fears of the plebeians, who should diligently submit to the authority of his “honour,” as Antony repeatedly reminds his audience (3.2.15). The result is that Brutus’s rhetoric has more in common with Menenius’s platitudes and maxims than with any sincere attempt to persuade his audience or to be at all sympathetic to them. Although the plebeians ostensibly approve of Brutus at the end of his oratory, their response is muted in comparison to their reaction to Antony’s funerary speech.

Antony’s use of rhetoric in 3.2 collapses the voices of the plebeians into one mob-like voice that devolves civil discourse into broken, fragmented utterances: Antony’s speech destroys clarity for the citizenry. Although the plebeians speak collectively in the early parts of 3.2, their words remain conversational, delivered as replies to Brutus’s rhetorical questions (3.2.32-5). The individual voices of the plebeians assert themselves immediately after their collective advocacy of Brutus, as the First through Fourth Plebeians assert similar, though distinct, praises of the patrician (3.2.49-53). In contrast, the plebeians respond more passionately and more collectively to Antony’s pathos-driven speech, which Gil argues succeeds by finding common emotional ground with the plebeians. Doing so moves them to empathize with Antony’s professed experience of Caesar’s death while pushing them to react emotionally and not critically to the situation. If Habermasian publics require rational debate and reflection to exist in order to afford persons a space in which they can participate on their terms and not others, then Antony works to destroy the Roman plebeian public in this scene to serve his political purposes. As Wilson notes, exhortations focus on “stir[ring] affections,” and orators often frame exhortations around encomiums of persons, “expectations” people may have, and hopes for substantial “reward,” like

74 Wills, 43, 48-50, 53. See also Yu, 98, where Yu sees Brutus as appealing to reason in a manner appropriate to “political assemblies,” such as the Senate.

75 Gil, 70-1.
Antony does in this scene with Caesar’s will. Audiences willingly embrace and interiorize affecting, theatrical rhetoric while eschewing “sour-checking sermon[s],” like Brutus’s speech. Antony also plays upon the citizens’ collective greed as a pathetic response, leading them to call for Caesar’s “will” repeatedly (3.2.140, 155). With the revelation of Caesar’s bloody body, the pretense of individual voices and auditing Antony’s and Brutus’s rhetoric falls away to slavish devotion to Antony and the mob mentality early modern authorities feared. Shakespeare demonstrates that authorities sometimes desire this kind of mob response, when citizens cease thinking rationally as skeptical, individual members of a public and become a mass that patricians like Antony can direct against foes or against opposing agendas.

Shakespeare’s departure from Plutarch emphasizes Antony’s rhetoric and its destruction of citizen speech and rationality. The plebeians’ initial, collective exclamations represent a degeneration of their individual subjectivity into monosyllabic shouts and imperatives: “Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay! / Let not a traitor live!” (3.2.199-200). Plutarch only ascribes one line of dialogue to the plebeians—“kill the murthers”—and he otherwise only describes the riot that erupts in the forum. Before the plebeians deliver their string of monosyllabic imperatives, Shakespeare has the individual voices of the citizens begin to break down. The First through Fourth Plebeians deliver a sequence of apostrophes as exclamations, beginning with “O piteous spectacle!” and culminating in “O most bloody sight!” shortly before the collective call for revenge occurs (3.2.196-8). In this way, Antony objectifies Caesar’s corpse as an aesthetic prop for his public theater and as a tool for constraining how citizens can respond to this spectacle. The plebeians utter 54 sentences—collectively or individually—before these

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76 Wilson, *Art*, 100, 47.
77 Plutarch, 1064.
apostrophes, but only three of these sentences are fragments. More of these sentences appear to be fragments, but these are implicitly imperatives, such as the Fourth Plebeian’s “A ring” which has an implied command of “[Form a] ring,” though these implicit commands increase in frequency as the text approaches the apostrophic moment (3.2.162). In contrast to the generally complete sentences they had spoken, the apostrophes are all fragments, anticipating the string of monosyllables the crowd shouts a scant line later. Antony’s rhetoric destroys the chance for the citizens to engage in the Habermasian rational debate they plan at the beginning of this scene, and Antony instead moves them to adopt his preferred discourse on his rivals and his own status as Caesar’s favorite.

In Coriolanus, the tribunes Sicinius and Brutus also trigger a collapse and degradation of citizen speech, but this collapse extends beyond the plebeians to draw in all Romans, for Shakespeare suggests this kind of discourse can come dangerously close to destruction of the public sphere. Shakespeare emphasizes the verbal consequences in Coriolanus rather than the civil collapse that ends the republic in Julius Caesar. As Ormsby notes, this collapse reflects the diminution of the public’s critical faculties in favor of their “unified volition,” but the tribunes’ role in causing this degradation and the means they use are also significant. The plebeians previously voiced their opinions individually as they spoke with the tribunes or questioned Coriolanus about his service to the state. They devolve into one collective voice: “Down with him!” (3.1.185). Shakespeare further magnifies the verbal degeneration that occurs in this scene, more so than in 3.2 of Julius Caesar, by confusing and combining all of the voices on stage at this time:

\[\text{ALL} \quad \text{Tribunes!—Patricians!—Citizens!—What ho!}\]

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78 These fragments focus on Caesar’s will, as found in 3.2.140 and 155, or represent the group’s answer to Brutus’s string of rhetorical questions in 3.2.35.

79 Ormsby, 56.
Sicinius!—Brutus!—Coriolanus!—Citizens!
Peace!—Peace!—Peace!—Stay!—Hold!—Peace! (3.1.187-9)

Even the normally loquacious Menenius finds himself bereft of speech: “I am out of breath,” he says, for “[c]onfusion’s near…[and I] cannot speak” (3.1.190-1). The sequencing of the utterances shows how rhetorical power has shifted in this scene. The interjection “What ho!” represents an attempt to gain the attention of a specific person or persons. The collective crowd of plebeians, tribunes, and patricians tries to get the attention of the tribunes, then the patricians, then, failing these nominal leaders, the citizens themselves.

The verbal and physical chaos in both plays forces audiences to make sense of what is occurring, and in doing so, these plays encourage spectators to reflect upon how the tribunes and patricians work to devolve citizens into a mob pliant to the rhetors’ purposes. When the groups shouting in 3.1 of Coriolanus fail to establish order, the crowd turns to individuals, and the first individuals invoked are the tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, suggesting their dominance in this scene. Even Menenius, lacking the words for the situation at hand, cedes verbal authority to Sicinius (3.1.193). The tribune establishes order again as the citizens collectively call on him to “speak” (3.1.194). In their machinations, the tribunes usurp the voices of the plebeians, with only an individual citizen making his voice heard, likely the same First Citizen from the opening scene, who hurls Menenius’s fable from that scene back at him (3.1.272-4). Aside from a citizen praising the tribunes early in 4.6, the individual voices of the citizens of Rome do not reassert themselves until the close of the same scene after news of Coriolanus’s march against them. The plebeians’ sense of remorse and return to individual voices invites audiences to consider instances when they have found themselves part of a mob only to realize at a later point possible

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80 Parker notes that the “following three lines must be divided amongst the various groups on stage….The effect must be of confusion, not polarization” (256n187).
81 “what ho, int. and adj.,” OED Online, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
shame at having arrived at such a point. The mistakes of the citizens serve as a mirror for
audiences to judge themselves, or at least to consider an ostensibly historical example of citizens
transformed into mobs so that spectators can try to avoid similar fates.

The potentiality for liberty on the part of citizens, their political subjectivity, depends
upon their judicious use of their voices to give power to those who would represent their interests
in the commonwealth. Rhetoric affords citizens the means to evaluate the discourses authorities
deploy as those forces seek to sway the public towards particular ends, and this evaluative
function of rhetoric has an aesthetic dimension. As Altman suggests, rhetoric allows persons to
gain “a different perspective.” Rhetoric then serves a similar function for political subjectivity
like role-playing does for Hamlet (see chapter 2) or the suggestive art and theatrics of the occult
do for magicians (see chapter 3). Even storytelling in the Henriad functions often along
rhetorical lines (see chapter 4), and the need for self-narrativization suggests the importance of
citizen speech of various kinds and before different audiences. Republicanism depends upon
representationality, for individual citizens cede their collective authority, their voices, to
empower leaders to act on their behalf. The plays suggest that the public should scrutinize those
who can command or attract the popular voice, those who can use popularity for political ends.
In doing so, Shakespeare adapts the lives of Caesar, Brutus, Antony, and Coriolanus from
Plutarch’s Lives, itself a prime example of the magistra vitae and Mirror for Magistrates genres
that North dedicated to Elizabeth I. Shakespeare amplifies upon the social contexts of those lives
to invite audiences to reflect upon the mistakes of the citizens of Rome and the motivations for
supposedly virtuous men. Just as he explores Bolingbroke’s and Hal’s use of popularity in the
Henriad, Shakespeare invites audiences to evaluate how and to what ends politicians accrue and
use popularity in these plays.

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82 Altman, 50-1.
While these plays’ representations of the plebeians partly serve as figurative mirrors held up to commoner audiences and encourage them to compare their experiences with those of stage citizens, the plays’ treatment of celebrity and fame also participates in the cultural production of a public. Simultaneously, the manipulation of fame intersects with the swaying of plebeian voices. These works center their examination of Roman life on powerful men who encounter the citizens of the city. As Miola notes, fame and public opinion determine how citizens can judge civic personalities. Coriolanus’s pursuit of fame and glory on the battlefield to advance his station in Rome earns him the opportunity to become consul. However, his reputation outside of war does not endear him to the people, and he feels any attempt to solicit the direct support of the plebeians—to gain their voices—is unbecoming. In this way, Coriolanus appears as anti-political, at least compared to the other patricians. Failing to participate within the realms of mutual respect and reciprocation that is necessary in a commonwealth, Coriolanus allows others to use his fame against him. *Julius Caesar* explores the process of fashioning the reputation of public figures after their deaths, for Antony appropriates the fame of Caesar and Brutus through the creation of a civic cult of personality around those men, with Antony as the chief beneficiary. While Antony’s actions culminate in civil war and the end of the Roman republic, Coriolanus resists this kind of fashioning and appropriation and offers a model for audiences to recognize this kind of rhetoric and to resist it.

In addressing these plays’ demonstrations of the manipulation of popularity, I situate my argument in terms of civil canonization as a means of appropriating the popularity of public figures. While critics like Naomi Conn Liebler and David Hawkes address Antony’s actions as marketplace ideology and iconoclasm, Antony’s shaping of Caesar’s and Brutus’s reputations...
through civil canonization has decidedly aesthetic and political registers.84 Antony refashions these men’s public biographies to his advantage, much as Hal does with Hotspur and others in the *Henriad* (see chapter 4). In arguing that Coriolanus’s obstinacy reflects resistance to similar attempts at reframing the hero through rhetoric, I participate within a tradition of criticism regarding Coriolanus that has sought to recuperate the often unpopular character from accusations of anti-republican sentiment. Shakespeare uses Coriolanus’s constancy to counter attempts to appropriate his body and his reputation for others’ uses, not just to examine “constancy, honor, and *pietas*” as Miola, Thierry Demaubus, and Geoffrey Miles argue.85 Through these plays, Shakespeare invites audiences to judge the ways in which public personas are fashioned and how rhetors craft their ethos at the expenses of others. In doing so, *Coriolanus* offers up its tragic hero as a model for fighting against this kind of unethical theft of character. Coriolanus seeks to participate within the public sphere on his own terms, just as many of the other characters examined in this dissertation pursue their political subjectivity and resist the cultural and political constraints imposed upon them.

While Coriolanus perceives seeking support in the marketplace as barter, he fails to recognize the reciprocal nature of living in a commonwealth. As Carlo Pagetti argues, Shakespeare deploys economic metaphors for buying “values, ideas, and…words,” and these marketplace metaphors suggest something potentially upsetting in purchasing favor rather than otherwise earning it through action.86 The plebeians advocate the kind of give-and-take necessary for reasonable persons living in a community, and they recognize they have a mutual

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85 Miola, 190; Demaubus, 30; and Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 149.
86 Pagetti, 154.
relationship with Coriolanus and other soldiers. The Third Citizen acknowledges that, were Coriolanus to “incline to the people[,] there was never a worthier man” for the consulship (2.3.36-7, 16). The citizens see their relationship with the soldiers in mutual terms: the citizens labor and the soldiers defend the city.

In recognizing Coriolanus’s merit, the citizens also remind him of those mutual obligations. The plebeians note he has only to “ask” for the consulship “kindly” to receive their voices (2.3.66-71). Wearing the “gown of humility” and asking for the citizens’ voices are parts of a ritual to constrain Coriolanus’s ego within socially acceptable boundaries that emphasize that mutuality. The First Citizen’s use of “kindly” echoes Coriolanus’s earlier usage of the word in 1.9. There, Coriolanus requests leniency for the “poor man” who “kindly” offered Coriolanus sanctuary in Corioles (1.9.81-6). The word suggests not only kindness but also commonality and the natural order, like Hamlet’s invocation of kind in describing Claudius’s marriage as “less than kind” or natural (1.2.65). The play repeatedly notes he fights for “his country,” not for his aggrandizement, and the ritual and the community stress this understanding (2.3.38). The citizens are willing to obey the formalities of these rituals—they are open to making Coriolanus consul—but they want him to acknowledge why he should be seeking to lead them. They ask that he show them a measure of respect and acknowledge their place within the political order of Rome. The citizens want Coriolanus to acknowledge that he is of common kind with the rest of the persons in the commonwealth and to demonstrate the mutual respect that humans ask of each other, even if Coriolanus is an exceptional member of the community. The plebeians know Coriolanus has done much for them, and not to make him consul would be to show

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88 This phrase appears some fifteen times in the text, shifting from supporting his country to, after his banishment, attacking it.
“[i]ngratitude” (2.3.9-11). The problem is that Coriolanus exceeds all boundaries as a man, and he refuses to constrain himself within the constraints of Rome. Indeed, Coriolanus threatens to grow beyond Rome’s ability to welcome him.

Where Coriolanus becomes monstrous as a personality, Caesar threatens to become monstrous because of his popularity. After chastising the mechanicals in 1.1, Flavius speaks of Caesar in a supernatural register. He tells Murellus to “[l]et no images / Be hung with Caesar’s trophies” in an attempt to “make [Caesar] fly an ordinary pitch” by “pluck[ing]” the “growing feathers…from Caesar’s wing,” who would otherwise “soar above the view of men” (1.1.69-75). Caesar’s image threatens to become iconic, an object of worship that decenters the traditional sites of social authority in Rome in favor of one man who takes on godlike assignations of authority. As men, the tribunes cannot compete with a supernatural being, and Caesar has begun to become more than human in the public consciousness. Cassius’s extended diatribe against Caesar in 1.2 revisits this anxiety. “I was born free as Caesar,” he tells Brutus, and both men have human failings (1.2.97). Cassius’s account of his swimming contest against Caesar emphasizes Caesar’s mortality in the face of a public reputation that makes “this man / …become a god” (1.2.115-6). Caesar’s name takes on almost supernatural authority itself, as Cassius invites Brutus to “conjure with [their names],” for Brutus’s name “will start a spirit as soon as ‘Caesar’” (1.2.145-6). Caesar’s cult grows over the course of the play, and that popularity affords Caesar and his supporters a dangerous rhetorical tool in Rome.

Antony amplifies Caesar’s divinity for the plebeian audience, using Caesar’s more than human reputation to augment Antony’s ethos, reframing Caesar and him as more deserving of the plebeians’ voices than Brutus and company. In this sense, Antony fashions his and Caesar’s biographies so that the narrative of these men’s lives can justifiably have more power, much as
Bolingbroke and Hal attempt to do in the *Henriad* (see chapter 4). Magnifying the popularity of Caesar into the register of worship and veneration, Antony does far more than represent Caesar as what Hadfield terms “a populist.” After Caesar’s assassination, Brutus and Antony speak of taking the “pulpit” to deliver funeral orations about the fallen leader (3.1.229, 236, 250). While they use *pulpit* in its classical sense, as a “stage or platform used for public speeches,” the word’s ecclesiastical associations are perhaps more immediate for audiences. In 3.2, Antony represents Caesar as saint-like, for should the plebeians hear Caesar’s will, the citizens would “kiss” his “wounds” and take samples of “his sacred blood” and other tokens from the corpse (3.2.133-7). Caesar’s wounds become marks of martyrdom, and Antony suggests that Roman authorities martyred Caesar, much as Christian saints like Cecilia and Valerian were. Antony transforms Caesar’s corpse, already a prop on Shakespeare’s stage at this point in the play, into a saintly relic ready to receive veneration from adoring worshippers and ready to be dismembered as memorials worthy of being passed from one generation to the next. For Protestant audiences, Antony’s tactics may suggest the worst abuses of Catholic orthodoxy and its supposed idolatrous treatment of saints for material gain. Catholic spectators, in turn, would likely view Antony’s strategies as blasphemous, responding perhaps as negatively as Protestants might.

What Shakespeare’s Antony does in this scene is distinct from the historical imperial cult of Rome that deified Caesar and the resulting emperors as figures of idolatrous worship that Christian martyrs railed against. Shakespeare uses the still extant understanding of Catholic saints—diminished in importance and immediacy in Reformation England, but still a strong part of the public discourse. Stories about saints’ lives served as sites of cultural production, much

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89 Hadfield, 181.
90 “pulpit, n.” *OED Online*, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
91 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to treat early modern discourse on saints in depth, but Julia Reinhard Lupton and Alison A. Chapman have both done so in recent books on the subject. See Julia Reinhard Lupton and Alison A. Chapman.
like classical rhetoric and Rome did, and Shakespeare takes advantage of that discourse to comment upon what Antony does with Caesar in this scene. Given that saints developed associations based upon their lives, their works, and their legacies, identifying what Caesar becomes the patron saint of and for whom Caesar was martyred is important.

Antony represents Caesar as a protector of and advocate for the people of Rome. Caesar becomes what Julia Reinhard Lupton might term a “citizen-saint,” and Caesar the tragic hero exists as a “sacred monster” that the community must excise for its own sake. Caesar’s impromptu civil canonization by Antony invokes Christianity and Christian forms of representation, leading to Caesar as a ruling authority becoming “a saint on the stage of public execution.” In drama, these figures represent a subordination of personal subjectivity to the collective, so that what distinguished them from the community disappears in their deaths. Caesar’s will becomes a testament of his love for the citizens and a covenant with them. In representing Caesar as a martyred saint, Antony transforms him into the patron saint of Rome’s plebeians, for Antony argues that Caesar died for them. If the brutality that results from Antony’s oration and his cynical admissions onstage do not spur audiences to respond negatively to how he manipulates and controls the plebeians, then the Christian blasphemy or idolatry he commits may do so as the spectators’ sense of dramatic irony grants them a perspective the onstage plebeians lack.

Antony manages to secure popularity through a proxy, ablating any potential backlash onto a Caesar who becomes beyond reproach because of his sacrifice and onto Antony’s rivals, whose reputations mark them as treasonous personae non gratae. While Brutus may say that he did not “[love] Caesar less, but…[he] loved Rome more,” Antony amplifies this reasoning in his

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oration so that Caesar dies for Rome, martyred by arrogant, self-serving men (3.2.21-2). Caesar’s wounds become mouthpieces for Antony as he “bid[s] them speak” and he “put[s] a tongue / In every wound of Caesar that should move / The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny” against the murderers who do not have Rome’s interests in mind. Antony fashions Brutus and company as men who conspire against Rome’s and the people’s interests on an almost diabolical level (3.2.219-23). Antony’s oration reframes the wounds on Caesar’s body as the wounds of a martyr, and when confronted with the supposed brutal sacrifice of their champion, the mob’s rationality gives way to utter pathos.

Repeating this process after Brutus’s suicide, Antony fashions Brutus to amplify his own reputation as Brutus’ rival and victor. Antony understands that men’s reputations develop from the kinds of rivals they have. Brutus was, Antony says, “noble[r]” than any other Roman, even more so than Caesar or himself, so Antony becomes nobler in having contended with Brutus and in speaking so well of him now (5.5.69). Brutus acted against Caesar in the interests of the “common good to all,” the republic and its peoples, unlike his co-conspirators, so Antony acts now in the same interests (5.5.73). Antony frames Brutus as a paragon of masculinity as his “elements” combine so that nature exalts Brutus as the ideal man (5.5.74-6). In speaking in this way of Brutus, Antony himself becomes more masculine, more a figure of excellence, and more Rome’s champion than he might have been otherwise. This encomium may seem sincere at first glance, but Shakespeare reminds us of Antony’s rhetorical adroitness through Octavius, who drags Antony’s words and the audience back to reality. “According to his virtue let us use him,” Octavius says, immediately after Antony’s monologue (5.5.77). The Second Triumvirate uses Brutus just as they use Caesar in advancing their newfound power and in securing their new empire. Moreover, where Antony previously spoke to the onstage plebeian audience, Antony in
this scene likely addresses the audience directly. In doing so, Shakespeare invites that audience to judge Antony’s encomium in light of his earlier appropriations of Caesar’s body and of his invective against Brutus.

Coriolanus is perhaps most persistently resentful of rhetoric’s potential to subvert his agency as an independent member of the commonwealth and to appropriate his fame as Antony’s rhetoric does with Caesar and Brutus. In expressing skepticism of language through Coriolanus, Shakespeare encourages his spectators also to do so. In this manner, Coriolanus’s conflict aligns with the plebeians in that the tribunes seek to constrain his liberty and potentiality to the forms that the tribunes and others desire and find useful. Coriolanus might have been an excellent politician and community leader, but doing so in the Roman republic would require him to subordinate his identity to a publicized version of that identity necessary in a representational government. Coriolanus is in many ways a figure like 1 Henry IV’s Hotspur: a heroic, idealistic representative of the chivalric and noble order. Both men are out of place in their respective worlds. Coriolanus clings to a patrician, far more epic ideal out of keeping with the realpolitik of the Roman republic while Hotspur is a throwback to the chivalric ideal of martial romances, an anachronism in Bolingbroke’s and Hal’s Machiavellian world. Coriolanus thinks that the plebeians and their concerns are trifles, for he can only value his form of service to their country, not theirs. He hates the plebeians and anyone he considers tainted by them. In some ways, Coriolanus demonstrates a problem between the nobility and the citizens in an almost medieval division of the estates: those who war and those who labor. In Coriolanus, the onstage analogues of these estates do not respect or favor each other. Coriolanus forgets why and for whom he should fight, but Shakespeare reminds his audience that the commoners need Coriolanus and the nobility.
Demonstrating a marked distrust of representation and speech as ways of fashioning meaning for himself and his identity on a social level, Coriolanus recognizes the instability of discourse and the potential for others to usurp control over it. His preferred identity is foremost that of a capable warrior, and Coriolanus refuses to compromise his identity even for the sake of his life: “Let them [the plebeians]…present me / Death on the wheel,” he tells his friends amongst the nobility, “yet I will still / Be thus [i.e., adversarial] to them” (3.2.1-6). He is unwilling to dissemble, in general, but Volumnia argues that he is willing to do so during war (3.2.48-53). Just as discretion moves soldiers to be canny and duplicitous in warfare, so too must citizens be dishonest as necessary in times of peace. She constructs an analogy in which citizenship, life in the city, becomes a kind of verbal warfare. According to Volumnia, were Coriolanus dishonest in his professed beliefs and intentions with the plebeians, such a course of action would be “no more dishonour[able]… / Than to take in a town with gentle words” (3.2.55-62). However, she has not seen how Coriolanus fights and how he has forged the epic reputation he has and which Shakespeare spends much of the first act representing on stage.

Eschewing rhetoric, Coriolanus favors direct action as a means for constructing his identity. In wartime, Coriolanus spurs his allies to fight as he fights, for he does not fight with words or as other Romans do. Cominius tells his fellow soldiers during a retreat that they have “[w]ell fought…/ Like Romans, neither foolish in [their] stands / Nor cowardly in retire” (1.7.1-3). In contrast, Coriolanus seeks out those who, like him, “have the spirit” to fight on despite danger, and after his battles, he is as fit and happy as on his “nuptial day,” unlike the Romans (1.6.13; 1.7.30-1). Ultimately, Coriolanus prizes heroics and a “brave death” rather than any dissimulation, even in battle (1.8.72). This emphasis appears most pointedly in 1.9 as Coriolanus condemns Aufidius after their duel breaks off into a mass melee. Aufidius’s “condemnèd
seconds” interfere in the duel, leading Coriolanus to accuse Aufidius of being “[o]fficious and not valiant” (1.10.14-5). Coriolanus adheres to this opinion and method of warfare even if the interference makes tactical sense for helping determine the outcome of their battle. He favors action as a means for constructing his identity, but as Paul A. Kottman argues about action, Coriolanus’s failure to represent his actions publicly and discursively surrenders the assignation of meaning for his actions to those who choose to do so. In Richard II, Mowbray may not want to represent his actions verbally since he is not as adept a storyteller as Bolingbroke is, but Mowbray recognizes that he must do so or cede authority over his biography to Bolingbroke (see chapter 4). Coriolanus fails to recognize this reality, favoring continued, bloody action as an attempted bulwark against dissembling and representationality.

Coriolanus chafes at representations of himself that infringe upon his framing of himself as a public figure, even when others praise him publicly. He tolerates Cominius’s ritual praise of Coriolanus since his superior, who has fought in the field, speaks of Coriolanus’s martial exploits. On his later, post-exile return to Rome, though, Coriolanus rebuffs attempts to speak to him by Cominius and others. Coriolanus avoids speech, and in 5.1-2, audiences only hear about what has happened. Coriolanus distrusts public rhetoric as a means of controlling others. For example, while Menenius recounts how he has spoken much that is good for Coriolanus as the old man confronts the Watchmen, these soldiers call Menenius’s good words lies, even if they are lies for Coriolanus’s benefit (5.2.31-3). Ultimately, Shakespeare offers us Coriolanus’s ideal of self-authorship in which he wishes to be “author of himself” rather than the product of “other kin” (5.3.36-7). Although critics like Miola, Jan H. Blits, and Unhae Park Langis read

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93 The Oxford edition does not distinguish these lines from Aufidius’s preceding lines, for these closing lines for 1.9 follow stage directions from the Folio. Given that the directions conclude with the reasonable note that Coriolanus follows Aufidius and his men, giving these condemnatory lines to Coriolanus makes sense.

Coriolanus’s boast as authoritarian hubris and a lack of empathy, Coriolanus instead seeks to guard himself from those social forces that would appropriate him. Coriolanus represents himself as something less and more than human, that he has no parentage and has come into the world fully-formed as if he had created and bore himself, “like a god” (333n36). Coriolanus sees his heroic actions as offering him a means for participating in the public sphere, as a means for forging an identity and biography distinct from his family and the state. Reacting against the encomiums offered in his honor and against the attempts to frame his service and injuries as being for the plebeians, he avoids verbal representation in favor of brute force and action.

Rhetoric opens Coriolanus to interpretation and community representation, and doing so cedes his authority over his person to the populace. He seeks to author not only the kind of man he wishes to be but also the way he will exist within the public. Coriolanus seeks to control how people conceive of him on his own terms, but he cannot escape his community obligations.

Coriolanus is like Hotspur in this regard, for both characters seek to author personae and ways of being that glorify them as martial heroes, and these men remain stubbornly asocial in their attempts to pursue political subjectivity. Hotspur repeatedly frames the story he wishes to tell of himself, and audiences only witness his martial prowess in his duel with Hal, complicated by Falstaff reminding spectators of the performative frame of the scene (see chapter 4). In contrast, Coriolanus appears quite capable of being the superheroic figure he and Rome believe him to be, given the extended battlefield action that dominates the first act. Coriolanus excels as a soldier, and he recognizes that this is his chief means for framing his position in the public sphere while also granting him power over his body and how he uses it under the law. Like Hotspur, Coriolanus chafes at more overtly verbal forms of expression, and both characters view

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themselves as ill equipped to participate socially in more acceptable, aesthetically-driven contexts, such as the arts of the courtier and rhetoric. Coriolanus’s recourse to violence becomes a means of safeguarding his political subjectivity against forces, benign and otherwise, that seek to appropriate him for their ends. Where Hamlet, for example, worries about the status of his body and how to represent himself publicly (see chapter 2), Coriolanus resorts to personal, not state-sponsored, biopower to protect his subjectivity and to impose his will on others. Coriolanus strives to be sovereign over himself.

In having Coriolanus buckle shortly after making such a claim to authorship in the face of his family, Shakespeare demonstrates how powerful those forces of family and community can be in determining self-representation. Coriolanus’s submission reinscribes him within the bounds of community that he has sought personal autonomy from in order to avoid rhetoric overriding his identity. In confronting him in his tent, Volumnia makes it clear that she hopes to “frame” him to her purposes, with frame here suggesting not only that she hopes to help and to be helped by her son but also that she hopes to shape him to her ends (5.3.63).96 Her kneeling, her use of Young Martius as a potential, future reproduction of Coriolanus, all of these maneuvers on Volumnia’s part are rhetorical appeals she deploys in an attempt to fashion Coriolanus to her purposes. Indeed, these appeals are pathetic and destroy Coriolanus’s rational and critical skepticism of the rhetoric she deploys against him. Her actions show that even beloved parents use rhetoric to persuade their children to be what they want, publicly and otherwise.

Coriolanus seeks to rise above this communitarian rhetoric and representation, which hinders his political subjectivity through emotional subjection, but he hopes to avoid appropriation at least in death. Towards this end, Shakespeare creates an echo in Coriolanus from Julius Caesar. Just as Antony “put[s] a tongue / In every wound of Caesar,” the citizens in

96 “frame, v.” OED Online, September 2012, Oxford University Press.
Coriolanus “are to put [their] tongues into [Coriolanus’s] wounds and speak for them” (JC 3.2.221-2; Corio. 2.3.6-7). Coriolanus finds such a use of his war wounds outlandish and degrading, for he “cannot bring / [His] tongue to” entreat the citizens to view his wounds in this manner (2.3.48-9, 73). His war service has become Coriolanus’s primary means for constructing his identity, but to use those wounds in such a political and rhetorical manner in public would necessitate relinquishing his claim to those wounds to the commonwealth and the plebeians for whom he has so little regard. As he goes towards his death in 5.6, Coriolanus knows that he faces dire consequences for not carrying through with the destruction of Rome on behalf of the Volsces. He puts himself on a war footing with them again as he chooses to try discretion and dissimulation against them. He uses bribery in an attempt to sway the lords of the city even as he exploits the Volsces’ citizens for support, moves that he avoids entirely in Rome.

Coriolanus recognizes that Aufidius desires to advance himself through Coriolanus’s death, and he works to deny this appropriation of his person by controlling the context of his death, denying the rhetorical opportunity to Aufidius. While suicide, such as Brutus chooses in Julius Caesar, becomes one option in Coriolanus’s closing scene with the Volsces, to do so would leave him in a similar position to Brutus while also ceding further authority over Coriolanus’s life, much as it also would for Hamlet (see chapter 2). Aufidius would represent Coriolanus to Aufidius’s advantage since he would have the rhetorical opportunity. Instead, Coriolanus allows himself to die fighting the Volsces, returning to his truest expression of himself: battling Aufidius and his people. Here Coriolanus demonstrates some measure of skill for representation and public theatricality, not in the civil world of peaceful, communitarian rhetoric but on the battlefield. Although this dissimulation seems at odds with his earlier

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97 Parker notes that this image is characteristically Shakespearean, finding similar expression in Richard III and 1 Henry IV (1.2.55-6 and 1.3.96 respectively) (232n7).
earnestness even in the battlefield, doing so prevents Aufidius from being able to reframe Coriolanus’s death rhetorically by making that death occur on Coriolanus’s terms before the audience Aufidius would try to sway. Coriolanus closes off whatever rhetorical and political opportunities Aufidius sought from Coriolanus’s demise.

Shakespeare demonstrates to his commoner audiences how public figures could manipulate them through rhetoric and how well-spoken, high-minded words often mask far more cynical and realpolitik machinations. Of course, Shakespeare’s play itself represents yet another site of manipulation of the public. However, his metatheatricality encourages audiences to respond rationally and deliberatively to not only the onstage examples but also the theater’s role in shaping opinion. As a site where official discourses come together with alternative ideologies, Shakespeare’s stage contributes to the formation of publics in which persons can try to participate with the culture on their own terms. Shakespeare often relies upon witty, liminal characters who can critique others’ attempts at shaping opinion. For example, Falstaff undermines these kinds of discourse through his subversive, counter-fictions in the *Henriad*, and Hamlet’s ironic commentary on Claudius’s Machiavellian theatricality serves a similar purpose. Audiences of *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* can see that the use of fame often serves these ends. Antony and his Second Triumvirate use Caesar’s and Brutus’s fame to extol themselves as they move from the republic to the empire and from the plebeians having some share in political authority to that authority becoming centralized within a handful of ambitious men. Shakespeare demonstrates these uses of rhetoric and fame in *Julius Caesar*, undercutting those displays by exposing Antony’s interiority and true motivations and by having Cicero frame the surrounding rhetoric for the audience. By the time Shakespeare produces *Coriolanus* a few years later, he revisits many of these same themes. Aristocrats and the nominal representatives of the citizenry
use rhetoric to try to constrain those same citizens even as the commoners themselves demonstrate a level of rhetorical expertise not found in *Julius Caesar*. Where Caesar and Brutus cannot resist the use of their fame to sway the public, Coriolanus resists the appropriation of his identity. Even if Coriolanus begins the play as an agent of state force, his thematic role shifts from anti-republican villain to a possible model for resisting attempts to impose a reified identity upon persons living under the law.

Coriolanus’s resistance against this kind of constraint puts him in the same company as many of the other characters I have examined in this dissertation. Just as Hamlet resists the Foucauldian discipline that Denmark and Claudius array against him to subject him to their authority, Coriolanus fiercely contests any attempt to rein in his passions or to frame him in ways other than he chooses. In this sense, Coriolanus’s chief goal is the same as Hamlet’s: freedom and self-sovereignty through acts of resistance. Where Kuzner situates Coriolanus’s avoidance of reified subjectivity as at odds with the plebeians who minimize their vulnerability as subjects, the play nonetheless offers not a model for republican citizenship but a model for a skeptical wariness that any person seeking to participate in the public sphere should cultivate.98 While this model may not be ideally republican, it concerns how canny persons should try to live within a commonwealth: with skepticism, rationally critiquing the rhetoric and public personas they encounter.

In this sense then, Coriolanus is not so much a republican-friendly text but a text that recognizes the limits of republicanism as an ideological construct. Simply living within a republic or commonwealth does not make one free, but it can be tempting to think that it does. While Kuzner points towards a “more radical” idea of selfhood that exists beyond the boundaries of the republic and its fictions, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* make it clear that freedom only

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98 Kuzner, 84-6.
comes in resisting state force or the forces that others array against one’s political subjectivity.\textsuperscript{99} Coriolanus becomes the model citizen, a man who has used his exceptionalism to carve a place for him in the public sphere and who fights to maintain the integrity of the life and biography he has fashioned.

Although Coriolanus may be a champion for patrician and aristocratic values, the play celebrates his heroic warrior mythos and invites audiences to cheer at the spectacle of his invincibility and earnest physicality. He may seem an unlikely model for commoners to look towards for political subjectivity given his disdain for the mob. Indeed, Shakespeare may himself hate mobs, but he celebrates citizens. Mobs are what Antony and the tribunes try to create as they devolve citizens into irrational weapons directed at others. With Coriolanus, just as audiences could watch Falstaff, Hamlet, or Hal and imagine themselves in the same situations, envisioning how they, the audience, might respond to the circumstances onstage, so too can audiences inhabit the vitriolic, superhuman Coriolanus. The aesthetic experience of the theater, the performance of his character, invites audiences to distance themselves from their everyday experiences so they can imagine standing proudly and facing death on their terms, not on the terms of others. The examples from classical Rome become models to avoid—the mean mob—while the positive examples—Coriolanus and the capable citizens—become examples from a version of history against which audiences can judge themselves.

\textsuperscript{99} Kuzner, 85.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

My enterprise in this dissertation has been to examine models for political subjectivity that emerge in Shakespeare’s plays. In particular, these models often depend upon an intersection of aesthetics and politics. They are aesthetic in that these models are theatrical in nature, performative and poetic, fashioning representations of the self that can participate meaningfully in the public sphere. These models are also aesthetic in the sense that they require potential subjects to imagine alternatives to their present circumstances. For Hamlet, he imagines how a son ought to act, how princes should comport themselves, and how he can best pursue his personal liberty in Claudius’s Denmark. For magicians like Prospero, or for dreamers like Bottom, the occult provides a discursive lens for apprehending one’s place in the universe and for imagining a better world than the mundane reality political subjects may inhabit. With its embrace of possibility and potentiality in the face of convention, magic allows persons to break from the constraints their belief systems and their social systems. Hamlet ultimately adopts physical resistance while using aesthetics to mask his intentions, but resisting biopower and Foucauldian discipline often entails aesthetic resistance to normative discourse in Shakespeare. In much the same way, storytelling provides subjects with ways of making sense of the political order and their places within it. Storytelling affords characters like Falstaff, Hal, and Bolingbroke the chance to pit their version of reality against rivals, with narrative skill and adaptability helping to determine whose version of history and the future becomes dominant. Finally, rhetoric allows plebeians and patricians alike the power and potential to shape discourse and to sway the polity to their way of thinking, whether for civil purposes or for more nefarious ends, such as Antony and Coriolanus’s tribunes do.
Shakespeare’s potential for offering models of political subjectivity and activity is not limited to the early modern period, though. As Marjorie Garber notes, Shakespeare in many ways has helped make modern culture, for he has “scripted many of the ideas that we think of as ‘naturally’ our own and even as ‘naturally’ true.” These ideas include how twenty-first century audiences consider ideas “about government” and “about the qualities that make a strong leader.”¹ As Garber notes, commentators examining the political narratives surrounding former President George W. Bush often spoke about Bush’s similarity to Shakespeare’s Prince Hal. Bush’s “hard-drinking, hard-partying youth” gives way in adulthood to his more sober, post-salvation persona as a born-again Christian. This transformation suggests the story that Hal fashions in the *Henriad* while Bush’s role in instigating the war in Iraq can compare to Hal’s campaign against France and Bush’s attempts to frame himself as a warrior-leader.² Although it is stretching things to suggest that Bush intentionally models his entry into political life and his presidency on the model Shakespeare offers, that Shakespeare made some version of that model available so that Bush or his political advisors could appropriate it is certainly arguable. If nothing else, Bush’s top adviser, Karl Rove, has invoked Shakespeare on occasion, including pointing to Jack Cade and the *Henry VI* plays in commenting on Hillary Clinton’s 2008 candidacy.³ The redemption narrative is ultimately a version of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and Shakespeare, through Hal, and Bush use that narrative for its political advantage.

Journalists and playwrights have used Shakespearean models to help make sense of the political world, as well. During the 2008 Democratic primaries in the United States between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, Clinton justified remaining in the race as long as she had by

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¹ Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), xiii.
² Garber, 191.
pointing to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy in 1966. As Garber notes, several critics quickly compared Clinton’s morbid response to the kinds of hopes Lady Macbeth might express. Of note regarding Clinton and the Kennedys, social satirists have appropriated Macbeth for political purposes, including Barbara Garson’s MacBird (1967), which framed Lyndon Johnson and his wife as a Texan version of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Ronald Wilcox would appropriate Macbeth and MacBird in his far less subtle Macbill (1998), which casts the Clintons in the lead roles instead. Writers have also compared President Obama to Shakespearean models, and Obama deserves credit for his ability to shape discourse, to make an American public willing to elect him twice as the nation’s first non-white president and to fashion his popularity for powerful political ends. Rick Hertzberg of The New Yorker would credit Obama, though, with delivering his own “St. Crispin’s Day” speech before congressional Democrats, a televised event that offered home audiences an example of presidential rhetoric and sprezzatura. Obama himself has also modeled his political rhetoric and engagement on deliberately Shakespearean models, not only the “eloquence of Shakespeare” but also Antony in Julius Caesar, as Marc D. Charney observes in the New York Times. Shakespeare has often provided a model for political action and subjectivity of some kind, as our politicians and journalists make clear.

Of course, not all models found in Shakespeare are ultimately positive. John Wilkes Booth would appropriate Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar as he worked on his conspiracy to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. As George Anastaplo argues, Booth’s profession as an actor likely

5 Garber, 102.
6 Garber, 103.
drew him to the theatricality of assassination. In pursuing his political will as a supporter of the South, Booth may have needed Brutus as a model to complete the deed while looking towards a sense of his own legacy after the act. Drawing on Shakespeare, Booth strove to act as “a kind of playwright or as the director of a stage production,” and he conceived of “the Southern heroes” in the Civil War as occupying a stage upon which he himself wished to act. For his model in Shakespeare, Booth had acted with his brothers in *Julius Caesar*, and although he played Antony in that particular production with his brothers, his brandishing of a knife after shooting Lincoln seems a deliberate echo of Brutus’s use of the prop after murdering Caesar. Even his shouting the slogan *Sic semper tyrannis* suggests how much Booth modeled his behavior on Shakespeare in treating his act as an example of tyrannicide rather than mere assassination.⁹ However, the backlash against the assassination on both sides of the Civil War demonstrates how Booth’s modeling and his attempt to fashion a public narrative for himself and his tyrannicide is perhaps more akin to Hotspur’s obsession with seeming heroism than with successful manipulation of public discourse.

Beyond the obvious political ramifications of Shakespearean modeling, much as Shakespeare adapted and appropriated other authors’ works for his own purposes, so too have many artists used Shakespeare for their own ends. With its applied, almost magical, mathematics, the occultism of John Dee reflects the aesthetic dimension of early modern science (see chapter 3), but the fantastic uses of science and advanced engineering often found in science fiction reflect a further development of that applied mathematics. For example, as Lisa Hopkins notes, the classic film *Forbidden Planet* (1956) has often been interpreted as a rewriting of *The

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The advanced scientific knowledge represented in *Forbidden Planet* leads Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan to argue how the film uses those tropes in place of Prospero’s occult lore to greater effect than many adaptations of *The Tempest* have. In science fiction, science serves a similar aesthetic purpose that magic does for Marlowe and Shakespeare, by allowing science fiction writers a means for imagining alternative and often better worlds.

Such has also been the case in *Star Trek*, given its aspiration for a better, more enlightened human experience with the aid of advanced technology, and in envisioning better worlds, *Star Trek* often has had recourse to models of political action found in Shakespeare. Gene Roddenberry’s franchise has often borrowed from Shakespeare since the original series (1967-9). In the original series episode “The Conscience of the King” (season 1, episode 13, December 8, 1966), Captain Kirk meets a twenty-third century Shakespearean actor named Anton Karidian. In reality, Karidian is an alias assumed by the tyrannical Kodos “The Executioner,” who was responsible for atrocities on a colony twenty years ago that resulted in the deaths of members of Kirk’s and others’ families. The title of the episode, of course, references *Hamlet*, and the climax occurs during a production of *Hamlet* aboard the starship *Enterprise*. In many ways, the episode’s writer, Barry Trivers, models Kirk’s role as a version of Hamlet. Kirk desires to bring Kodos to justice, but he struggles with the burden of proof. Kirk needs to determine whether Karidian is guilty of the crimes of which he suspects the actor, and Hamlet’s inquiry into Claudius’s interiority then becomes a model for Kirk’s inquiry against Karidian.

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12 “The Conscience of the King,” directed by Gerd Oswald, written by Barry Trivers, *Star Trek, Netflix.*
Director Nicholas Meyer also adopts another Shakespearean model in the film *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, specifically in the film’s antagonist, the Klingon General Chang, and the Klingons more generally. Chang is suggestive of Shakespeare’s Richard III—where Richard has his hunchback, Chang has an eye patch bolted to his skull—but Chang quotes from several Shakespearean plays, specifically *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. *Hamlet* once again dominates, though, as it did in “The Conscience of the King,” with Chang turning to Shakespeare’s soliloquy from 3.1 to offer a gloss on the Klingons’ current political plight in the film:

**CHANCELLOR GORKON:** I offer a toast. The undiscovered country—the future.  
**EVERYONE:** The undiscovered country.  
**SPOCK:** *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1.  
**GORKON:** You have not experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon.  
**CHANG:** taH pagh taHbe' [Klingons laugh] “To be or not to be?” That is the question which preoccupies our people, Captain Kirk. We need breathing room.14

In this scene, a diplomatic dinner aboard the *Enterprise*, audiences encounter a twenty-third century version of the Shakespeare scholarship debate. While the film’s borrowings of Shakespeare are grating to the sensibilities of many early modern scholars, Meyer uses Shakespeare to comment on the politics of the film, which in turn were a commentary on global politics between the United States and Russia after the Cold War. In particular, the Klingons understand that the soliloquy is about more than mortality. It is also about potentiality. Chang wonders what the fate of his people will be while Gorkon chooses to understand the soliloquy in terms of action and choices for the future, rather than just death. By the end of the film, Captain Kirk will offer his gloss on how to understand the soliloquy. Where some like Chang fear the

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14 Chang speaks the artificial Klingon language here, translating Shakespeare’s opening to the soliloquy into Klingon. I have adopted the official Klingon transliteration in reproducing it here.
future, seeking to preserve old political orders and rivalries, Kirk and Gorkon choose to embrace it and the potentiality for a better galaxy for both humans and Klingons. In *Star Trek VI*, the model of Hamlet becomes a model for self-reflection even as the tragic dimension of the play turns towards a comic resolution in the melodramatic plot of the film.

In exploring and understanding the models for political subjectivity in Shakespeare, critics work not only to understand how early modern subjects could imagine and attempt to participate meaningfully in the public sphere, but they also work to recognize how those models remain significant and relevant today. For example, early modern citizens watching the *Henry VI* plays might interrogate how authorities represented social conflict and the justifications for war. So too have twenty-first century citizens watched President Josiah Bartlet turn to an adaptation of those plays in the “Posse Comitatus” episode of Aaron Sorkin’s *The West Wing* (May 22, 2002), as Sorkin and his fictional president seek a model for conceiving of American foreign policy after the attacks of September 11, 2001. As our popular culture continues going to the Shakespearean canon for content and inspiration, we as cultural critics must be prepared to explicate the models found in Shakespeare even as we work to educate our fellow citizens in how to be canny, self-reflexive spectators of those materials.

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