PERFORMING THE PRESENCE OF THE FEMALE GAP:

ACCESSING THE EXCESS IN VICTORIAN SHAKESPEARE

By

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Shakespeare Institute

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

September 2021

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a search for female agency, unrecorded in theory and in history. My enquiry is also a bid to recover, through Shakespeare, the performative presence of the Victorian actress, Ellen Terry, hovering on the threshold of women's emancipation and our modernity. The lost female presence she represents is, I suggest, a gap in our Western social and political narrative, and in the philosophical investigations of personhood that have occupied thinkers since G. W. F. Hegel. Victorian Shakespeare is itself a pre-theoretical gap, on the cusp of the emerging discipline of Literary Studies; and it is an area of research to a great extent foreclosed by the still current (new) Historicist emphasis on Early Modern contexts in Shakespeare Studies. And yet, the female gap Terry performs through Shakespeare's characters is, according to my radical conception, precisely a-historical, describing a dynamic agency that actively exceeds its own representation in the delimited male-centric system – being fluid, multiple and singularly indefinable. As a function of its exclusion from the structures of power, the female gap finds an alternative mode of presence metaphysically – and paradoxically – both beyond and within the system. I want to speak to the unrepresented but positively-lived experience of our ancestral mothers: to reclaim, through Shakespeare, their generally disregarded – but nonetheless important – kinds of agency. In so doing, I will scrutinise our contemporary systems of representation and open gaps in our current narratives of identity and power. My reading of the female gap might also, I hope, have implications for the performance of Shakespeare's female characters on our stages today, and contribute to current debates about the re-gendering of some of Shakespeare's male roles.

DEDICATION

This thesis is written to the memory of my spirited grandmother, Elinor, whose presence continues to exert its extra-ordinary influence on me, and on those of us whose devotion she inspired. She performs a gap in all the important ways I discover here.

'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety.'

Antony and Cleopatra
2.2.233-4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Professor Ewan Fernie, first of all, who has provoked and guided my thinking throughout this project, with his supreme professional acuity and personal tactfulness. Far beyond the call of his supervisory role, though, he has generously and sensitively supported me through my major health crisis, and has continued firmly to believe in me and in my writing. My gratitude to him is beyond words. My second supervisor, Dr Rebecca Mitchell, has stimulated my argument with timely and pertinent challenges; I thank her for her professional interest and courtesy. I also want to thank Dr Martin Wiggins for his support and, especially, for orchestrating the Shakespeare Marathon readings that gave me the precious chance to perform some of the roles I've always wanted to play. And I would like here to recognise, too, the kindness and efficiency of Rebecca White and Juliet Creese in the Shakespeare Institute office, and to remember gentle David Gould, who always had time, and a smile. In a different field of expertise, Consultant Haemato-Oncologist Dr Prem Mahendra has treated me with excellent, respectful and reassuring care. She is herself an extra-ordinary woman I am very fortunate to know.

On a more personal note, I want to acknowledge with thanks the enthusiasm of my friends: of Romaine and Ana, who have lived energetically and affectionately in the gap with me; Jay, with his wit and critical edge; and Lucy, for her unbounded positive spirit. Above all, I am indebted to my remarkable family, whose love and constancy have sustained me in this, as in every, endeavour. My loyal sister, Anna, has been with me every step of the way. My children, Sarah, Edward and Isabel, have all offered sage advice – their input as different, and equally valuable, as they are. I owe my determination to complete this work to my late brilliant father,

Victor, who gave me the drive to aim high, and always told me I could do it. And my mother, Judith, who fostered my fascination with language and with Shakespeare from my early childhood, has been, throughout, my dearest ally. My last and greatest debt is to my husband, Christian, who anchors me in all ways, in that strong, flexible relation that enables me fully to create, to dream and to thrive. There is no greater love.

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PREFACE

This thesis has emerged from a number of inter-related concerns regarding the characterisation of women in the fields of literary theory, history and theatre. I have noticed that current trends in socio-political analysis continue to disregard forms of agency that fail to fit our masculinist models of power, and that female experience, especially of the past, is conceived of mainly in terms of victimhood – or is entirely overlooked. I am aware that my investigation into historical excluded femaleness unlocks a complex discussion about all kinds of political and personal oppression: not only of women, but in terms of gender, class and race. Although I am interested in these gaps in representation, I do not have scope to scrutinise them all in this particular project. So, my focus here is specifically on the female gap, as I have conceived it through a unique kind of theatrical modelling. In finding a way to access female presence that is excessive to the historical record, it is not my intention, however, to try to close the gap: a male-centric order of representation is no place to register female agency. Rather, my project finds female presence to be paradoxically powerful in being a gap. This is not at all to romanticise political exclusion; instead, I contend that off-the-record female presence has exerted – and continues to apply – real dramatic influence on the socio-political narrative of history. To make visible the female gap using conventional terms may seem a doomed task. But I shall argue that theatre – and Shakespeare's drama in particular – provides the most appropriate conditions for the performance of this live and dynamic kind of presence.

In developing my own theory of the gap, I have been much influenced by the metaphysical thinking of G. W. F. Hegel, as interpreted by Slavoj Zizek, and of Jacques Derrida and Alain

Badiou.[1] Underpinning the theoretical argument of my thesis most significantly is the psychoanalytic conceptual framework of Jacques Lacan, refocused once again by Zizek.[2] I am interested in the way the thinking of modern theorists like Zizek and Badiou can be harnessed for literary interpretation; but I am also interested in making a creative contribution to theory by reading literature philosophically. It is apparent that most historically significant theory has a striking masculinist bias; and this is inevitable, given that theoretical models of selfhood are devised using a symbolic scheme that is a product of the male consciousness. Since the scheme incontrovertibly privileges male experience, femaleness is written into the system only and always as subordinate 'other', and as object. If subjective agency is a function of visible registration to the male order, then unregistered, invisible female agency must be found elsewhere. And this under-scrutinised 'elsewhere' is the most obvious gap in conventional theory – one, only to a certain extent, I think, filled by the post-Freudian feminist thinking of writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and, later, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.[3]

I am aware that the title of my thesis raises questions about the gendering of the gap: it is clear that its femaleness has implications for current oppositional debates in contemporary feminist and queer theories. My term 'female gap' may invite obvious charges of an unfashionable essentialism that conceives of femaleness as biologically disadvantaged (as

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[1] See especially: Slavoj Zizek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2013); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
[2] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017); Slavoj Zizek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006).
[3] See especially: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage Books, 1997); Hélène Cixous, *The Third Body* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009); Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, expanded edn,(Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) and *Sharing the World* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2008).

phallic lack), in a masculinist system that ties sex to gender and privileges male sexual (phallic) primacy. In such a system, female sexuality may be associated primarily, and often misogynistically, with passive availability - and with reproductive potentiality. But my reading aims to displace this notion of passivity by reconceptualising the gap as active personal multiplicity, exceeding the delimited system of representation in which femaleness is always biological – and political – 'lack'. Moreover, since my model for identity-shaping is a theatrical one, my characterisations of femaleness are actively performative and flexible. In constructing female agency through the destabilising of rigid definitions, my theory has much in common with queer generations of subjectivity and identity.[4] Recent studies in queer theory by Lee Edelman, Heather Love, Judith 'Jack' Halberstam and Stephen Guy-Bray have stimulated my thinking about gender, especially in relation to the characterisation of Cesario and Ganymede in Shakespeare's Comedies.[5]

The dynamic gap I characterise in my thesis is, however, produced in response to a binary heteronormative context, in which female presence is physically located in a female body – my test-case being the performance of Shakespeare's female characters by the great Victorian actress, Ellen Terry. Shakespeare's female characters were, as we know, played by adolescent boys in the Early Modern theatre. An examination of feminine performativity focused on this period may discover productive tensions in gendered role-play that work to dismantle the

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[4] See especially: Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); *Undoing Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

[5] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007); Judith Halberstam, 'Boys will be…Bois?: Or, Transgender Feminism and Forgetful Fish' in *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory*, ed. by Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin and Mark E. Casey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Stephen Guy-Bray, *Shakespeare and Queer Representation* (London: Routledge, 2021).

connection between biological sex, sexuality and gendered identity. But, for my project, the gap in the order of representation is conceived as specifically female.[6] My stepping back into the late Victorian theatre is not, though, a naïve historical return: in 2021, we cannot review female experience except through a post-colonial feminist or deconstructionist lens. Although my conception of female performative presence owes much to post-structural thinking, I am keen also to acknowledge materialist feminist concerns about the cultural control of women who are denied socio-political representation across the world: the kind of gender-performative freedom a theatre-focused thesis examines is not available to women violently oppressed by systemic misogyny. Although my study is rooted in theory and in drama, it is also materially feminist in that it celebrates the performance of femaleness by a successful actress. And, although her own performativity seems conventional and non-confrontational, it, nevertheless, can be found continually and affectively – through Shakespeare – to exert its radical drive for freedom from within.

In citing terms originating in the theories of the philosophers mentioned above, I have taken the liberty of de-capitalising and unmarking them, after their first identification and attribution. This is for the purposes of fluency and to incorporate them more familiarly in my own intensive and extensive thinking. Examples are: Lacan's three modes – the 'Socio-symbolic Order'; the 'Imaginary'; the 'Real' – and Badiou's 'Event'.[7]

All quotations from Shakespeare's plays refer to *The New Oxford Shakespeare The Complete Works: Modern Critical Edition*, edited by Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus and Gabriel

[6] Its multiple energies released into the system are not always, however, entirely feminine (See Chapter I, 'Lady Macbeth'; and Chapter III, 'Viola', 'Portia' and 'Rosalind').

[7] This is a term also used, after Badiou, by Zizek, *Event* (London: Penguin Books, 2014); and by Nicholas Luke, *Shakespearean Arrivals: The Birth of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The play to which the references apply is indicated by the character in the chapter heading, unless otherwise stated. When referencing variant First Folio and Quarto texts, I have adopted the conventional abbreviations, F1 and Q1, 2 or 3.

INTRODUCTION

How do we retrieve the female story that has never been told – lost, like its protagonist, to the past? The most obvious method is through historical fiction, where attempts are made to fill the gap and write the story, imaginatively resurrecting the woman and placing her firmly at its centre. But it is my contention that her real story can never be told, if we rely upon the language of conventional narrative and the definitions that have always already failed to represent her. And the failure of her representation continues, since our current definitions come with intrinsic value judgements that have been conceived historically in favour of men. French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray points to women's fundamental disempowerment through language: '[i]f we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again'.[1] These stories, she claims, 'constitute the locus of our [female] displacement', since 'their [male] fatherland, family, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves'.[2] My search aims to reach into and, somehow beyond, the story to discover the female agency that exceeds it – that does manage to 'keep on moving'. To open up this live dimension of the story, I turn to the theatre, where experience is felt to be intensely of the moment and unpredictable – and where presence is fluid, mobile and, well, dramatic.

The theatrical encounter generates the kind of live energy that allows us to 'keep on moving', as Irigaray would wish; but we are, nonetheless, still bound by the parameters of the 'same

[1] Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together', *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 205.
[2] Ibid., p. 212.

old stories', using the same imprisoning language structures. In an encounter with Shakespeare's dramatic text – and in particular with his female characters – though, something extra-ordinary seems to happen that bends those structures: some sort of excessive energy is released from the narrative definition to unsettle the coherence of ordinary characterisation and generate further personal possibility – and another sort of presence. This disruptive energy is not excessive in that it is unnecessary, however, but in that it is unaccountable in the smooth causal narrative sequence: it seems to work as an intrinsic extra dimension of the creative process that continually adapts the very forms it produces. Philip Davis notices something similar, when he declares that 'Shakespeare gets into the very origin of things, as if for the first time … lock[ing] into the creative life-force itself'.[3] Like Davis, I will find the Shakespearean energy to be *original* – extra-ordinary and yet fundamental – and, so, somehow actively exceeding pre-defined and narrowly singular symbolic limits.

Irigaray complains that 'We [women] haven't been taught, nor allowed to express multiplicity';[4] but I shall argue that Shakespeare has already allowed it. I am aware that my term, 'the female gap', may seem to imply emptiness, rather than to evoke plurality; and that it may even be read in an uncomfortably sexually suggestive way – locking women into their worst kind of objectification as passive vehicles for male erotic gratification. I do not intend to avoid this crude association: instead, I address the discomfort directly, by associating the gap candidly with the misogynistic punning on the female 'nothing' (genitalia) about which Shakespeare makes ominous *Much Ado*; and, also, with the sexual jealousy that obsesses characters such as Hamlet, Othello, Leontes in their plays. Parolles, in *All's Well that Ends Well*,

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[3] Philip Davis, *Sudden Shakespeare* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 2.
[4] Irigaray, p. 210.

makes this kind of prurient sexism most explicit in his especially unpleasant badinage with Helena on the subject of her 'withered' virginity.[5] But I consider Helena's response to be a sensationally empowering one that speaks to my conception of exceptional female agency, engendering from *nothing* a 'thousand loves'[6] – a rich profusion of the kind of multiple (and multi-gendered) selves Irigaray claims women haven't been allowed to express:

> *Helen*: A mother, and a mistress, and a friend,
> A phoenix, captain, and an enemy,
> A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,
> A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear:
> His humble ambition, proud humility,
> His jarring-concord, and his discord-dulcet,
> His faith, his sweet disaster, with a world
> Of pretty fond adoptious christendoms
> That blinking Cupid gossips.[7]

With a dynamic similar to this explosive multiplication, the female gap characterises abundance rather than lack: with enforced passivity reconfigured as freely expansive dramatic agency.

But how will accessing this excessive female dimension in Shakespeare's drama help to resurrect the lost presence of a woman whose real story can never be told? To begin with, it is important to clarify that the conviction that we have left the past behind us – that it is

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[5] 'All's Well that Ends Well', ed. by Rory Loughnane, 1.1.98-149.
[6] Ibid., 1.1.40.
[7] Ibid., 1.1.141-8.

circumscribed and finite – relies on an artificially conceived temporal disjunction. In fact, the past is always present, as Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes affirm, in proposing their particular theory of presentism: 'if it's always and only the present that makes the past speak, it speaks always and only to – and about – ourselves'.[8] The active presence of the past is, as I have suggested, most apparent in the theatre, where our separation from other lives is a spatial rather than a temporal dimension of our immediate experience. During the performance of one of Shakespeare's plays, for example, we – the audience – are not detached, retrospective witnesses to an old, already-finished story, but co-actors in its dynamic currency: there is no narrative (past) tense available to the experience of the *now*. And so, in our immediate encounter with these historical characters, we are more than their future inheritors standing advantageously at the experiential frontier of their historical frames of reference; instead, in sharing their space and their *presence*, we are more intimately involved in their performance than temporally-linear interpretations would suggest. In the course of this investigation, I shall explore the dramatic excess produced in the moment of performance as a manifestation of a radical and peculiarly *female* energy that is otherwise unavailable to the narrative; and I shall, by means of a Shakespearean performative model, seek to make visibly present the unrecorded-but-vital female agency that continues to be a significant gap in our more recent historical narrative.

[8] Terence Hawkes and Hugh Grady, 'Introduction: Presenting presentism', *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 5.

The Theory Gap

All post-Hegelian metaphysical thinking concerns itself with gaps of an existentially dramatic kind, and I shall describe here the two most relevant for my thesis, as I understand them. Most fundamental of these is the pre-subjective void from which the conscious subject emerges into being. In Lacanian theory, the subject arrives by being *subjected*: to a linguistically achieved Socio-symbolic Order, or 'big Other' – a network in which we find our meaningful selves in relation to one another, and a whole world constituted of signifiers and their corresponding signifieds. But the network is intrinsically incomplete: full of gaps containing the residue of energy that is left when the subject splits from the void and is uploaded to the Order. These gaps are artificially, but necessarily, closed by our requirement for meaning: we operate, in this closure, under the control of the Lacanian 'Imaginary' mode to make our world make sense for us – and to make our narrative (and our history) coherent. This continual pasting over is neither optional nor even conscious, since it is essential to subjective survival in the Socio-symbolic Order, which is the only place we can be ourselves. To acknowledge the gaps – if that were indeed possible – would be to risk a radical decentring of our identity. But they are, nonetheless, present, dangerous and active as a kind of invisible and formless dark energy. And the pressure this excessive residue exerts is akin to Lacan's third existential mode: what he calls the 'Real' – described by Zizek as the 'indivisible remainder' that is 'constituted retroactively, in and through the inconsistencies of symbolisation'.[9] In other words, we can never get hold of it as conscious subjects in the Order of Being, even though we are subconsciously aware of its indeterminate influence.

[9] Zizek, qtd. in Kelsey Wood, *Zizek: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p.24.

The second gap – even more invasively, though – actively permeates individual subjective definition: so that the subject, once uploaded to the Order, experiences self-hood as itself radically incomplete – and is forced, through a desire for meaningful presence, continually to strive for an elusive kind of self-satisfaction. But subjectivity is, according to Lacan, always and only external, partial and performative: essentially complete satisfaction is always unavailable to any subject. Being a subject, then, entails a gap, carried as an excessive 'indivisible remainder', and felt as a kind of unfulfilled potential that provokes our real sense of existential dissatisfaction, desire or dread. In his ground-breaking – or ground-recovering – study, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, Zizek re-interprets Hegelian theory to shift the *first* gap – separating 'reflecting subject from pre-reflexive Being' (during the uploading of the subject to the Order) – into the *second*: that within 'Being itself'.[10] In other words, the gaps that create the subject in the macrocosm of the wider Order are of the same kind as the ones experienced at a microcosmic level – inside that individual subject. In Hegelian dialectical theory, as interpreted by Zizek, the gap is – as it is for Lacan – both the drive for emergent independent subjectivity, and also a precondition of its failure of unity: so, the gap immanent to the subject's self-conscious narrative of 'I' is also the story of 'Being itself'. As Zizek says, then, Hegel's unique 'dialectical reversal resides in transposing an epistemological obstacle into the thing itself, as its ontological failure'.[11] So, it would seem from this, that existential dissatisfaction is fundamental to self-definition, and that desire for an elusive *more* is written into our contract of being.

[10] Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 15.
[11] Ibid., p. 16.

It might be tempting – given this unavoidable mortal malaise – to project a consoling vision of metaphysical completeness at a spiritual level, through a leap of faith in some kind of immortal wholeness. But any prospect of eschatological unity belongs, for Zizek, to the Lacanian category of the Imaginary that continually feeds us with false security and denies our confrontation with the very Real threat of our inevitable annihilation. Worse still, this existential threat sometimes breaks through our illusory security, manifesting as the inexplicable narrative ruptures we experience as experiential trauma – what Badiou terms the 'Event' – such as accident, natural disaster, critical illness or physical assault. Only by renegotiating the framework – to make it make sense – can the subject retrieve symbolic security and re-establish meaningful presence.

The description above simplifies Lacan's complex theory, of course. But, even in my more extensive and deeper reading, I have found a significant gap in the framework he establishes: I have searched for, and failed to locate, the *female* experience as represented through his defined existential modes; and I have, therefore, concluded that subjectivity, for Lacan, may achieve visibility only by means of a masculine scheme of valuation; and, here, the autonomous female *subject* is a gap. But it is not one that can, or even should, I think, be closed by offering women agency in terms defined by men; indeed, the only way to equalise gendered agency in the existing system would require its radical overhaul. Instead, and only a little less radically, I want to discover the presence of the female gap operating as a more flexible dimension of the existential narrative, moving somewhere in the hinterland between the Lacanian Real and the Order: intimately involved with both, as a kind of dynamically permeable margin that filters the energy-exchange between the two. Lacking definition in the phallocentric power structure, the female agent is capable of flexing more freely in response

to the intrusive Real energy that catastrophically undermines the more rigid (since more defined) narrative Order. In its mobility, the female gap is, I shall argue, more actively receptive to chance and change, and, so, more dramatically present.

The Theatrical Gap

We cannot, as I said at the beginning, examine unrecorded lives. But I have suggested that it is in the theatre that the invisible past may become, most significantly, both actively and visibly present, and that this seems the best environment for accessing the energy of the female gap: dramatically live, yet unrepresented – and unrepresentable – in history. In my close analysis of Shakespeare's female characters, I will also find an opportunity to reactivate, to some extent, the past presence of the late great Victorian actress, Ellen Terry, who performed those scripted parts; and I hope to show how, 'in a double process of character creation' – to use Stuart Sillars's words[12] – she developed a personal identity intertwined with those of the characters she embodied. I situate my investigation in the Lyceum Theatre in London during the last two decades of the nineteenth century; and I focus on Ellen Terry, not only because she was immensely successful, but also because she seemed to find, in her identification with her Shakespearean roles, a more visible freedom in being female than that experienced by women outside the theatre. Terry's actual performances in Shakespeare's plays are, sadly, unavailable to us, since her heyday was a prefilmic age.[13] Their traces remain, though, in her

[12] Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 167.
[13] Terry appeared, late in her career, in four silent films: *Her Greatest Performance* (1906), dir. by Fred Paul; *The Pillars of Society* (1920), dir. by Rex Wilson; *The Bohemia Girl* (1921), dir. by Harley Knoles; and *Potter's Clay* (1922), dir. by H. Grenville-Taylor and Douglas Payne.

autobiography, her copious performance notes, lecture scripts and letters – and in contemporary theatre reviews of her performances, and other biographical writing. And it is important to point out here that even a *filmed* record would not be definitive of her presence, since it is only with *live* energy that the female narrative gap may be produced, being – by its very nature – elusive to capture.

Terry's acclaim is, of course, no gap in the theatrical record: she was, according to Russ McDonald, 'acknowledged to be the greatest interpreter of Shakespeare's heroines in her time'.[14] Effusive contemporary critics focused on her charm as a performer, eliding the attractions of the character she played with the actress herself. She had what Charles Hiatt described as a 'magnetic [stage] personality'[15] – what we might now call 'star quality'. But what is most interesting about Ellen Terry, for my thesis, is that she achieved visibility not by defying restrictive gender positions, but, instead, by playing them out in plain sight on the stage she shared with her theatrical partner, Henry Irving, for twenty-seven years. It is my contention that she not only exposed, in performance, the limitations of the female parts in the plays, but that she also inhabited an excessive kind of dramatic freedom positively written into them – finding their limits actively *liminal*. And I shall suggest that she played a similar performative excess in defiance of society's requirements for her own private and professional subordination. She certainly didn't seem to suffer personal disempowerment; conversely, she appeared to grasp her freedom from the jaws of confinement – seizing the opportunity creatively to exceed the ordinary representative order as its more unpredictable and daring

[14] Russ McDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. xv.
[15] Charles Hiatt, *Ellen Terry and her Impersonations: An Appreciation* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), p. 267.

extra-ordinary correlative, as I shall reveal. Virginia Woolf's description touches on Terry's capacity for activating this kind of modal excess, when she suggests that '[s]omething of Ellen Terry it seems overflowed every part and remained unacted'.[16] It is this 'something' – or, perhaps more technically, this 'nothing'– with which I am concerned throughout this dramatic study.

In locating my encounter with these female characters in the Victorian theatre, I am aware of a certain anachronism: they are, after all, a product of Shakespeare's Early Modern consciousness. But, if Ben Jonson was right that these plays are 'for all time',[17] then their performance has always been current, albeit tailored to changing contemporary cultural and political contexts. The Victorian era – an active gap between Shakespeare's time and our own – is an especially significant context for the working-out of my thesis, in that it is one we associate most directly, I think, with the systemic disenfranchisement of women. It is, apparently, a most unpromising context in which to find the workings of important female agency – even more so than the Early Modern period itself, perhaps. But our edited historical narrative inevitably simplifies the complexity of live experience; and the ruptures that characterise the experience of intimate selfhood, and of broader society, are smoothed and even compromised by individual and collective memory – and in the analysis of the historian. In pasting over the gaps, historical memorialising works hard to make things make sense – a little like the Lacanian Imaginary mode I have described, although not, perhaps, with the same metaphysical reach. My hope is that, through the creatively-critical release of Shakespeare's

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[16] Virginia Woolf, 'Ellen Terry (1941)', *Collected Essays, Vol. IV* (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 72.
[17] Ben Jonson, 'To William Shakespeare', in William Shakespeare, *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies Published According to the True Originall Copies (First Folio)*, ed. by John Heminge and Henry Condell, Early English Books, 1475-1640 /774:11 (London: printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount, 1623).

female character-excess, operating through Ellen Terry's actual (imagined) performances, I can retrieve a less-edited version of the female presence we imagine we no longer value.

The Historical Gap

When we write about history, we are furnished not with objective knowledge – however definitive hindsight might seem – but with a set of assumptions conditioned by our position within the narrative itself. We make linguistic choices that provide the story with unity – even as a kind of cohesive *dis-unity* – in order to shape it as a link in the causal chain of progression that has facilitated our present. But, as Zizek points out, every linguistic choice is already a judgement: when we scrutinise the past, we are using conventions that are already imposing a set of contemporary value-judgements:

> what you see is the result of your judgement – you literally see judgements. There is no zero-level sensory perception of reality which is then later coordinated into judgements. What you always already see are judgements.[18]

And all meaning, according to the Lacanian model, is contingent on the socio-symbolic system of references, so that:

> [t]he meaning of any signifier arises in the particular context of its use, and through its relations with other terms in a dynamic and historically contingent (not deterministic) system of differences.[19]

[18] Slavoj Zizek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Zizek* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 55.
[19] Wood, p. 15.

In history, we are always, to quote Davis, ‘in the midst of the middle of things, without a strong narrative sense of a beginning and end’.[20] Any sense of progression is a construct of contemporary consensus; and, especially in the case of our most recent history, we are inclined to exaggerate its difference whilst, even more strenuously perhaps, resisting its unsettling sameness. I am interested in activating the temporal gap, not as a sequential process, but as a more genuinely involving dramatic experience. But to engage respectfully with the past is singularly challenging. Jonathan Dollimore describes serious historicism as ‘that most crucial yet difficult of intellectual activities: being historically and culturally inside something that one is also critically resisting’.[21] If we regard the process of modernisation as progressive, then we inevitably resist, as Dollimore’s description suggests, the regressive – or, at least, non-progressive – non-modern. Believing in the benefits of progress, we slough off this excessive non-modern, and, with it, the residue of exception that could destabilise modernity’s self-definition. Since the symbolic order of definition is, as I have discussed, a construction of the male consciousness, then modern progressiveness, conceived in conventional terms, must be a masculinist drive; and so, the non-progressive non-modern excess must be considered to be feminine – or, at the very least, non-masculine.

But, as Heather Love points out in her thought-provoking study, *Feeling Backward: The Politics of Loss and Queer History*, ‘[t]he idea of modernity – with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance – is intimately bound up with backwardness’.[22] Love is concerned with recovering, though not necessarily rationalising, all those who bear a

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[20] Davis, *The Victorians: The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 8. 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 28.
[21] Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Shakespeare and theory’, *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. by Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 272.
[22] Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 5.

disqualified identity. The recovery she advocates is, though, one involving visibility rather than qualification: moving forward by 'living with an injury – not fixing it'.[23] Here Love reasons that:

> [i]f modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging behind – and so seriously compromised the ability of these others ever to catch up. Not only the sexual and gender deviants but also women, colonized people, the non-white, the disabled, the poor, and criminals were marked as inferior by means of the allegation of backwardness.[24]

In terms of gender, race and disability, however, the 'injury' cannot simply be fixed by drawing a line – by saying that it is now 'not so' – even though this appears to be the way retrospective definition works. But what if we pause and look backward more carefully, before covering past female experience with a smothering non-modern linguistic bandage? Perhaps the injury we identify from our privileged position further through the historical narrative is more than just damage – more nuanced in its experiential value. Might it be possible to re-negotiate our relationship with the past more genuinely to acknowledge the female experience we have either dismissed, lamented, or imagined we have more-or-less successfully 'healed'? If it is possible, then the non-modern and backward could be carried forward more positively, as a significant driver in the modernising process. In avoiding limiting definitions that deny the past agency of over half of the human race, we might find 'feeling backward' – to use Love's phrase – newly significant to our present, and even to our capacity for feeling forward. Making visible the female gap would then be – again to adapt the context of Love's formulation – not so

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[23] Love, p. 4.
[24] Ibid., p. 6.

much 'a refusal of politics', as 'a politics of refusal'.[25] If we adopt this more positive homeopathic approach to past injury, we might value all lived experience more equally; and we might also discover a more inclusive politics of presence that can incorporate the backward and forward, without attempting to resolve the temporal antagonism.

The Shakespearean Gap

My reading of Shakespeare's heroines is, I shall argue, an unusually empowering one that, whilst fully acknowledging female socio-political role-restriction, discovers vibrant female presence continually exceeding imposed constraints. I agree with Jacqueline Rose that 'Feminism gains nothing' by resenting the order of exclusion on behalf of our disenfranchised ancestral mothers and 'swamping [them] in their worst fates'.[26] Instead of using the conventional language of confrontation, then, I want to celebrate more positively past women's affective currency, following Adrienne Rich in 'think[ing] *along with* the human forces newly pushing forth, in ever-changing forms and with ever different faces';[27] and, whilst recognising their real systemic disenfranchisement, I want to recognise the power of their excessive energy-stream – a phenomenon similar to what Luce Irigaray describes as 'an indefinite overflowing in which many a becoming could be inscribed'.[28] This is not a merely romantic hypothesis, with no practical force: it is, rather, the language of theatre, and of

[25] Love, p. 58.
[26] Jacqueline Rose, *Women in Dark Times* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2015), p. 141.
[27] Adrienne Rich, 'Raya Dunayevskaya's Marx', *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 85.
[28] Irigaray, 'Volume without Contours', trans. by David Macey, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991), p. 55.

illimitable dramatic possibility. But acting choices must be positively made in performance – compromising, it might seem, the continuing accessibility of the dramatic excess I have proposed as extra-ordinary female agency. Whatever the performative choices, though, there is still available, I would argue, in Shakespeare's characterisation, a live, irreducible excess dramaturgically produced. Even when actively embodied by the actress – and perhaps *especially* then – female presence emerges as a kind of dynamic and powerfully affective formal fluidity.[29]

Stanley Wells's praise for our contemporary national treasure of the stage (and screen), Judi Dench, in her characterisation of Cleopatra, at the National Theatre in 1987, speaks, I think, to this paradox of embodied excess in performance:

> It was Judi Dench, as Cleopatra, who brought greatness to the production in a feat of classical acting by which she extended herself into every aspect of the role, from the sordid to the sublime, *while never losing the sense of a unifying self that could encompass Cleopatra's 'infinite variety'* [my italics].[30]

Wells's term, 'unifying self', does not, though, quite capture the disparateness of the female gap: although the body of the actor physically grounds the character, the presence of the female gap somehow, I think, exceeds the performer's unity of physicality as a kind of metaphysical aura. In this example of Cleopatra, Shakespeare creates a character who demonstrates the presence of the excess, without demystifying its elusive status: so that the

[29] The description of music as 'liquid architecture' is popularly attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in a conversation about aesthetics with his friend and fellow poet, Friedrich Schiller, in 1829.
[30] Stanley Wells, 'Shakespeare in Performance in London and Stratford-upon-Avon, 1986-7', *Shakespeare Survey*, 41 (1988) 159-81 (p. 177).

Egyptian queen's dramatic self-*diffusion* is equally, and intriguingly, a radical selves-*cohering* 'infinite variety'. Enobarbus's best attempt to describe the indescribable mines Classical images and all sensory models for definition; and he is eventually driven to express Cleopatra's unfathomable attraction as a potential cosmological effect – that shifts the very air ('but for vacancy') to make 'a gap in nature'.[31] On stage, the actress playing Cleopatra embodies, and so unifies, her 'infinite variety'; but, through Enobarbus's finally-defeated rhetorical search, Shakespeare points to something like Zizek's metaphysical 'indivisible remainder' that is unassimilable to all delimited definition. The ungraspable excess of the female part seems somehow dramatically present in Shakespeare: excessive, not in being *extraneous* – like discarded performance choices – but in occupying a position closer to Irigaray's '*extatique'* female placement:[32] outside the conventional symbolic order, but also involved in it. And, with a Hegelian dynamic, the female part is also *intrinsically* divided: continually dissolving and resolving according to the demands of the dramatic present.

I notice, during my study, that Shakespeare's female characters appear to respond with a flexible kind of presence to their plays' dramatic crises: more receptive to the intrusive Real of the Event, since they are themselves extra-ordinary. This kind of female adaptability manifests in many of the plays as correlative and multiple felt presences arising from active images. Cleopatra, as I have said, famously produces an 'infinite variety' of selves - but she is not the only one: Cressida, in *Troilus and Cressida*, as another example, 'lie[s], at a thousand watches' and *All's Well's* Helena has, as we have seen, a number of concurrent alternatives in

[31] 'Antony and Cleopatra', ed. by Terri Bourus, 2.2.215-6.
[32] Whitford, p. 17.

mind for her imagined appearance at court.[33] In five of the comedies, female alternative presence dramatically escapes the vital image and becomes enact-able, performing its excessive character visibly on stage: in Julia's Sebastian, Viola's Cesario, Portia's Balthazar, Rosalind's Ganymede, and Imogen's Fidèle.[34] Operating as visible gaps in the narrative order, these characters act as permeable, fluid agents filtering dangerous energy from the void (in which Julia, Portia and Rosalind 'dissolve', Imogen is a 'nothing', and Viola a 'blank') to destabilise the entire male order.

In my analysis, I raise ethical questions about the impact of this disturbing energy, and find different answers depending on the gap's variously hospitable dramatic contexts. In general, the energy released through the female gap in the comedies is of a more benign influence than that unleashed in the tragedies; whilst in the late plays, the gap focuses a peculiarly spiritual power. Whether beneficial or detrimental, though, the energy is live, dramatic and necessary. And my thesis finds the female gap, by virtue of its extra-ordinary status, operating as its primary filter. The near-destitution of the socio-symbolic order is discovered – certainly in the later plays – to be a necessary condition for the reworking of the community network. In the comedies, too, communal survival is enabled by a rebalancing of the narrative with its gaps: where the gaps-made-visible flex with a now more flexible order; and *relationship* is prioritised through a salvaging and reconditioning of its individual elements.

[33] 'Antony and Cleopatra', 2.2.234; 'Troilus and Cressida', ed. by John Jowett, 2.3.18-9; 'All's Well that Ends Well', 1.1.140-9.
[34] In 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona'; 'Twelfth Night'; 'The Merchant of Venice'; 'As You Like It'; and 'Cymbeline', respectively.

Structure

My thesis proceeds as a series of case-studies: close readings of Shakespeare's female characters, and a reconstruction of Ellen Terry's performances of them – underpinned by my theory of the female gap. I reference Ellen Terry's own character-grouping in my arrangement of chapters. In her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare,*[35] Terry organised Shakespeare's female characters into two types: The Pathetic Women and The Triumphant Women. For my purposes, these are interesting headings in that they identify the tragic heroines with sympathy and pity (pathos), and the comic ones with positive outcome (triumph). 'Triumph' seems, at first glance, to be a very *orderly* word – speaking of a kind of competitive masculinist individualism. But the triumph that I identify in the later comedies and in Shakespeare's last plays is, as I have already indicated, not that of a narrowly-personal ascendency, but of a more broadly-productive and inter-personal societal flourishing.

I begin with Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia and Cordelia – all drivers of their plays' evental crises, but also gaps: excessive characters who are tragically removed from the narrative before its conclusion, and whose gaps are closed. In the following two chapters, I examine two tragic female characters – Juliet and Cleopatra – who appear to share their presence more equally with their male counterparts, evolving a more promising (if eventually defeated) vision of mutual connectivity. I proceed by investigating the comic gap performed by Beatrice, and by Viola, Portia and Rosalind in their differently excessive guises of Cesario, Balthazar and Ganymede – who all promote their plays' projected rebalanced narrative

[35] The printed scripts of her lecture tours of America in the first two decades of the 20th century: Ellen Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. by Christopher St. John (London: Martin Hopkinson Ltd., 1932).

futures. I conclude my case-studies with the gaps of forgiveness and restitution enabled by Hermione and Imogen that exceed ordinary codes of moral justice and build a more flexible model of powerful personal interrelationship – along the lines of a complex ecosystem, with its balanced and flourishing pattern of monistic biodiversity.

These are Shakespearean roles played by Ellen Terry, with Henry Irving, at the Lyceum Theatre in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Cleopatra and Rosalind are, however, anomalies here, being much-lamented gaps in Terry's own repertoire; but they are parts she is, paradoxically, most associated with in their loss. I suggest a number of gap-related reasons why this may be the case, and why Terry's playing of the gap in her own life reflects so closely the one dramatised by Rosalind in Shakespeare's 'Ardenspace' – to borrow Liam Semler's term.[36] My analysis of the Arden-gap marks a shift in my thinking about the character of female presence in the late plays, and it does, in this sense, provide an active break – a gap – in the thesis itself. In conclusion, I shall raise questions about how my reading of the female gap might condition the performances of Shakespeare's female characters on our stages today – by all genders – and contribute to current debates about the re-gendering of some of Shakespeare's important male roles.

[36] Liam Semler, 'Emergence in Ardenspace: System and Exile in Shakespeare's Pedagogy', *Teaching Shakespeare Beyond the Centre: Palgrave Shakespeare Studies*, ed. by Kate Flaherty, Penny Gay and Liam Semler (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Chapter I

The Tragic Gap

Shakespeare’s Pathetic Women

DESDEMONA
LADY MACBETH
CORDELIA
OPHELIA

DESDEMONA

Ellen Terry played the role of Desdemona in *Othello* in two productions: first, in June 1863, at the Princess's Theatre,[1] under the direction of Charles and Ellen Kean, and then – in a more extensive run – at the Lyceum Theatre opposite Henry Irving, in 1881.[2] *The Times* described her first performance as 'youthfully innocent, graceful, natural and so intense in feeling'.[3] So much seems to have been expected from a sensitive young actress of the period. But Terry never left a part she had played alone, either during the rehearsal period or after the production: it appears, from her own notes, that her understanding of her role continually evolved, and that her reading was never either socially naïve, or conventional. She asserts that '[t]he part of Desdemona gives an actress…difficult problems to solve', and – more intriguingly – that she 'know[s] no character in Shakespeare which has suffered from so much misconception'.[4]

In her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, Terry considers Desdemona first under the heading of Shakespeare's 'Pathetic Women'. She imagines her, fittingly for such a definition, as a woman of 'small and slim' stature, and a 'rather frail physique'.[5] But the 'pathetic' marker has an etymology that reaches beyond physiological detail to encompass Desdemona's enormous capacity for compassion (pathos), sensitivity and strong emotional commitment: qualities all celebrated by Terry as powerfully affective. She pinpoints the fundamental dramatic driver of

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[1] Where she had made her Shakespearean debut at the age of nine, as Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Charles and Ellen Kean, opening on 28th April, 1856.

[2] Irving also played Iago, in the same production (opening on 2nd May, 1881) – interchanging roles with American actor, Edwin Booth, every week throughout the six-week run.

[3] See image ref. Southwell Brothers, *Ellen Terry as Desdemona in 'Othello'* (1863) <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw197174> [Accessed 18th January, 2019]. Terry does not mention the production in her autobiography.

[4] Terry, *Four Lectures,* p. 129, 128-9.

[5] Ibid., p. 125.

Desdemona's presence as the mental sympathy that stimulates her positive *action* of consecration:

> *Desdemona*: I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
> And to his honours, and his valiant parts
> Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.[6]

And, in an argument that seems to summon and then reject a kind of Bradleyan essentialism,[7] Terry develops a reading that has more in common with the 'process philosophy' of Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead – both of whom were her contemporaries;[8] and her action-focused commentary chimes, perhaps unexpectedly, with much recent dramatic theory.[9] For Terry, though, Desdemona is 'naturally unconventional':[10] a definition that might seem to fix her character before its playing out. But she continues, in line with a more dynamic character-conception, by stressing the 'genially expressive'[11] quality of Desdemona's responsiveness to the situation as it unfolds. And there is something especially interesting about this phrase if we recognise it as demonstrating a positively *active* kind of receptivity: where her 'geniality' may be interpreted, not only as benign good humour, but also as skilful and sensitive *accommodation* – of Iago and Cassio and, most importantly, of Othello himself,

[6] William Shakespeare, 'The Tragedy of Othello; or, The Moor of Venice', ed. by Gary Taylor, 1.3.246-8.
[7] A. C. Bradley (1851-1935) is renowned for his essentialist character criticism, wherein he interprets Shakespeare's characters as pre-existing entities, coherent beyond the plays' margins. See especially: Shakespearean Tragedy (1904), 2nd edn (London: Macmillan & Co Limited, 1924).
[8] See Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Data of Immediate Consciousness*, trans. by F. L. Pogson (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2001); Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and* Reality, corr. edn, ed. by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherbourne (New York: Free Press, 1978).
[9] See, for example: Simon Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen Drama, 2011); Bridget, Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, performance, self* (London: Routledge, 2005); Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Bruce McConachie, *Engaging Audience: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and my MA thesis, 'Performing the Presence Gap: Constructing Dramatic Subjectivity in Shakespeare', Shakespeare Institute (Unpublished master's dissertation, 2017).
[10] Terry, p. 125.
[11] Ibid.

as she moves to 'meet him, and receive him'.[12] In the first act of the play, we see evidence of this capacity for personal compliance in her perception of a 'divided duty'[13] to her father and husband, which may signal her potential for embracing her own roles-expansion rather than reduction: the division she proposes suggests a doubling, rather than a halving, of her parts, since it is clear that she has no intention of sharing between them a singular quantity of her love. There is, however, no opportunity for Desdemona to reconfigure the father-daughter relationship through her enabling, 'genial expressiveness', since Brabantio will not allow it; instead, her fluid responsiveness must be played out in new relationships, and within new contexts.

It might seem that Terry's reading – and indeed enactment – of Desdemona's obliging character must confine her within a conventionally subservient and secondary role. And this role-constriction appears to be confirmed in Desdemona's willingness for her heart to be 'subdued / Even to the very quality of my lord':[14] a deference that, equally, characterised Terry's professional and personal relationship with Henry Irving. But this line speaks of something more dynamic operating in the apparently conventional bond between them, as I shall explain. F1's 'very quality' (Q2 'qualitie') supersedes Q1's 'utmost pleasure', in most texts, although the latter has been adopted by some editors[15] to underline Desdemona's directness in 'trumpet[ing] to the world'[16] her sexual openness. But the Folio line is, I think, the more nuanced and empowering version, since it allows for Desdemona's recognition of Othello's 'quality' as a creatively-volatile character-potential, shaped by her love. In other

[12] 2.1.172.
[13] 1.3.179.
[14] 1.3.244-5.
[15] Including M. R. Ridley (ed.), *Othello*: *The Arden Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 35.
[16] 1.3.244.

words: by providing the emotional ground for their connection, Desdemona's 'subjugation' is actively generative of their precarious interaction, and of the 'Othello' who becomes present by its means; so that she is submitting not to the definitive pleasure of the Othello-subject, but to a more dynamic energy – a 'quality' – actively produced in the relation. Her susceptibility – far from being passive – is found to be radically and powerfully *moving*: to the extent that it affectively probes Othello's subjective boundaries and radically unfixes him (with a little help from Iago) from his own well-rehearsed historical narrative.

Considered in this way, there appears to be something strikingly active about Desdemona's subdued heart. Certainly, there is nothing meek about the 'downright violence' of her active decision to 'love the Moor to live with him'.[17] In breaking the 'rules of nature', Desdemona has, according to her father, forfeited her identity as a 'maiden never bold, / Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion / Blushed at herself'.[18] Neither rule nor identity is, however, that of nature, but, rather, of linguistic delimitation. Words, with their cultural meanings, have inscribed 'Desdemona' as a contained and containable feminine function of the masculinist system. In Lacanian terms, it is the metaphysical event of love that breaks both essentialist and structuralist 'rules' in *Othello* – and in Othello; and the dramatic agent of this crisis is the *un-inscribed* Desdemona, to whom the rules are already misappropriated, as Brabantio's description makes clear. In actively and publicly breaking the rules, Desdemona seems to be forfeiting her value along with her accountability. But the forfeit involves an important kind of liberation, since it releases her from the measuring system that weighs her worth as an object for exchange between men; and, anyway, since the rules can neither describe nor inscribe

[17] 1.3.242-3.
[18] 1.3.101, 94-6.

female *agency* as such, they are already broken when she makes a positive choice either to abide by or reject them. Desdemona-as-female-agent is a real gap in the male subjective order; and she is as such – albeit in a precarious sense – freer than Othello himself, for all his self-declared 'unhoused free condition'.[19]

In his fascinating study, *Shakespearean Arrivals: The Birth of Character*, Nicholas Luke considers the metaphysical conditions for the dramatic birth of the male subject in Shakespeare's tragedies. He suggests that Othello 'arrives' as a subject only when he lands in Cyprus – emerging through the event of love only sometime *after* his marriage to Desdemona. The love Othello initially declares for his wife in Venice is, according to Luke, merely a rhetorical element of his self-producing and object-consuming narrative: the '*Logos* that guarantees his stability and certainty as the One'.[20] But, in his removal to Cyprus, Othello is dramatically dislocated from his story and from the arena (Venice) in which it has power. Without the familiar parameters of the hierarchy that has given him status, Othello is made suddenly, vulnerably present in Cyprus – reconfigured, as Luke argues, from the dramatic 'vanishing point':[21] from the void. The actor who plays the role does, of course, reconfigure the character afresh, and from the void, every time he steps onto the stage; and, in the imagined dramatic context, the 'vanishing point' is the sea's horizon, as observed by Shakespeare's messengers. But Othello's ship's appearance from nowhere seems to have a metaphysical dimension – so that it appears to emerge from the 'chaos of the void's infinite multiplicity':[22]

[19] 1.1.25.
[20] Luke, p. 76.
[21] Ibid., p. 82.
[22] Ibid.

Montano: What from the cape can you discern at sea?

First Gentleman: Nothing at all. It is a high-wrought flood.

I cannot 'twixt the heaven and the main

Descry a sail.[23]

The actor's arrival onstage and the character's mooring on the imagined island-shore together seem to mimic the Hegelian metaphysics of subjective arrival. But Luke identifies the advent of a more *precarious* subject in Othello's presence on new ground: now severed from his familiar situated narrative, Othello is, Luke finds, no longer a *self*-grounded subject but one 'grounded by the indiscernible event…the voyage beyond representation',[24] produced by both the sea-storm and, once ashore, the metaphorical turmoil of his (belated) love for Desdemona.

It is significant for my thesis that Shakespeare's Othello arrives *after* Desdemona in Cyprus and has to catch up with the context.[25] He is, for the first time, emotionally *present:*

Othello: It gives me wonder great as my content

To see you here before me.[26]

His 'you here before me' can be read temporally as well as spatially – and also, perhaps, metaphysically, if we recognise the extra-ordinary context of their meeting: Desdemona, at once de-registered in Venice and a gap in the official story of 'wars against the Ottomites',[27]

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[23] 2.1.1-4.

[24] Luke, p. 83.

[25] A departure, as Luke also points out (p. 81), from Giraldo Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1566) – thought to be Shakespeare's main source - in which the couple reach land together.

[26] 2.1.174-5.

[27] 1.2.230.

is already excessively present. And by inspiring Othello's 'wonder', she erodes the stable certainties of his familiar identity – his self-consciously configured 'story of I'[28] – and throws him into an uncontrollable relationship with her in the dramatic present. Being affectively *touched* by Desdemona is equivalent to the onset of a kind of madness, as the verb's colloquial usage suggests. More positively, to touch the 'face' of the other – to use Emmanuel Levinas's term[29] – is to be sublimated to the mystery of connectivity, traumatically divorced from what Badiou describes as the self-communing 'solitary consciousness'.[30] Submitting to the relation is, then, essentially and presently both traumatic and dramatic. More radically still, the experience could be considered an a-temporal occurrence, since it signals a rupture in historical sequencing. As Zizek puts it:

> Trauma is 'eternal'; it can never be properly temporalized/historicized, it is the point of 'eternity' around which time circulates.[31]

Here, though, I read Zizek's 'eternity' as the *dramatic present* that incorporates all temporal dialectical dislocations.[32] Othello's trauma manifests, initially, in minor rhetorical break-down, which he is yet capable of observing, so that he can wonder at the destabilising effect of Desdemona's presence that 'stops [him] here', and makes him 'dote' and 'prattle out of fashion'.[33] Later, when he is provoked by Iago to extremity, Othello's rhetorical control is lost

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[28] Graham Holderness, 'Who is it That Can Tell Me Who I Am?', *Shakespeare and I*, ed. by William McKenzie and Theodora Papadopoulou (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 163.
[29] Emmanuel Levinas's 'face' calls to attention all that is singular in the face-to-face encounter, 'exceeding the idea of the other in me': Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay in Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 50.
[30] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. by Peter Bush (London: Serpent's Tale, 2012), p. 39.
[31] Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 146-7.
[32] See 'Introduction', p.1.
[33] 2.1.197.

so completely that he is no longer in any condition to wonder, as he teeters on the brink of narrative self-annihilation:

> *Othello:* Lie with her? Lie on her? We say 'lie on her' when they belie her. Lie with her? 'Swounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief – confessions – handkerchief. To confess and be hanged for his labour. First to be hanged and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such a shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips! Is't possible? Confess? Handkerchief? O devil![34]

He seems here to recognise, even in the midst of his loss of self-control, a real force at work beyond words that 'shakes' him 'thus'. Only with the recovery of his coherent voice – what George Wilson Knight famously described as his 'Othello music'[35] – can he repossess himself; although he manages this paradoxically only as the subject of his own death. In writing the tale 'Of one that loved not wisely but too well',[36] Othello constructs the self-apologia that at last denies and consumes his presence.

Luke's reading of the Othello-crisis is helpful to my reading of the female gap in that it identifies Desdemona as the dramatic catalyst for Othello's subjective disturbance: she 'is given the dramatic impetus to interrupt Othello's self-sustaining tale and propel a new, vulnerable subject into being'.[37] In this, he attributes to her enormous metaphysical capacity

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[34] 4.1.34-40.
[35] George Wilson Knight., 'The Othello Music', *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd.,1960), p. 97.
[36] 5.2.342.
[37] Luke, p. 71.

that supports his opening claim that '[t]o some extent, *Othello* is Desdemona's tragedy'.[38] He goes on to assign her ultimate tragic power, admitting that 'in evental terms, Iago would have had no power over Othello without Desdemona's rupture of his tale'.[39] Certainly, as I have discussed, Desdemona's astounding presence in Cyprus, far from bringing 'calms',[40] heralds the initial psycho-sexual subjective storm that is further whipped up by Iago. Luke describes her as 'an evental figure', since it is 'through [her] consecration that the [self-] consuming tale' told by Othello, for which she initially falls, 'becomes an event of love'.[41] In my reading, Desdemona's declared consecration introduces dangerous Real energy into Othello's self-determining narrative. And here Desdemona emerges for me – as for Luke – as an 'excessive' presence;[42] but where Luke sees Desdemona as a functional character, 'serving to [open] up the space for the Othello subject',[43] I am more interested in finding Desdemona's presence in its own important space, figuring a gap in criticism such as Luke's.

My reading does not, then, establish Desdemona's presence as an 'arrival' in Luke's sense of an emergence into dramatic subjectivity. Although her breaking of the 'rules of nature'[44], as defined by Brabantio, certainly signals a rupture in her prescriptive – and pre-scripted – character, neither the rule nor the character is intrinsic to her presence: presence being excessive to any designated delimitation, in being dramatic, and of the immediate context. In the symbolic order, Desdemona is always and only produced as object of the male cause: as

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[38] Luke, p. 17.
[39] Ibid., p. 72.
[40] 2.1.176.
[41] Luke, p. 77.
[42] Ibid., p. 80.
[43] Ibid.
[44] 1.3.101.

her father’s rebel; as Cassio’s advocate; and, first of all, as Othello’s ‘fair warrior’;[45] but then as a ‘lewd minx’,[46] and, finally, as a pearl’[47] that he threw away. She is defined, then, through a social and linguistic order that privileges male primacy in the roles of narrator and subject of the narrative. *Othello* never can, in fact, become Desdemona’s tragedy, whatever its title, according to these gendered rules. But this fact does not deny her the powerful agency of operating as a narrative *gap*; and although she can never command the symbolic centre stage – can never arrive as a *subject* – her dramatic presence is commanding precisely because it is excluded from the constraints of the definitive subject position: her vital influence is felt to be extra-ordinarily, if unrepresentably, narrative-shaping. Irigaray observes excessive female presence operating productively within the ‘masculine mastery over discourse’ in terms that are strikingly similar to mine:

> Within this syntax, in this order of discourse, woman, even though she is hidden, most often hidden as woman and absent in the capacity of subject, manages to make ‘sense’ – sensation? – manages to create content.[48]

In order to examine female ‘content’, it is necessary to discover femaleness working productively in excess – extra-syntactically – of the masculine syntax, story, and performance. And this seems to be an impossibility, given that all investigation is syntactically managed through our language structures. But it is my contention that Shakespeare’s text paradoxically opens up the space – the gap – in its own narrative order, allowing for the dramatic emergence of extra-ordinary female presence. Through such space, extra-symbolic female agency is

[45] 2.1.173.
[46] 3.3.467.
[47] 5.2.345.
[48] Irigaray, ‘Psychoanalysis and Language: Chapter 8, Questions’, *The Irigaray Reader,* p. 134.

discovered operating influentially beyond the limitations associated with verbal definitions, and yet somehow produced by them. The language-structure in Shakespeare is not so much radically dismantled as it is made dramatically-porous: so that we may find a kind of extra-ordinary energy released from within, activated by the dynamic interaction between the structure and its gaps. Given Desdemona's extra-ordinary status as a gap, then, it may be found that it is not so much that she 'got out',[49] as Brabantio thinks, but that she was never *in*; and neither can a union with 'gentle Desdemona'[50] be a confinement nor a 'circumscription' of the subject's 'unhoused free condition',[51] since *her* condition is already, and extra-ordinarily, free.

The Victorian Shakespearean actress was, by default and denial of any choice, fully involved in the performance of syntactically excessive femaleness – in life as much as in art. Victorian writer Anna Jameson comments on the prejudice of history that has lost the female story – one that she attempts to reclaim in the 'Introduction' to her famous analysis of Shakespeare's heroines, in which she declares that:

> [w]omen are illustrious in history, not from what they have been in themselves, but generally in proportion to the mischief they have done or caused. Those characters best fitted to my purpose are precisely those of which history has never heard, or disdains to speak; of those which have been handed down to us by many different authorities under different aspects we cannot judge without prejudice.[52]

[49] 1.1.165
[50] 1.2.24.
[51] 1.2.25-6.
[52] Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), p. 9.

She goes on to describe the partial presence in the narrative of women in whose characters:

> there occur certain chasms which it is difficult to supply: and hence inconsistencies we have no means of reconciling, though doubtless they *might* be reconciled, if we knew the whole instead of a part.[53]

I want to suggest, with a Hegelian twist, that Shakespeare dramatises the inconsistencies of the female character as a positively-irreconcilable and fluid whole: so that performance is the means whereby female presence actively coheres, always differently and for that dramatic moment; and, so, the female part – multiple and unfixed – is never definitively and conventionally complete, but continually self-dispersing. To attempt any sort of narrative reconciliation is to deny the mobility of the extra-ordinary female gap: so that the performance of dramatic inconsistency emerges as the ambiguous freedom that comes with being excluded. Interestingly, Jameson identifies a 'transient energy' in Desdemona's apparent 'gentleness verging on passiveness', that 'not only cannot resent – but cannot *resist* [my italics]'.[54] In my reading of flexible female presence, lack of resistance is not necessarily passive, but has, conversely, the positive quality of being actively receptive: the 'transient energy' Jameson describes may be conceived as Desdemona's keen responsiveness to the moment (her 'geniality'), and her fluid engagement with the order. By contrast, the resistivity of the Othello-subject that gives him important definition under favourable (masculinist) conditions[55] makes him vulnerable to collapse when charged with the dynamic energy of the gap: in this case, his disorientating love for Desdemona. Only by reasserting his old, uncharged

[53] Jameson, p. 9.
[54] Ibid., p. 175.
[55] As seen in the Othello we meet in Act 1.

personal model can he restore the integrity of his subjective boundaries, in order to die with self-proclaimed dignity.

Desdemona's presence, then, depends not on narrative definition but, much more dramatically, on her active receptiveness to the present condition. She stands up in public not to assert her subjective independence, but to demonstrate her method of dissociative adaptability: to meet the flexible requirement for her now 'divided duty'[56] as wife and daughter. Desdemona's 'energy' is 'transient' in escaping definition; and by being volatile, reactive, and powerfully provocative of Othello's amazement. Such an energy 'stops' him and arouses in him 'too much of joy',[57] so that he can proclaim, 'If it were now to die, / 'Twere now to be most happy'.[58] Surely an energy that provokes this kind of ecstatic arrest cannot be deemed passive? And Desdemona continues to unsettle the stabilising impulse of Othello's satisfied 'content so absolute',[59] with her urging for love's continuation:

> *Desdemona:* The heavens forbid
> But that our loves and comforts should increase,
> Even as our days do grow.[60]

Love, for Desdemona, can never be contained in any absolute terms, however dearly Othello would like to preserve his comfort from future uncertainty – from 'unknown fate'.[61]

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[56] 1.2.179.
[57] 2.1.188.
[58] 2.1.180-1.
[59] 2.1.182.
[60] 2.1.184-6.
[61] 2.1.184.

Irigaray examines the extra-ordinary experience of ‘wonder’ released ‘in the constitution of the ethics of sexual difference’.[62] For her, this ‘feeling of wonder, surprise and astonishment in the face of the unknowable’ recognises the irreducible ‘*gap between man and woman*’.[63] But the gap – the mystery of sexual difference – is, she claims, threatened with reductiveness by the attempt to contain and possess the other as knowable content, wherein it is:

> filled instead with attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, etc., and not with that wonder which sees something as though always for the first time, and never seizes the other as its object.[64]

She affirms Descartes's designation of wonder as ‘the first of all passions’, caused by an encounter that happens ‘before we know whether or not the object is beneficial to us’;[65] furthermore, she insists that wonder ‘cannot seize, possess or subdue such an object’, so that ‘[t]he latter, perhaps, remains subjective and free’.[66]

Othello cannot, then, seize Desdemona as his ‘content’, if, as Irigaray claims, ‘[o]ne sex is never entirely consummated or consumed by another’.[67] Desdemona is a fluid gap in Othello's narrative – again, to quote Irigaray – ‘beyond the calculable and measurable, beyond the *quantitative*’.[68] This is, perhaps, where we may find Terry's ‘genial’ Desdemona at work: not only as a facilitator of ‘life, growth, or comfort’ in Othello, but also, ‘characterised by genius’ - where genius is conceived as the ‘prevailing character or spirit of something’ that exerts a

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[62] Irigaray, p. 171.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., p. 172.
[65] Ibid., p. 171.
[66] Ibid., p. 172.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., p. 164.

‘powerful influence over another for good or evil’.[69] This is the influence, I think, of the peculiarly *female* gap in the register here: filtering into the order the unaccountable and astonishing Real energy of presence that has the power to disrupt the boundaries of the securely-confined narrative subject. Neither good nor evil in itself, this energy may disfigure or reconfigure the subject under its influence, as I shall discuss in later chapters devoted to other plays. Here, though, the Desdemona-gap seems to introduce a positive, loving challenge to Othello’s fixed boundaries: undermining his ‘round unvarnished tale’[70] to draw him into his more dramatic, more creative – and so more precarious – presence.

In using Desdemona as the unwitting agent of his mission to destroy Othello, Iago appears to recognise her extra-ordinarily affective presence. Her power to destabilise is so much stronger than his own, and she has already permeated Othello’s external defences. Iago can convert this destabilising influence for what might be his own personal gain, or, perhaps, what is merely a fascinating experiment. In harnessing Desdemona’s radical energy, Iago opens up a void of destruction: the equivalent of the Lacanian Real. And this activates the desire for something more than the subject can accommodate so that, in pursuing the ‘more’, he risks radical self-dispersal. In engaging with voiding energy, Iago will not survive the process any more successfully than Othello. And Desdemona, too, as a character within the narrative, is clearly destroyed. But she dies continuing to deny the definitions that are imposed on her by the rhetorical order – by Iago, most obviously, but also, finally and tragically, by Othello. She claims that she cannot process his words – only feeling the emotion that drives them:

[69] See Online Language Dictionaries <https://www.wordreference.com/definition/genial> [Accessed 16th March, 2020].
[70] 1.3.90.

Desdemona: I understand a fury in your words,

But not the words.[71]

Indeed, the words that castigate her *can* make no sense, since what she *is* must be continually misconceived in any attempt to relativise her in symbolic terms. In his last attempt to possess her – to absorb her within his narrative – Othello constructs her as a seizable object: a 'pearl' of immense value to him – *for* him – had he not thrown it away.[72]

We find what seems to be, perhaps, a surprising lack of resistance in Desdemona's response to the male subject position, even when it threatens to overwhelm her own presence; and, in this, her allowing 'geniality' may seem to border on the masochistic. For Desdemona – and, indeed, for Terry herself – confrontation is not, however, the business of the female agent, who must find another means of personal justification. When the system is constructed to define, and underline, masculinist power – whether in Early Modern Venice or late nineteenth century England – feminist opposition to its privileging cause is always already doomed to failure. The only real agency available to the female is, then, harnessed in eluding fixed definition by that order. In Lacanian terms, adopting an excessive position – as a gap – in the order is a subjectively precarious activity, which brings the destructive force of the Real into threatening proximity. But, if the Real is conceived as the drive responsible for *producing* the subject,[73] then there is – as Irigaray would concur – an especially close connection between the female and the Real, since both are actively productive (and reproductive) of the subject,

[71] 4.2.29-30.
[72] 5.2.345.
[73] The dialectical process of subject-production involves a 'split' whereby the energy that produces the subject is necessarily denied in order for the subject to survive. See Hegel, as interpreted by Zizek in *Less than Nothing*, pp. 6-7.

but yet have no registered place within the confines of its code. In Freudian theory, the mother is a figure who must be rejected, if full and independent subjective participation is to be achieved.[74] But the maternal life-force has limitless, unpredictable and excessive power – a recognition encapsulated in Jacqueline Rose's description of the 'the fact of birth' as 'a type of endless reminder of what escapes us, a living caution to our totalitarian dreams'.[75] New life emerges, according to Rose, always excessively to our expectation and to our understanding – and, certainly, to our control – of it. The female gap, as a model for the radical life-force that propels the system to which it is paradoxically excessive, has, then, real (and Real) agency in the unpredictable birth of every new moment. In this mode, the female gap manifests, according to my reading, as the quintessence of dramatic presence.

Othello – in dramatic proximity to the Real energy of his love for Desdemona – searches for language that can only grasp at definition: 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul'.[76] Earlier in the play, he loses rhetorical control more obviously, as I have discussed;[77] but, here, there is something more ingenious working as symbolic disorder: less a breakdown of sense into unreadable nonsense, than an energetic transfer into a kind of structurally-achieved *ab*-sense, within the apparently undisturbed regularity of the line. Indeed, its especially smooth surface, with its haunting repetition, is suggestive of calm and absolute definition. But rather than providing an answer, the elusive 'cause' is generative of the unknown, the limitless, the proximity of systemic revolution. It marks a return of Othello's wonderment in the face of the unknowable – and the presence of the gap. Although Desdemona is removed as a *character*

[74] See Irigaray, *The Sex which is not One*, pp. 34-67.
[75] Rose, p. 11.
[76] 5.2.1.
[77] pp. 27-8.

from most of the last scene of the play, her influence continues to work as a kind of ab-sense that cannot be read as, or confined within, such a character: so that she somehow exceeds her own ending as the ambiguous and elusive existential cause itself. At the very least, she is the root-cause of the Othello drama, her influence rendered deadly by the parasitic contrivances of the unethically-brilliant Iago.

Both Othello and Iago are impressed by the power of Desdemona's affective presence, albeit very differently. Ellen Terry played her part with Henry Irving in each role: he and the American actor, Edwin Booth, interchanged the two roles in alternate weeks, during a six-week run. It is clear from her recollections that Irving was much more convincing as Iago; and, according to Terry, Irving himself considered his playing of Othello to be a failure, signing off from the part on the last night 'half-humorously and very deliberately' with the words, '*Never again!*'.[78] Terry claims that she 'could not bear' to see him in the role, describing how '[h]e screamed and ranted and raved – lost his voice, was slow when he should have been swift, incoherent where he should have been strong'.[79] But, as Iago, he was apparently mesmerising:

> One adored him, devil though he was. He was so full of charm, so sincerely the "honest" Iago, peculiarly sympathetic with Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo, *all* of them – except his wife.[80]

It is clear from this description that Irving really enjoyed playing the villain. He was: '[d]aringly Italian, a true compatriot of the Borgias, or rather, better than Italians, that devil incarnate, an Englishman Italianate' – to quote the uncomfortably xenophobic words of the then

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[78] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 161.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., pp. 160-1.

dramatic critic of *The Times*, A. B. Walkley.[81] Irving was immensely capable of converting Terry's energy for his own purposes – just as Iago does Desdemona's. Interestingly, though, it was when he was playing *Iago* that Irving was most disorientated by Terry's presence as Desdemona. As Othello, he apparently defended himself from the sort of disruptive energy that would make his breakdown properly convincing. But, as Iago, it seems he was more genuinely – since perhaps more unexpectedly – moved by her power. Terry describes her disturbing effect on Irving here as her 'greatest triumph as Desdemona':[82] he was, she says, 'in spite of Iago and in spite of his power of identification with the part, very deeply moved' by her acting. Although Terry describes the way he cleverly and swiftly contrived to represent this genuine emotion as Iago's 'fresh stroke of hypocrisy',[83] its manifestation is not inappropriate to a reading such as mine, in which Desdemona's presence as an extra-ordinary gap threatens all orderly stability, including the dis-orderly version Iago has authored for himself.

[81] A. B. Walkley, qtd. in Terry, p. 160.
[82] Terry, p.160.
[83] Ibid.

LADY MACBETH

Terry finds a productive energy in the love 'that never does things by halves', even when the character who loves is apparently defeated by the system; the radical 'self-abnegation' such full immersion requires is, she claims, 'rare in women, but rarer still in men'.[84] Desdemona is, for Terry, a powerful example of rare and courageous generosity; and she reads Desdemona's self-denial not as a retreat from presence, but rather as an active choice. We may be inclined to regard Terry's view as a conventionally romantic one that sanctifies Desdemona's attempts to save Othello through love – even to the extent of absolving him of her murder:[85] so that in the laying down of her own life she performs, for his, a Christ-like kind of absolution. For the male subject, who is represented as absolute in the symbolic system, the giving of self is more often associated with the precarious action of giving way – and giving away. But, in my reading, selfless energy-commitment is figured as a powerful activity of extra-ordinary female presence that probes the limits of secure masculinist identity. But this is not to suggest that the gap is necessarily morally superior to the order in its character and aims. It is true that selfless giving is generally associated – as in the case of Desdemona – with goodness, and with a charity offered often at one's own expense. But the extra-ordinary energy-giving activity of female gap is not conditioned by ordinary rules, and the energy it shares with the order has Real, dangerous force. I want to suggest, in this next chapter, that the freedom of the gap to harness and share such energy is an ambiguous – and very disturbing – kind of power.

So far, my discussion has focused on the loving and allowing impulse of the female gap that produces something life-affirming through its uptake of Real energy; but this extra-ordinary

[84] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 191, 192.
[85] 5.2.124-5.

energy is, nevertheless, unpredictable and threatening to the stability of the subject, since its affective presence cannot be rationalised within the order. So, Desdemona's presence is a *cause* – first of wonder and then of irrational fear – that leaves Othello teetering on the edge of subjective dissolution. As the female gap, she opens a proximate void that is, as Badiou describes it, 'outside situations, unpresentable', and is, as such, 'in excess of being as a thinkable disposition'.[86] This is the location of the catastrophic death-drive of desire that threatens to unseat the subject and to expose the vulnerability of his precariously-achieved identity.

Nowhere is the ambiguous power of the female gap more apparent in Shakespeare than in the dramatic presence of Lady Macbeth: an important – even iconic – role for Ellen Terry. In *Macbeth*, the threatening energy of the void is filtered through a loving relationship, as in *Othello*, but, here, its destabilising effect on the subject is quite different. In fact, it may be that in this play the Real enters the narrative relatively unfiltered: so that Lady Macbeth operates as a kind of super-conductor, channelling its destructive potential almost neat. Her drive, as I conceive it, is not the politically-ambitious 'will to power'[87] of traditional interpretations, but something much more chaotic, more frightening – and much less definitive, as I shall now demonstrate.

In *Macbeth*, the terrifying Real energy of the void appears almost in its raw state – almost unrepresentable. Certainly, its personal conduit – the supernatural 'weird sisters'[88] – is almost unrecognisable *as* a person, or even as three. If they represent anything, it is the excess of

[86] Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 74.
[87] See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin Classics, 2017).
[88] Shakespeare, 'Macbeth', ed. by John Jowett, 1.5.6.

being *as* excessive beings: excessive to the order of causation, but also strangely productive of the future of the narrative – like a kind of ghastly womb of revolution, generating the chaotic energy of something like Rose's unpredictable new birth.[89] It seems, here, that the void has assumed some dis-ordered form of sensible life: that by conjuring something dramatically incongruous from nothing, Shakespeare is giving exceptional space to the non-spatial, making the unthinkable not just thinkable in abstract terms, but also dramatically and unnervingly *present.* In Lacanian terms, this manifests as the fracturing of the Imaginary with the consequent letting loose of the chaotic Real within the Order. So, in existential terms, the weird sisters are, in fact, not weird at all, since, as Roberto Esposito puts it, all '[b]eings are traversed by nothingness because they ultimately issue out of it';[90] the weird sisters become dramatically visible, then, as *non*-exceptional beings, who only seem 'not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth'[91] because their nothingness is, somehow and suddenly, available to the situation. What is *weird* is really only their shocking visibility in the order, and our direct encounter with their nothingness in the opening scene of the play.

The play opens into a void of which we attempt to make narrative sense, but which quickly subjects us to disruptive and nonsensical rhymings and reversals: what Terry Eagleton describes as the weird sisters' 'riddling, ambiguous speech' that 'promises to subvert' the hierarchical 'structure'.[92] Luke draws attention to the 'almost comic' effect of such 'language's excessive and shifting quality'.[93] But in our initial disorientation, with only the promise of a mysterious encounter with the referent, 'Macbeth', it feels that there is a fine line between

[89] Rose, p. 11.
[90] Roberto Esposito, *Persons and Things*, trans. by Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 72.
[91] 1.3.36.
[92] Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 2.
[93] Luke. p. 142-3

comedy and horror. And the horror is, it seems to me, to be derived mainly from the emergence, dramatically, of the three-way Lacanian 'split': weirdly visible, yet un-transposed – and un-transpose-able – by language; hence the incongruous riddling offered us in place of cogent narrative. Hegel described the violent abstraction performed by language as a kind of original sin – the usurpation of the concrete by the abstract:

> Adam gave a name to all things. This is the sovereign right, its primal taking-possession of all nature.[94]

The weird sisters arise, then, as the disturbing manifestation both of the raw energy of the Real that eludes linguistic signification, and also of the residue entailed by this kind of linguistic usurpation. As Esposito says:

> [l]anguage can express what it is only by presupposing its negation. The naming of things, the instant they are assigned to the class that includes them, wipes out their empirical being, reducing them to an infinite series.[95]

With the weird sisters' 'naming of things', both they and the things they name are consigned to meaninglessness; and, still more radically, if we adopt Maurice Blanchot's association of the word with death, they themselves return to the void along with those who speak to them:

> When I speak, I deny the existence of what I am saying, but I also deny the existence of the person who is saying it.[96]

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[94] G. W. F. Hegel, *G. W. F. Hegel and the Human Spirit. A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6),* trans. by Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), p. 89, qtd. in Esposito, p. 79.
[95] Esposito, p. 78.
[96] Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', trans. by Lydia Davis, *The Work of Fire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 324.

There is, then, something dramatically – existentially – explosive in Macbeth's first demand that they speak to him; and in their naming of the titles that will compound his destruction.

It is tempting to try to rationalise the startling first scene as a disturbing prelude to the bloody action to follow. But some directors withhold the scene until after our introduction to the main narrative in Act 1, Scene 2 – or cut it altogether since it seems so confusing as an opening sequence. But the sudden bursting forth on stage of 'wild life'[97] – to use Bradley's phrase – is dramatically in tune with the eruption of intrusive Real energy as I have conceived it: so that we are, from the outset, involved not in a linear narrative, with its illusion of coherence and smooth progression, but in a dramatic experience of symbolic splintering. As audience members, we feel we are involved in the making of some kind of original meaning, since, as Luke says, the weird sisters exhibit an 'origin-less, over-spilling quality':

> exist[ing] on the borders of the play-world; they come from an unknown dimension. We cannot see 'beneath' them. We cannot discern their origins or desires.[98]

To take this a step further into post-structuralist territory, I want to suggest that 'they' cohere only as temporary energy-coalescences: rather than conceiving of the weird sisters as having desires or indeed origins – however elusive – I want to consider their presence as the dramatic manifestation of the alternative kind of energy I have discussed in relation to my concept of the female gap. When they speak to Macbeth, they do not so much invoke – as Hegel suggests – the 'most secret and private wish' of a character already 'determined by his passion of

[97] Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy,* p. 332.
[98] Luke, p. 143.

ambition',[99] as what is beyond even *his* capacity for 'present fears' or 'horrible imaginings'.[100] The weird sisters are then, even more terrifyingly, not the conduits of present fears nor harbingers of future horrors, but deniers of possibility itself: promising not what is to come, but 'what is not',[101] nor ever shall be. As such, they perform the strange presence of temporal and spatial ab-sense, or what Luke describes as the 'weirdness of the disembodied or not fully embodied':[102] a kind of a-personal existential driver that is both productive and, equally, *disruptive* of being. Badiou's account of being draws attention to the 'limited order of presentation' by which being is defined as 'natural';[103] in other words, being emerges as 'natural' only through a scheme of symbolic relativity. In Hegelian dialectical theory, however, there is always an invisible antagonism in any definition between what is included and what is left out in the selection: so that being must be, according to dialectical thinking, at the same time both natural *and* unnatural, with the latter somehow secretly 'ghosting' the former. The weird sisters, though, being beyond any symbolic scheme, may actively and openly perform the antagonism – may be equally natural and unnatural: foul *and* fair; and Macbeth seems to recognise this, when he ponders that their 'supernatural soliciting' / Cannot be ill; cannot be good'.[104]

We find a reaction in Macbeth similar to that in Othello, when made aware of his own subjective precariousness: both subjects are suddenly and self-shatteringly disturbed by alien emotional forces involving them from beyond their own definitions. But I shall suggest that

[99] Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 231, 578.
[100] 1.3.133-4.
[101] 1.2.138.
[102] Luke, p. 145.
[103] Badiou, p. 75.
[104] 1.3.126-7.

their eventual symbolic dissolution – their demise as characters in the dramatic narrative – does not occur as a result of the manifestation of the experientially extra-ordinary 'event', but from their attempts to exert 'future-proofing' control over its effects. In my reading of the female gap, I explore the greater adaptability of female characters ('without identifiable history')[105] to the immediate presence of exceptional energies that wield their influence from beyond predictable structural limits.

In the socio-political web of measurable and nameable concepts, there is no room for the excessive 'live' energy of the unrepresentable; but Shakespeare dramatises it here as an alternative dimension of being: not the other-as-exception, but as the non-exception of an insidious voiding energy source that is subject-free and dramatically-multiple, as manifested in the presence of the three weird sisters. Being *multiply* subject-free, they could be interpreted as performing something like Badiou's 'theorem of the point of excess' in which 'it is formally impossible, whatever the situation be, for *everything* which is included (every subset) to belong to the situation'.[106] They disperse, like 'bubbles'[107] of the earth, with an ungraspable radical formlessness that both undermines and completes their dramatic definition. With the restoration of peace and the known order of Malcolm's hierarchical new/old Scotland, at the end of the play, the sisters seem simply to disappear; but the 'time', as Macduff ambiguously insists, 'is free' – and their insurgent energies are, we might imagine, always waiting in the wings.

[105] Luke, p. 142.
[106] Badiou, p. 97.
[107] 1.3.74

From the outset, Macbeth is susceptible to the weird sisters' extra-ordinary intrusion.[108] Indeed, the concurrence of their prophesying and its partial realisation – in Macbeth's nomination as the Thane of Cawdor – appears to be a clear invitation to accept and think along with the unexpected. And this Macbeth does, acknowledging the presence of the uncertainty (and the dialectical split) that '[s]hakes so my single state of man' that 'nothing is, but what is not'.[109] Whilst he is receptive to chance, he nonetheless off-loads responsibility for any outcome in an oddly passive construction:

Macbeth: If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir.[110]

This is not, however, how chance works: Duncan's planned visit presents itself as the sort of chance he's after, but one which requires his active engagement. Macbeth, though, tries to resist its homicidal demands through a proleptic imaginative leap: he wants to 'jump' not only the 'life to come', but also personal responsibility for the enactment of the 'horrid deed' that will realise his desire.[111] He takes an impersonal stance again, on this next step towards the king's anticipated murder:

Macbeth: Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires.
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be

[108] Unlike Othello, whose subjective boundaries are firmly and resolutely drawn for the whole first act of his play.
[109] 1.3.136, 138.
[110] 1.3.139-40.
[111] 1.7.7, 24.

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.[112]

If the bloody deed were merely a socially and politically opportunist act, Macbeth might be less squeamish about it, and about its possible discovery. In this case, its accomplishment would 'be the be-all and the end-all',[113] with the restoration of order on his terms. But what his imaginings push towards is a fear of the inevitable change the deed will work in him: he, like Othello, is 'a soldier, and afeard'[114] – afraid of *not* being that soldier. The conditional 'if' seems indicative, I think, of this unspoken anxiety: 'If it were done when 'tis done'[115] – and *if I could be the same person afterwards*.

Lady Macbeth acknowledges her husband's need to protect his own self-image – and not just for external eyes:

Lady Macbeth: What thou wouldst highly,

That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,

And yet wouldst wrongly win.[116]

She herself, however, embraces the transformative potential of the act without any such future-proofing reserve, but, conversely, with a bold and active receptivity. Indeed, she calls for the radical dissolution of her sexual identity in a demand for spiritual possession that seems, most provocatively, closer to an act of sexual affirmation. Bradley notes that she lacks imagination – that she 'hardly imagines the act'[117] – but this is, perhaps, the point: she, unlike

[112] 1.4.50-3.
[113] 1.7.5.
[114] 5.1.31-2.
[115] 1.7.1.
[116] 1.5.16-8.
[117] Bradley, p. 353.

Macbeth, does *not* project herself into an uncontrollable future, but accepts the present as the only place for self(ves) determination however precarious. She acts *now* – 'unsex me here'[118] – opening herself with erotic immediacy to the 'destructive, dangerous and suffering state of freedom' in which we are, to adopt a Nietzschean view, 'most ourselves…violating the restraints of the very history which has produced us'.[119] I suggest that these 'selves' are, in terms of the gap, essentially fluid and multiple: unrestrained – since not produced – by history. Lady Macbeth seems to show more of the 'courage' that Badiou proposes in 'passing through there where previously it was not visible'[120] – not '[t]omorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'[121], but today. There is something terrible and awe-inducing about her lust for demonic possession. Her absolute willingness to embrace the dissolution of identity that comes from her 'unsex[-ing]' seems less an act of sacrificial and diminishing self-denial than an ecstasy of spiritual and sexual resurrection, albeit murderous of the agents who penetrate her (like some magnificent and 'naturally mischievous'[122] black widow spider) – so ambiguous is the drive of the Real let loose by the weird sisters and converted by the female gap.

Her willingness to become whatever facilitates the creative spirit is, of course, essentially dramatic. She calls the 'murth'ring ministers' out of nothing – 'sightless substances' – to animate her role: one 'top-full / Of direst cruelty'; her purpose swayed by 'no compunctious visitings of Nature', being beyond good or evil. The dark '[s]pirits / That tend on mortal thoughts' – like the weird sisters themselves – wait in the wings, excessive to the action but

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[118] 1.5.37.
[119] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries,* 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. xxxi.
[120] Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 294.
[121] 5.5.18.
[122] 'You wait on nature's mischief': 1.5.46.

also its fundamental drivers.[123] Macbeth, on the other hand, is caught in an imaginative and certainly less sexually-charged, undramatic hiatus: instead of abandoning himself to the requirements of the moment, he looks – by seeking to 'ground time's flow'[124] – to impose external control, to shut off the drama and to close down the play. The risk of going *with* the flow is too uncertain – makes him too vulnerable. By skipping the present, though, and harnessing the future as a kind of absolute condition, he could not only avoid interaction with the void but also reap its rewards 'here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time'.[125] But this eternal 'here' would mean no play, and no life.

Macbeth does, on his wife's persuasion, of course, eventually commit to action. Luke describes his act as 'one of demonic fidelity' in which he 'arrives as a subject of hell'.[126] But I will go further, in suggesting that Macbeth here shares in a more radical energy that is somehow excessive to being, as manifested in the multiple ab-sense of the weird sisters' weird presence. In the void, his subjective boundaries collapse. As a result, he feels the deliciously erotic Real desire for the ultimate obscene conquest: to cut off the sovereign (and Sovereign) source in something like a blood-soaked state of grace that frighteningly exceeds him. Duncan's corruptible bleeding flesh is, in Macbeth's description, imbued with the pattern of incorruptible beauty that might be sewn into a vesture of the divine:

Macbeth: Here lay Duncan,

His silver skin laced with his golden blood,

And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature

[123] 1.5.34-50.
[124] Luke, p. 164.
[125] 1.7.5-6.
[126] Luke, p. 166.

For ruin's wasteful entrance.[127]

Disconcertingly thrilling in this passage is the disturbing convocation of religious awe and violent sexual assault; and the ravenous, blood-guzzling of the Hell-hound himself, suggestively produced by the image, seems to unleash the Real power of murderous desire.

This is the point at which Macbeth takes stock and draws back: it has already gone too far, or, at least, far enough. This isn't the mechanical slaughter of the battlefield executed by a soldier fully self-possessed. The dangerous drive of the Real threatens to destroy him – to prevent his return as a definitive and presentable self within the order. His old self is no longer available to him after immersion in the void; and his guilt prevents him from comfortably assuming an 'alter[ed] favour'.[128] Obliged to operate within the system that gives him socio-political power – *subject* to its laws – Macbeth cannot fully embrace the animating and dangerous freedom of the void. Indeed, he never exhibits the exhilaration of, in Ewan Fernie's words, 'adventuring beyond all determinism'.[129] Instead, his attempt to retreat from the nightmare of his recurring visions – 'that / Which might appal the Devil'[130] – could be considered a failure of the sort of courage Badiou proposes: a return to binary definitions of order and rebellion that deny another form of life beyond good and evil – beyond 'all determinism'.

It is Lady Macbeth who appears to embrace and receive the spirit of the void more willingly, refusing to dwell either in regret of accomplished action or anxiety about steps yet to be taken. She remains present. Macbeth on the other hand – denied both '[r]enown and grace' –

[127] 2.3.105-8.
[128] 1.5.68.
[129] Ewan Fernie, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 63.
[130] 3.4.57-8.

retreats from any productive communication with presence: that of his wife, his audience, or even his own. And once he shuts her out, effectively closing the gap, Lady Macbeth, too, is denied congress with the narrative present. She is, as a result, reduced to feeding on a poisonous dramatic memory that can be played out only subconsciously and incoherently. Like Desdemona, her availability to extra-ordinary energy has made her disruptive to the order and threatening to the (male) subject. Unlike Desdemona, however, she is not murdered, but – like Ophelia[131] – suffers a more prolonged trauma of exclusion through symbolic breakdown. Her sleepwalking ravings are reminiscent of the disjointed projections of images by the weird sisters in Act 1, Scene 3; and – in their nightmarish goriness – the sequence of apparitions in Act 4, Scene 1. The logic of the temporal and material order is ruptured: the past, like Macbeth's future, remaining continuously present:

> *Lady Macbeth:* Out, damned spot; out, I say! – One, two: why
> then, 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my Lord, fie, a soldier,
> and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our
> power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have
> had so much blood in him?[132]

She harps on the 'old man['s]' voluminous blood, with a fascination that draws comparison with her own ghostly lack. In her reportedly habitual, imaginative revisiting of Duncan's murder, her presence is definitively divorced from its hollowed-out and fragmented symbolic signification – lost in an imaginative hiatus similar to Macbeth's projection to the 'end all', although in the opposite temporal direction. What remains present in all this is the chaos of

[131] As I shall discuss, in 'Ophelia'.
[132] 5.1.30-4.

the void's terrifying energy, let loose and made visible through the gap in the order – as the apocalyptic manifestation of the Lacanian Real. As Ross reports, it unleashes 'sighs and groans, and shrieks that rend the air'.[133] But Lady Macbeth is beyond even the 'prophesying with accents terrible' that once '[n]ew-hatched' her.[134] Her redundant gap winds itself into its own suffocating cocoon, detaching itself from dramatic relevance; and in its death throes, it jolts the narrative, exposing the Macbeths' guilt and releasing itself into the void – in which Macbeth will finally join her.

So, Lady Macbeth is 'fiend-like'[135] not because she makes an ambitious grab for temporal power, but because she truly does engage with Real, dark forces, filtering their dangerous energy into the order where it destroys its subjects. This is why *Macbeth* does seem such a dangerous a play to perform: it is a drama not only about political intrigue and disorder, but also one that 'traverses the fantasy'[136] – to use Zizek's words – introducing the energy of the void's wild excess through the female gap radically to break down the order's symbolic codes and with them – excitingly and frighteningly – our own parameters of certainty.

Ellen Terry played Lady Macbeth to Henry Irving's Macbeth, at the Lyceum Theatre in 1888, in a significant production that defamiliarized the 'fiend-like queen' that Sarah Siddons had made her own in 1775.[137] Terry's heavily-annotated scripts[138] reveal a serious and sustained effort to summon and play the excess released by the scripted female part – what Nina Auerbach describes as a 'largeness'[139] beyond the formal role – but somehow dramatically

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[133] 4.3.169.
[134] 2.3.49, 51.
[135] 5.11.35.
[136] Zizek, *Event*, p. 25.
[137] Sarah Siddons first performed the role on 2nd February 1775, at the Drury Lane Theatre, London.
[138] Held at The Ellen Terry Museum, Smallhythe Place, Small Hythe, Tenterden, Kent, TN30 7NG.
[139] Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry, Player in Her Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 250.

generated by it. Terry's concern with finding more flexibility in the characterisation than is immediately apparent chimes with my own search for a freer – even more rebellious – energy operating within the conventional female role. Her copious marginal notes may not, in their entirety, have been translated into her performance in any obvious way; but the alternative dramatic possibilities they explore – of mood, impulse and affective influence – certainly seem to have generated, for her, a more complex relationship with the role. Auerbach comments on Terry's performative fidelity to Shakespeare's characterisation, whilst also acknowledging her personal investment in the part: describing it as her 'first Lyceum role to address her forbidden selves' which 'became the vehicle for everything she had learned about being a woman'.[140] Rather than playing just a part, or merely suiting the role to the expectations of an audience, Terry, it seems, gave it the more nuanced shape and the fuller scope of her own immediate experience.

Lady Macbeth's faithfulness to Macbeth, in a relationship in which Terry imagines '[s]he has never failed her husband yet', has much in common with her own loyalty to Irving.[141] And like Lady Macbeth's, Terry's commitment, whilst being far from passive, is also far from being simply controlling. Terry's close examination discovers Lady Macbeth to be a woman 'of acute nervous sensibility', whose hypothetical threat to dash out of her baby's brains is – according to Terry – more a mark of her sensitivity than 'proof of abnormal ferocity'.[142] She reads the 'I have given suck'[143] speech as a call to action:

[140] Auerbach, p. 250.
[141] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 161.
[142] Ibid., p. 161.
[143] 1.7.54-9.

> Are not these lines capable of *this* construction: 'I would do all that I *couldn't* do, all that would be utterly false to every natural instinct and feeling of mine, rather than break such an oath as the one you have sworn'.[144]

Terry insists on the catalysing power of Lady Macbeth's presence in the play: one that 'rouses' Macbeth from dramatic 'paralysis'[145] to engage with the presence of the dark energy of '[v]aulting ambition',[146] unlocked by the weird sisters, and drawn into the order through the susceptible gap. Macbeth has significant subjective status in the order, being King Duncan's twice-honoured 'kinsman and his subject'.[147] But although she is the beneficiary of Macbeth's advancement, Lady Macbeth has no actual political power – having no independent representation. As a result, though, her energy is free to operate more insurgently – both within and beyond the power-structure that does not recognise her influence. And the greater the gap, the more disturbing is its activity.

In playing Lady Macbeth, Terry also played the ambiguity of her own status: that of a significant female public figure, harnessed to the male lead, but with a different kind of agency – more live, reactive and free – even though, or perhaps *because*, considered secondary. Auerbach suggests that Terry made the role her own confessional,[148] and there certainly appears to be sympathy for her character's disappointment in her recognition that when she 'pour[s]' her imaginative 'spirits in [Macbeth's] ear',[149] she has misplaced her faith in his

[144] Terry, p. 161.
[145] Ibid.
[146] 1.7.27.
[147] 1.7.13.
[148] 'In her incessant explication of Lady Macbeth, she never stopped trying to confess', in Auerbach, p. 257.
[149] 1.5.22.

receptivity – and in his capacity to do as he had 'so sworn' to do[150]. Her own frustration could, perhaps, be equally read here:

> A woman (all over a woman) who *believed in Macbeth*, with a lurking knowledge of his weakness but who never *found him out* to be nothing but a brave soldier *and a weakling*, until that damned party in a parlour – 'Banquet Scene' as it is called.[151]

What Terry celebrates in Lady Macbeth is her 'contriving'[152] elasticity – that contrasts with Macbeth's inflexibility that will not commit him to extra-ordinary action, despite his ruthlessness (by order) on the battlefield. According to Terry, Lady Macbeth's love for her husband – that calls in the powers of darkness on his behalf – somehow absolves her of abetting him in murder; or, at least, she acknowledges the lengths to which Lady Macbeth's passion will drive her, and the variety of means she may use by way of encouragement. In Terry's reading, there is no conflict between Lady Macbeth's 'unsex[ed]' and murderous self, and the pliable charming one who 'wins' Macbeth to murder 'not by bullying, but by pleasing'.[153] Her performance notes instruct her: 'Smile. Devil…Be damn'd *charming*';[154] and it seems clear that she was, in this direction, pulling on one of her own strategies for mobilising a man (Irving) equally frozen in his intention.

In her *Memoirs*, Terry draws attention to the imprisoning weight of Irving's stateliness, and its constraint on her own performative swiftness: 'Pace', she writes, 'is the soul of comedy, and to elaborate lines at the expense of pace is disastrous'; and she continues, 'Of course, it is not

[150] 1.7.58.
[151] Terry, qtd. in Roger Manvell, *Ellen Terry* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), p. 194.
[152] Manvell, p. 358.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid., p. 195.

a question of a swift utterance only, but of swift thinking'.[155] Her concern is not just with the timing of the comedic interchange, however; it is evident in one of her *Macbeth* scripts[156] that she is protesting against Irving's restraint on their interactive rhythm: '*Please* quickly…*Please* at once…A look like lightning will help me here'.[157] And this sense of urgency echoes Lady Macbeth's own impatience with her husband's 'green and pale'[158] hesitancy.

In a role she 'made her own',[159] Terry unlocked an insistently female agency: one that is invested in the primary narrative but that also operates in an alternative, indefinite space along its margins. Without orderly definition, this agency is dangerously free – having no registration as a force for either good or ill within the symbolic system. It is easy to define Lady Macbeth as evil. But Terry opened up *a-moral* possibilities for her action in Shakespeare's script: playing her as, above all, a passionate lover, un-constrainable through any simple registered judgement. Terry's own private story is a gap that opens concurrently and interdependently with her public one. We have no access to any personal narrative of her marriages or, indeed, other partnerships – apart from those built on supposition, or offered in fragments in her autobiography and letters; she is entirely reticent about her six-year relationship with Edward Godwin, and never confirmed any sexual intimacy with her lovers, Irving included. In its elusiveness to judgement – especially in such morally-censorious times – the part she played in her own story is very Shakespearean. Her legacy as a performer, as Auerbach describes it, speaks to this ungraspable quality of her identity-shaping:

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[155] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 79.
[156] The Ellen Terry Museum.
[157] Terry, qtd. in Margaret Webster, *The Same Only Different; Five Generations of a Great Theater Family* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1969), pp. 142-3.
[158] 1.7.37.
[159] Auerbach, p. 250.

> [H]er stage presence elicited abstract rhapsodies, not precise descriptions. She is celebrated most as a picture, one that is living and kinetic, but, nevertheless, remote and confined: she is magnetic but not quite real.[160]

Where Irving 'imposed himself on audiences through a sequence of pantomimic, almost imperceptible but unforgettably vivid gestures', Terry 'made herself into a concentrated catalyst for the half-understood images that haunted spectators'.[161]

The enactment of her diffuse personal identity is, of course, lost to time; but in the responses of her contemporary audiences, there is lack of concrete definition – so that she seems elusive even to them:

> Ellen Terry does not act so much as she elicits reactions in the viewer. All her energy concentrated itself on achieving this remote catalysing power.[162]

The general reaction to Terry's Lady Macbeth reflects the confusion she herself induced in others who could not accommodate her paradox of femininity and power. The *Morning Post* of November 1899 reported a fragile beauty in her incarnation of Shakespeare's evil queen:

> A creature so spiritual, so ineffable, has never perhaps been put on the stage. Is this Lady Macbeth?[163]

American artist John Singer Sargent thought so. And he painted her as a gap: not as part of the *Macbeth* narrative, but isolated from context – the stage, Irving-as-Macbeth, and even from Shakespeare. Nowhere in *Macbeth* does Lady Macbeth appear as this singular figure,

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[160] Auerbach, p. 194.
[161] Ibid., p. 198.
[162] Ibid., p. 195.
[163] Qtd. in Manvell, p. 201.

crowning herself in the act of self-authorising defiance, imagined by Sargent in his mesmerising portrait of *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth.*[164] In the portrait, she stands alone: outside the parameters of the play, but recognisably driving its dramatic energy. She appears to be enacting a kind of forbidden agency hidden within her scripted role. Terry claimed that the portrait encompassed all the secret power she put into her part. She says, in her *Memoirs*:

> It was a satisfaction to me that some people saw what I was aiming at…Sargent saw it, and in his picture is all that I meant to do.[165]

It is as though Terry herself has authored Sargent's realising image. In the language of the Victorian theatre, as Martin Meisel explains, a 'realization' occurs through the transformation of one art 'into a more real, that is more vivid, visual, physically present medium':[166] so that one art intensifies the life of the other. Whether or not this is the case here, the artist and the actress – between them – generated in this painting something extra-ordinarily vital: a kind of triumphant Everywoman, stepping out from the boundaries of Shakespeare's play as an exultant and suddenly-visible gap. The astonishing beetle-wing dress Terry wears here, designed by Alice Comyns-Carr,[167] was made with real green beetle-wings and was, Comyns-Carr says, intended to look 'as much like soft chain armour as I could [make it], and yet have something that would give the appearance of the scales of the serpent'.[168] It is, in itself, something quite extra-ordinary. Auerbach describes the painting as the 'definitive embodiment of Ellen Terry's disjunction from her assigned role';[169] but I see it more as the

[164] John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, oil on canvas, 1889 (London: Tate Britain).
[165] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 233.
[166] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 30.
[167] Ellen Terry Museum.
[168] Alice Comyns-Carr, qtd. in Manvell, p. 198.
[169] Auerbach, p. 265.

juncture of Lady Macbeth and herself, and the manifestation of that raw energy – produced in the fusion – that would play for *itself*, but has no representative power except as it is assimilated into the male narrative. Sargent somehow managed, here, to represent the unrepresentable – and therein, I think, lies its mesmerising intensity.

In the play, Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to play multiple roles: first and foremost, a soldier – but also 'th'innocent flower' and 'the serpent under't'.[170] Arising like a kind of militant and glittering serpent in Sargent's picture, she fulfils the roles she has designed for Macbeth: the painted image momentarily arrests the brilliant fluid freedom she works to enable in him. But there is nothing static about the energy of this still image: just as Sargent painted the gap in the *Macbeth* narrative, freeing Lady Macbeth into her own power, so he painted Terry into hers – through an art-form in which she was, as Auerbach says, 'most mercurially and suggestively alive'.[171] But the live freedom imagined here is an ambiguous liberation of multiple meanings. Her solo presence can be interpreted as a kind of proud female autonomy connecting with the ancient power of the Goddess of Complete Being,[172] with a touch of the death-dealing Medusa and the war-waging Amazon. But there is, at least, another simultaneous reading: of something much less certain about the figure's stance and facial expression – that could speak more of distress than of triumph. If viewed like this, her raised arms leave her exposed rather than authoritative; and she is less harpy than supplicant – reaching out for something else: something more. What she grasps may be a hollow crown: the symbol of male authority, of patriarchy and of the valuing system that excludes her. Rather

[170] 1.5.61-2.
[171] Auerbach, p. 17.
[172] See Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1992).

than put on the crown and step into the order that would ironically subject her to its limitations, she might dash it to the ground, rejecting man-made authority, and even the ultimate male Authority, whose Trinity the weird sisters have already weirdly replaced.

Her expression seems to reflect more than one emotion: not only the blind fury of the rejected, nor simply the bitterness of the excluded; and neither does it appear singularly to speak of the satisfied smugness of the powerful. Perhaps it is, finally, unreadable – a gap in meaning. The female gap as I have conceived it is neither defined through the power structure, nor ultimately excluded from it: instead, it operates within and yet beyond hierarchical symbolic codes. Sargent's image shows a woman who, ultimately, steps obscenely out of line – beyond the maternal role and in denial of filial honour: so that, in the horror of the Lady Macbeth-gap, there can be found no sovereign self, but only crushed baby-skulls and old, pitiful, sleeping fathers streaming with blood – and another role to play. And as for Terry, the unreadable expression on the face of the queen is also – and perhaps especially – hers, since we can make sense of her only in terms of a multiplicity of competing roles. The queen of the stage – 'Our Lady of the Lyceum'[173] – was not a role with which she crowned herself.

Reports of Terry's performances are, if not unreadable, certainly hazy, as I have mentioned. But Sargent's portrait, with its extra-ordinary immobile mobility, makes the unreadable powerfully present. Auerbach seems to reach towards a similar paradox, in her analysis of the still image:

[173] Oscar Wilde, qtd. in Auerbach, p. 195.

> When they acted together, the intractable Irving obscured her adaptability, but now, in portraits, we can see Ellen Terry's metamorphoses, while Irving's power survives only in his disciples' dark myths.[174]

The image, then, may release the gap more explicitly than the report – the 'myth'. Terry had 'been groomed', as Auerbach says, 'in a theatre that took its identity from painting';[175] and Ellen Terry's status as a living picture is also part of her theatrical legacy: according to Michael R. Booth, '[n]o performer in the history of the English stage has ever been considered in quite these pictorial terms'.[176] But dramatic agency can be neither framed nor indeed *tamed* by its visual capture; and there is nothing ordinary about Sargent's realisation of Lady Macbeth's – and Terry's – extra-ordinary power.

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[174] Auerbach, p.200.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.

CORDELIA

Cordelia, as her name suggests, represents the heart – the 'heart of a lion', if we do a little etymological shaping.[177] But her great heart seems surprisingly impervious to the emotional neediness of her admittedly vain and self-serving elderly father. Her chilly meting out only of what is due in the filial relationship can seem distinctly off-putting, however much we sympathise with her disapproval of Lear's cynical power-parade. And such love that can be quantified '[a]ccording to [her] bond'[178] appears to be a negotiable commodity, subject to the same condition of emotional reification as her father's. Desdemona's mathematical approach to filial affection as 'so much duty'[179] haunts the voice of Cordelia here. It is certainly the case that these fathers in both plays are possessive, over-bearing and embarrassing; and, yes, youth can be – perhaps has to be – cruel. But, even so, is this a *great* heart? I shall argue that it is, and extra-ordinarily so, and that this is why it cannot be confined – nor defined – by the order that names her.

We forgive Desdemona without question, since we find her capacity for loving at the heart – *as* the heart – of the unfolding *Othello* drama; and anyway, Brabantio's position is rendered almost immediately uninteresting and forgotten. Cordelia, on the other hand, seems to drain the romance from any love that might draw attention to itself. It is fair to say that in flattering her father with 'glib and oily art',[180] she would thereby further his reliance on what might well be empty gestures; and he needs to learn humility before he might safely '[u]nburthen'd crawl

[177] From the French, 'coeur de lion'.
[178] 'King Lear and his Three Daughters', ed. by John Jowett, 1.1.77.
[179] 'Othello', 1.3.184.
[180] 1.1.207.

toward death'.[181] Perhaps her bald response is, then, a kinder act than just a mortifying let-down for an arrogant showman used to applause: in public, and by his youngest and most devoted daughter. But the extreme violence of Lear's reaction speaks of something more than mere slighted ego, however overblown that may be: it is, much more radically I think, the catastrophic exposure of the fragility of his constructed self-hood. And he has to look at its emptiness – has to see its 'nothing[ness]' – in the eyes of Cordelia.[182]

The realness – and Real-ness – of Cordelia's presence here threatens the order of things as mapped out in Lear's hierarchical kingdom. Unlike her sisters, she does not conform to the conflated rules of their father's politico-personal game. As with Othello's rehearsed speeches, the effect – indeed outcome – of Lear's orchestrated sharing-game is already written into the contract between speaker and audience. Both Desdemona and Cordelia, however, rupture their respective narratives by bringing real and disturbing presence to the historical present. And in this radical activity, they open the gap, introducing free energy from the void that both threatens the stability of the subject and is also, and more positively, the primary driver of change.

But there seems to be a contradiction in the reading of Cordelia's definitive moral staunchness as the fluid multiplicity of the female gap: it is difficult to find any dramatic flexibility in such a paragon. The persona Cordelia presents in the opening scene of the play seems to be pretty fixed – an impenetrable holy thing, unswayed even by the most dizzying viciousness of others. As a bounded thing, she is an object of the order (being female), and so subject to possession,

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[181] Shakespeare, *King Lear: The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.1.40, p.5. [in F1, but not in Q1].
[182] 1.1.73.

or transfer: rejected her father, she is picked up, although perhaps with more care, by the King of France. Esposito makes the point that the things that belong to people are termed 'goods' not because they are positive entities in themselves – or even good by way of being – but in that they confer good on those that possess them, so that '[t]he thing is not first and foremost what it *is* but rather what someone *has*';[183] and what 'essentially qualifie[s]' it is 'the fact of its being someone's and no one else's, in a form that [can] not be contested'.[184] Since Cordelia is not doing Lear any good, she is picked up by France in the hope that she might be good for *him*. The value of the object thus confers value on the subject, who is considered a subject only in so far as he is in possession of a demonstrably-valuable object. It was so, at least, in Roman 'ius' and, according to Esposito, '[t]his testifies to the absolute primacy of having over being that has characterised our culture for some time now'.[185]

But Cordelia's 'price is fallen', not only for her father who relinquishes her ownership, but also, according to Lear, for the whole of 'nature [who] is ashamed / Almost to acknowledge [Cordelia] hers'.[186] It would be more conventional for France, like Burgundy, to relinquish claim to a bad bargain. He, however, reverses the measure of value:[187] to exalt the 'poor', 'forsaken' and 'despised'[188] in finding Cordelia's 'virtues' of greater worth than material riches. This is laudable, perhaps. But leaving aside the religious complications here – what Fernie describes as 'the enigmatic spiritual territory of ecstatic mortification and shame' into which

[183] Esposito, p. 18.
[184] Ibid., pp. 19-20.
[185] Ibid., p. 18.
[186] 1.1. 179, 194-5.
[187] In anachronistically Christian terms: see Holy Bible, 'The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians', *The King James Study Bible: King James Version* (Columbia: Liberty University, 1988), 6:8-10.
[188] 1.1.233-4.

France's speech 'plunges us'[189] – the terms of the exchange are, nevertheless, questionable: France still resolves to 'seize upon'[190] his object, along with her virtues hung about her like another kind of gold.

Possession of an object is very different, though, from possession of another subject. There is something very disturbing about the desire to possess the subjective other, whether emotionally, mentally, spiritually or sexually – or all at once. And Cordelia, understandably, refuses her father's public display of ownership; but she also denies *our* access, and this provokes in us an associated kind of desire: the desire to know her. Simon Palfrey describes this as the 'often dangerously insinuating' power of imaginative empathy;[191] and it can feel uncomfortably prurient. Do we need her to confess to us, in soliloquy, so that we can 'seize upon her' too, and have full knowledge of her? The biblical echo of carnal knowledge here is disconcertingly suggestive - especially in the theatre, where the imaginative prodding of the subjective boundary is conditioned by the bodily presence of the actor; and though we do not confront the character directly, we do share the energy of the acting space, with real affective influence on the actor. Cordelia's resistance to Lear's demand for performance is a block for us, too. Do we want her to dance more elaborately for us than for him, tantalised as we are by her two brief asides? Well, yes: in an intimacy with the character mediated through the – very vulnerable and present – performer's physical body. With Cordelia, though, there appears to be no sign of the more violable inwardness that would make her more penetrable in possession than a 'thing'; and in her refusal of interpersonal negotiation, she seems to lack

[189] Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 184.
[190] 1.1.235.
[191] Palfrey, p. 300.

dramatic presence. None of Shakespeare's tragic heroines, though, breaks the 'fourth wall' to make us complicit in her thinking – although we do witness Lady Macbeth alone, and Desdemona has a trusted confessor in Emilia. Cordelia's private thoughts remain a gap, like her physical presence, for most of the play. But it is not the same kind of presence-gap that my thesis aims to unlock: it is not that *other life* that explodes within and beyond the play's more obvious parameters – unrepresented and unrepresentable in the ordinary historical narrative – that Shakespeare extra-ordinarily dramatises.

When Cordelia is apparently entirely absent from the stage, it is difficult to locate her excessive energy working in relation to the order that denies her. And it is not a question of reading *between* the lines to locate this alternative life in Shakespeare. In a letter written to Ellen Terry after the première of *Cymbeline* at the Lyceum in 1896, George Bernard Shaw warned her about the deliberate opening of gaps in the script:

> In playing Shakespear [sic], play *to* the lines, *through* the lines, *on* the lines, but never between the lines. There simply isn't time for it. You would not stick five bars rest into a Beethoven symphony to pick up your drumsticks, and similarly you must not stop the Shakespear orchestra for business. Nothing short of a procession or a fight should make anything so extraordinary as a silence during a Shakespearean performance.[192]

The Shakespearean excess is dramatically released *within* the lines, as they are performed, and not in artificially-interposed pauses. There is, whilst Cordelia is still present on stage as Lear's subjected daughter, a certain energy – the energy of resistance – in her refusal of the

[192] George Bernard Shaw, 'Letter XXXV: G. B. S *to* E. T.', *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence*, ed. by Christopher St. John (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), p. 59.

system; but her denial also seems to provoke an active extra-symbolic dramatic energy arising, to use Hugh Grady's words, from:

> that fearful condition which results when one's name has been lost, when one has been severed from the feudal signifying systems, with their property and inheritance laws and customs.[193]

Before she speaks her 'nothing',[194] however, Cordelia must be something: but being something *female* she already lacks adequate subjective representation in the 'feudal signifying systems', in which she is, according to their 'customs', merely 'property'. Her name in the system identifies her as an object; and her leaving with and for France, as something rejected by her father and otherwise owned, may then be conceived as an extension of her reified condition. So, her 'nothing' that 'can come of nothing'[195] seems more like a reinstated *something* than the radical energy of extra-ordinary presence. Her refusal seems to have little in common with Lady Macbeth's existential risk-taking, or with the self-forgetful passion of Desdemona whose courageous spirit flexes with the changing emotional weather of Cyprus. In fact, Cordelia has little choice but to leave. But before this, she has already, importantly, unleashed what Luke describes as 'the creative energy of the void':[196] through the 'no thing' that is her love, released extra-ordinarily from its commodification. I shall argue, here, that this loving energy reaches beyond the 'thing' – the prospective 'wife' – that leaves the stage; and I shall find it haunting – even driving – the play as an insistent and dangerous *un*-reified

[193] Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 145.
[194] 1.1.73.
[195] 1.1.74.
[196] Luke, p. 173.

presence capable of rocking the foundations of the order and radically undermining its hierarchical stability.

This unloosed, wild energy is much closer to the dark forces with which Lady Macbeth engages; but unlike in *Macbeth*, the forces are here introduced by the noble female character herself, without recourse to any 'weird sisters', or even her own ghastly ones.[197] For all its potential for destruction, however, the Cordelia-gap – once re-personalised in the character who returns to the play – has a reconditioning, redemptive power, more like Desdemona's consecrated love.[198] But, as I have suggested, her departure leaves a gap open – for most of the play – to radically free, a-moral and un-reified agency raging unmediated through the order. Un-reified agency is, of course, dramatically untenable, unless there are weird manifestations of its presence, as in *Macbeth.* When Cordelia is removed, as a loving gap that both releases and also shapes and filters it, the energy is dangerously and radically free; but for it to be effective, it must find an alternative character-conduit – and I shall briefly examine the dramatic possibilities for its presence in *King Lear.*

With the multiply-cohering weird sisters in mind, I shall begin my investigation, most obviously, with the combined presence of Cordelia's two sisters, who might be found to harness Real disruptive energy in the ruthless business of toppling a king. They do seem to pick up and run with the radical energy Cordelia unexpectedly makes available, further to probe Lear's subjective security and expose his vulnerability. And even before this, it is Lear himself who has, in Luke's words, 'initiated his own potential voiding in proposing to release

[197] Goneril and Regan.
[198] Cordelia, unlike Desdemona or Lady Macbeth, has the opportunity to reconnect with the narrative that grasps at a future graced by her presence.

himself from the "burden" of identity-making that constitutes subjectivity'.[199] This is the process that is arrested by Lear's bartering of his regal responsibilities in exchange for love, as equally quantifiable goods – in a deal which Cordelia refuses. Goneril and Regan seem to seize and feed upon the hiatus, '[l]ike monsters of the deep',[200] in what Grady describes as 'an amoral, instinctual drive to power',[201] apparently similar to that stimulated in Lady Macbeth by the weird sisters. But Goneril and Regan do not show themselves to be flexibly receptive to the energy provoked by Cordelia: they are, instead, I would argue, precisely *inflexible*: operating, like Lear himself, within only a simulacrum of presence that, in Badiou's terms, 'convokes not the void' of immediate and 'real truth processes', but 'the presumed substance of that situation'.[202] This enables them to participate deliberately in Lear's mechanistic love-test, with its 'closed particularity';[203] and to assert their own authority, in place of his, through a similarly artificial structuring 'count' that excludes the 'nothing' that is a dysfunction of countability – 'the name of unpresentation in presentation'[204] – that would threaten the 'one' and open the void itself. In dispensing with the 'nothing', then, Goneril and Regan, like Lear, work to avoid the gap, rather than to engage with it: in a symbolic securing, rather than a release, of their subjective boundaries.

Cordelia's refusal of Lear's system is, conversely, a complete symbolic refusal not unlike Lady Macbeth's in her last delirious narrative fragmentation.[205] Cordelia insists that her 'love's /

[199] If the subject is the 'bearer of a fidelity', as Badiou says [Badiou. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2000), p. 43], then it must, by definition, be burdened; and so, Lear, as Luke says, '"unburden[s]" himself of the process that *constitutes* subjectivity' (Luke, p. 174).
[200] 4.2.48-9.
[201] Grady, p.137.
[202] Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 73.
[203] Ibid., p. 74.
[204] Ibid., *Being and Event*, p. 58.
[205] I shall discuss this kind of linguistic voiding with reference to Ophelia's madness, in the next chapter.

more ponderous than [her] tongue'; but since her love lacks symbolic significance, it has no value in Lear's contractual economy of exchange: the 'nothing' has no power – cannot be counted – in the closed particularity of the situation. Her silence, then, denies her representation in Lear's game – Badiou's 'simulacrum'; but it simultaneously frees her from its artificial rules – and releases her into a kind of meta-theatrical real presence that is somehow within and yet beyond the play. Her linguistic refusal is not, though, merely a challenge to the symbolic order, but also a manifestation of the disjunction between representative and insistent energy: the order and its gap. It is critically conventional to identify a similarly insistent and extra-ordinary force in the savage riddling of Lear's Fool, through which he pushes Lear, uncompromisingly, to the edge of the void and appears to jump in ahead of him (in his unheralded disappearance from the play in Act 3, Scene 6). By dismantling the value-system that Lear has clung to – and which Goneril and Regan now inherit – the Fool exposes him as a vulnerable subject who, having given away everything, cannot be somebody: 'is not Lear'.[206] As such, he is even less than a Fool, who is, at least, a thing owned, with a place in the transactional order: as the Fool points out, 'I am a fool; thou art nothing'.[207] I shall argue, though, that in his dissociation from his own order, Lear is, in fact, *less* than nothing – since the nothing is always actively engaged in the order, even as it is refused registration there.

The Fool lives by apparently defying ordinary logic, and by unsettling empty forms of definition – as in this example:

Fool: That sir which serves and seeks for gain,

[206] 1.4.193.
[207] 1.4.162.

And follows but for form,

Will pack when it begins to rain,

And leave thee in the storm;

But I will tarry, the fool will stay,

And let the wise man fly:

The knave turns fool that runs away,

The fool no knave perdy.[208]

In this way, the Fool appears to escape the formal code, whilst remaining within it; and this practice seems to correlate with the unrepresentable-yet-insistent energy of female gap as I have described it. But the Fool's overtly disruptive activity is actually written into his particular symbolic role, and thus cannot be considered excessive; moreover, his disruption is verbally managed – as direct contradiction. He may be conventionally couched as Cordelia's 'bitter twin':[209] overtly linked with her at her death, in Lear's anguished cry, 'my poor fool is hanged'.[210] But he is, in his peculiar way, the order's symbolic agent and, for this reason, cannot share the gap she has opened. Her free energy must find a more flexible, more extra-ordinary dramatic vehicle.

Luke describes Edgar's 'multiple, incomplete selves' as the 'most comprehensive, and difficult, example of the play's discontinuous arrivals from nothing'.[211] I would go further: suggesting that, in his manifestation(s) as Poor Tom, Edgar does not arrive as either something or someone *from nothing*, but is dispersed *beyond* nothing – into and as the void itself. Edgar

[208] 2.2.232-9.
[209] Luke, p. 190.
[210] 5.3.300.
[211] Luke, p. 190.

himself, being male and Gloucester's legitimate son, is visibly recognised by the order as its subject, whereas Cordelia can be registered only as its object. And his wrathful rejection by his father – though it parallels Cordelia's – is a very different crisis, being provoked indirectly through deceit, rather than through direct exposure. But both characters apparently abandon the order that has disclaimed them, to adopt an excessive space beyond its narrative limits: Cordelia, as I have said, finds that place in France, whilst Edgar adopts the guise of the excessive and multiple character that is Poor Tom. It is my contention that this multiple character-space incorporates not only Edgar's excluded energy, but also the unmediated radical nothingness Cordelia leaves behind her, as I shall now explain.

It is patently clear that Poor Tom is nothing from the outset, since he is – in a meta-theatrical twist – merely Edgar's assumed disguise. Through this role, though, Edgar opens a gap that uploads and activates real voiding power of the kind Cordelia has already unleashed: a turbulent energy that has the capacity to undermine the entire order. Edgar's is a call for possession reminiscent of Lady Macbeth and her 'murth'ring ministers':

Edgar: My face I'll grime with filth,
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots
And with presented nakedness outface
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars who, with roaring voices,
Strike their numbed and mortified arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;

And with this horrible object, from low farms,

Poor pelting villages, sheepcotes and mills,

Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,

Enforce their charity. Poor Turlygod, poor Tom,

That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am.[212]

Like Lady Macbeth, Edgar exposes himself to the 'persecutions' of nature that may, like her dark spirits, animate his role. Like her too, he seems to derive powerful, a-moral agency from his loss of identity. Poor Tom's gap is certainly multiply-animated: not only by rebellious demons, but equally by suffering self-mortifying spirits; and the shifting shapes of the void continue to rush in and multiply: as not one but *five* 'foul fiend's,[213] a proud 'serving-man', and 'Child Rowland' from the 'dark town'.[214] These shapes merge with those of animals: a hog, fox, wolf, dog and lion. And then there is the 'night mare'[215] – a female spirit, possibly in the shape of a coiled serpent, with her 'nine-foaled' (nine-fold) – that conjures the shades of the weird sisters, and which Poor Tom fends off: 'aroint thee, witch, aroint thee'.[216] But the shapes disperse more gently and seductively too: in a nightingale's song, and the purring of a grey cat.[217] And this performance of apparently unlimited, wild receptivity continues to overspill all subjective and ethical boundaries, so that Poor Tom can never 'arrive' – to use Luke's terminology – but is always and only multiply, dramatically and fleetingly present.

[212] 2.2.165-77.
[213] 3.4.38.
[214] 3.4.68, 149.
[215] 3.4.95.
[216] 3.4.98.
[217] 3.6.24, 38.

Poor Tom's extra-ordinary presence seems, perhaps, to have little to do with Cordelia's loving nothingness: however elusive and dispersed her presence, it would be imagined in a more significant guise than that of a foul beggar in a ditch; and her void-opening silence seems, initially at least, more considered than the ravings of a sparsely-clothed lunatic. But Poor Tom characterises not just the 'nothing' of either the fugitive Edgar or the banished Cordelia, but something even more radically deconstructed: *beyond* either the excluded subject or object that they represent. He figures, I think, the dramatic embodiment of the Real remainder of the system and, as such, is much more threatening and unreadable. Zizek describes the abject other, in political terms, as the disenfranchised 'excremental remainder' of society, that – as explained by Kelsey Wood – 'experience[s] the pathology of the entire society': the 'universal truth of an event or situation' that can never be 'revealed in the big Other'.[218] According to this definition, Poor Tom absorbs and dramatises the entire 'pathology' of the play: including that of the Edmund-Gloucester relationship, and, by association, that of Lear himself. On both accounts, Poor Tom figures the void, and the face of Gloucester's and Lear's own self-shattering shame.

Lear casts Poor Tom as the 'thing itself';[219] and this description seems to speak of an essential unity that can be scrutinised – and pitied. But, being '[u]naccommodated man',[220] he is not any 'thing' that can be provided for in the order; and neither does he perform an insistent relationship with it. In his symbolic detachment, he goes much further, operating as the 'less-than-nothing' that is the voiding power itself. When Lear is exposed to Poor Tom's energy, he

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[218] Wood, p. 43.
[219] 3.4.84.
[220] 3.4.84.

faces the abyss, in which his identity will be dispersed and destroyed; and when he declares, 'Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy / uncovered body this extremity of the skies',[221] he seems to acknowledge that fate-worse-than-death that awaits him in Poor Tom's version of hell. The Fool's conclusion, '[t]his is a naughty night to swim in',[222] perhaps recognises and invokes the wild elements for which Poor Tom is the occasion and origin.

Lear famously comes to acknowledge the '[p]oor naked wretches',[223] of whom he has taken little care. But he is driven further, to embrace the full force of the 'pathology of [his] entire society', rather than merely recognising it: to become – with the phenomenon that is Poor Tom – an 'excremental remainder'. This marks the existential distance he travels between the pity he expresses *for* the outcast and his solidarity *with* them: between his (false) witnessing of the 'thing itself' as other and his discovery of the void within himself. At this point, there is, I suggest, nothing ethically salutary about Lear's determination to swim with Poor Tom in the naughty night: Poor Tom is possessed by a raging 'foul fiend',[224] and considers the 'Prince of Darkness' a 'gentleman';[225] and there is something sinister about Lear's trust in the dark arts of such a 'philosopher'.[226] In Lear's enormous – and rash – empathetic leap, he loses all agency, being immersed in the same self-dissolving darkness as the wretch he imagines thereby saving. So, in attempting to feel what Poor Tom feels, Lear's action is doubly perilous: there is nothing inevitably worthy of saving in this self-proclaimed multiple-thing of darkness; and, even if there is, disempowering empathy is not an effective method of salvation - as Paul

[221] 3.4.80-1.
[222] 3.4.87.
[223] 3.4.25.
[224] 3.4.103-4.
[225] 3.4.112.
[226] 3.4.122.

Bloom discovers in his fascinating and controversial study, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*:[227] for the rescue to be effected, there must be some distance written into the contract between rescuer and rescued – and this distance is compassion rather than empathy. Lear, at this point, appears lost with no chance of salvation – and so is certainly no help to Poor Tom, who does not, in any case, ask for it.

At this point it is useful to clarify that Poor Tom is not the same character as Edgar, but the manifestation of the void working through him, much like the murderous spirits in Lady Macbeth. These are dark forces that require the mediation of the gap that, having allowed them in, also enables the order's more flexible survival. Edgar, though, cannot perform this function, being a male subject and, therefore, of the order; his pity for the deconstructed Lear has no affective power, not only because it is hidden in the emotional detachment of Poor Tom, but also because the void has been catastrophically opened by Cordelia's presence and, more importantly, by her love. Lear must sink deeper into the abyss before he is rescued by her return.

It could be argued that Edgar represents an equivalent kind of gap that rescues Gloucester. Certainly, it appears that Poor Tom presents a void to him, too – in the self-denying possibility of the leap from Dover Cliff – and that Edgar lovingly converts the wild energy of dissolution for the purpose of his father's restoration, however brief. And Edgar *is* a gap, in that he is already (only) a role, and one also in disguise – and so a multiple role – and, anyway, Gloucester cannot actually see him. But Edgar is not a gap in the sense of my theory of the peculiarly *female* gap, since he is a male subject and, thus, fully recognised by the order's scale

[227] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016), pp. 15-56.

of empowerment. At the end of the play, indeed, he reclaims his political significance: instituted as the new pivotal leader who bears '[t]he weight of this sad time'[228] and proceeds overtly to carry it forward – at least, in the Folio version of the text. And the Gloucester plot is entirely bound up in a masculinist power struggle, instigated by the artful Edmund – his central purpose being the reconfiguration of the rule of (male) primogeniture. The Lear-subject, on the other hand, is confronted by Cordelia's artless love, working extra-ordinarily within the power structure: not to reconfigure its order, nor to seize that power, but to expose its artificial and limiting rule. Only by instilling the more life-affirming influence of the loving relation as its driving force, can the narrative accommodate the more fluid, now-visible, female gap.

Lear can be restored, then, only through a newly flexible relation with the female presence that has radically challenged his delimited, fixed self. The un-reified energy let loose through the gap – and cohering in the presence of Poor Tom – has continued its voiding action on both Lear and, by association, Gloucester, whose physical ravaging figures as an intensifier of Lear's; but, however horrifying the suffering – and however touching the poetry – involved in the Gloucester plot, its dynamics are much more conventional than those driving Lear's crisis. It takes sustained energy to break down the entrenched vanity of an aged king and spoilt father – most of a (very long) play, in fact. Cordelia re-emerges at the point where he is ready to acknowledge female presence, not as he has earlier in the play, as a weakening of his self-control – 'O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!'[229] – but as the allowing and creative

[228] Spoken by Edgar, rather than by Albany, in F1. See Shakespeare, *King Lear: The Arden Shakespeare*, 5.3.322-5.
[229] 2.2.215.

spirit of love. When he can finally embrace the gap, in a positive release of control that lets the 'nothing' in, he can be both reconciled to Cordelia and also himself redeemed.

Cordelia acknowledges the void in which her father has been all but engulfed, so that ''[t]is wonder that [his] life and wits at once / Had not concluded all'.[230] And he himself recognises his own dissolution in being 'bound / Upon a wheel of fire',[231] in a purgatory that encompasses, fleetingly, the extra-ordinary visitation of Cordelia's blissful soul. The 'spirit'[232] that Lear addresses as his 'child Cordelia'[233] is, in this thesis, a manifestation of the gap that may convene a new order from the ruins of the old, by means of a flexible relation with the gap's now-visible presence and felt agency. But this hope is short-lived; and Cordelia's agency remains excessive – only potential – not only because of the brutal plot twist that allows her to be hanged, but because her gap has already been closed down by Lear's reasserted subjective primacy. In his romantic vision of singing with Cordelia 'i'th' cage',[234] he again binds her to his need, in what Fernie describes as 'a recrudescence of self-centredness and vanity here in the fantasy of an exclusive relationship'[235] – and a nightmarish replay of Lear's original game. There is a painful ab-sense, as well as absence, in Cordelia's death, which Nahum Tate famously sought to resolve as more meaningful in the happy ending of his revised version of 1681.[236] But there *is* a sense in which she remains excessively present as a real cause of ethical enlightenment: as a kind of elusive yet transfiguring nothingness. It is, perhaps, a compelling

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[230] 4.7.39-40.
[231] 4.7.45.
[232] 4.7.47.
[233] 4.7.67.
[234] 5.3.19.
[235] Fernie, p. 205.
[236] See: Nahum Tate, *The history of King Lear, a tragedy, As is now acted at the Theatres Royal, in Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Revived, with alterations, by N. Tate, Esq* (London: Gale ECCO, Print Editions, 2010). Tate's version was performed throughout the nineteenth century; Irving's revival in performance of Shakespeare's Folio text was one of the first.

irony that Lear can read her 'face'[237] and find the gap, only when she is beyond the relation and will 'come no more'.[238]

King Lear is especially bleak in that the void of self-destruction opens for both Lear and, by association, Gloucester without mediation or any clear promise of their rescue. If Cordelia does open the void, she doesn't apparently remain present, so that there seems little opportunity for us to access her excessive love as any positive force for good. I have looked to locate a transfer of her agency to other characters who might perform her role in a kind of sympathetic dispersal. But her sisters, being the most obvious candidates, do not function as gaps – though they do widen the void – but operate as agents of ruthless power within the order and on its terms. And, although it is tempting to find the gap in the outsider-figure of the Fool, in response to the pointing of role-conflation in Lear's famous cry, 'And my poor fool is hanged',[239] I have found that he is not, in fact, *exceptional*, but an *accepted* role in the order; and, as such, he has clear – and important – definition within it. I have also ruled out Edgar as the new agent of the Cordelia-gap. Although there is certainly a case for reading Poor Tom as a gap in the sense of his being an outcast, he nonetheless emerges, for Lear, as a newly recognisable male subject – if a significantly subjected one. So, although Lear has 'ta'en / Too little care'[240] of such '[p]oor naked wretches',[241] they still have a place in the order – albeit at the bottom of its ranks. Lear identifies in Poor Tom a man who has, like him, been 'subdued' by 'his unkind daughters';[242] and by claiming solidarity with 'unaccommodated *man*' [my

[237] See my discussion of Emmanuel Levinas and the 'face of the other', in 'Conclusions'.
[238] 5.3.302.
[239] 5.3.300.
[240] 3.4.29-30.
[241] 3.4.25.
[242] 3.4.56-7.

italics],[243] he still has a long way to go before he can acknowledge the female nothing insisting with the 'thing itself'.[244]

But it is my contention that Poor Tom functions as a much more menacing influence on Lear than either the 'something male' Lear takes him to be, or the 'female nothing' that operates as the gap within the order. Edgar, possessed by his disguise, has introduced a radical voiding power that threatens the survival of the subject who is drawn within its scope.[245] Poor Tom does not offer a relationship with Lear, though he answers his questions. His dangerous attraction for Lear is precisely his symbolic detachment; and in following him – in 'keep[ing] still with [his] philosopher'[246] – Lear risks his *own* symbolic detachment and entire subjective breakdown. Luke describes Edgar and Cordelia as 'the two twin "spirits" of the play', with Edgar playing 'the angel of darkness to Cordelia's angel of light';[247] but this dichotomy equalises, and thus confuses, two very different kinds of agency and status: where Cordelia's influence is extra-ordinary but, nonetheless, personalised and positively engaged, the dark influence activated by Edgar's 'angel' is, in my thesis, not a controlled kind of role-play, but the letting-loose of a destructive force through the semblance of impersonation – akin to that more usually acknowledged in 'The Scottish Play'. I shall discover, in Chapter II, a manifestation of similarly disturbing, dark energy working through 'Queen Mab', in Mercutio's astonishing and extra-ordinary speech in Act 1, Scene 4 of *Romeo and Juliet.*[248]

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[243] 3.4.84.
[244] 3.4.84.
[245] Like the evil influence of *Macbeth*'s 'weird sisters', as discussed in 'Lady Macbeth'.
[246] 3.4.144.
[247] Luke, p. 199.
[248] See Chapter II ('Juliet').

Ellen Terry played the role of Cordelia, to Henry Irving's Lear, at the Lyceum Theatre in 1892.[249] According to Auerbach, it was 'an ambitious but poorly received production'.[250] Irving was, Terry wrote after the first night, 'just marvellous', but also somewhat 'indistinct from nervousness'.[251] Of her own acting she was uncharacteristically approving: 'I was rather good tonight. Cordelia *is* a wee part, but a fine one all the same'.[252] By December, however, she admitted that *King Lear* was 'one of our rare failures', and that Henry Irving was 'not well', with 'business by no means up to the proper point'.[253] It may have been partly the case that in playing Lear to Terry's Cordelia, Irving was exposed to unfamiliar dramatic neglect: where Terry, in her 'useful' roles as lover or wife, and even mother,[254] could support his own evolving characterisation, the withdrawal of her fostering spirit as Cordelia was genuinely painful to him. And there was something a little uncomfortable too, perhaps, about Terry's playing the daughter-role here to Irving's emotionally-coercive father-figure: after their performance of the intense and mutual passion of lovers such as Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Desdemona, and the Macbeths – to quote just three examples – the relationship between Lear and his daughter, as played by these particular actors, must have had an ambiguous sexual tension – feeding upon hints perhaps already present in the text.

Irving's preparation for his role was always, according to Terry, tightly controlled, even (or especially) in the impersonation of extreme emotion. In its attention to detail, and its flair in performance, his characterisation was mesmerising; but Terry found him hard to reach,

[249] Opening night: 10th November, 1892. Edward Gordon Craig (Terry's son) played Oswald.
[250] Auerbach, p. 420.
[251] Terry, *Memoirs*, pp. 249-50.
[252] Terry, p. 250.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Terry played Volumnia to Irving's Coriolanus, at the Lyceum in 1901.

claiming that his 'self-concentration spoils the porridge',[255] and wishing that he 'were more ingenuous and direct'.[256] At the time of this production, Terry had just begun her famous lengthy epistolary correspondence with George Bernard Shaw.[257] The playwright's comment on the contrast between Irving and Terry – always more admiring of the latter – underlines Terry's own assessment:

> 'The contrast', he notes, 'between [Terry] and Irving could hardly have been stronger. She, all brains and sympathy, scattering them everywhere and on everybody: he, all self, concentrating that self on his stage as on a pedestal'.[258]

But that 'self' still required Terry's enabling presence to shore it up; so, her absent Cordelia may have opened a dramatic void for him, as much as for Lear.

The role of Lear may, then, have been exposing of Irving's dramatic and personal needs; but it seems that the playing of Cordelia could have exposed Terry too. In her lecture notes, Terry introduces the character by surmising of her audience that:

> [p]erhaps some of you have a daughter who like Cordelia is extremely reticent, loves you dearly, but never gushes. Perhaps there is a daughter here who knows exactly what Cordelia means when she says her love is 'more richer than her tongue'.[259]

Terry may have been summoning her own daughter's reticence in Cordelia's '[s]till waters'.[260] As Christopher St. John says, in her editorial notes to Terry's letter to Shaw (CLXVIII):

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[255] Terry, 'About Henry Irving', *Memoirs*, p. 270.
[256] Ibid., p. 269.
[257] From 24th June, 1892 to 1st March, 1920.
[258] Shaw, in *A Correspondence*, p. 13.
[259] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 153
[260] Ibid., p. 156.

> '[t]o one as ebulliently expressive as Ellen Terry, her daughter's Cordelia-like abstention from the demonstrations of admiration and affection lavished on her by adoring friends of both sexes must often have caused pain'.[261]

Certainly, Terry avoids claiming any natural sympathy with the character – writing in the margins of her own script, next to Cordelia's refusal to flatter Lear, 'FOOL'[262] – and affirms that 'Cordelia is a most difficult part to play', with 'so little to say, so much to feel'.[263] In her study of Cordelia in *Shakespeare's Heroines*, Anna Jameson agrees that '[e]verything in her seems to lie beyond our view, and affects us in a manner which we feel rather than perceive'; and she goes on, 'The character appears to have no surface, no salient points upon which the fancy can readily seize: there is little external development of intellect, less of passion, and still less of imagination'.[264] For Terry, the role's lack of 'salient points' was more likely to close down than to open up any dramatic possibilities. Their absence was probably as dramatically difficult for her as her absence was for Irving.

Charles Hiatt, one of the most admiring of Terry's contemporary critics, claims that, with her presence on stage, she 'illuminated the play', and that '[h]er impersonation was not merely a feature of the Lyceum production, it was *the* feature, so far as the acting of the play went'; and he goes on to quote Clement Scott, who considered that '[t]he play woke up and gained new life when Cordelia was discovered'.[265] So, it seems that Terry/Cordelia did, in fact, recover the play with her recovered presence: 'illuminating' the newly-shared relation that awakens

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[261] Christopher St. John, 'Note to Letter CLXVIII: E. T. *to* G. B. S., *A Correspondence*, p. 194.
[262] Auerbach, p. 420.
[263] Terry, p. 156.
[264] Jameson, p. 203.
[265] Charles Hiatt, *Ellen Terry and her Impersonations: An Appreciation* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), pp. 230-1.

Lear/Irving to the other – finally transfigured beyond himself. This is the more comfortable and familiar Terry-Irving dynamic: and one that dramatises the vital and empowering relationship of the gap to the order, as explored in this thesis.

OPHELIA

As I said in my previous chapter, Ellen Terry found Cordelia a rather unnatural part to play. But she never considered her weak. Ophelia – her fourth 'pathetic woman' – presented her with a different kind of challenge, being a character who, more than any so far discussed, seems to lack obvious agency: her story really is a gap, in the sense that we cannot know it, or her, in any productive way. And yet, it is my ambitious contention that her presence is a strongly active influence on the narrative: that, in being (and remaining) the female 'nothing', she opens a void of powerful energy as dramatically affective as the 'no thing' of Old Hamlet's ghost. Jacques Derrida and Stephen Greenblatt, in their respective *Hamlet*-inspired 'ghostly encounters', make much of the affective presence of intrusive past energy in their constructions of identity.[266] My own concern, here, is with disruptive energy that, similarly, eludes the temporal frame; but this *female* energy has not escaped from any record of the past, being a *presence* gap. As such, it is always already affectively and insistently present.

In the socio-political order, Ophelia – like both Desdemona and Cordelia – is conceived of as a marketable commodity, whose value depends upon her chastity as well as her filial obedience: so that she is – again like them – always an object of scrutiny, of desire and of possession. Unlike either, however, Ophelia is denied an opportunity publicly to refuse the market and to step out of the trading game. Her reification is assumed, and assured, in the proprietorial virtue-shaping conducted by her father and brother, who warn her of the devaluation

[266] Derrida's intrusive patriarchal ghost represents the broader (male) political narrative - in his *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); Greenblatt's, in *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) is a more personal father-figure.

potential of Hamlet's advances: Laertes insists that her '[b]est safety lies in fear',[267] warning her of the risk – to him too – of 'unmask[ing]'[268] her beauty, or responding to Hamlet's provocations:

Laertes: Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or loose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity.[269]

Laertes has already judged Hamlet's 'favour' for Ophelia to be merely a 'fashion', and 'a toy in blood'[270] – of little value in comparison with his serious commitment to the important matters of state. Hamlet will inevitably, he insists, prioritise politics over his 'holy vows'[271] to her. As Polonius insensitively points out, Hamlet's 'vows' must be revealed as 'brokers / Not of that dye which their investments show, / But mere imploratators of unholy suits'.[272] His more worthy, more honourable, investment will be in the business of public affairs; and his dalliance with Ophelia – like Gertrude's with Claudius – 'cannot come to [any] good[273] – at least, not to retain the market value of the 'good' that Ophelia represents for her family honour.

As Juliet Dusinberre observes, in her comprehensive study of Shakespeare's female characters, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, '[a] man who is unchaste loses nothing in

[267] Shakespeare, 'The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark', ed. by John Jowett, 1.3.42.
[268] 1.3.36.
[269] 1.3.28-31
[270] 1.3.6.
[271] 1.3.113.
[272] 1.3.126-8.
[273] 1.2.158.

the eyes of the world. A woman who is unchaste *is* nothing [my italics]'.[274] And the 'nothing' spreads out to encompass and accuse all women; the slur of unchastity, in Dusinberre's words, 'jeopardises the chastity of women in general',[275] as Emilia's comment suggests in *Othello*:

> *Emilia*: For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
> There's no man happy; the purest of their wives
> Is foul as slander.[276]

In *Hamlet*'s 'nunnery scene' (Act 3, Scene 1), Hamlet reinforces the notion that there can be 'no man happy', since unchastity is endemic in the female sex: he satirises the chaste woman as one who has never been tested: 'be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny'.[277] The idealisation of the purity of women's bodies is, as Jacqueline Rose points out, a 'thinly veiled form of hatred'.[278] And the disgust with which Hamlet views the fault in the individual woman – his mother and, by extension, his lover – embraces the radical failure of the generic female to obviate the 'stain of her own future dishonour', since, as a woman, she carries within her the seeds of her own destruction.[279] Furthermore, and more significantly for the perceived health of the system, her dishonour – either potential or actual – directly infects the masculinist order that has already, by misplaced trust, ceded to her too much power. Fear is, for the controlling male, the primary emotion inspired by uncontrollable female sexuality. Thus, what we see in Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia's (possible) and

[274] Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 3rd edn (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 53.
[275] Ibid., p. 54.
[276] 'Othello', 4.2.15-7.
[277] 'Hamlet', 3.132-3.
[278] Rose, p. 153.
[279] Ibid., p. 154.

Gertrude's (actual) sexual agency is not a just a 'supreme instance of violent male self-enactment',[280] but also a struggle with a fatal emotional dependency that undermines his own self-reliant masculinity. In this case, the feminine must be reified as worthless property – to be cast off – if her risk to his intrinsic subjectivity is to be obviated.

My investigation of the female gap in *Hamlet* is, however, not concerned with underlining the paradoxical subjection of Gertrude or Ophelia to codes of honour which they must, as women, necessarily undermine – since this is a contradiction produced by the masculinist socio-symbolic order itself. More significant for my thesis is an examination of the excessive agency of their presence that refuses the containment of any delimited role. I want to ask the same question about them as does Rose about women under brutal male domination in twenty-first century Pakistan, driven to swallowing bleach to avoid arranged marriages:

> Which is preferable – the image of women as powerlessly submitting to male control, or a woman as full agent in a story that, for many, seems to defy all understanding?[281]

What concerns Rose is how particular women asserted themselves – how they 'gave voice, and lent face'[282] – in and beyond their constrictive and often violent conditions. This question also occupied Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists, as Dusinberre explains:

> The dramatists took the concept of a man's dominion over his wife and daughters, and explored what it was like to be a woman under these conditions.[283]

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[280] Rose, p. 156.
[281] Ibid. 149.
[282] The words of Fadime Sahindal, qtd. in Unni Wikan, *In Honour of Fadime: Murder and Shame,* trans. by Anna Paterson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), p. 230.
[283] Dusinberre, p. 92.

Dusinberre describes the crucial female dynamic in the drama as 'an interplay between breaking free and submitting to the male world's view of women', where the tragic isolation of the human spirit is revealed as all the 'more terrible in a being conditioned to dependence on men'. She uses the example of Lady Macbeth, 'forever re-creating in her sleep-walking the inception of her separateness from her husband' whilst she 'still reaches for his hand'.[284] Denied – even incapable of – subjective autonomy in the masculinist structure, the female is here defined as a kind of radical interior exception, necessarily present in an unpresentable capacity. My reading of the gap attempts to unlock and make dramatically visible the radical agency of inherent female presence. In my analysis of Cordelia's role, female resistance functions as overtly subject-threatening: her role-refusal propels Lear not only to the recognition of his own unadorned essentialism, but goes further – to expose, through Poor Tom, the terrifying void at the centre of being itself. In Ophelia, I shall find a less confrontational, but equally provocative, model of female refusal, operating as one of the play's primary dramatic drivers.

Initially, it appears that the female gap is altogether absent in *Hamlet.* The unexpected metaphysical event that ruptures the narrative is, as in *Macbeth*, a mysterious presentation of the existential void, in quasi-human form. Like the weird sisters, the ghost of Old Hamlet arrests the dramatic narrative before it has really got going, and before the arrival of its most significant figure. Luke notes that 'even before Hamlet's entrance, the ghost has intruded from the unseen and opened the play-world to excess and uncertainty'.[285] But the socio-political structures of this world have already been established, and are made especially apparent in

[284] Dusinberre, p. 93.
[285] Luke, p. 104.

performance: a night-watch is set up on the ramparts of a Danish castle, and the cry, 'Long live the King!'[286] signals the hierarchical forces within. This is a masculine opening onto a very masculine world; and, although the identity of the 'thing' that has been 'twice seen'[287] is as yet undisclosed, it nevertheless enters the scene in the guise of something male, dressed in full military armour, representing – and re-presenting – the pinnacle of that order.

Horatio's demands of this apparition for a speech-encounter, like Banquo's of the weird sisters, are left unanswered; it is Hamlet for whom – as for Macbeth – the void beckons. And, again as in *Macbeth*, it is the second scene that contextualises the character whose encounter with the 'illusion'[288] will condition the dramatic progress of the play. But, here, we find Hamlet, unlike Macbeth, already at odds with his situation. He is silent for the first sixty-four lines of the scene, refusing to accept or be defined by his surroundings and, thus, only partially present. His encounter with the ghost does not cast him further adrift, but seems actively and paradoxically to restore his dramatic presence: so that he throws off his inclination to 'melt, / Thaw and resolve… into a dew' in response to a 'weary, stale, flat and unprofitable'[289] world – incited, instead, to urgent engagement: 'Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned…Thou com'st in such a questionable shape / That I will speak to thee'.[290] Even more directly, in a line that bursts with presence, he demands 'Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?'.[291]

But, where the weird sisters in *Macbeth* are entirely extra-ordinary and unrecognisable to the order, the ghost in *Hamlet* is, in fact, disconcertingly *recognisable*, as Hamlet's 'King, father,

[286] 1.1.3.
[287] 1.1.19, 23.
[288] 1.1.126.
[289] 1.2.130, 133.
[290] 1.4.41-5.
[291] 1.4.58.

royal Dane';[292] and, as such, representative: of patriarchy, patrimony and patria. It seems that Hamlet's task is not to engage with a force that might void the order, but with one that re-orders it – as it *should* have been. This requires an engagement not primarily with the present, but with the presence of the *past*. Where Macbeth strives to capture and to fix an uncontrollable future, Hamlet is charged with re-ordering an intrusive past; and both appear to lose their presence through the workings of the imagination that tempt them with illusory success. As Zizek makes clear, the Imaginary – like the Symbolic – is a constructed, artificial security, haunted and undermined by the Real.[293] Real energies introduce the doubt (fear), uncertainty and even terror in the experience of the subject whose complete being, according to Hegel, encompasses its own potential voiding. Henri Bergson described consciousness as 'the light that plays around the zone of possible actions or potential activity which surrounds the action really performed by the living being'; once the action is performed as 'the only action possible', then 'consciousness is reduced to nothing'.[294] If being present is to be fully conscious and fully alive to possibility, then Hamlet is present so long as he avoids closing down his choices and uploading 'the only action possible' to the order. Seen in these terms, his eventual 'rashness' is not presence but its absolute loss, as I shall discuss later.

Once the ghost speaks to Hamlet, however shockingly, it ceases to be extra-ordinary in that it re-inscribes a recognisable narrative – albeit one that is historically displaced – reducible to cultural and linguistic circumstance. Moreover, it plays the role of Lacan's most significant and definitive other[295] – the Father: the ultimate symbol of authority, command and duty. Rather

[292] 1.4.46.
[293] See Zizek, 'Framing, Reframing, Enframing', *Event*, pp 7-32.
[294] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 152.
[295] See Wood, pp. 89-90.

than opening the void of destruction, the ghost insists upon the (re)construction of a (re)new(ed) order, built through filial obligation. Charged, confusingly, by one father-figure with 'remembering',[296] and by the other (Claudius) to give up 'obstinate condolement'[297] – Hamlet is pulled back, through their ironic symbolic equivalence, into the inscribed situation.

Gertrude tries to pull him back too: to the occasion of her wedding and the reconfigured hierarchy of the Danish court. But Hamlet's disgust at 'things rank and gross in nature'[298] intensifies his grief to 'possess [him] merely';[299] and, in his self-consuming void, all definition is threatened with dissolution. Most disturbing for him is the fragmentation of the maternal signifier: by leaping 'with such dexterity' into 'incestuous sheets',[300] Gertrude has exceeded her delimited role of grieving widow and, by extension, all-giving mother; and Hamlet seeks to control the excess through the name of 'Frailty', generalised as the universal name of 'woman'.[301] His misogynistic definition denies his mother's positive agency, and also her capacity for fluid role-play: for him, her marriage to Claudius cancels out all her other relationships – especially those with her dead husband and with her stricken son. By categorising all female behaviour as essentially corrupt, Hamlet refuses its affective power: brutally coercing Gertrude for his needs, and disconnecting Ophelia from his (and her own) presence. It is my contention that Gertrude's unruly presence has already so radically disturbed Hamlet's self-composure that the appearance of the ghost only intensifies the crisis. If read in this way, Hamlet's Real crisis is his confrontation with the excessive energy of *female*

[296] 1.5.90.
[297] 1.2.93.
[298] 1.2.136.
[299] 1.2.137.
[300] 1.2.157.
[301] 1.2.146.

presence, woven in and around the conventional revenge tragedy structure; the play's primary dramatic driver is, in this case, his encounter not with the resurrected 'no thing' of his father's ghost, but with the active and very present 'nothing' of the female gap.

It may seem that I have fallen into the trap in which Lacan was caught in his psychoanalytic seminar on *Hamlet* in Paris in 1959: having promised to speak about Ophelia, he proceeded – for forty-one pages, according to Elaine Showalter[302] – to discuss Hamlet; Ophelia was referred to only as a 'transcendental signifier',[303] and the object of Hamlet's desire. Lacan's is not an unusual psychoanalytic – or literary critical – view. But the foregrounding of Ophelia in much feminist criticism is also problematic, I think, in that it is concerned more substantially with links between madness, female sexuality and socio-political representation than with the character produced by the text. That Ophelia has been so potent a driver of such discourse is, of course, not at all a problem in our negotiations for greater female visibility and the alleviation of cultural oppressions of women. Ophelia has long been identified with victimhood by feminist theorists, either by those who wish to 'reclaim' her story',[304] or those, such as Showalter, who consider that she has no story to tell:

> Deprived of thought, sexuality, language, Ophelia's story becomes the Story of O – the zero, the empty circle or mystery of feminine difference, the cipher of female sexuality to be deciphered by feminist interpretation.[305]

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[302] Elaine Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism', *Shakespeare and the Question of* Theory, ed. by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1985), p. 77.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Like Carol Neely, who insists, "As a feminist critic, I must 'tell' Ophelia's story", in 'Feminist modes of Shakespearean criticism' *Women's Studies,* 9:1-2 (1981) 10-15 (p.11).
[305] Showalter, p. 79.

My aim is to find Ophelia operating as the very active and provocative gap in *Hamlet*'s (his)story. The 'empty circle' of female sexuality is only empty according to denigrating definitions of the female sex-organs that would minimise their power, and refuse the ultimate generative capacity of the womb. Mystifying female presence as *difference* is equally unhelpful, I think, since the 'othering' of femaleness is a function of a male-centring masculinist perspective.[306] I am concerned with finding femaleness operating centrally, but unrepresentably, in the historical narrative. It is, as I have already established, only in a dramatic medium that lost female presence can be properly reactivated; so, whilst Ophelia's *story* might be an 'empty circle', her dramatic presence is full and uncircumscribed.

Ophelia enters the play very clearly subjected to the male order as its object, and with a very clear role prescription: she is to protect herself for the good of those to whom she, as goods, belongs. This role seems to correlate with that of the other tragic heroines already discussed; but Ophelia never directly confronts the system that denies her agency. She is, we assume, like Desdemona, considered by her overbearing father to be a 'maiden never bold',[307] though there is no evidence of Polonius's thinking of her at all, except in terms of her behaviour as '[his] daughter and [his/her] honour'.[308] Certainly, in our first encounter with her, she bends to Polonius's 'charge[s]' not to 'give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet', acquiescing instead to silence: 'I shall obey, my lord'.[309] Demands for either speech or silence are, as we have seen with Cordelia, examples of coercive control. The *use* of language by a female character – not just her choice of words – is considered a privilege bestowed by the male subject, which is

[306] See Judith Butler's well-known discussion of the centrality of masculinist discourse in *Gender Trouble.*
[307] 'Othello', 1.3.94.
[308] 1.3.96.
[309] 1.3.133-5.

why Cordelia's refusal of the gift is considered so entirely provocative. But there is nothing provocative about Ophelia's instructed silence.

Although we do not see the first meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet, her report describes his conduct vividly – so moved as to threaten his self-governance. His emotion manifests in his dishevelled dress and 'a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors'.[310] Moreover, his direct engagement with her provokes him to curious behaviour:

Ophelia: He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As 'a would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their helps,

[310] 2.1.80-2.

And, to the last, bended their light on me.[311]

The reported action of this famous speech is so vivid that it is often played out in performance. And the bringing of the encounter to dramatic presence is important to my theory, since it is an example of the gap at work in the order, as I shall explain. Hamlet's actions are clearly defined and, however unusual, are not extra-ordinary, being available to the order of representation. Ophelia's part in the story is a narrative gap, since her references are entirely to his behaviour; but it is, nevertheless, her affective influence that drives the encounter and provokes his disturbance: in facing the female gap, the male subject is exposed to the free energy of the void that has the power to unseat his own definition and loosen his self-control.

This radical force seems similar to the evental love that 'stops' Othello, or to the dark ambition that holds Macbeth 'rapt withal'; or to the epiphany of Lear's union with Cordelia's 'soul in bliss'. All of these encounters introduce extra-ordinary energy into the order, as I have discussed. But the destructive potential of Hamlet's encounter is doubled, in that he transfers it from one gap to another: from Gertrude to Ophelia. As a result, in facing Ophelia he is also facing Gertrude.[312] When Polonius judges Hamlet's behaviour to be 'the very ecstasy of love', he is only half-right: Hamlet's crisis is the recognition of Ophelia's femaleness as an agency with the potential to exceed the limits – the control – of his own loving inscription, and the possibility is too much for him to bear.

Hamlet's encounter with the ghost of his father immerses him further in the void, arresting the commitment to action that would more clearly define his singular subjective boundaries.

[311] 2.1.85-98.
[312] I use this term in the Levinasian sense of 'exceeding the idea of the other in me': see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 50.

Luke's suggestion that Hamlet's delay manifests 'infinite multiplicity itself'[313] corresponds to my conception of the multiple female presence of the gap. But there is no drama in Luke's 'multiplicity', as he describes it, since it 'does not solidify into an actable fidelity but trails into the groundless unknown of "something after" (III.i.80.): the "know not of" (III.i.84) that "lose[s] the name of action" (III.i.90)'.[314] Hamlet is lost in the 'perchance'[315] of a projected and unknowable future beyond action: in the imagination of the nothingness that may be consciousness itself. In radical and active submission to multiplicity, Hamlet might achieve something like the full presence of the gap, as I have conceived it: where the question is not '[t]o be or not to be', but how to be fluidly and positively *in between*. But Hamlet, as a subject of the order, at last commits to 'be-ing' – trusting in the 'special providence' that gives higher authority to his avenging action. Hamlet, though – unlike Macbeth – does not seem bent on stepping back into the order as its head. Indeed, it is only with the ultimate dissolution of his subjectivity that the new narrative is instated. Since Fortinbras 'has [his] dying voice',[316] however, Hamlet's participation in the future of the hierarchy is assured. As a consequence, although '[t]he old order changeth',[317] there is no sense that the new one will be very different after all.

Hamlet's gap of deliberation is, however, very different from the paradoxically insisting and extra-ordinary female gap dramatised in Shakespeare's tragedies. Long before her poisoning, Gertrude's presence is closed off to eradicate the threat she represents to the male subject:

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[313] Luke, p. 119.
[314] Luke, p. 118.
[315] 3.1.66.
[316] 5.2.314.
[317] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*, 1842 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45370/morte-darthur> (line 240) [Accessed 13th July, 2020].

Hamlet forces her to deny her excessive sexual self and re-establish her singular maternal identity, operating under his control. Ophelia's potential for fluid agency is also closed down, before it can pose an actual subjective threat. She is severed from the order both through Hamlet's heartless rejection of her and, also, in the traumatic loss of her father – losses that are doubly alienating being intertwined. But my thesis finds her unexpectedly, and dangerously, present in a dramatic dislocation – an ab-sense – similar to that of Lady Macbeth. Her detachment from the ordered frame of reference is ironically freeing, since her presence has always been curtailed there. To use Zizek's words, her 'gestures of symbolization are [no longer] entwined with and embedded in the process of collective practice'[318] – a practice that delimited her. Like Lady Macbeth, her redundant linguistic signifiers cohere only with past experience, or, even more disturbingly, with that which is (perhaps) beyond her experience. For the audience in the play, her narrative fragments shockingly expose a knowledge repressed in and by the system: for Lady Macbeth, this is murder; for Ophelia, sex. Our fascination in the theatre with Ophelia's broken narrative is, aside from the pity it inspires, its suggestiveness of experience beyond the parameters of the play; and although this is, of course, itself a dramatic illusion, its presence as imaginative possibility haunts the character that coheres – even as it dissolves – before us.

I want to suggest, however, that this kind of ghosting is as real as – indeed *more* Real than – the Ophelia who is recognised by the order. In Freudian terms, the intrusion of the repressed unconscious in Ophelia's performance of self is the manifestation of hysteria; and, as Lacan interprets Freud, this intrusion is subjectively destructive, since it marks the breakdown of the

[318] Zizek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 15.

symbolic order – the 'big Other' – by means of which subjectivity is secured. But my conception of the female gap allows for the positively performable presence of this kind of unconscious excess: being essentially multiple and dramatic, and *non*-subject to the symbolic structure. And although lacking representation in this way, and thus a gap, it is nonetheless affective – especially so, perhaps, in exceeding all controllable definition. Being excessive, it has the capacity to void that definition: by opening up the secure Imaginary to let in the Real energy of the death-drive of desire.

To obviate the threat she poses, the consensus of the order is that Ophelia's behaviour, being non-sensical, is mad: she is '[d]ivided from herself and her fair judgement'.[319] But Ophelia's ravings may be conceived not as nonsense, but as ab-sense:[320] a position of compulsory dislocation from the 'sense' of the symbolic order, but one disconcertingly present, with its own extra-ordinary – and affective – autonomy. The cultural association of madness and femaleness has a long history and was the primary focus of scrutiny for English psychiatrists John Conolly and Henry Maudsley in the mid-nineteenth century – and, later, for continental psychoanalysts Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud. For them, Shakespeare's fictional Ophelia was merged imaginatively with actual patients to provide their proto-typical case-study. As Kimberley Rhodes says:

> Practitioners of medicine, psychology, religion, philanthropy, and social welfare utilized Ophelia as a diagnostic and instructional tool to identify symptoms of hysteria,

[319] 4.2.82.
[320] See: Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, *There's No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship: Two Lessons on Lacan*, trans. by Susan Spitzer and Kenneth Reinhard (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. xviii.

demarcate social boundaries for adolescent girls and evoke sympathy for fallen women.[321]

Being a theatrical role, Ophelia could provide performative evidence of the symptom without the actual physiology: behaviour without biology. And yet it could be exhibited for scrutiny through the body of the actor. As such, her condition of madness could be considered entirely in its performative dimension, to suit the clinical methodology of behavioural science.[322] There is no room in this essay for a detailed examination of such research, nor is there scope for more than an acknowledgement of either the feminist history of psychiatry or the cultural history of madness as a peculiarly *female* malady. But, in the following discussion, I shall reference aspects of both insofar as far they illuminate my investigation of Ophelia in Victorian performance culture.

In her fascinating study, *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture*, Kimberly Rhodes considers the way in which contemporary nineteenth century works of art actively participate in 'producing meanings for the play',[323] especially with regard to images of Ophelia. Her concern is primarily with Victorian visual culture – in which Ophelia was richly represented – and its effect on theatrical art; my concern, on the other hand, is primarily with the stage, and with the actress who performs Ophelia's dramatic presence. But, like Rhodes, I am interested in the relationship between Victorian visual art and dramatic performance, language and presence. As she points out:

[321] Kimberly Rhodes, *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture: Representing Body Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 10.
[322] This angle is covered most comprehensively in Showalter's *The Female Malady*, pp.145-164.
[323] Rhodes, p. 1.

> Any study of Ophelia must be cross-disciplinary…in order to fully exploit the potential of the subject and interpret the combined effect of the multiple forms the image embodied.[324]

The character's status as a model for female psychological instability in the Victorian era was, according to Rhodes, a marker of cultural concerns about the place of women and the anxieties provoked by attitudes to the female body, in relation to the body politic. As Laertes points out to Ophelia early in the play, Hamlet's 'choice [must] be circumscribed / Unto the voice and yielding of that body / Whereof he is the head'.[325] When the head of the body politic was a woman – Queen Victoria – the gender of the 'yielding' body was more ambiguous, disturbing the clear binaries on which the masculinist order depended. As Rhodes suggests, the clinical identification of Ophelia-esque madness in young, rebellious women provided a defence, stamped with the cultural authority of 'Shakespeare', against their disruptive provocations. Elaine Showalter describes nineteenth century sexual prejudice thus:

> During an era when patriarchal culture felt itself to be under attack by its rebellious daughters, one obvious defense was to label women campaigning for access to the universities, the professions, and the vote as mentally disturbed.[326]

Ophelia was considered the archetypal hysteric, in a conflation of art with history that ironically exposed the constructed-ness of both. It is with hysteria as Real dramatic energy that I am here concerned in my study of the female gap – not in order to normalise, or naturalise, feminine psychological disturbance, but to interrogate the masculinist

[324] Rhodes, p. 9.
[325] 1.3.21-3.
[326] Showalter, p. 145.

determinants of the norm itself; and to expose the prevalence, and enormous influence, of the apparently 'ab-normal'. Unlike Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar – writers of the iconic feminist critical work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*[327]– though, I am here concerned not with the characterisation of female madness as rage against the rigidities of the patriarchal tradition, but with the flexible and bold presence of the productive female agency that continually eludes its limiting gender definitions.

The playing of Ophelia is, of course, always conditioned by the cultural context of her performance and by the role's performance history; but the prevalence of her presence across time is unusual given how few her lines number in a very long play; though her *mute* body occupies further theatrical space, appearing in Act V, Scene 1, after her death. And she is primarily identified *as* a body – variously interpreted by her father, brother and lover, according to male anxieties about feminine chastity. As such, she is the driver of others' actions, and even their poetry.[328] But there is a peculiarly compelling ambiguity in the Victorian Ophelia – in her translations from page to stage to visual art – that opens up and performs the female gap most intriguingly of all Shakespeare's tragic heroines. Showalter discovers a 'Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives',[329] that eludes obvious binary representations of virtue and vice favoured by the Victorian interpreters.[330] But she is, I argue, nonetheless present in her multiplicity: not only performing obvious familial roles in the play

[327] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).
[328] See Gertrude's memorable description of Ophelia's death, in Act 4, Scene 4, lines 160-77.
[329] Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia', p. 92.
[330] For example, John Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens', *Sesame and Lilies* (1864), qtd. in Francis O' Gorman, 'The Clue of Shakespearean Power Over Me: Ruskin, Shakespeare and Influence', *Victorian Shakespeare, Volume 2: Literature and Culture*, ed. by Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 209-10.

– and within the socio-ethical context of the particular production – but also over-spilling their constraints and haunting other times and definitions.

Ellen Terry refused either to play 'representative madness', or to sentimentalise her performance. Ophelia was her debut role at the Lyceum Theatre in 1878.[331] She had watched Irving play Hamlet in Birmingham in 1874, and did so again in the year he engaged her to play Ophelia. In her opinion, 'Hamlet was by far the greatest part that he had ever played, or was ever to play',[332] even though she did acknowledge that it was '[a]t all its best points…susceptible of absurd imitation'.[333] But then, she says, 'All great acting has a certain strain of extravagance which the imitators catch hold of. They give us the eccentric body without the sublime soul'[334]. She dismisses the suggestion that Irving's Hamlet 'improved' when he had the 'advantage' of her Ophelia, claiming that he 'was always quite independent of the people he acted with'.[335] But she herself confesses to a continual responsiveness to the dramatic pace of other actors.[336] In her capacity for instinctive adaptability, there is evidence of her feeling for a delicate aesthetic cohesiveness. With reference to its technical application, she asserts that '[i]n acting one must possess great strength before one can be delicate in the right way'; and she adds, 'Too often weakness is mistaken for delicacy'[337] – and equally, perhaps, delicacy for weakness. For Terry, then, delicacy is a positive term, describing powerful dramatic agency, rather than submissiveness.

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[331] When she returned to London, after her six-year retreat with Edward Godwin to the Hertfordshire countryside and the births of their two children, Edith and Edward Gordon Craig.
[332] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 106.
[333] Ibid., p. 105.
[334] Ibid., p. 106.
[335] Ibid., p. 102.
[336] I shall discuss this further in Chapter III: in relation to the comic heroines, Beatrice, Portia and Rosalind.
[337] Terry, p. 110.

In 1878, Terry's delicate responsiveness as Ophelia to her unpredictable situation in the play was also, apparently, evidenced in her sensitive negotiation of the constrictions imposed on her own professional life. Without ultimate control over her performance choices, Terry exerted her influence through the subtle power of interaction. And her own acting was both enabling of others', and had its own remarkable ease – a 'freedom from self-consciousness', envied by the 'striving, striving' Irving.[338] Against the current theatrical grain, her Ophelia did not, according to Charles Hiatt, either rage in hysterical abandonment or disappear in ineffectual defeatism; instead, 'hers was an insanity without wrath or rage, without exaltation or paroxysms'.[339] The stillness she brought to her character was, though, not fixity but intensity. As a young actress, she had learned the difference between 'sustaining' and 'fixing' from her mentor, playwright Charles Reade: the importance of measuring the *intensity* connecting separate dramatic effects, 'with that superb concentration which seems…the special attribute of the tragic actress', whilst 'pass[ing] swiftly from one effect to another'.[340] In his view, 'sustaining' allowed for a more mobile depth of intensity that enabled the actor to make a smooth transition from one moment to the next.

Rhodes associates Terry's Ophelia with the complexly powerful and sexualised image of the same character in Henrietta Rae's 1890 painting.[341] Both Terry and Rae present, in Ophelia, a still presence far removed from what Janet Beizer describes as the 'capricious, convulsive' body of the hysteric.[342] Rae's bold figure dominates the theatrical space in the painting, but,

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[338] Terry, p. 82.
[339] Hiatt, p. 114.
[340] Terry, p. 80.
[341] Henrietta Rae, *Ophelia*, 1890, oil on canvas, 1890, Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, in Rhodes, p. 161.
[342] Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquised Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth Century France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 8.

unusually, Ophelia is not represented as a lone figure: instead, Rae emphasises her bold gesture of connectivity in her 'provocative address' of Gertrude, who huddles to the left of the image with Claudius.[343] Rhodes draws attention to the communicative potential of the gap between the figures represented on the same pictorial plane: 'Rae has orchestrated her composition', Rhodes says, so that 'the disposition of figures and active use of the charged space between them is assertive rather than passive'.[344] The relationship between Rae's upright Ophelia and her cowering onstage audience[345] reveals, according to Rhodes, 'the painting's underlying exploration of the anxiety caused by confrontation with a sexualised female body and the desire to both behold that body and condemn it as diseased so as to deny its power'.[346] This description seems to fit with my theory that Ophelia's extra-ordinary presence, that charges the space, threatens the security of the subjects registered in that order, so that they try to close it down, and thereby 'deny its power'.

According to Showalter, Terry's critics claimed hers was an inspiring 'poetic and intellectual performance' that challenged the 'conventions of invisibility and negation associated with the part'.[347] Terry challenged yet another symbol of negation in ordering a costume for the 'mad scene' (Act 4. Sc.2) of 'black crêpe de Chine and miniver',[348] rather than the traditional white. This was not, she told Irving, because she considered that Ophelia would be dressed in mourning: '"O, not exactly that. I think *red* was the mourning colour of the period. But black

[343] Rhodes, p. 172.
[344] Ibid., p. 171.
[345] Compare with Benjamin West's *Ophelia and Laertes*, 1792, oil on canvas, Cincinnati Art Museum, gift of Joseph Longworth, in Rhodes, p. 168.
[346] Rhodes, p. 171.
[347] Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia', p. 89.
[348] Terry, p. 124.

seems to me *right* – like the character, like the situation"'.[349] And although she was, finally, dissuaded from wearing it – since 'there must be only one black figure'[350] in the play – her choice reveals a sense that Ophelia is somehow less available to interpretation, less transparent, than convention would have it. Dressed in white, Ophelia becomes a *tabula rasa* on which Hamlet's story is written; in black, Terry's Ophelia would have avoided his impression – performing, instead, her own *opaquer* kind of dramatic presence.

Theatrical drama has a certain advantage over the painted scene in being physically progressive through time:[351] Rae's 'mad scene' is dramatised through the viewer's imaginative release of its arrested action, whilst Terry's performs its own continuous momentum. In response to the captured drama of the picture, it is tempting to read the scene represented in isolation, thus denying the shaping influence of context. Terry was very conscious of the cumulative effort of her role-play: although Ophelia speaks in only five of the nineteen scenes of the play, those scenes build and develop her characterisation, so that the 'mad scene' is in dramatic tension with those preceding and following it. Terry comments on how Ophelia '*pervades*' the scenes that lead to her final living one, remarking:

> I have been told that Ophelia has 'nothing to do' at first. I found so much to do! Little bits of business which, slight in themselves, contributed to a definite result, and kept me always in the picture.[352]

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[349] Terry, p. 123.
[350] Ibid., p. 124.
[351] Although, in a different sense, the picture is continuously available, unlike transient and momentary theatrical performance.
[352] Terry, p. 122.

Keeping 'in the picture' – contributing to an overall aesthetic effect – was important to Terry, so that, even when playing Ophelia's psychological dislocation, she was acutely aware of her physical context, and those within it. Her precise technical control underpinned her Ophelia's *loss* of control; as she insisted: 'Before you can be eccentric you must know where the circle is'.[353] In her *Memoirs*, she recounts an episode of research into actual displays of insanity amongst inmates at a local asylum.[354] She was, according to Showalter, taking up the challenge of Dr John Conolly[355] to any '"actress ambitious of something beyond cold imitation"' to witness the '"habitual courtesy, the partial rudeness of mental disorder"'.[356] But Terry says she was 'disheartened' to find that the women she saw there were 'too *theatrical* to teach [her] anything'.[357] Only two impressions struck her as useful to her characterisation of Ophelia. One was a particular young girl's attitude of blank alertness: '[her face] was quite vacant, but her body expressed that she was waiting, waiting. Suddenly she threw up her hands and sped across the room like a swallow'; the other was a woman laughing, 'with a face that had no gleam of mirth anywhere – a face of pathetic and resigned grief'.[358]

The stillness Terry adopted in her own performance might also have been influenced by the what she knew of Sarah Siddons's interpretation of the sleep-walking Lady Macbeth. In her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, Terry recounts a tale told by Irving about John Philip Kemble's description of his sister Sarah's 'method in the scene'.[359] In response to a question from a

[353] Terry, p. 81.
[354] Bethlem Royal Hospital ('Bedlam'), London.
[355] John Conolly was the superintendent of the Hanwell Asylum, Middlesex (established 1831), and author of *A Study of Hamlet*, first published in 1863.
[356] Conolly, qtd. in Showalter, p. 86.
[357] Terry, p. 122.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 165.

theatre enthusiast in a 'coffee-house in the City', Kemble apparently replied, '"*Method*? Sarah's method? Let me think. Sarah's method? Well, let me see… *She never moved!"'*.[360] Terry imagines that '[t]he effect of her (famous) whirlwind exit must have been tremendous after that immobility'.[361] Terry's performance of Ophelia's 'insanity without wrath or rage' accords with this prompt, and with the impression of the sudden swallow-like movement of the girl in the asylum.

The stillness of Terry's Ophelia could also be interpreted as a refusal of the order that would deny her provocative power. 'Her speech is nothing',[362]Gertrude is told. But Laertes recognises, 'This nothing's more than matter'; and the gentleman who tries to explain Ophelia's behaviour to Gertrude offers what I think is a pretty clear description of the orderly struggle to make sense of – and thus deny – the power of the gap:

Gentleman: Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshapèd use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They yawn at it,
And botch the words up to fit their own thoughts.[363]

In 'botch[ing] the words up', Ophelia's witnesses try to eradicate the threat posed by her symbolic ab-sense, though the attempt renders meaning 'much unhappily'.[364] Either understood or not, then, Ophelia's presence provokes huge anxiety. Most significant for me is her apparent growth in stature on her release from constraint: it is the first time that we

[360] Terry, p. 165.
[361] Ibid.
[362] 4.2.7.
[363] 4.2.7-10.
[364] 4.2.13.

find her directly addressing the queen; the first time she speaks of her father's death, and of her sexual experience and rejection.

There is something of this power evident in the theatrical portraits – and photographs – of Terry-in-role that materialised her performance of Ophelia in the visual culture of the time. But Terry acknowledges the transience of performance art:

> We players know quite well and accept with philosophy the fact that when we have done we are forgotten…leaving no trace of our short and merry reign behind us when it is over![365]

The theatrical portrait would seem to fill the gap, and to make the performance eternally present. In the case of this particular subject matter, the image is recognisably both Terry and Ophelia, and thus might seem to keep both 'live'. But the image is, in this case, affectively controlled – unlike the potentially disruptive energy of live theatre[366] – tailored to 'the conventions of middle-class femininity considered acceptable and admirable in nineteenth century Britain'.[367] In this record, the disturbing presence of the female gap may be safely closed; but in the multiple presences of Victorian Ophelia – generated in theatre, art, literature and in the psychiatric study – she somehow eludes any singular definition: more present as a gap, I suggest, than any other female character in Shakespeare, and – even perhaps – woman in history.

[365] Terry, p. 99.
[366] And the imaginative intensity painted into Rae's canvas.
[367] Rhodes, p. 3.

Chapter II

The Shared Gap

Shakespeare's Seductive Women

JULIET
CLEOPATRA

JULIET

In the title *Romeo and Juliet*, the linking of names appears to indicate the sharing of dramatic weight by two significant subjects: one male and the other female. Their respective agencies seem to be made equivalent through the conjunction 'and'. After considering four tragedies named after their eponymous heroes, we might feel that this title, at last, appears to give actual symbolic space to the female subject. I want to demonstrate, however, that the female presence performed by Juliet in this play is still a gap, and that the name 'Juliet' is precisely nominal, and empty of actual presence: being merely the descriptor for the biological goods belonging to the house of Capulet – to be bartered and profited by. According to my interpretation, the title registers 'Romeo' as a conventional male subject who is linked to a conventionally-registered female object: 'Juliet'. Their combined real presence is not to be found in their symbolic labels, but somewhere in the gap in between them. In my reading, the gap emerges through the conjunction 'and', working as the most active component of the dynamic *relation* at the play's centre; and it is this relation that produces the presence of both Romeo and Juliet, combined dramatically beyond their names.

To adhere to my now-established theory, I must here find Juliet excessively filtering disorderly voiding energy into the order to deconstruct and destabilise the Romeo-subject. Similar activity has already been examined in the subject-threatening presence of some of Shakespeare's other tragic female characters.[1] But we have seen how the male protagonists are only briefly affected before fatally reasserting their subjective boundaries and their solitary titular identities; and female presence, however disturbing, is dramatically cancelled

[1] See Chapter I: *The Tragic Gap*.

by the reconditioning of the patriarchal order. In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, Romeo's singular identity is found to be permanently voided by Juliet's presence; and, from that void, a new multiple 'Romeo-and-Juliet' blended presence emerges that blurs the boundaries between their names (and 'houses'), but preserves their difference through the interface of their dynamic relation. The Romeo-and-Juliet presence, shaped by the gap, cannot, as a *subject*, enter the hostile limitations of a strict patrilinear order unable to accommodate its fluid (in)definitions. So, their newly combined and precarious presence is, ultimately, cancelled; but not before its affective influence has shaped the projected narrative future, with hope for the establishment of a more conciliatory network of relations.

In the theatre, the Romeo-and-Juliet conjunction is the active phenomenon of two hours' staging; and its brevity reflects the transient nature of the energy exchange – or, at least, its unavailability beyond the dramatic present. What we witness at the beginning of the play is the affective pressure of the gap on the sketchily-drawn subject (Romeo) in an especially restrictive order of being, divided between the houses of Capulet and Montague. In the opening sequence, Romeo affects the conventional attitude, and adopts the stylised language, of the Petrarchan lover; as such, he performs a recognisable, orderly male role. Indeed, the focus of his romantic attention seems to be only arbitrary and, certainly, secondary: so that his infatuation with Rosaline, whom we do not meet, is, most importantly, a catalyst for the drawing of his own self-definition. His clichéd idealising is a fantasy that negates the presence of the desired object herself; so that it is desire in and of *itself* that engenders Romeo's 'sick health' and 'still-waking sleep'.[2] Any interaction with the elusive Rosaline would interrupt his

[2] Shakespeare, 'The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet', ed. by Francis X Connor, 1.1.167, 168.

solitary lament, and disrupt his secure status as a self-produced lover. Zizek describes this kind of romantic idealising as 'false idolizing':

> False idolising idealizes, it blinds itself to the other *as such*, using the beloved as a blank screen on to which it projects its own phantasmagorical constructions; while true love accepts the beloved the way she or he is, merely putting her/him into the place of the Thing, the unconditional Object.[3]

Rosaline, as a 'blank screen', can be possessed because she is a product of Romeo's own imagination. She is, as Paul A. Kottman suggests, 'a mere lack, as Romeo says, a "not having"'.[4] But, paradoxically, the 'not having' is *complete* having, since his desire begins and ends within himself. Romeo's is, as Luke describes it, 'a "love" composed of one'.[5]

Romeo is imagined as playing a role here, with the essentialist assumption of a more genuine subject pre-existing the clichéd lover we encounter. But he is always and only the Romeo of the dramatic moment and, so, no more nor less real a subject than any other dramatic construction. Practically speaking, what happens in his encounter with Juliet might simply displace and replace this construction, much as the Rosaline-lover (reportedly) did the self-proclaimed Romeo who is 'some other where'.[6] Jonathan Goldberg argues that 'Juliet as replacement object is inserted within a seriality rather than as the locus of uniqueness and singularity';[7] but there is, though, something more vibrantly *present* about the Romeo who is

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[3] Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, p. 128.
[4] Paul A. Kottman, 'Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63:1 (2012) 1-38 (p. 10).
[5] Luke, p. 41.
[6] 1.1.185.
[7] Jonathan Goldberg, 'Romeo and Juliet's Open Rs', *Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare*, ed. by R. S. White (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 197.

suddenly – and catastrophically – projected into the Romeo-and-Juliet relation. Luke proposes that the 'explosive moment of love'[8] happens in, but also beyond, Romeo's famous speech beginning 'O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright'.[9] It is impossible to account for what Badiou terms the 'absolute contingency of the encounter'[10] where 'looking liking move[s]';[11] and in this scene, as Luke says, the occurrence exceeds scripted direction – somewhere between the 'torches' speech and the touching of hands: 'If I profane with my unworthiest hand'.[12]

What we witness on the stage is the *effect* of the transformative occurrence: of the subjective destabilisation precipitated in 'awaken[ing] from the egological' – to use Levinas's term – through the 'astonishing or traumatizing' event of 'facing the Other'.[13] In symbolic terms, the 'face' of the Romeo-Juliet relation is unrepresentable: a 'no thing'. But the dramatic excess nevertheless becomes present in the moment of performance, catalysed into the space through and beyond the script – and beyond the book by which Romeo, initially, kisses.

The disturbing excess of the symbolic gap into which Romeo falls is prefigured in the extravagant wild energy of Mercutio's extraordinary 'Queen Mab' speech.[14] With an astonishing vividness, generated by minuteness of detail and breadth of scope, Mercutio calls forth from his imagination the presence of the tiny-yet-potent Mab, driving her hazelnut chariot through sleeping brains on the relentless course of dreamers' wish-fulfilment. In

[8] Luke, p. 41.
[9] 1.5.40.
[10] Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. by Peter Bush (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012), p. 43.
[11] 1.3.98.
[12] 1.5.89.
[13] Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the*-Other, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harhav (London: Continuum, 2006), p.75, 74.
[14] 1.4.55-96.

tracking her progress, Mercutio loses control of his own imaginative rein, until steadied by Romeo's mid-line 'Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace'.[15] But Mercutio's 'talk of dreams…Begot of nothing but vain fantasy'[16] has drawn in the energy of the void that haunts the subjective order from beyond its limits. Although Mercutio's ecstasy seems to be dismissed by Romeo as 'nothing' and by Benvolio as a 'wind' that 'blows us from ourselves',[17] both descriptions have more dangerous connotations than such perfunctory reassurance might suggest: if Romeo's 'nothing' is the unrepresentable void that threatens the subject with oblivion, then Benvolio's self-displacing wind is, equally, its potentially violating current. Mercutio's 'Queen Mab' releases, it seems, dark forces similar to those introduced by the weird sisters in *Macbeth*: there is a striking resemblance between Mercutio's attribution of Queen Mab's intrusion to 'vain fantasy / Which is as thin of substance as the air'[18] and Macbeth's impression that the weird sisters 'melted / As breath into the wind'.[19] In both cases, the supernatural is actively produced as a kind of spectral otherness,[20] arising in the situation from nothing and disappearing into thin air that, however thin, exerts a powerfully destructive force on the receptive subject.

Once the gap has opened in the dramatic context, the characters' subjective boundaries are under threat. Where, in *Macbeth*, it is Banquo who, briefly, draws the endangered subject (Macbeth) back from the edge of the void, it is, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo himself who, with

[15] 1.4.96.
[16] 1.4.97, 99.
[17] 1.4.97, 105.
[18] 1.4.99-100.
[19] 'Macbeth', 1.3.76-7.
[20] Unlike Derrida's 'specter', however, the supernatural other here is unrecognisable as a (male) subject, or indeed, any 'inhabitant o'th'earth' ('Macbeth', 1.3.36.). See 'Conclusions' for more on Derrida's spectral 'other'.

the help of Benvolio, restores Mercutio. But Romeo's security has also been shaken by the Queen Mab energy, and he has a premonition of his own dissolution:

Romeo: I fear too early, for my mind misgives

Some consequence yet hanging in the stars

Shall bitterly begin his fearful date

With this night's revels, and expire the term

Of a despised life clos'd in my breast

By some vile forfeit of untimely death.[21]

His invocation of a divinity to shape his end recalls Queen Mab's charioteering, as he offers up the 'steerage of [his] course' to unknown, ominous forces.[22] By handing over responsibility for the direction of his 'sail',[23] Romeo assumes a fatalism - echoed as we have seen by both Macbeth and Hamlet– that acknowledges his impotence on the brink of the self-shattering event, so that he places precarious trust in an ambiguous higher power.

The Queen Mab energy haunts the meeting of Romeo and Juliet in Act 1, Scene V. Even were it not for the Prologue spoiler – and its chilling references to 'star-cross'd lovers' and 'death-marked love'[24] – the sanctity of the encounter between the pilgrim-lovers is shadowed by Mab's ominous wheeling wagon. Like Mab's disruptive intrusion, the event of love is here excessive: being, for the Capulets, an unwelcome rupture in their plan for Juliet's imminent marriage to Paris, and certainly unexpected at their exclusive party. Badiou proposes that

[21] 1.4.107-12.
[22] 1.4.113.
[23] 1.4.114.
[24] 'Prologue', 6, 9.

‘[l]ove always starts with an encounter’, drawing attention to its extra-ordinary evental status: ‘I would give this encounter the quasi-metaphysical status of an *event*, namely of something that doesn’t enter into the immediate order of things’.[25] Juliet, who has startled Romeo out of his self-informing fantasy, herself laments that Romeo is ‘[t]oo early seen unknown, and known too late!’.[26] Their liking-upon-looking, once activated, moves them irredeemably, so that their subsequent knowledge of identity can perform no redress.

The traumatic event of love undermines the security of their identity in the system of representation, where Romeo is registered as a young, aristocratic, male subject and Juliet as an object for social and political negotiation. The moment she steps out of line, her dependent status is made shockingly apparent in her father’s vocative abuses: ‘minion’, ‘green-sickness carrion’, ‘baggage’ and ‘whining maumet’.[27] He gives her two options, where the first (and apparently better) is to be handed over to a man he has selected to be her new owner: ‘An you be mine I’ll give you to my friend’.[28] The second turns familiar Shakespearean anxiety over paternity into its brutal refusal:

> *Capulet*: An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
> For, by my soul, I’ll ne’er acknowledge thee,
> Nor what is mine shall never do thee good.[29]

Disappointingly, but predictably, the other women in the scene fearfully comply with the abusive line, leaving Juliet alone to push beyond its limiting definition. In adopting an

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[25] Badiou, *Love*, *p*. 28.
[26] 1.5.135.
[27] 3.5.151, 156, 160, 184.
[28] 3.5.191.
[29] 3.5.192-4.

unrepresentable presence outside the order, she will not come to – or become – any 'good' in its valuing-system. Unacceptable to that order, she moves closer to the void that will quickly destroy her and radically destabilise the order itself.

The movement of Romeo towards the void dissolves any traditionally-conceived romantic 'self-other' relationship. I quoted Zizek's 'blank screen' earlier, to illustrate Romeo's idealising projection of his fantastical Rosaline. But the extra-ordinary relation between Romeo and Juliet is, I think, more attuned to Levinas's conception of the 'face' – or to Jean-Luc Marion's 'crossing of gazes'[30] that leaves otherness not only unknown, but also undefined:

> I see not the visible face of the other, an object still reducible to an image (as the social game and its makeup demands), but the invisible gaze that wells up through the obscurity of the pupils.[31]

Marion's 'crossing of gazes' could be considered to be the kind of event Badiou describes as 'a completely precarious having-taken-place'.[32] I want to bring this event, however, into the continuous present, so that it becomes a precarious *taking*-place: an unrecordable, dramatically-present process, produced by the order but indefinable by its terms. As such, it can neither be logically accounted for through retrospective analysis, nor practically prevented through provisional planning. All that can be recorded, in symbolic terms, is an unanswerable question – Miranda's question in *The Tempest* – 'What is't?'.[33]

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[30] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. by James K. A. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 87.
[31] Ibid., pp. 56-7.
[32] Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation for Universalism*, trans. by Ray Brassie (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 58.
[33] 'The Tempest', 1.2.409.

Romeo and Juliet are exposed to this provocative question in their mutually transformative love-at-first-sight event. Unlike Othello, whose speech is 'stopp'd' by his sudden joy in seeing Desdemona, as if for the first time, in Cyprus, Romeo discovers with Juliet a newly-shared register opening up within their externally limiting context: their intimacy is generated as an inner excessive capability of the symbolic system itself. This manifests as a fluid exchange that works to disrupt the boundaries of the poetic form that produces it: their combined voices fundamentally displacing the traditional singular male one of the Petrarchan sonnet they now share.[34]

Romeo opens the sonnet with a regular *a-b-a-b* quatrain[35] – already a slight variation on the Petrarchan scheme:

Romeo: If I profane with my unworthiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand,

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

It is Juliet's voice that introduces the truly disruptive new element, though – being female and breaking into the octave to form a separate quatrain beginning with a *c*-rhyme:

Juliet: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this.

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

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[34] 1.5.89-102.

[35] The Petrarchan octave rhyme-scheme is *a-b-b-a-a-b-b-a.*

But her intrusion is a positive one: she breaks the singular pattern to create a new, more flexible interaction that plays back into and accommodates Romeo's *a*-rhyme offering. In fact, she repeats the words he has used, to share in 'this' – 'kiss'.

Romeo's question invites poetic development at the beginning of the sestet, which turns smoothly into a third quatrain, split between their two voices; in speaking both the third and fourth lines of the quatrain, Romeo joins in Juliet's creative method by accepting her rhyme – here, matching her call for 'prayer' with an acknowledgement of the risk, in his fear of 'despair'. The last two lines of the sestet seal their new-found interdependence in a shared couplet, and with the kiss that has been twice proposed:

Romeo:	Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
Juliet:	Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
Romeo:	O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:
	They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
Juliet:	Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
Romeo:	Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.[36]

The relation is not fixed within this more flexible Shakespearean sonnet, however; instead, and in the spirit of the unconfinable gap, their shared presence pushes out from this newly-moulded form, gathering pace and confidence. Although Romeo opens a new quatrain, it is Juliet who 'urges' its continuation:

Romeo:	Thus from my lips by, by thine my sin is purged.

[36] 1.5.89-102.

Juliet: Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

Romeo: Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!

Give me my sin again.

Juliet: You kiss by th'book.[37]

Just as they achieve a creative poetic union in the shared line - and in a second kiss – however, their excessive gap closes with the intrusion of the order, in the shape of Juliet's Nurse.[38]

The motif of pilgrimage-and-prayer infuses this extraordinary event of love with a religious dimension that apparently refuses the mischievous dark energy released by Queen Mab and suffuses the encounter with a kind of spiritual grace. But this dimension is ambiguous when read in terms of the extra-ordinary gap. The intensity of the connection has isolated the lovers from the rest of the assembled company, as if in a temporal and spatial hiatus. Their next meeting effects a similar narrative arrest: in a moonlit space enclosed by orchard walls that seems both interior and excessive. But the kind of extra-ordinary union we saw achieved in the previous act is always only provisional, being a creation of the dramatic moment; and there is also the metaphysical – and ethical – question of *difference* that conditions the character of such a union. As Badiou says, 'love involves a separation or disjuncture based on two people and their infinite subjectivities';[39] it is experienced 'from the point of view of two and not one'.[40] Accordingly, the shared sonnet both unifies and separates the lovers; or, more positively, it is their difference that realises each through the other.[41] The Hegelian split is

[37] 1.5.103-6.
[38] For a discussion of the directive utility of the shared line, see Oliver Morgan, *Turn-Taking in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 1-17.
[39] Badiou, *Love*, p. 27.
[40] Ibid., p. 22.
[41] See Buber's 'I-You' relation; Levinas's 'face'.

apparent in the new combined Romeo-and-Juliet presence that is reinforced in the 'balcony scene';[42] but I shall argue that such a presence has no place in the limiting subjective order, organised by and around the houses of Capulet and Montague, and that it, thus, remains an unrepresentable gap in the system.

Romeo opens this scene once again using conventional language, but there is now a shift in its mood: he exchanges the declarative for the interrogative, asking a version of the gap's foundational question – 'What is it?' – in wondering, 'But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?'.[43] Instead of self-enclosed idealising, he actively seeks connection: both mental – in 'O that she knew she were' – and physical – in his wish that he 'were a glove upon [her] hand' so that he 'might touch that cheek'.[44] Juliet's presence is, according to my theory, more permeable to the void, being unrepresentably female. She deconstructs the essentialism that names her a Capulet and Romeo a Montague, proposing that he 'doff'[45] his name and, with it, his registered subjective identity. Her rash gift of herself – 'Take all myself'[46] – is offered up, not initially to Romeo, but to the unknown, pre-empting his joining her there. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern comment on Juliet's speech-closing half-line as a 'leap into the dark' that, in theatrical terms, cues a speaker whose lines may or may not take up the offer, thus 'encapsulating an existential risk that the actor must partly share in'.[47] By inviting the unseen Romeo into the darkness, and proposing the overthrowing of his identity, Juliet has

[42] Act 2, Scene 1.
[43] 2.1.44.
[44] 2.1.53, 66-7.
[45] 2.1.89.
[46] 2.1.91.
[47] Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 148.

already undermined conventional forms: the reciprocity of vows (initiated by *him*) and all 'compliment'[48] of courtship.

The spirit of Juliet's gift is of the same excessive nature as the unquantifiable surplus of Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift that operates beyond measurable terms of exchange. Lowell Gallagher develops his fascinating analysis of Mauss's concept in relation to the ethics of the gift in *The Merchant of Venice*, and also examines accounts of the gift proposed by Derrida, Marion, Levinas and Badiou. For all five philosophers – as Gallagher concludes – the gift (and the subject that is given) is '"no thing" other than the process through which the sheer excessiveness of grace disrupts and alters the entire field of the given'.[49] Juliet's gift of herself to the dark accords with this description in being, similarly, excessive to any structure of reciprocity: she does not call for Romeo in return for herself, but for the release of Romeo into the 'no thing' that is the presence of selfless grace.

When Romeo plunges in from the more immediate darkness – taking up her offer and completing her line – their combined presence is 'new baptized' as 'love'.[50] In voiding himself and vowing to live beyond his name – 'Henceforth I never will be Romeo'[51] – Romeo becomes available to the gap opened by Juliet – not as a *subject*, but, through the grace of the gift, as their combined *presence*. 'Romeo' and 'Juliet' are reduced to secondary roles, empty of agency, played in and for the old order. Theatrically, of course, these separate roles are equivalent in status to their new combined presence: they all occupy the same space and

[48] 2.1.131.
[49] Lowell Gallagher, 'Waiting for Gobbo', *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. by Ewan Fernie (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 81.
[50] 2.1.92,
[51] 2.1.93.

temporal frame. But the Romeo-and-Juliet presence is, I suggest, felt as a kind of intensifying dynamic on stage that seems to exceed individual character-definition and its symbolic position in the narrative order.

I proposed earlier that the emerging Romeo-and-Juliet presence is a function of the dramatic moment – that there is a fundamental division between them that continually reasserts itself and must be repeatedly overcome. But whereas character-division more usually involves a retreat into self-possessed identity, the difference activated by the gap is the dialectical split that is the relation itself. So, the active difference in the Romeo-and-Juliet presence positively produces their *connection*, rather than driving their separation. The evental rupture filtered through the gap is, as I have already discussed, radically disruptive of the symbolic framework. But, here, the effect is not of verbal incoherence, broken syllables or silence;[52] instead, language is tested, not only to expose its powerlessness, but to make a positively new connection beyond conventional terms. For example, Juliet's dissatisfaction with Romeo's courtly oaths not only flags up their affective inadequacy, but also reaches towards a less secure linguistic form: one reflecting process, rather than marking completion:

Romeo: Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops –
Juliet: O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.
Romeo: What shall I swear by?

[52] See the effects on Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Ophelia (Chapter I); and on Leontes (Chapter IV).

Juliet: Do not swear at all,

Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,

And I'll believe thee.

Romeo: If my heart's dear love –

Juliet: Well, do not swear.[53]

Juliet here rejects Romeo's conventional language that rehearses an already-imagined love, as felt by someone else. Instead, she proposes something linguistically – and personally – more vulnerable, stripped of 'cunning'[54] and self-protective boundaries:

Juliet: Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay',

And I will take thy word; yet if thou swear'st,

Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,

They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,

If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.[55]

In disrupting Romeo's Petrarchan vows, Juliet releases the dynamic energy of unfolding presence. Her demand for linguistic experimentation calls to mind Badiou's point about poetic excess: 'it is only by breaking up all ordinary prose that [poetry] extends the limit of the communicable'.[56] In searching for connection through the denial of finished form, Juliet reactivates its process and, in doing so, embraces uncertain outcome. Whilst some kind of form is, of course, necessary to their communication – and to Shakespeare's script – Juliet

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[53] 2.1.148-58.
[54] 2.1.132-6.
[55] 2.1.90-4.
[56] Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p. 159.

works to arrest and unsettle lifeless formulaic constructions. In this, she is operating with the agency of the female gap, as I have conceived it: active within the boundaries of the system but unlocking its excessive, more fluid potential.

Juliet's struggle is, then, to open out the process of love and draw Romeo into its precarious flux. When Romeo speaks of 'satisfaction',[57] Juliet refuses the completeness of such a state, offering it up instead to a continual process of giving that keeps the relation both ethically and creatively live. She expresses this unbounded activity, famously, in a metaphor of the restless sea:

> *Juliet*: My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep. The more I give to thee
> The more I have, for both are infinite.[58]

The rhythmic repetitions of 'my' and 'more', wash across the lines, extending the 'boundless' and 'infinite' action of giving – and giving again – in waves that exceed the confinements of 'satisfaction'. The moment itself overspills into a felt a-temporality that defeats inscription in any causal narrative chain: it is not a completed event – like the flash of lightning Juliet describes 'which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens'[59] – but an ongoing, present process that can never be contained in an orderly sequence. Juliet's words are not extra-ordinary in themselves – indeed, they are thrillingly simple; but their poetic energy 'extends the limit of the communicable' by harnessing a deeper elemental motion. This is not the rapt silence of Macbeth nor is it Cordelia's refusal; and neither is it the linguistic rupture of

[57] 2.1.168.
[58] 2.1.175-7.
[59] 2.1.161-2.

Othello's and Leontes's jealous passion, nor even Ophelia's mad singing. Instead, Juliet's excessive communication stimulates an extra-ordinarily affective and mobile transparency through which the gap still remains open and present – more than four hundred years later – and keeps the 'it' of the question 'What is't?' dramatically live.

So, it is Juliet who initially dramatises the presence of the precarious Romeo-and-Juliet relation: casting off confining certainties of name and identity, and giving herself up to a continual movement beyond knowing. Entering the relation is to risk exposure to the perpetual motion of giving and giving again, where there is no certainty of outcome. Juliet demonstrates the risk involved by looking beyond the equivalence of the exchange requested by Romeo – 'Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine'[60] – to her own unconditional offering. The professed limitlessness of her bounty is further produced in the expansiveness of their moment of encounter in the orchard, at the beginning of Act 2, where time seems to operate according to a newly flexible rhythmic pattern:

Juliet:	I have forgot why I did call thee back.
Romeo:	Let me stand here till thou remember it.
Juliet:	I shall forget to have thee still stand there,
	Rememb'ring how I love thy company.
Romeo:	And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
	Forgetting any other home but this.[61]

[60] 2.1.169.
[61] 2.1.213-8.

Emrys Jones has elaborated brilliantly on the slowing effect of the interchange between the lovers here, noting how '[t]he present moment has become indefinitely prolonged; the repeated terms – 'stand here', 'still stand there', 'still stay' – repudiate (or try to) all distracting thoughts of past and future'.[62] What is most notable for my discussion is that the 'still'-ness Juliet introduces in order to slow (still) the moment both *actively* holds it always (still) in the present, and also stimulates Romeo's own repeated giving-back: he is *doubly* still: 'I'll still stay, to have thee still forget'. Within the stillness of this scene, then – what Jones calls its 'extraordinary *raptness*'[63] – there is also extra-ordinary affective *activity*, working with its own unrepresentable intensity. By its conclusion, Romeo has taken the risk, led by Juliet, and entered the gap of presence that is the Romeo-and-Juliet relation. And this sort of risk is a dangerous one, in terms both of the dramatic outcome of the play, and also in its Real socio-political disengagement from the symbolic system of representation.

In Lacanian terms, Romeo has entered the void of the Real, driven by the 'infinite remainder' of desire that unsettles the subject from the Sociosymbolic Order by exposing holes that are artificially – but necessarily – closed by the Imaginary. Juliet has, according to my theory, filtered Real wild energy, through her extraordinary presence, into the masculinist order, thus threatening Romeo's singular identity and her own (object) status within it. Their combined presence as a gap in the order is set against their names and their familial relationships – so that their love could be conceived as a death-drive, more (selves)destructive than creative. Julia Kristeva adopts this view, seeing the violence in Juliet's ecstatic longing for post-nuptial

[62] Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 35.
[63] Ibid., p. 35.

sexual consummation as an 'unconscious desire to break up Romeo's body':[64] to have 'loving black-browed night' (the void) absorb him and 'cut him out in little stars'.[65] But the image is both a destructive and a cosmically creative one, in which Romeo – through their rapturous union – reconfigures the entire heavens and institutes love as a new order of being: 'And he will make the face of heaven so fine / That all the world will be in love with night'.[66]

Such a realm is, of course, unrealisable, and the extravagance of Juliet's image seems both to acknowledge this and to foreshadow the imminent violent exclusion of the lovers' presence from the more ordinary world. At this point in the play, Romeo has already been drawn – unwillingly – into conflict. Indeed, he cites 'love' as his reason for drawing back, and claims that he 'tenders' the name Capulet 'as dearly'[67] as Montague – since neither name identifies his reconfigured presence. This conciliatory offering is no 'vile submission'[68] in terms of the gap – in which courage is, to use Badiou's words, 'exile without return, loss of one's name'.[69] It is, conversely, Romeo's retreat into the system – the masculinist code of honour – that marks his submission. It is made dramatically clear, here, how quickly familiar ideology reasserts itself in times of crisis. Luke comments on the 'tragic irony' of Romeo's reabsorption into the 'feud-driven situation', where '[he] is physically exiled because he cannot bear the existential exile from his old self that is decreed by fidelity, because, in "fire-eyed fury", he tries to recapture his name'.[70] In doing so, he both denies his new emotional presence and is denied his physical one.

[64] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.214.
[65] 3.2.20, 22.
[66] 3.2.23-4.
[67] 3.1.61-3.
[68] 3.1.64.
[69] Badiou, p. 168.
[70] Luke, p. 64.

Even Juliet's commitment to the precarious relation seems to waver, when she hears of Tybalt's murder: as illustrated in her retreat into conventional Petrarchan paradox – 'Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical! / Dove-feathered raven, wolvish-ravening lamb!'[71] – and an essentialist concern with his 'serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!'.[72] But she quickly recovers her faith in Romeo, without demanding proof of his innocence; and, in this, she returns to the activity of giving without the gift's necessarily being due, risking the 'continual movement beyond knowing'[73] that is the activity of presence. Juliet acknowledges that their projected community of presence cannot continue in a marriage recognised by the order, instructing her Nurse to 'bid [Romeo] come to take his last farewell'.[74] Nevertheless, despite – or perhaps because of – this, their post-nuptial encounter dramatises its possibility; here, in their entwined presence, Shakespeare offers us a glimpse of an alternative reality. Julia Lupton describes how 'Shakespeare allows us to glimpse a possible polity *even where it has no chance of flourishing*'.[75] This particular narrative interlude in *Romeo and Juliet* opens up a possibility for intense dramatic presence that will never flourish under conventional conditions.

Luke discusses the 'anti-Petrarchan artistry' whereby Shakespeare develops the lovers' intimacy through a reversal of the traditional associations of the nightingale's song with the lament for lost love: 'In stark contrast', he writes, 'Romeo and Juliet use the nightingale as a tool for togetherness and play'.[76] Just as Juliet undercut Romeo's conventional poetic references and set a new rhythm in motion in her 'bounty' speech, she here engenders new

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[71] 3.2.75-6.
[72] 3.2.73.
[73] See p. 128.
[74] 3.2.143.
[75] Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 89.
[76] Luke, p. 68.

references to suit their new world. In this suspended space, there are still trappings of the order – and names, including their own, are still relevant; but, in the fluid gap, terms are always provisional and flexible, like presence itself. In this scene, the Romeo-and-Juliet presence invents new time, new space and multiple meaning: so that it is *both* day and night, *both* the nightingale and the lark; and the poignant debate between them itself expands and intensifies their space and time together.

This precarious new split presence – a relation that activates its own dramatic multiplicity rather than division – is, finally, denied by the order of representation and its gap is closed. But, unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroines, Juliet is not shut down alone: after his brief and catastrophic retreat from the gap, Romeo re-enters its dynamic space to join Juliet in their activity of ultimate selves-denial in the tomb. It is here that they paradoxically achieve their ultimate presence – pyrrhic victory though it is – in escaping the heavy confines of the order in death; but, in a more positive sense, they remain subliminally present in their joint-effecting of the 'glooming peace'[77] between their families. The mobility of their continuing influence contrasts with the heaviness and fixity of the tomb and gold statue designed to contain them at last. Of course, as dramatic constructs, they must cease to be at the end of the play. But equally, as dramatic constructs, they are ever-present as long as the play continues to be performed; and always as a peculiarly vital gap in the story of Verona's feuding families – a 'feasting presence, full of light',[78] to appropriate Romeo's description of the vault illuminated by Juliet's beauty. Although the world of *Romeo and Juliet's* Verona cannot ever accommodate the lovers' gap, it is this gap that continues to *shape* the narrative and *produce* the drama. An

[77] 5.3.304.
[78] 5.3.86.

eponymous title does, by its very orderly definition, deny the gap. The Comedies and the late plays, with their more speculative ones, seem, perhaps, to offer a better chance for its survival.

Ellen Terry played the role of Juliet opposite Henry Irving's Romeo in the spring of 1882, when she was thirty-five years old and he was in his mid-forties. In her memoirs, Terry records that Irving's request, 'Do all you know with [the part]', led her to make the 'dreadful mistake' of reading 'everything that had ever been written about her before I had myself decided what she was'.[79] This, she felt, denied her 'original impulse' and she wished that, instead of 'cracking [her] brain over the different readings of her lines and making [herself] familiar with the different opinions of philosophers and critics', she had 'gone to Verona and just *imagined*'.[80] Irving himself went to great lengths to research his roles, and to investigate the detail of Shakespeare's (fictional) historical contexts. But Terry may have misinterpreted Irving's request that she do all she knew with *her* part, as an encouragement to follow his example; but the 'knowing' to which he referred may, I think, have identified precisely that imaginative instinct that she overrode. It is this instinct that he so admired in her, and for which he felt he had to compensate in his own meticulous preparation.[81]

Both Irving and Terry were old to play the parts of teenaged lovers, and this may have contributed to their apparent unease in bringing the relationship to life onstage. But Terry later observed that Juliet was a part for a young actress 'only young with the youth of the poet, tragically old as some youth is';[82] she was herself, she felt, perhaps still too *young* to play the role – 'Now I understand Juliet better. Now I know how she should be played. But

[79] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 163.
[80] Ibid.
[81] See Irving's self-deprecating appraisal of his suitability as a performer, qtd. in Terry, p. 269.
[82] Ibid., p. 163.

time is inexorable. At sixty, know what one may, one cannot play Juliet'.[83] Terry says, in her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, that Shakespeare 'endows Juliet, a very young girl, with the inward freedom which produces this [moral] courage'; and that 'Juliet, at what fourteen meant to Shakespeare, is older than her years'.[84] She adds, 'Whatever her age let [the actress] remember that Juliet is something more than a great lover. She is a great poet'.[85] Irving, it seems, struggled with his part too, feeling more capable of bringing Romeo to life in a solo *reading*, knowing that, on stage 'I cannot come anywhere near it – I should like to – but I can't'.[86]

Terry remained unhappy with her performance as Juliet, and acknowledged that 'no one liked [it] very much',[87] but she defended Irving's Romeo from the 'bricks thrown at it' by the critics. Although she admits, in her *Memoirs*, 'I am not going to say that Henry's Romeo was good', she adds that 'some bits of it were as good as anything he ever did'.[88] She identifies 'sublime moments' in scenes of more repressed emotion – for example, when Romeo hears from Balthasar of Juliet's supposed death – where 'the melancholy was sincere, the feeling deeper, and the expression slighter'; in these, he looked, she argues, 'aged as only a very young man can look'.[89] Terry contrasts the subtle effect of his acting here with the extravagance of his performance in the 'big emotional scene' in Friar Lawrence's cell, in which 'he screamed, grew slower and slower, and looked older and older'.[90] But she explains away

[83] Terry, p. 163.
[84] Ibid., *Four Lectures*, p. 138.
[85] Ibid., p. 138.
[86] Irving, qtd. in Michael Holroyd, *A Strange Eventful History: The Dramatic Lives of Ellen Terry, Henry Irving and their Remarkable Families* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 139.
[87] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 168.
[88] Ibid., p. 165.
[89] Ibid., p. 166.
[90] Ibid., p. 165.

his misjudgement here as ‘his very genius for impersonation’: since, whereas an ‘actor of commoner mould’ would moderate the dramatic effect of his behaviour – taking ‘such scenes rhetorically’ – ‘the actor who impersonates, feels, and lives such anguish or passion or tempestuous grief, does for the moment in imagination nearly die’.[91] Her conclusion is that ‘[i]magination impeded Henry Irving in what are known as “strong” scenes’.[92] Terry’s analysis gives us an insight into Irving’s acting method in both of these descriptions, but such analysis necessarily involves a separation between the observer and the object of scrutiny; and it is notable that these are scenes in which she herself played no part. As a result, the impression she gives of Irving’s Romeo is of a self-engendered character with no relation to her Juliet, or to any other part.

This sense of separateness is apparent also in Irving’s impression of Terry’s performance. In a letter written to her in anticipation of their ‘long run’ of the play at the Lyceum, he describes her in the part he ‘saw from the front’ in the dress rehearsal. [93] His praise of her acting was much more fulsome than was Terry’s defence – however loyal – of his. He wrote to her that ‘beautiful as Portia was, Juliet leaves her far, far behind. Never anybody acted more exquisitely…“Hie to high fortune” and “where spirits resort” were simply incomparable…the beauty of it is bewildering’.[94] Like Terry, Irving is an appreciative witness from beyond the frame of the play. What neither reveals is their feeling about their parts in dramatic relation to each other, although Irving’s correction that ‘you – we – must make our acting easy and comfortable’[95] does acknowledge the necessity of their combined effort. According to

[91] Terry, p. 165.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Irving, qtd. in Terry, p. 167.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Michael Holroyd, their acting was neither of these things: since 'irritated by his finicky slowness, Ellen had been obliged to modify her own natural timing' and 'she quarrelled with Irving during rehearsals'.[96]

Their mismatch in pace was to be a concern for Terry in other productions too, as I have already discussed in relation to *Macbeth*.[97] Irving's deliberateness apparently denied her the swiftness – of thought, vocal delivery and movement – that was her most striking quality. His slowness may have been a product of his earnestness, and lack of natural dramatic instinct. But Holroyd hints at another possible reason for his awkwardness: 'Romeo's passion seems to have unsettled him, stirring perhaps his own feelings too markedly'; and this made him pull back from full immersion in the part.[98] His fear of becoming overwhelmed – 'mesmerised by Ellen'[99] – whilst dramatising a similar vulnerability on stage, could be read, according to my theory, as an example of the female gap at work simultaneously in life and art. If we accept Holroyd's suggestion, we may surmise that Irving's 'full immersion' might have been too exposing of his inner emotional and dramatic constraint: in the moment of performance, the formulaic learning of his art – like Romeo's Petrarchan posturing – might have been discovered, or even fractured, and would anyway have appeared mean and contrived when flung into relief by Terry's disturbing – and 'inwardly free' – Juliet. Unlike Shakespeare's other tragic subjects who are destabilised by female presence, Romeo never again regains orderly autonomy.[100] Perhaps Irving was unwilling to appear disempowered by Terry in the presence

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[96] Holroyd, p. 141.
[97] I shall discuss this further in my analysis of Portia's presence in *The Merchant of Venice*, in Chapter III ('Portia').
[98] Holroyd, p. 140.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear (in my order of engagement with the plays).

of their audiences - and, in the process, to raise suggestion of her agency (even primacy) in facilitating their stage success. Whether or not this were so, he performed, it seems, with none of the 'Italian warmth, life and romance of this enthralling love-story' that he apparently indulged in his self-produced elaborate scene-painting, music and choreography.[101]

[101] Irving, qtd. in Holroyd, p. 139.

CLEOPATRA

A still more dangerous choice of play – since potentially more revealing of Irving's emotional enthrallment with Terry – would have been *Antony and Cleopatra*. As a dramatisation of mature passion, this play lends itself directly to actors of greater experience, like Terry and Irving. Around them, as around their fictional counterparts, maturity had spun complex webs of personal entanglement – involving previous (and current) marriages, children, and established public and familial expectations of loyalty and decorum. In the case of Shakespeare's famous lovers as he imagined them, a compromised, intimate relationship is performed in plain sight, for a visible and locatable audience, with little evidence of its private character. Played out on stage and operating through Shakespeare's dramatised interactions, the Irving-Terry relation could be compared to this most histrionic of Shakespearean partnerships. It seems that it was Terry, rather than Irving, who drew back from any exposure the enactment of these roles might have demanded: she claimed that she 'knew Henry was not attracted by the part of Antony', and, anyway, she 'could not see [herself] as the serpent of old Nile'.[102] Terry quickly, then, dismissed the opportunity to play the part of Shakespeare's consummate actress. But the role would have been such a natural vehicle for her dramatic versatility and comic timing that even its absence in her repertoire has a vital kind of excessive resonance – as I shall briefly explain here.

I shall discuss at greater length, in Chapter 10, Terry's much-lamented lost opportunity to play another resonant role in Rosalind – a comic part she seemed born to play. Holroyd sums up the perfect fit of the actress with the character who 'combined comedy with romance'; and

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[102] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 231.

who 'changed partners as she explored her own multiple identities and, in a perfect ending, tested and won the heart' of the man she loved.[103] The un-played Rosalind represents, for Auerbach, too, Terry's 'banished comic spirit'.[104] But her denied Cleopatra stands, at least for me, for the most significant *tragic* example of the multiple excess of the female gap – made impressively visible beyond the confines of the symbolic order of representation that dramatically produces her. Indeed, what Auerbach writes of Terry's banished Rosalind could, I think, equally describe the Cleopatra-gap in Irving's Lyceum Shakespeare repertoire. Here is Auerbach:

> The banished Rosalind that haunted her admirers became more powerfully associated with Ellen Terry than the acceptable parts she did play, bestowing on the actress an oblique and peculiarly Victorian sort of victory: her vivid non-performances teased her audiences into imagining a wealth of forbidden things, all the fooling, fun, and swiftness of thought the Lyceum could not contain.[105]

Cleopatra, too, would have provided Terry with the dramatic space for performing an agency so rich in provocative versatility that her non-performance of the role could only, surely, tease her audiences, similarly, into 'imagining a wealth of forbidden things'. But Cleopatra was not, apparently, a role that haunted the imaginations of Terry's Victorian audiences. Such brilliant artistry in the business of sexual attraction was considered disagreeable to prevailing morality; and although Terry must have been capable of dramatising the emotional vulnerability, along with the erotic potency, of Shakespeare's Queen of the Nile, the role was considered too great

[103] Holroyd, p. 193.
[104] Auerbach, p. 233.
[105] Ibid.

a playing-risk for an actress publicly associated with respectability, by theatre managers with an eye to profits.

Cleopatra could never be charged with 'respectability', of course. Shakespeare did, however, as Dusinberre points out, give Cleopatra 'her own moral law that in being always an artist she was in fact true to her own nature'; furthermore, 'this constituted a kind of integrity, the integrity of the player who can be true to himself by giving himself to his art'.[106] The definition is apposite to both Cleopatra and Terry: where the artist and the woman are inextricably combined, and performing is their natural mode of being, accusations of histrionic deceptiveness are peculiarly unfounded. Some roles become less convincing as the performer ages; but performance history is, perhaps, a factor even more important than personal history in the assessment of the performer's credibility in role. An actor's age seems to have been less of an issue for Victorian audiences – Terry was forty-nine when she played Imogen in *Cymbeline* – but expectations set up by such a familiar stage relationship as that between Terry and Irving might, perhaps, have disturbed their suspension of disbelief:[107] for example, when Terry played first wife, then daughter and, finally, mother to Irving's male lead.[108]

Artistic propriety is, then, important to dramatic integrity. Dusinberre makes the case for Cleopatra's paradoxical integrity in her refusal to perform a modesty that 'can be no yokefellow'[109] to a woman who can never be Antony's chaste wife. Her deliberate exhibition of her 'infinite variety' is not, perhaps, only a free choice of parts to play, but also a response

[106] Dusinberre, p. 70.
[107] Gender and colour-blind casting are much more usual on the twenty-first century stage; but age-blind role-playing is less common. Sir Ian McKellen's Hamlet - in a production directed by Sean Mathias and scheduled to open at the Theatre Royal Windsor, after the current lockdown (Spring 2021), is anomalous. McKellen (81) first played the role fifty years ago, directed by Robert Chetwyn, for a European tour.
[108] In *Macbeth* (1888); *King Lear* (1892); *Coriolanus* (1901).
[109] Dusinberre, p. 69.

to her exclusion from the order of chaste women. In this, her freedom is conditioned by systematic definitions, even as it exceeds them. Charmian's advice to 'cross [Antony] in nothing' provokes her retort: 'Thou teachest like a fool, the way to lose him'.[110] But the conscious caprice that gains Cleopatra her Antony works, simultaneously, to lose him in a more dangerously metaphysical sense: in opening the Tiberian void in which Rome melts. 'Here', he declares, 'is my space / Kingdoms are clay'.[111] In that space, the 'triple pillar of the world' is not so much 'transformed'[112] as *dissolved* in an extra-ordinary kind of affective energy pool, shared by Cleopatra.

The loss is certainly negative in orderly terms that demand political representation; but there is gain to be found here in the self-loss, 'for the love of Love': so that 'Antony / Will be himself', in a negative sense, only when *not* ('but') 'stirred by Cleopatra'.[113] Such a quest for inspired self-renunciation has an eschatological impulse: in its radical availability to what exceeds subjective limitation, as imagined in Antony's vision of a 'new heaven, new earth'.[114] But renunciation in this play seems more closely associated with the relinquishing of responsibility than with the sharing of compassion: with the abandonment of the self to pleasure, rather than to the greater good. Antony's abdication from selfdom appears uncomfortably and paradoxically self-serving. Or perhaps it is that we are less inclined to find the impassioned giving of the self to another – so exciting in the young – quite so attractively noble in the middle-aged.

[110] 'Antony and Cleopatra', ed. by Terri Bourus, 1.3.9, 10.
[111] 1.1.36-7.
[112] 1.1.12.
[113] 1.1.46, 44-5.
[114] 1.1.17.

In any case, pushing to exceed the self – however thrilling – is ultimately a precarious business, as Romeo and Juliet also, and more attractively, discover. Antony's exposure to the voiding energy of desire proves fatal to him: once Cleopatra has finally disarmed him – 'robbed [him] of his sword'[115] and masculinist identity – Antony 'cannot hold [his] visible shape'.[116] His famous speech about lost identity acknowledges the fragility of the unbounded self: conceived as a cloud-shape that 'even with a thought / The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct / As water is in water'.[117] But Cleopatra's was, it seems, no cynical assault on his personal boundaries. As Mardian insists, 'My mistress loved thee, and her fortunes mingled / With thine entirely'.[118] It is this mingling of fortunes that dissolves singular identity such as 'triumph[s]'[119] in the order. And the radical self-effacement of desire is recognised by both Antony and Cleopatra as a death-drive, so that their mingling in death becomes, figuratively, the consummation of the marriage bed: Antony intends, before his botched suicide, to be a 'bridegroom in [his] death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed',[120] whilst Cleopatra conceives of the 'stroke of death' as 'a lover's pinch, / Which hurts, and is desired'.[121]

But Cleopatra succeeds and *exceeds* Antony in presence – by a whole act, and in the manner of her departure: by avoiding subjugation to the historical narrative of conquest through her own 'dislimning' – which is also, paradoxically, an illumination – in 'fire, and air'.[122] Her dramatically-ironic refusal of having her greatness 'boy['d]' by a 'squeaking Cleopatra'[123] on

[115] 4.15.22.
[116] 4.15.14.
[117] 4.15.9-11.
[118] 4.15.23-4.
[119] 4.15.20.
[120] 4.15.98-9.
[121] 5.2.284-5.
[122] 5.2.278.
[123] 5.2.216.

the Roman stage holds good, in that she is paraded as a captive neither in historical narrative nor in theatrical performance. And indeed, even when she *was* 'boy'd' on the Elizabethan stage, she continued to refuse the 'baser life' of her physical characterisation: in the performance of her excessive '[i]mmortal longings',[124] and in the ecstasy of her very female poetic dispersal through the erotic epiphany that combines her roles as mother and lover – 'nursing' Antony as the asp at her breast. The 'pinch' of desire becomes, in this dual image, the vehicle of both self-exceeding life and death.

Antony must, then, lose himself – must be 'stirred' – to enter full presence through his relationship with Cleopatra:[125] embracing the female gap in the order that draws destabilising energy from the affective void. His presence is destroyed, it seems to me, not when he submits to Cleopatra's embrace – however politically ill-advised this may be – but when he reasserts his Roman self-hood: as 'a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished'.[126] Like those other soldiers, Othello and Macbeth, Antony clutches at an order that can no longer contain him – now that he has ventured beyond the rigid boundaries of the identity that made him powerful. Like them too, Antony struggles out of the chaos of the unrepresentable and closes the gap; but, unlike Desdemona and Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra survives the closing of their shared gap, and, through her electrifying elemental apotheosis, her own.

Cleopatra is generally considered to be a character full of *self*-delight, and hardly a gap in narrative history, where she has powerful political representation. But Shakespeare's Cleopatra consciously dismantles her own definitions. Harold Bloom's observation that

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[124] 5.2.279, 270.
[125] 1.1.45.
[126] 4.16.59-60.

'Cleopatra never ceases to play Cleopatra',[127] is suggestive of a self who consciously orchestrates her own performance. Even after Antony's death, she is, he writes, 'still actress enough to play her last and greatest scene'.[128] But he completes this thought with a claim that chimes with my thinking about the female gap as a less *definitive* presence, inextricably involved in an order that can never fully represent her: acknowledging that Cleopatra's final scene is one 'for which the dead Antony is the occasion and provocation';[129] she performs always in relation to the system – to Antony – so that we cannot, to use Bloom's words, 'disentangle her passion from her self-portrayal'.[130] In other words, her self-presentation is contingent on her *present* feeling – since passion is necessarily an experience of the moment. And when he concludes that '[w]e cannot reach the inmost level of Cleopatra's ever-burgeoning inner self',[131] he recognises her elusiveness – her extra-ordinary 'ever-burgeoning' presence.

In my thinking, Cleopatra's flexible presence, provoked by Antony, denies the kind of 'inmost level' of selfhood that is produced by the order – and especially here the Roman order – thus actively exceeding its (misogynistic) definitions. Her final ecstatic apotheosis into fire and air is Shakespeare's poetic release of a presence that reaches beyond her historical characterisation, and beyond the confines of the play, in search of the relation: the catching of 'another Antony' in 'her strong toil of grace'.[132] Eric Mallin declares that her 'miracles of self-preservation and self-presentation are at once fully functional in history and gratuitously

[127] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate Limited, 1999), p. 546.
[128] Bloom, p. 567.
[129] Ibid., p. 568.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] 5.2.336, 337.

luminous'; so that, in '[e]xceeding representation, she becomes it'.[133] But, for me, she is never contained even by the representations she fabricates. Closer to my thinking is Mallin's conclusion that 'Cleopatra is not only a performer; she is *performance*';[134] as the female gap, for my theory, she is not only a presenter, but is *presence*.

In his recent essay, 'Happiness: Othello, Henry IV, Antony and Cleopatra', Richard Strier contends that, in Cleopatra, Shakespeare formulated a 'developed and specific conception of happiness' that 'always involves self-affirmation' – linking Cleopatra with Rosalind, and to Falstaff, in 'being not only happy but committed to being so'.[135] And it is apparent, he asserts, that she, like them, 'enormously enjoys performing her identity'.[136] Cleopatra's seems, especially, to be a pleasure that pushes against orderly expectation: against the serious politics of the 'Roman thought', and against the 'holy, cold and still conversation' of a dull, conventional marriage to a 'statue', not a 'breather'.[137] But I think that Cleopatra's performances are more self-dispersing than self-affirming, so that all we can grasp of her is an *impression*: of her 'infinite variety' that 'beggar[s] all description'.[138] Whether we find such histrionics unpalatable, or whether they increase our appetite, is a matter of taste; but it is not, I suggest, for Cleopatra entirely a matter of choice, but a response to limiting definitions of the powerful female daring to be visible within the male system.

For Terry, too, flexibility was key to her currency as an actress: despite owning a powerful reputation, it was necessary for her to renew her roles precisely to avoid definitions that

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[133] Eric S. Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*, London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 114, 111.
[134] Mallin, p. 119.
[135] Richard Strier, 'Happiness: Othello, Henry IV, Antony and Cleopatra', *Shakespeare and Emotion*, ed. by Katharine A. Craik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 287.
[136] Ibid.
[137] 1.2.68; 2.6.120; 3.3.21.
[138] 2.2.234, 197.

would stale her own variety. This need is common to all actors, of course; but it is also, especially, a condition of being registered as female (object) in a socio-symbolic system designed by men. In such a context, Terry's agency lay both in her active receptivity to the system and, also, in what Auerbach describes as her 'grasp of a visionary mobility, an imperial comedy, beyond the boundaries of any stage she knew'.[139] The dramatic combination would have made her, for me, the ideal Cleopatra. And although Terry makes moral objection to the role in her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare* – in which she describes her as 'shallow'[140] – in her unpublished manuscript, it seems that she, conversely, celebrated her affinity with a 'woman whose character, life and trade are one'.[141]

By the end of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, the system within which Terry worked during her time at the Lyceum Theatre, began to change – theatrically and politically. The founding of the Suffragette Movement by Emmeline Pankhurst in October 1903 was a significant and active challenge to a political system that denied female representation. And drama produced by ostensibly 'feminist' writers such as George Bernard Shaw (in England), Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg (in Scandinavia), and Anton Chekhov (in Russia) gave an overtly political edge to the dramatisation of women, by endowing their major female figures with powerful dissenting voices.[142] From their correspondence, it is clear that Terry was encouraged by Shaw to engage with roles that offered her a more provocative position in stage history – freeing her from her relationship (both private and public) with Irving and using

[139] Auerbach, p. 265.
[140] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 157.
[141] Betty Bandel, 'Ellen Terry's Foul Papers', *Theatre Survey*, 10 (May 1969) 41-52 (p. 49).
[142] See, for example: Shaw, *The Man of Destiny* (1897); *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1900); Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (1879); *The Wild Duck* (1884); August Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (1888); Anton Chekhov, *The Seagull* (1895); *Three Sisters* (1900).

her significant celebrity to promote the cause of female emancipation. But Shaw's urging could be considered to be motivated primarily by self-interest; and the private role in which he, rather embarrassingly, cast her – as his goddess-mother[143] – was no more emancipated than the one she played as Irving's stage wife.

Shaw's appeal was, however, to be taken up more positively by a new generation of women, and, significantly, by Terry's daughter, Edith Craig. Craig became a central member of the Actresses' Franchise League (established 1908), an organisation invested in theatrical propaganda concerned with the promotion of women playwrights and performers, in a de-professionalised itinerant theatre that refused the institutional fixity of the Lyceum-style repertoire.[144] This kind of theatre company gave agency to a new union of visible women, who insisted on the political impact of exclusively-female performance. But, although its flexible casts and protean production conditions 'fed', as Auerbach has it, 'the continual and mighty changes in which the suffragette movement placed its faith',[145] its status as an alternative current, at odds with the theatrical mainstream, denied it full force. Radical change to patriarchal ordering – and to any established system, in fact – must, to be most effective, be initiated from the inside.

Meanwhile, the imagining of excessive 'forbidden things' that Terry's non-performance of Rosalind may have provoked in her audiences – and that her un-played Cleopatra ought, surely, to have stirred – remained a product of the old theatre: in an imagining of the potential 'wealth' of female freedom that the system 'could not contain'. But it is my contention that

[143] See my discussion of Terry's worshipping artistic sons in Chapter IV ('Hermione').
[144] Edith Craig's 'Pioneer Players' grew out of her promotion of political and professional communal female energies.
[145] Auerbach, p. 421.

Ellen Terry unlocked some of that wealth through her performances of Shakespeare's other female characters, even if their radical interventions might not be as visible on the record as those performed by a either a Rosalind or a Cleopatra. The resonances of *Antony and Cleopatra* for the Irving-Terry relation are, I think, very clear: in Irving's susceptibility to Terry's own magnetic 'infinite variety';[146] in her theatrical capitulation after his death[147] (and in playing her last act alone); and in her elusive dramatic charisma that apparently made her audiences, like Cleopatra's, 'hungry, where most she satisfie[d]'.[148] As I have suggested, Irving may have found Antony even more vulnerable a role to play than Romeo; Cleopatra was, though, almost certainly, a gap Terry might have made extra-ordinary.

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[146] 2.2.234.

[147] Although Terry played other Shakespearean roles after Irving's death (1905) – including Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* (1906), and Juliet's Nurse, in *Romeo and Juliet* (1919) - the end of their Lyceum reign together signalled the end of any serious critical acknowledgement of her acting.

[148] 2.2.235-6.

Chapter III

The Comic Gap

Shakespeare's Triumphant Women

BEATRICE
VIOLA
PORTIA
ROSALIND

BEATRICE

Ellen Terry first played the part of Beatrice – to Charles Kelly's Benedick – on tour in Leeds in 1880. She had married Kelly (whose off-stage name was Wardell) in 1878, in what appeared to be, according to most of Terry's biographers, a 'concession to respectability' – and primarily for her children's sake.[1] There was, surely though, more to it than this: none of Terry's intimate relationships was especially conventional, and there is no evidence that she was not genuinely attracted to Wardell. But her marriage certainly satisfied her family, who had cut off all ties with her during and after her six 'wilderness' years, living in the country with Edward Godwin.[2] Irving's production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, in which he took the role of Benedick, with Terry as Beatrice, opened at the Lyceum on 11th October 1882.[3] Their performance of *Romeo and Juliet* earlier in that year had not been universally celebrated; and it seems that Irving was determined to boost profits with a comedy in which he knew Terry, at least, would excel. He made it clear that he was staging the play to show-case her talent; and, according to Terry, 'he never really liked the part of Benedick'.[4] But she found the role of Beatrice to be 'triumphant':[5] a character of 'brilliant mind', with 'a strong deep heart for its consort'.[6] She could not bring her to life alone, however: as with Juliet – and all her other Shakespearean parts – her dramatic realisation depended on the relational gap of dynamic energy-exchange: Terry's Beatrice could only be as good as Irving's Benedick allowed it to be, and vice versa.

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[1] See Manvell, p. 137.
[2] From 1868, until she married Charles Wardell in 1878.
[3] The production was revived in 1891.
[4] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 127.
[5] In Terry's *Four Lectures*, Beatrice is the first heroine to be identified in her chapter on 'The Triumphant Women'.
[6] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 83.

It is worth noting that, despite Irving's confidence in the choice, *Much Ado About Nothing* was not an especially popular play with audiences in the nineteenth century. It seems that Beatrice was regarded as a tiresomely assaultive character, much like Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*, who needed deflating with some salutary suffering.[7] Beneath her challenging wit, then, there had to be made explicit what Russell Jackson identifies as a 'profound seriousness' that might make her comic aggression palatable.[8] Shaw was not offended by Beatrice, of course – being all in favour of out-spoken women – but found her battle of wit with Benedick entirely unconvincing:

> The main pretension of *Much Ado* is that Benedick and Beatrice are exquisitely witty and amusing persons. They are, of course, nothing of the sort…It took the Bard a long time to grow out of the provincial conceit that made him so fond of exhibiting his accomplishments as a master of gallant badinage.[9]

Anna Jameson had written more positively, earlier in the century, suggesting that Shakespeare had 'exhibited in Beatrice a spirited and faithful portrait of the fine lady of his own time'.[10] She admires the dramatisation in terms that could conjure a Cleopatra – 'In Beatrice, high intellect and high animal spirits meet, and excite each other like fire and air' – except for her greater generosity of spirit: 'we are yet more completely won by her generous enthusiastic attachment to her cousin'.[11]

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[7] See Auerbach, p. 226.
[8] Russell Jackson, 'Perfect Types of Womanhood: Rosalind, Beatrice and Viola in Victorian Criticism and Performance', *Shakespeare* Survey, 32 (1980) 15-26 (p. 21).
[9] Shaw (1898), qtd. in introductory notes to 'Much Ado About Nothing', ed. by Anna Pruitt, *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, p. 1439.
[10] Jameson, p. 66.
[11] Ibid., p. 67.

‘Generous, enthusiastic attachment’ to another woman is available to Beatrice more naturally than it is to Cleopatra, whose high status isolates her from her female company, and, perhaps, from all proper intimacy. Shakespeare underlines Cleopatra’s lack of interiority – as I have discussed – by playing out even her relationship with Antony histrionically in public. Terry’s letters and biography are scattered with affectionate addresses to women friends, and admiring epithets associated with other actresses, such as Eleanora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt. But her closest associations, throughout her life, seem to have been with men: perhaps this was because she knew how to please them – with her own ‘high intellect and high animal spirits’ – and perhaps because the intimacy was always only a performative one that denied them real access, and could be cast off without too much anguish. Whatever the case, there is no analysis of female friendship in her own writings, and no evidence of any deep attachments to women, except to her own daughter – and even that more often reveals frustration than sympathy.

And yet, Ellen Terry was considered the ideal Beatrice of the day. She claims to have felt more at home in a comic part, declaring, ‘It is only in comedy that people seem to know what I’m driving at!’.[12] Irving, it seems, avoided comedy because it did not suit the serious stateliness he made the benchmark of reverence and respectability at the Lyceum. Auerbach hints that he may always have been haunted by the ridicule his early performances had attracted in the provinces, giving him an aversion to audience laughter.[13] But even Irving’s grandson, Laurence – usually entirely approving – admitted that ‘[i]n jilting the comic muse, [Irving] was guilty of

[12] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 172.
[13] See Auerbach, p. 224.

a grave breach of promise'.[14] Even when Irving did eventually relent, though – and staged *Much Ado* – his resistance apparently held Terry's Beatrice back. She says that she was 'not the same Beatrice' as she had been with Charles Kelly in Leeds, and 'though there was very much to admire in Irving's Benedick', he 'gave [her] little help'. She goes on, 'Beatrice must be swift, swift, swift!'; but, '[o]wing to Henry's rather finicking, deliberate method as Benedick, I could never put the right pace into my part'.[15] Pace was, for Terry, as I have noted, 'the soul of comedy', and 'to elaborate lines at the expense of pace' was 'disastrous'.[16] Clement Scott thought that Beatrice's movement, described by Hero as 'like a lapwing' that 'runs / Close by the ground'[17] expressed all of Terry's swiftness: 'the exact description of the Ellen Terry movement'.[18] The imagined vision of Terry-Beatrice's moving lightly along the ground with the potential for flight, conjures, for me, the responsive and mercurial activity of the female gap as I have conceived it – operating as the live dramatic energy connecting with the 'ground' of the order.

The Lyceum Theatre production of 1882 was, apparently, a resounding critical success, despite Terry's concerns about Irving's deliberate Benedick.[19] It seems that Terry really was, as Holroyd says, 'born to play Beatrice',[20] and the line 'there was a star danced, and under that was I born' was continually used to describe her 'pleasant-spirited[ness]',[21] both in and out of role.[22] Terry was adamant that there should be nothing 'malicious or vulgar' about the verbal

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[14] Laurence Irving, *Henry Irving: The Actor and his World* (Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 441.
[15] Terry, p. 127.
[16] Ibid., p. 79.
[17] Shakespeare, 'Much Ado about Nothing', ed. by Anna Pruitt, 3.1.24-5.
[18] Clement Scott, *Ellen Terry*, 2nd edn (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1900), p. 15.
[19] According to Manvell, p. 164; and Terry, p. 172.
[20] Holroyd, p. 142.
[21] 2.1.254-5, 259.
[22] See Auerbach, p. 225.

sallies between Beatrice and Benedick: 'the lightest raillery'[23] being enough for the positive negotiation of trust between two characters of 'quick wit' and 'queasy stomach[s]'.[24] Equally, she insisted on absolute seriousness in the scene between them after Hero's denunciation in the church.[25] In her lecture notes, she draws attention to the 'gags' that had dogged Beatrice's performance history throughout the nineteenth century; and she is most indignant at Hero's slander being played for laughs. She quotes the 'old school' actor, Walter Lacy – drafted in as an advisor on the production – who suggested some business that she found 'preposterous':

> When Benedick rushes forward to lift up Hero after she has fainted, you 'shoo' him away. Jealousy, you see. Beatrice is not going to let her man lay a finger on another woman.[26]

Terry declared this 'nonsense', and managed to negotiate her way out of it, but she was defeated in her resistance to two verbal 'gags' upon which Irving insisted: the first was the apparently traditional adoption of an extra line for Beatrice – 'Kiss my hand again' – after Benedick's 'Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand':[27] it was an addition which Terry found 'obnoxious'.[28] The second was 'to descend to the buffoonery of'[29] responding to Benedick's final lines in the scene – 'Go comfort your cousin. I / must say she is dead. And so farewell'[30] – with:

> *Beatrice*: Benedick, kill him – kill him if you can.

[23] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 83.
[24] 2.1.289, 90.
[25] Act 4, Scene 1.
[26] Walter Lacy, qtd. in Terry, p. 95.
[27] 4.1.316-7.
[28] Terry, p. 96.
[29] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 127.
[30] 4.1.318-9.

Benedick: As sure as I'm alive, I will!

Irving's obduracy in including these additions certainly seems, to our modern taste, to be misguided; and Terry says that she 'used every argument, artistic and otherwise' to dissuade him.[31] But his decision is also a reflection of audience expectation: only by playing Beatrice coquettishly could she be accepted by them as a recognisable (and dismissible) type of womanhood. Terry was never happy with her performance in the role, mainly, perhaps, because of this subversion of her part. But although she admits that she was 'never swift enough, not nearly swift enough at the Lyceum where I had a too deliberate, though polished and thoughtful Benedick in Henry Irving', she is consoled in the knowledge that she, at least, 'did not make the mistake of being arch and skittish'.[32]

Audiences and readers throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first have celebrated Beatrice's lively spirit of independence: she would be, like Rosalind in *As You Like It*, a fictive feminist icon, but for reservations about her disappointing capitulation to apparent subservience at the play's end; and I shall say more about this later. She is, though, again like Rosalind, the comic genius of her play. But where Rosalind's attitude is entirely life-affirming (despite its ironic perspective), Beatrice's pleasant spirit seems tinged with something more darkly life-*refusing*. Harold Bloom recognises Beatrice's 'primal exuberance and cognitive power' as a courtly version of 'Falstaffian intelligence and wit',[33] but notices that she 'frequently is on the edge of bitterness';[34] Benedick not only notices but feels it: 'She speaks

[31] Terry, p. 127.
[32] Ibid., *Four Lectures*, p. 97.
[33] Bloom, p. 192.
[34] Ibid., p. 194.

poniards, and every word stabs'.[35] Bloom goes on to describe *Much Ado* as 'the most amiably nihilistic play ever written', and considers the title 'apposite' in that '[w]ith every exchange between the fencing lovers, the abyss glitters, and their mutual wit does not so much defend against other selves as it defends against meaninglessness'.[36] But this is, I think, to interpret the 'nothing' too simply – and too entirely negatively. In my reading, there is every positive reason to make much ado about nothing, since the 'nothing' is found to work *meaningfully*, as the play's fundamental and extra-ordinary dramatic driver.

It is conventional to consider the ambiguity of the titular 'nothing' in a critical reading of the play – and always an enlightening discovery in the schoolroom. For a start, the similarity in Elizabethan pronunciation of the words 'nothing' and 'noting' is considered significant to the overall plot development, through its series of misconstrued 'notings' or observations. It has often been pointed out that the play owes its complications of plot more to mis-hearing than mis-seeing – unlike *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'in which Shakespeare influences his characters through the eye'.[37] And actress Maggie Steed, who played Beatrice at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST) in 1988, has drawn attention to manipulative vocal influences at work in her part: identifying Beatrice's spoken rhythm as 'almost characteristic of a stand-up comic', with Leonato 'egging her on'.[38] This auditory focus is interesting for my thinking about female presence in that the dramatic influence of sound was, for the Victorians, ephemeral – and so more fluid than visual evidence. If we consider Terry's performance, it is clear that we

[35] 2.1.190.
[36] Bloom, p. 193.
[37] E. W. Sievers (1866), qtd. in introductory notes to 'Much Ado about Nothing', *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, p. 1440.
[38] Maggie Steed, on playing Beatrice (with Clive Merrison as Benedick) in the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) production of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1988), directed by Di Trevis, qtd. in introductory notes to 'Much Ado about Nothing', p. 1439.

are even less equipped to grasp her vocal presence than her visual one.[39] A recording would close off the performance in a particular moment, denying its live freedom, and subjecting it to limiting hindsight (or 'hind-hearing'). Steed's point about the *performative* nature of the comic ritual established in Leonato's household is useful, too, in its suggestion that, even in her private sphere, Beatrice adopts a role designed to entertain and please her audience; and in being constantly 'on stage' – and reliably 'pleasant-spirited' – Beatrice seems to be Terry's perfect fit. Scott's effusive account of Terry's performance reaches to just such a conclusion:

> And who whilst life lasts can ever forget how the actress in the character of Beatrice, one of the most enchanting personations of my time, one of the most exquisite realisations of a Shakespearian heroine that any of us have ever seen, spoke those words, – 'No sure, my lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that I was born.' Why it was not Beatrice, but Ellen Terry, personated by Ellen Terry. It was a revelation.[40]

There is another pun on the 'nothing' about which Shakespeare's play makes much ado, which is still more relevant to my theory of the specifically female gap: it is the overtly crude pun on the description of the female genitalia as 'no thing' – the absence of the phallus – that renders it un-noteworthy in a masculinist system that recognises only the 'some thing' male. The female is, in such a system, a physical, and by extension political, gap. Three hundred years after Shakespeare wrote his play, Freud famously conceived of female agency as itself, paradoxically, phallically driven: as an energy born of phallic envy and motivated through its

[39] There are recordings of her voice (circa 1925), but they are not clear. We also have to take account of changes in vocal style, and make allowances for Terry's age, in assessing its dramatic effect.
[40] Scott, pp. 14-5.

lack.[41] And yet, even despite our contemporary refusals of such appropriation, misogynistic sexual jealousy continues to make much ado about this apparent lack – this 'nothing'. My reading of the female gap as intrinsically involved with the male order does not buy into this phallocentric model, by confusing representational lack with subordination and powerlessness: that female agency is not represented is a limitation of a socio-symbolic order that cannot accommodate it. But its energy is insistently and productively (and reproductively) Real, and can neither be created nor destroyed by an order in which it is refused. Radically free, then, the female gap is never *sub-ordinate* (except as the object in orderly definition), but always *extra-ordinary* – the order and the gap being interdependent and relationally equivalent.

The title *Much Ado about Nothing* does not make visible the relational equivalence of male and female as do *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*;[42] but, in the nineteenth century, the play was often referred to as 'Benedick and Beatrice', an assertion that A. C. Swinburne corroborates:

> In high comedy [Shakespeare] never surpassed the perfection of the two figures which at once gave to the play in common parlance the name of 'Benedick and Beatrice'.[43]

But I think *Much Ado*'s title goes further, in making visible its core female energy – the 'nothing' – as the generator of all of its dramatic business. Shakespeare's plays that centre on a male figure identify him eponymously in their titles, but those that focus centrally on female

[41] See Sigmund Freud, especially: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,*1905 edn, trans. by Ulrike Kistner, ed. by Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerink (London: Verso, 2016). All psychoanalytic thinking and practice since Freud have been some sort of reaction to his theories, and I have already noted his legacy in the work of Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray and Slavoj Zizek. ('Introduction').
[42] And 'Troilus and Cressida' – which Irving never staged.
[43] A. C. Swinburne, *The Age of Shakespeare* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), p. 34.

characters do not. I want to interpret this omission more positively for these characters as a *symbolic* lack: an incapacity of the system to harness and contain female presence. The gap, once named in and assimilated by the order, becomes, paradoxically, something *less* than nothing:[44] something inevitably more bounded. It is interesting that the plays with female energy-centres, and that have titles without a named character, are comedies: there seems to be a correlation between namelessness, fluidity and positive outcomes – for all (or most) characters.

This is not, however, to romanticise the gap's freedom as the virtuous privilege of the outsider. In my chapters on Shakespeare's tragic heroines, I have discussed the moral ambivalence – even amoral influence – of the gap's voiding energy. And its extra-ordinary status is found to be dangerous, not only for the (male) subject caught in its maelstrom, but also for the female non-subject, who must remain flexibly present with the order that would deny its power. Terry gives us an inkling of her frustration when she describes how she had to adapt her performance choices to fit with Irving's rigidly independent ones. Her intervention in the direction of the church scene – mentioned earlier – is a rare example of any refusal of cooperation on her part; and even in this case, it seems that she ultimately acquiesced. She says in her *Memoirs* that '[s]uch disagreements occurred very seldom';[45] and there are other instances where she clearly – of her own volition – modifies her acting to support the performance of the ensemble.[46] It appears, then, that Terry managed to sustain her enabling generosity of dramatic spirit throughout their professional life together. In shaping her

[44] See Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 1.
[45] Terry, p. 128.
[46] See discussion of Terry as Portia (Irving as Shylock), in 'Portia'.

performance to suit the dramatic conditions, Terry showed herself to be a more natural – since more present – actor than Irving, closed as he was in solo study and the fixing of his own part. Terry's description of Irving's preparation for a first rehearsal is illuminating of the entire self-reliance of his achieved characterisation:

> His concentration during his three months' study of the play which he had in view was marvellous. When, at the end of the three months, he called the first rehearsal, he read the play exactly as it was going to be done on the first night. He knew exactly by that time what he personally was going to do on the first night, and the company did well to notice how he read his own part, for never again until the first night, though he rehearsed with them, would he show his conception so fully and completely.[47]

The 'showing' of his formed 'conception' allowed for little direct engagement with the other actors, Terry included. This is the action, both professional and personal, of a defended order that would deny the gaps – and the unpredictable affective presence of the other in the relation.

Benedick may have been a less risky part for the defended Irving than either Romeo or Antony, since this character is already emotionally braced against the gap – against Beatrice's affective assault. Retreating into formalised skirmishes of wit, Benedick can feign insouciance, although with telling flashes of indignation: 'O, she misused me past the endurance of a block. An oak but with one green leaf on it would have answered her'.[48] Even his commitment to being 'horribly in love' with Beatrice – post-'gulling' – is expressed as a rational, if ironic, decision:

[47] Terry, p. 131.
[48] 2.1.184-5.

since ‘the world must be peopled’; and, anyway, the commitment is made only once he has had the assurance that ‘her affections have their full bent’ in loving him.[49] This is all very amusing in performance, of course, and Benedick’s prose underlines the speech as a comic set-piece. In contrast, Beatrice’s equivalent soliloquy is expressed more seriously, in verse: in an incomplete sonnet, where – working on the principle of Romeo and Juliet’s shared lines – the omission of a third quatrain seems to open a gap that might be occupied by Benedick’s lines, were he present. Taking this further, it could be that the formal incompleteness here reflects the provisional nature of their mutual confession: ‘If thou dost love’, says Beatrice, *then*, ‘my kindness shall incite thee / To bind our loves up in a holy band’.[50] They have not yet confessed their love to each other. It is worth noting that Beatrice is here more exposed than Benedick – in her declaration that her own approval of his worth already exceeds the reports designed to persuade her: ‘For others say thou dost deserve, and I / Believe it better than reportingly’.[51]

The real gap in which Benedick loses his defences opens at the end of Act 4, Scene 1, as I shall explain. But, first, I want to show how Beatrice operates as a dynamic gap from the very beginning of the play. In Leonato’s household, Beatrice occupies an extra-ordinary position: although she is his niece, she is also an orphan, outside the direct line of inheritance. Certainly, Leonato does not treat her with the same fatherly care (and control) he bestows on Hero. When his brother, Antonio – who is clearly not Beatrice’s father – says to Hero, ‘Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father’, Beatrice chips in with:

[49] 2.3.187, 192, 179.
[50] 3.1.113-4.
[51] 3.1.115-6.

Beatrice: Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make curtsey and say, 'Father, as it please you': but yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or make an other curtsey and say, 'Father, as it please me'.[52]

It is *not* Beatrice's duty to follow Leonato's direction; and Leonato not only allows her to reject the idea of a husband, but actively encourages her in her humorous dissertation on the perils of marriage. 'Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust?' she asks, and devises a fantasy in which she sits with the bachelors in heaven, 'and there live we as merry as the day is long'.[53] Her refusal to conform – to be 'fitted with a husband'[54] – is not considered by the family as the great cause for regret it would be were it *Hero* who rejected convention in this way; and nor is the romantic history between Beatrice and Benedick the object of anything other than amusement for them – although they do seem genuinely affectionate towards both, and keen to get them together.

Beatrice, as Leonato's niece, has a freedom unavailable to Hero, as his daughter. She accompanies the system flexibly, supporting its structure whilst resisting its most restrictive modelling. Her greater opportunity for *self*-modelling has led to a general assumption that Beatrice is full of self-love, even though of a most generous kind. Bloom, for example, asserts that she 'takes her time to secure [Benedick], because her primary interest is herself'.[55] But, just as I found Cleopatra more self-dispersing than self-affirming, I also see Beatrice varying her role in response to the limiting – and unflattering – definitions available to a woman

[52] 2.1.38-40.
[53] 2.1.44-5, 36.
[54] 2.1.41-2.
[55] Bloom, p. 197.

'daring to be visible within the male system'.[56] Although Beatrice may seem to elude narrow mainstream categorisation, she must still adopt roles that facilitate her presence moment-by-moment. And, as I have pointed out, the roles available to unconventional *visible* women have misogynistic labels, designed to obviate the threat of unruly femaleness. But she does, initially, take refuge in one of those definitions: playing the shrewish and unmarriageable manhater[57] – or, at least, *one*-manhater. She is good at it: her enquiries about Benedick in the opening scene are made in the character of a combative antagonist, in keeping with Leonato's assessment of the relationship as 'a kind of merry war'.[58] In their initial bout, Beatrice presents herself as the 'Lady Disdain'[59] of Benedick's definition, reinforcing the impression of her emotional imperviousness with references to her 'cold blood' and her hard-hearted resilience to the madness induced by '[catching] the Benedick'.[60] It might seem obvious to us that she is, in playing this self, defending another self from a real risk of catching 'the Benedick'. But her performance apparently convinces the other characters, who subscribe to her part – calling her 'shrewd of tongue' and 'curst'.[61]

It is, for Beatrice, an easy role to play: she is sharp-minded, eloquent and watchful; and we have the impression that she is experienced in the art of manipulating her audience. As mentioned earlier, she is a comfortable stand-up comedienne – another 'allowable' role designed to render harmless the energy of extra-ordinary female presence, since laughter diffuses her threat:

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[56] See Chapter II ('Cleopatra'), p. 145.
[57] Like *The Taming of the Shrew*'s Katharine.
[58] 1.1.45-6.
[59] 1.1.87.
[60] 1.1.95, 64.
[61] 2.1.15, 6.

Prince: By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

Leonato: There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lord. She is never sad but when she sleeps, and not even sad then; for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamt of unhappiness, and waked herself with laughing.

Prince: She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

Leonato: O, by no means. She mocks all her wooers out of suit.[62]

This is suspiciously like a definition fitting for a court jester – a wise Fool, speaking 'all mirth, and no [obvious] matter'.[63] The label absorbs and contains some of the radical free energy of the void; and it is a safe, temporary role for Beatrice to adopt: without a designated role – without involvement in the order – the female gap loses presence altogether. Lack of representation is not absolutely the same thing as exclusion,[64] though, and the presence of the gap is sustainable only through both its extra *and* intra-ordinary activity: the female gap must have an orderly conduit, however fluid and multiple, to remain present, as I discussed in Chapter I ('Cordelia').

As an actress, and as a woman, Terry understood that she had to accommodate the system, paradoxically to escape its limitations; and, in this, she and her role of Beatrice coalesced: instead of confronting the system, they both offset its codes with humour. Laughter is generally less readable than rage, and Terry's aptitude for comedy was clearly threatening to Irving's sense of dignity. Her own laughter was – in turns – acquiescent, subversive and

[62] 2.1.259-65.
[63] 2.1.251.
[64] See 'Introduction'.

transcendent. And the threat posed by Beatrice's humour is apparently nullified by Don Pedro's plan to unite her with Benedick; but its energy is irrepressible, bubbling up at the end of the final scene, when she 'yields' to Benedick, with the caveat that it is 'upon great persuasion, and partly to save [his] life', since, she says, 'I was told you were in a consumption'.[65] Terry's bubbling Beatrice sometimes broke through her other, more serious, roles[66]: according to Auerbach, her laughter was a mystery to Irving, for whom self-control was paramount. But, as a gap, Terry's comic spirit over-spilled the designated selves she played, and perhaps threatened his. As Auerbach puts it, 'a woman who laughed was a woman who went too far'.[67]

In every part, then, Terry played a multiplicity of roles, not all of them equally apparent. It is a shame, I think, that Terry never had the chance to play Cressida, in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*; it wasn't a play that suited Victorian tastes. But Cressida's description of her own practice of '[lying] at a thousand watches'[68] fits Terry here, even though the fictive Cressida is considered a much more cynical – and much less lovable – character than Terry. But actresses in the late nineteenth century had not entirely cast off their dubious moral reputation; and engaging in self-display on stage laid Terry open – like Cressida – to sometimes prurient scrutiny and questions about her moral integrity. Cressida's claim encompasses both the numerous interpretations of her character by her audience – in life and art – and the rapacious manner of their judging. She is lying down – submitting to those (thousands) who would control her, or use her for their own purposes. The image appears to figure the oppressive,

[65] 5.4.93-5.
[66] As I shall discuss in Chapter IV ('Hermione').
[67] Auerbach, p. 234.
[68] 'Troilus and Cressida', ed. by John Jowett, 1.2.218-9.

misogynistic order-in-action – and Irving could certainly be thought professionally to have appropriated Terry's talent to enhance his own success. But Terry did not regard herself as exploited. And Cressida's image, like her presence, equally eludes its subjugated circumscription: she may 'lie', instead, by playing roles – none of which is, in itself, the only *truth*; and the 'watches' may be her own, from the 'thousand' perspectives of her myriad 'faces'. In this alternative reading, female agency is versatile, clear-sighted and uncontainable. A comprehensive account of Cressida's line incorporates all of this, from the thousand watches represented by the order, to those of its gaps.

Beatrice is, similarly, a versatile performer: the comic entertainer is not her defining role, though it is a useful one for Leonato's spare, unmarried niece. To emphasise her excessive status in a patrilineal market that trades in young, virginal would-be brides, many directors cast Beatrice as significantly older than Hero; and this does make sense of the hints about her previous relationship with Benedick.[69] And, perhaps, it is her greater experience that underpins her acute watching / noting of the dramatic situation: she assesses the melancholic Don John accurately, at the opening of Act 2, and facilitates Claudio's wooing of Hero, in the same scene, by alerting him to his 'cue' and by directing their kiss.[70] It is difficult to know whether she has been fully conscious of her own feelings for Benedick, before the playful prompting of Ursula and Hero at the end of Act 3, Scene 1; but she is quick to throw off outworn behaviours that do not suit the moment. Being present to the changing circumstance, as it is reported, Beatrice immediately acknowledges that '[n]o glory lives

[69] 2.1.211-7.
[70] 2.1.231, 235.

behind the back of such'[71] redundant roles, and resolves to connect more positively with the system, and marry Benedick.

Beatrice's capitulation to marriage in the final scene is a disappointment to those who see in it the coercive force of patriarchy that denies her independent spirit. But, in terms of the gap, her choice is not, I suggest, a reactionary one that closes off her agency, but rather a positive expansion of her allowing presence that shares in the energy of the relation. And Benedick, however securely he has drawn his self-image, accommodates the disorientating impact of the gap more successfully than the tragic heroes who shut down its energy and retreat inside their familiar boundaries. In the comic gap, it seems that the mutually-informing, mutually-dispersing energy of presence is actively engaged, negotiated and sustained. When the gap is given its space, the order becomes more flexible, bending to the unexpected with the strength born of adaptability. In effect, then, the order is reshaped by the positive extra-ordinary influence beyond its control that it has, nonetheless, helped to produce.

The real gap has already opened by the time of their betrothal: when Beatrice and Benedick are left alone on stage after the crisis of Claudio's and Hero's abortive wedding.[72] They are facing an unexpected (for them) rupture in the dramatic narrative: an 'Event', in Badiou's sense. Leonato has responded to Hero's disgrace with Lear-like inflexibility – seeking to neutralise the perceived threat to the body of his order by cutting out the malignant part of 'her foul tainted flesh'.[73] It is a vicious response for which we never quite forgive him. Benedick reacts very differently, and with many fewer words. He is on the brink of the void and, like

[71] 3.1.110.
[72] Act 4, Scene 1.
[73] 4.1.139.

Othello and Macbeth, lost for words: 'For my part', he admits, 'I am so attired in wonder / I know not what to say'.[74] And Beatrice says little more – although she *does* know what to say: 'O, on my soul my cousin is belied'.[75] In this shared – and extended line – Beatrice gives Benedick words, and a belief that shapes his course of action to the end of the play. He is, from this point, resolved to support Beatrice's conviction at the expense of his loyalty to his friends. It is a formally shared space that underlines the statement's pivotal status not only in the plot, but, equally importantly, in their relationship. The only other time they share lines – more regularly – is in their comic denial of their feelings for each other in the closing sequence, where apparent rejection acts, in its mirroring, as absolute affirmation:

> *Benedick*: Do not you love me?
>
> *Beatrice*: Why no, no more than reason.
>
> ………….
>
> *Beatrice*: Do not you love me?
>
> *Benedick*: Troth no, no more than reason.[76]

Left alone at the end of Act 4, Scene 1 – for the only time in the play – though, Beatrice and Benedick no longer have an onstage audience; and the gap opens disconcertingly, with the first direct confession of their love. It is a linguistically pared-back interaction in which the 'nothing' of real feeling – that is beyond words – is foregrounded. In Benedick's confession, the 'nothing' and Beatrice become one and the same focus for his love: 'I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange?'.[77] The strangeness he finds is not that 'nothing'

[74] 4.1.140-1.
[75] 4.1.142.
[76] 5.4.74 and 77.
[77] 4.1.264.

is love, but that it resists the definition that would make it *something* – known and controllable. Beatrice's hedging of bets in reply isn't just evasive, I think, but a paradoxical expression of the gap's unavailability to expression: her love is a 'thing I know not', and as such, a 'nothing' that she must confess, and cannot deny: 'nor I deny nothing'.[78] This is, in its confusing exceeding of terms, the extra-ordinary 'nothing' about which the play makes 'much ado'; and it is a precarious voiding 'nothing' that demands extra-ordinary commitment. When Beatrice asks Benedick to '[k]ill Claudio',[79] Benedick understandably recoils, but the gap demands presence, and action, to keep it live: he must commit to Beatrice and to the unknown – stepping beyond familiar masculine codes of power and honour, for love's sake.

Love of Beatrice has led Benedick into the extra-ordinary gap, and he, unlike Shakespeare's tragic heroes who save themselves by closing it down, sustains its presence. In this, he accommodates Beatrice as much as she bends to him, so that their marriage promises to be a mutual adaptation. Beatrice's heart is still 'wild', tamed only in homing with Benedick's 'loving hand' – a hand that is also, read positively, the platform for her flight.[80] This could be, I suggest, a more mobile image than associations of falconry with captivity might suggest. The gap is, after all, tethered to the order, however dynamic its performance; but it still has scope. And it is not Benedick who insists on any taming, especially if we follow Anna Pruitt, editor of the play in *The New Oxford Shakespeare The Complete Works: Modern Critical Edition* (2016), in giving the line, 'Peace, I will stop your mouth!' to Leonato.

[78] 4.1.265-7.
[79] 4.1.282.
[80] 3.1.112.

Writing of Terry's partnership with Irving, Auerbach describes the disapproval it attracted from the more confrontational feminists of the time, such as the actress Stella Campbell, who 'like most enlightened women of her generation…scorned Ellen Terry's apparent acquiescence and the indirect, finely tuned sedition within'.[81] The same criticism could be levelled at Beatrice; but this simple scorn underestimates the agency available in such indefinite, mobile sedition: there is no suggestion that Beatrice's spirit is to be rendered entirely peaceable. It is interesting, finally, that Beatrice makes the gap visible – and sustains its presence – by playing the *woman's* part throughout. In the comedies that are my focus in the following three sections, the female gap is facilitated through *male* impersonation; and this will lead me to re-evaluate the more-or-less direct association of sex and gender that I have worked with until now. And I shall consider how far our contemporary theories about gender are transferrable to the Victorian actress's playing of Shakespeare's female roles.

[81] Auerbach, p. 234.

VIOLA

With Beatrice, in the previous section, then, we have entered the comic gap that allows for its more positive and visible dramatic correspondence with the narrative order. In her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, Terry, interestingly, includes Viola under her heading 'The Pathetic Women', along with the tragic heroines already discussed; indeed, she begins with her. But *Twelfth Night* is a comedy, with no character erased from the play's ending; so, Viola's sympathetic responsiveness to the order of things in general, and to Duke Orsino in particular, enables her ongoing interaction with the narrative, and the prospect of an associative viable future. Although her continuing presence would seem to mark her as a 'triumphant' character, according to Terry's definition, she has none of Beatrice's sharp wit, Portia's bubbling confidence nor Rosalind's slick management skills. Terry attributes to her 'a lovely rather than a brilliant mind', and finds her 'less witty than either Rosalind or Beatrice – adding that although she 'seldom says a clever thing', she 'often says a beautiful' one.[82] Playing the male role – as Cesario – is not, for Viola, an opportunity to revel in any particular symbolic freedom it affords her. In fact, she seems more limited than liberated by her disguise, since she can neither confess her own feelings for Orsino, nor deflect Olivia's for her. The restriction is, however, a (triumphant) catalyst for 'some of the most exquisite word-music [Shakespeare] ever wrote',[83] since Viola is forced to express her own passion through another channel, converting the full potential of its dramatic power into poetry.

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[82] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 126.
[83] Ibid.

For example, when Olivia asks 'Cesario' what he would do if he loved her 'with [his] master's flame', Viola declares, with all the sincerity of her passion for her 'master' that she would:

Viola: Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house,
Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia'! O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.[84]

Her passion is expressed with even greater poignancy in her insistence (disguised as Cesario) to Orsino that women 'are as true of heart' as men with, perhaps, an even greater capacity than theirs to 'bide the beating of so strong a passion';[85] and she illustrates her point with a personal anecdote that may or may not give away her own feelings, along with her female identity:[86]

Viola: My father had a daughter loved a man
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman
I should your lordship.[87]

[84] Shakespeare, 'Twelfth Night; or, What you Will, ed. by Rory Loughnane, 1.5.221-9.
[85] 2.4.103, 90.
[86] Some directors have Orsino recognise his attraction to another man here; others might have him suspect that Viola is a woman.
[87] 2.4.104-6.

But Viola's female identity cannot, in any case, be discoverable as something essentially different from the character who plays Orsino's servant: Viola-Cesario perform a multiple identity that never finally coheres as singular in the symbolic register of identity. Viola, as a singular self, enters the play as a gap in all stories – even her own: thrown up by the sea on the shores of Ilyria, her past really is a blank; and, of course, since she is a fictional character, that past is always only one imagined by the audience. But, in deliberately adopting the clothing and mannerisms of her lost brother, Viola constructs a present – and a presence – out of a past presence; and this past presence was already fused with her own, since Sebastian was her twin. In being a twin, then, Viola is already multiple – with '[o]ne face, one voice, one habit, and two persons, / A natural perspective, and that is and is not';[88] so that in being Cesario, Viola partly also plays Sebastian – what Dusinberre calls 'her own natural division of herself'.[89]

The fraternal-sororal twin is not, however, a division but a *doubling* of the same genetic material in a shared womb-space; similarly, Viola and Sebastian share a dramatically generative space that produces not so much a split personality as a multiple one. Cesario, then, represents not Viola's existential fracture but the incorporate *combination* of Viola and Sebastian. As such, the character dramatises quite explicitly the fluid presence of the female gap as I have conceived it: as the excessively multiple presence that incorporates the radical Hegelian split, and overspills the fixity of singular identity. But a multiple identity that embraces both male and female characteristics might be difficult to reconcile with the specifically *female* gap of my thesis. It is clear, I think, that the difficulty is resolved when we

[88] 5.1.202-3.
[89] Dusinberre, p. 264.

consider that Viola's impersonation of her brother is her own, entirely female creation: that the Sebastian who partly informs Cesario is actively *produced* by Viola, as one element of her responsively flexible and multi-faceted performance.

Dusinberre describes the female originating character (Viola) as the witness of her male performance (Cesario), standing at the theatrical margins as a watcher in a world ruled by men.[90] If we position Viola here, we find her uploading her performative masculine self to the order whilst watching from a distance. But I think that the marginal space to which Dusinberre refers is a much less definable, less separable, arena than this description suggests. The gap by which the female originating subject operates is, according to my thesis, inextricably intertwined with the 'world ruled by men'; the marginal space is one conventionally designated for the female object who is disadvantaged by the record. In my theory, Viola does not stand passively in any such margin, but engages actively with the dramatic requirement for (multiple) presence and, in so doing, demonstrates the intrinsic connectivity of the female gap to the male order. In playing the gap, Viola-as-Cesario draws in the voiding energy that rocks both Orsino and Olivia and, as a result, redirects the course of the narrative. Cesario, though, is no empty cipher, but rather a contributory presence to the full multiple presence of the female gap-made-visible in the order.[91]

Furthermore, Cesario, in conversation with Orsino, produces another presence – in an apparently different dramatic present – who corresponds to the originating Viola in this one.

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[90] See Dusinberre, p. 156.

[91] There is, of course, a complication of my theory when Viola is played by a boy actor, since the gap is then animated by a disguised *male* body, on which a masculine disguise is then overlaid. With no recourse to the female body, Shakespeare's female character is here excessive to its physical manifestation. But my thesis examines the gap as animated through a *female* actor's performance of the female character imagined by Shakespeare's text.

And the correspondence is not just an emotional one, but a behavioural one, since both are disguised:

Viola: She never told her love,

But let concealment, like a worm I' th' bud,

Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,

And with a green and yellow melancholy

She sat like patience on a monument,

Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?

We men may say more, swear more, but indeed

Our shows are more than will; for still we prove

Much in our vows, but little in our love.[92]

And yet, this extra presence is no more nor less real than the scripted character embodied by the actor, disguised or not. In the comic cross-gendered disguised part, Shakespeare activates the female gap not as *loss* of dramatic presence but, conversely, as its multiple *release*: the brother-sister gap active in the speech above, for example, produces Cesario's sister who is both a 'blank' in the ongoing narrative, and also actively present as *Sebastian's* sister in the narrative future; and, of course, the Cesario who produces that sister is also a blank – and yet dramatically present as *Viola's* brother, again visible in the narrative future. Together, then, Cesario, his sister, Viola and her brother perform here the multiple presence of the female gap – as originated by Viola.

[92] 2.4.107-15.

As another example, Julia, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, releases two additional presences into her own identity gap, in a similar way. Dressed as the page Sebastian, she introduces a Julia played by the boy she now plays – in a performance of Ariadne and Theseus (yet more presences) – watched by an imagined Julia who is being played as Ariadne: thus, bringing all these equally dramatic presences to the narrative present. Julia is, 'Sebastian' says,

Julia: About my stature: for at Pentecost,
When all our pageants of delight were played,
Our youth got me to play the woman's part,
And I was trimmed in Madam Julia's gown,
Which servèd me as fit, by all men's judgements,
As if the garment had been made for me;
Therefore I know she is about my height.[93]

Sebastian shares Julia's outward dimensions, ones presented here as Ariadne's; but the sharing has, importantly, an inward dimension, too: like Cesario, Sebastian dramatises their shared passion, although here it is played as revelation rather than as concealment:

Julia: And at that time I made her weep agood,
For I did play a lamentable part –
Madam, 'twas Ariadne, passioning
For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight –
Which I so lively acted with my tears

[93] 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona', ed. by Sarah Neville, 4.4.144-50.

That my poor mistress, movèd therewithal,

Wept bitterly; and would I might be dead,

If I in thought felt not her very sorrow.[94]

The imagined Julia of this additional narrative watches Sebastian 'play' her as Ariadne in her grief; and the grief-revealed reflects the grief-concealed: not only that shared between Sebastian and the imagined Julia at the fantasy-pageant, but also by the Julia-Sebastian who recounts the experience to Silvia. The point is that they are *all Julia* – and all excessive and yet dramatically present as a performable, narrative female gap.

If the gap is essentially female in Shakespeare's comedies, it is, nonetheless, performed as multiply-gendered, as I have demonstrated: and, so, the fluid selves Viola plays in Cesario are both masculine and feminine at once. But, in *Twelfth Night,* the extra-ordinary Sebastian of the Cesario-gap actively confronts the ordinary, delimited Sebastian who emerges very clearly, and separately, as male. I argue that this orderly Sebastian – with his own definite future in the projected narrative – has no intrinsic identity with the excessive Sebastian present in Viola's Cesario. Interestingly though, in my reading, the Cesario-gap is not actually lost to the future – though it lacks formal representation there – continuing as it does in and as Viola's multiple dramatic presence; and her presence continues to refuse the singular identity that would deny her past performance as Cesario, even when she is dressed in her 'woman's weeds'.[95] In this way, Viola keeps her past *present*, and retains her dramatic agency in being more than her 'master's mistress' or Olivia's 'sister'.[96]

[94] 'Two Gentlemen', 4.4.151-8.
[95] 5.1.260.
[96] 5.1.306.

Throughout the play, her excessive identity has drawn in the irruptive energy of the void to disrupt the course of the narrative, and activate the dramatic event of self-shattering love. This energy is the Lacanian 'jouissance' or 'death drive'[97] that, for Lee Edelman, is figured by the queer: describing all that refuses to cohere in what he terms the 'calcification of form that is reproductive futurism'.[98] In other words, Edelman sees the queering of the narrative as a voiding of its formal and causal progression. But the female gap, however disruptive, inevitably and importantly sustains an indissociable relationship with the historical narrative as the necessary vehicle of precisely what Edelman rejects: reproductive futurism. Its dramatic energies *are* potentially subject-threatening and narrative-rupturing, holding fluid correspondence with the Real; but the female gap is, nonetheless – and *through* this correspondence – actively generative of the (new, flexible) narrative future in which subjectivity continually re-emerges.

Shakespeare's female characters perform the gap most explicitly in their comic cross-dressed role-play that appears to accommodate and unravel gender, age and social status. As such, it could seem that the gap they play is not specifically female, but a fusion of all types of the politically and socially dispossessed;[99] and the gap could also be assimilated into the masculinist narrative as one of its more chaotic (and interesting) psychological aspects. In the former case, it would be easy to imagine that this study would find the female gap working within all instances of socio-political exclusion, using Shakespearean drama as a model to

[97] See Zizek, *How to Read Lacan*, pp. 62-3.
[98] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 48.
[99] Edelman, for one, claims the gap in the future-seeking narrative for the queer subject; and his analysis of the alternative life of active exclusion seems to chime, to some extent, with my thinking about the activity of extra-ordinary femaleness.

examine 'otherness' as crucially under-represented in the historical narrative; and, in the latter case, psycho-philosophical theorists[100] could claim the female gap as a *general* permeable boundary through which the narrative-shifting event intrudes: an event that draws in the void of nothingness that both dissolves and remakes all subjects. But there is, I think, something more interestingly *female* about the gap's function in relation to the narrative that is especially clearly illuminated by Shakespeare's characterisation of femaleness. And it is my contention that the female gap has a unique relationship with the order for two reasons: first, it is the order's essential, biological, reproductive energy provider; and second, it has no opportunity, being female, to be defined as anything other than the 'other' of that order, since there are no conditions in which it may achieve real agency in an order constructed through male definitions of power. The female gap is, then – at its most positively correspondent – essential, active and present: it is a gap not of narrative rejection, but of narrative (re)generation. But its presence is, nonetheless, always excessive to its any singular representation. For Stephen Guy-Bray in his latest study, *Shakespeare and Queer Representation*, 'queering the narrative' involves the interruption of the narrative sequence through poetic 'decorative representation',[101] so that form substantially *becomes* content. The female gap does, similarly, introduce (Real) disruptive energy into the narrative; but its presence functions less as formal distraction than as redirection: as such, it is capable both of arresting and of propelling the narrative's forward movement.[102]

[100] Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek, for example.
[101] Stephen Guy-Bray, *Shakespeare and Queer Representation* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 19.
[102] I shall explore this paradoxical function more extensively in later chapters.

Viola's cross-gendered play, then, releases an excessive character who never wholly identifies with a masculine element of the narrative structure. Dusinberre says that '[d]isguise freed the dramatist to explore…the natures of women untrammelled by the customs of femininity': that the masculine spirit of the disguise 'can liberate women from the constraints of traditional femininity'.[103] It is, of course, the case that the masculine role increases – even makes possible – Viola's visibility, before she might be 'delivered to the world' and has 'made [her] own occasion mellow' in the revelation of her 'estate'.[104] Viola's role as Orsino's 'eunuch'[105] not only hides and complicates her estate, but actively expands its range: so that, in being Orsino's personal servant, Viola-Cesario has more affective dramatic licence with access to both Orsino and Olivia. As I have discussed, Cesario can have no independent future in the narrative – and, being a 'eunuch',[106] has no reproductive function in any case; but, as an excessive presence of the multiple gap, Cesario progresses both Orsino's and Olivia's movement towards emotional fulfilment. All of this accords with Dusinberre's claim for the freedom of the masculine disguise. But I think, conversely, that Viola finds significant limitations in the trappings of the male order to which she is suddenly subjected as Cesario: where she is required to choose a delimited self to play. She is, arguably, in this singular masculine role, subordinated even more restrictively than she would have been were she to have played a woman of her own 'estate'.

But Viola's character-disjunction is a clear demonstration for the audience of the capacity of the gap for fluid and multiple presence; and in playing her non-identity with her narrative (masculine) self, she is more explicitly present as a gap than she will be once she dons her

[103] Dusinberre, p. 271.
[104] 1.2.38-40.
[105] 1.2.58.
[106] 1.1.52.

‘woman’s weeds’ – and can no longer be ‘all the daughters of my father’s house, / And all the brothers too’.[107] The overt dramatic exposure of the gap’s multiple identity is a metatheatrical twist in Shakespeare’s Comedies that focuses the audience on its power of radical affectiveness: the heroine’s multiple performance reconditions the emotional absorptions of the major narrative players, redirecting their desires and, consequently, the story itself. But Viola’s exposure in *Twelfth Night* depends on a special intimacy with the audience born of dramatic isolation; since, aside from the sea-captain who sets her up for her role-play, Viola has no onstage confidant or confidante. The glimmer of humour she derives from her sudden recognition of Olivia’s infatuation with her disguised persona is shared only with us – ‘she loves me, sure’ – and it is quickly quelled by her natural compassion: ‘Poor lady – she were better love a dream!’.[108] In opening herself(ves) up to the unknown – the void – Viola acknowledges the precariousness of the subject she has constructed in Cesario, absolving herself of responsibility for the deception with her invocation: ‘O Time, thou must untangle this, not I; / It is too hard a knot for me t’untie’.[109] And if Cesario is to be rendered ‘nothing’ by the order, so Orsino and Olivia – entrammelled with her – also face the void.

The pathos in Viola overcomes any easy amusement at others’ mistakes, and seems to colour with sadness the emotional atmosphere of the whole play – throwing into painful relief the cruel jesting of Olivia’s household. It is a play that opens with a rhetorical exercise in brooding love-melancholy, accompanied by the obligatory music and sighs. But the sincerity we later find in Viola’s confessions of love are perplexingly absent in Orsino’s initial extravagant

[107] 2.4.117-8.
[108] 2.2.19, 23.
[109] 2.2.37-8.

apostrophes to the 'spirit of love' that devours 'as the sea'.[110] Unlike Juliet, whose boundless bounty, like the sea, replenishes itself by giving, Orsino gives nothing – and is, as a result, himself diminished by love's depersonalising influence:

Orsino: O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price,
Even in a minute.[111]

And Orsino's emotional immersion seems to be an entirely solitary, self-indulgent one – full of shapes conceived by his own 'high fantastical'[112] self-communing fancy. More positively, though, he does reveal a promising *capacity* for loving, like the Romeo who imagines himself devoted to the elusive Rosaline. But the object of Orsino's desire is, in this opening speech, even more out-of-focus than is Romeo's, in his; in fact, she doesn't get a mention. Suffering what we must imagine, at this stage, to be unrequited – or impossible – love, Orsino tries to purge himself through a kind of orgasmic musical satiety:

Orsino: If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.[113]

[110] 1.1.9, 11.
[111] 1.1.9-14.
[112] 1.1.15.
[113] 1.1.1-3.

And it seems to work: ''Tis not so sweet now as it was before'.[114] If his desire is so easily diminished, it does not bode well for any 'shape' to which it becomes attached. But there is, I think, something more philosophically-interesting about Orsino's apparently independent – and thus undramatic – experience here. The dynamic relation is not an interpersonal one, but one of metaphysical engagement: so that, whilst the personal vehicle for his passion appears disappointingly incidental, the event of love itself is still a radically self-shattering kind of communion. And it is productive too: breeding infinitely shifting 'shapes' with the 'fancy' in its vast organic current. Orsino seems to recognise his impotence in the face of the all-consuming 'spirit of love' that renders inconsequential – even illusory – any mere particulars fixed upon as love-objects.

In terms of my thesis, what Orsino is wrestling with is the Real energy of the void – the apparently causeless 'cause'[115] that confronts all the male subjects I have so far discussed. Fortunately for Orsino, however, Viola's performance of the gap promises to rescue him from a doomed commitment to its voiding power; but Orsino still does not seem entirely rescuable: his easy replacement of Olivia with Viola in the last act taking us back to the beginning of the first one, and to the suspicion that there is really no *other* in the picture. If this is so, Orsino's securing of Viola as 'his fancy's queen'[116] suggests that he will absorb Viola into his own fantasy of love – as one of its shapes – before she inevitably falls into 'abatement and low price'.[117] The ending of the play is generally considered problematic; and the clown's closing lyric certainly doesn't leave us optimistic for any of the lovers' futures. Dusinberre describes

[114] 1.1.8.
[115] See 'Othello', 5.1.1.
[116] 5.1.366.
[117] 1.1.13.

the effect of Viola's love for Orsino as perplexing for an audience 'committed not to her success but to her sadness';[118] and once she is freed from her disguise, Viola seems dramatically confined by her delimited role. Moreover, the orderly Sebastian appears to claim one of Cesario's twinned identities:

> [Viola] is diminished by a return to a world where she must be Orsino's lady after the momentary freedom of a Twelfth Night masculinity which restored Nature's wholeness.[119]

I think there is, though, a more promising reading of the play's ending that can accommodate Orsino's fantasy, whilst acknowledging the narcissistic theme it first introduced and that runs through the whole play. The place to look for a rewarding resolution of the theme is clearly not in Malvolio's self-defeating self-love; but it is not absolutely amongst the variables of romantic love either. I have suggested that the 'real' Sebastian appears to claim the masculine part of Cesario, when he emerges and is recognised as Viola's lost twin. But, as I have also said, the Sebastian who shares in Cesario's dual identity is Viola's own creation, shaped from her 'high fantastical' imagination; as such, the appearance of the orderly Sebastian is not necessarily reductive of the Cesario-blend, but, being something apart, serves rather to underline its uniqueness.

There is, however, above all, a sense in which the reunion of the twins is the most dramatically intense revelation of the gap as pure relation in the whole of Shakespeare. Here, the spirit of love produces, in our 'fancy', an extra-ordinary balance of multiple shapes as interconnected,

[118] Dusinberre, p. 266.
[119] Ibid., p. 267.

separate forms. Antonio asks, 'How have you made division of yourself?'; and Sebastian himself is equally bemused: 'Do I stand there? I never had a brother, / Nor can there be that deity in my nature / Of here and everywhere'.[120] In this almost mystical selves-encounter, Viola's multiple presence as Cesario seems to open out and to realise dramatically the gap between their selves that inextricably connects her with Sebastian: so that Cesario stands as the multiply-gendered manifestation of their twinning; and so, the female gap here appears somehow to produce the subject with which she is radically and affectively engaged. This reading is in line with my conception of the female gap as the active vehicle and enabler of narrative futurism, as discussed earlier. Moreover, the active participation of the gap in the narrative allows for the further interrelation of selves: with Orsino and Olivia, now connected as brother and sister. And to return to Orsino: although I have identified Viola's primary relation as her twinship with Sebastian, there is scope in the gap also for her commitment to being Orsino's 'fancy's queen'. Indeed, the giving of her own mutable presence may be seen ultimately to meet and fulfil the desires of his volatile fancy, with all its teeming 'high fantastical' shapes: at last, Orsino's imagination may have met its match(es), actively and more productively performed *beyond* himself.

Ellen Terry's performance as Viola in 1884[121] – with Irving as Malvolio – was marred by ill-health: she acted with an infected thumb that led to a dangerous case of blood-poisoning. The shadow this cast probably affected her memory of the production, which she described as 'dull, lumpy and heavy'.[122] She did, however, find a simplicity in her part – a dramatic

[120] 5.1.209, 213-5.
[121] The production opened at the Lyceum on 18th July, 1884, between two tours of Canada and the United States (1883-4; 1884-5).
[122] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 233.

directness – that cut against Victorian audience expectations of principal boy extravagance. Terry's daughter, Edith Craig, apparently admired the sincerity of her acting, declaring to Terry: 'You were far better than any Viola that I have seen since, but you were too simple to make a great hit in it'.[123] This seems like faint praise, but Craig's assessment speaks, I think, to the integrity Terry discovered in her playing of the blended Cesario role: instead of flagging up the performative irony of her disguise, she played the theatrical truth of its excessive identity, and of its startling dramatic presence. It may have been that Irving's very serious Malvolio called for a certain comic suppression on her part.[124] Although the play was not a critical success – and was not then popular off-stage either[125] – it has bequeathed to us a photograph of Terry as Viola taken, unusually, during the onstage production rather than in the studio. In it, Terry's Viola appears absorbed into the starkness of the scenery: the rocky shore of Ilyria. She is dressed in 'woman's weeds' that protect her modesty, and confine her within the female object-role. As a woman, Viola can apply for a position – however subservient – in Orsino's household only if she takes on the trappings of a male character: to offer herself, as a woman, in service to a man would be unspeakably immodest – indeed, impossible; so, in *Twelfth Night*, as in Shakespeare's other comedies,[126] a central female figure both defends her modesty and, equally, finds apparent freedom, through the male disguise.

On the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages, the assumption of a male persona did, of course, have the practical purpose of releasing the boy actor into a more comfortably androgynous

[123] Terry, p. 232.
[124] The comic sub-plot was not considered funny; but Holroyd suggests that this might have been Irving's intention: 'by playing Malvolio as a Don Juan on stilts, a man more sinned against than sinning, he turned comedy into tragedy and fantasy into reality' (Holroyd, p. 171.)
[125] Irving had never seen or read the play before he staged it. *Twelfth Night* had not been performed on the English stage for thirty-five years, previous to the Lyceum production (according to Holroyd p. 170.).
[126] 'The Merchant of Venice'; 'As You Like It'.

role. But, in the Victorian theatre, there was something more ambiguous about the actress's donning of a male disguise – something provocative about a woman assuming the physical and political freedoms associated with men. Released, like the boy actor, into the fluidly-gendered characterisation, the actress visibly exceeded her own female representation. But it is my contention, in this thesis, that the excess of the gap involves no direct participation in the masculinist system, but rather a fluid dispersal of all bounded definition: so that the freedom of both Shakespeare's female character, and the actress who played her professionally, is not to be found simply in her assumed masculine identity, but in the sustained ambiguity of her part, and its refusal of orderly coherence.

The multiple selves of the female gap are here embodied in dramatically equalised, since *physicalised*, alternative performances: the imagistic excess – of Cressida's 'thousand watches', Cleopatra's 'infinite variety', or Helena's 'thousand loves', for example – seems to escape from the poetry and claim actual dramatic space. And the alternative possibility is held in tension – in fluid exchange – with its original character-self, rather than as its replacement. The selves in their multiplicity, then, disrupt the narrative of signification, not in claiming an oppositional (male) identity, but in denying the possibility of coherent identity itself. Auerbach suggests that Terry's playing of Shakespeare's cross-dressed characters was an opportunity for her to recover the 'lost boys'[127] that belonged to her early stage-career – and her youthful androgyny – before she was confined by female roles. But I think it was not so much the denied *gender* position but the lost *mobility* of her childhood performances that she reclaimed and

[127] Auerbach, 'Stage Child', *Ellen Terry, Player in her Time*, pp. 30-75.

harnessed in these roles: a mobility that released the excess of her female identity in visible dramatic correspondence with a narrative that ostensibly denied its performative freedom.

Edelman's study, *No Future*, examines the gap in the narrative performed by the queer subject, who can never be registered as 'substantive' in an order that requires normative characteristics for its definition. He proposes that 'queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration'.[128] And he finds – as I do – a vibrant life-force performing a gap in the symbolic order that acknowledges its fundamental Real energy. For Edelman, 'queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects, insisting on the Real of a jouissance that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed'.[129] In his reading, 'queerness' is directly associated with the Real of the symbolic order; its 'unnameability' locates its presence in the 'figural repository for the excess'[130] outside the politics of signification. Furthermore, in identifying with the negativity of jouissance – the insistent death drive, continually (and essentially) denied by the subject – queerness may, according to Edelman, 'disidentif[y] from the promise of futurity' and 'figure the undoing of the Symbolic, and the Symbolic subject itself'.[131]

The female gap is, in a similar way, excessive to the order that does not adequately represent its fluid presence. But it works, I think, much more positively than Edelman's queer gap in relation to the order's symbolic codes – being continually intertwined and productively present with it; as such, its dramatic presence positively enables the future present of the

[128] Edelman, p. 24.
[129] Ibid., pp. 24-5.
[130] Ibid., p. 24.
[131] Ibid., p. 27.

narrative, and works – unlike queer's dismantling of political futurism – actively *for* its more flexible continuation. And – unlike Guy-Bray's queer poetic 'representation that exceeds its function'[132] – the female gap functions in excess of representation: its activity is, indeed, its excessive presence. Instead of being either life-obstructive or life-denying, then, the female gap is essentially life-*producing*: operating to filter the energy required for the emergence of the symbolic something from the void of nothing, to which it is necessarily responsive. It is an activity that radically undermines an order dislocated by the Lacanian Imaginary from the Real: one feeding on its own existentially moribund causal chain. With the rupturing event that breaks the chain, the male subject is threatened by the voiding energy made visible through the gap in the order. At the end of *Twelfth Night*, Viola's union with Sebastian realises dramatically the live relation of the multiple gap to the order. And, in Viola's excessive mobility, Orsino's volatile high fantasy appears to access its potential for fulfilment. There is, in my reading, I think, a much more promising freedom available to Viola than the diminished kind she suffers in Dusinberre's; and a more productive, active future in prospect for her that reaches beyond Edelman's cancelled one.

[132] Guy-Bray, p. 15.

PORTIA

Viola is an anomaly in being the only comic heroine to feature in Terry's group of 'Pathetic Women'.[133] And although Portia numbers one of her 'Triumphant Women', the two characters share a peculiarly sympathetic aspect that seems to place them somewhere between the two categories. But Portia also shares with Beatrice and Rosalind an ebullience of spirit that invests her presence with more visible confidence. She already appears destined for triumph at the outset of *The Merchant of Venice*: her 'estate', unlike Viola's, is 'delivered to the world'[134] in the opening scene in unmatchable terms: as 'a lady richly left…nothing undervalued / To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia'.[135] But she could be considered to be, paradoxically, less free than the beleaguered Viola, being caught through her significant symbolic value in a system that defines her as an important prize – a 'golden fleece' for which 'many Jasons come in quest'.[136] Although she appears to enjoy the freedom of her high-born status, she is not an entirely autonomous subject but, rather, an object for possession – goods – to be won by '[r]enownèd suitors';[137] and she is also denied agency in the choice of a husband by her father – as controlling of her future as either Brabantio or Lear of their daughters' – even from beyond the grave. She laments her lack of choice:

[133] Terry also examines Imogen ('Cymbeline') and Hermione ('The Winter's Tale') under this heading; but I discuss both characters under my heading, 'The Last Women', in Chapter IV.
[134] 'Twelfth Night', 1.2.40, 38.
[135] Shakespeare, 'The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice; or, The Jew of Venice', ed. by Rory Loughnane, 1.1.160-5.
[136] 1.1.169, 171.
[137] 1.1.168.

Portia: O me, the

word 'choose'! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I

dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead

father.[138]

Furthermore, she – unlike Desdemona and Cordelia – has no opportunity to make a stand, or to assert her right to refuse the system that confines her. Instead, she must – like the other female characters I have discussed – find a way to exceed her limiting definition by converting the live and radical energy of the gap into a more dramatically affective presence.

Terry found enormous scope for her own flexible acting-range in playing Portia at the Lyceum. Like the renowned lady of Shakespeare's Belmont, Terry attracted much admiration and applause; but she was equally tied by the structures that established her worth: by the Lyceum Theatre, Henry Irving and the paying audience. In her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, she quotes Georg Brandes's summing-up of Portia's character as 'of most use' to her 'as an actress':

> [I]n spite of her self-surrender in love there is something independent, almost masculine in her attitude towards life. This orphan heiress has been in a position of authority from childhood. She is used to acting on her own responsibility, without seeking advice first.[139]

The 'something independent' that Terry takes from Brandes is only ambivalently so, in being enabled by the death of her father and the inherited wealth by which she achieves

[138] 1.2.17-20.

[139] Georg Brandes, qtd. in Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 117.

representation in the order. In her visibility there, she is, indeed, 'almost masculine'; but her activity – however independent it may seem – is still conditioned by male direction. It seems, at first, that Portia acquiesces to the limiting project, willing to concede her power to the man who wins her father's game. Bloom, for one, finds the capitulation of a 'sophisticated ironist' (Portia) to a 'glittering gold digger' (Bassanio) not merely unlikely, but absolutely a 'fail[ure of] all her own finely wrought self-awareness'.[140] I'm not sure, however, that Portia's choice of lover is so self-defeating as Bloom suggests; in fact, I think her dramatic presence actually seems to grow as she heads for this apparently self-diminishing resolution.

Terry, too, challenges the view that Portia's 'famous speech of surrender' is 'either strange or repellent' in a character 'in the habit of directing herself and directing others'.[141] She draws attention to Portia's 'excessive generosity which partly explains her offering with herself all she has to the man she loves'.[142] It may or may not be her 'generosity' that is 'excessive', but Portia is unhesitatingly willing – like Desdemona and Juliet – to commit herself emotionally. Rather than adhering to the rules of the game that have been set so unemotionally by her father, she is eager to move beyond them – to embrace and let loose the disorderly power of her desire for Bassanio; and its 'excess' undermines all formal ceremony, so that the ceremony itself becomes redundant, as she confesses in her aside:

Portia: O love, be moderate! Allay thy ecstasy.
In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess.
I feel too much thy blessing: make it less

[140] Bloom, p. 177.
[141] Terry, p. 117.
[142] Ibid.

For fear I surfeit.[143]

Certainly, Portia commits herself in plainest monosyllables: 'You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand, / Such as I am'.[144] Her wish that she might be 'trebled twenty times myself', in order to '[e]xceed account',[145] opens a gap in the reckoning that is the 'sum of nothing':[146] she is no longer 'lord / Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, / Queen o'er myself': so that 'even now, but now'[147] she exceeds those definitions that have, up to this point, represented her singular identity – as the sum of *something*.[148] Portia's agency is not, though, necessarily subsumed in the voluntary giving-away of her 'same myself':[149] rather, and importantly, she could be seen to be thereby released from the hold of the dead narrative in which she has no power to choose, and in which she is defined purely by her wealth.

Bassanio is himself arrested not only by the disturbing energy of his own passion, but by Portia's efficient conversion of its force: it is her focusing power that 'bereft[s him] of all words' – just as Desdemona's 'stops' Othello. The ordinary signification of his familiar linguistic code becomes suddenly inadequate to the expression of such extra-ordinary affect. In what is, admittedly, fluent verse that includes an apt simile, he describes the 'confusion in [his] powers' in terms that could also describe the gap itself:

Bassanio: Only my blood speaks to you in my veins,

And there is such confusion in my powers

[143] 3.2.111-4.
[144] 3.2.149-50.
[145] 3.2.153, 157.
[146] 3.2.158 ('nothing' in F1).
[147] 3.2.167-9.
[148] 3.2.158 (in Q1).
[149] 3.2.170.

> As after some oration fairly spoke
>
> By a belovèd prince, there doth appear
>
> Among the buzzing pleasèd multitude,
>
> Where every something being blent together
>
> Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,
>
> Expressed, and not expressed.[150]

'[E]very something' of the order, here, '[t]urns to a wild nothing' in losing its symbolic definition – in 'being blent together', and exceeding all rational limits.

Timothy M. Harrison's gloss of Bassanio's speech, in his recent essay on 'Confusion' in *Shakespeare and Emotion*, is useful to my analysis here. He considers that:

> [i]n this temporary breakdown, it is as though 'every something' within Bassanio has been 'blent together' and become so confused that his state has become a 'wild nothing', a disorderly mess out of which only 'joy' emerges as a phenomenon distinct enough to be recognisable'.[151]

Harrison's 'disorderly mess' is, to my thinking, the effect of the gap's affective threat to the subject's 'varied mental faculties: reason, imagination, memory and so on'.[152] The phenomenon of joy positively emerges from the nothing of the void that has unseated reason from its top rank in the orderly hierarchy. As a result, the gap filters joyful, life-affirming energy from the 'nothing' into the order. And, since the play is a comedy, we can be pretty sure that

[150] 3.2.176-183.
[151] Timothy Harrison, 'Confusion: Cymbeline, The Merchant of Venice, The Winter's Tale', *Shakespeare and Emotion*, p. 334.
[152] Ibid.

Bassanio will not close down the gap opened by Portia, to reset and secure his footing on the old framework.

Meanwhile, Portia's commitment to the excessive emotional disturbance she has helped to activate is absolute – like that of the tragic female figures I have discussed, and whose gaps are closed down. Her unwavering resolution to dissolve her single identity 'even now, but now' is reminiscent, for example, of Desdemona's calm determination to 'consecrate' her 'soul and fortunes' to Othello.[153] If her commitment to Bassanio is to be considered genuine, Portia-the-sophisticated-ironist of Bloom's reading dissolves as readily as Bassanio in her encounter with the affective unknown. This is the point at which we may find her claiming the freedom of the gap, beyond orderly form – and coming alive. It would have been an interesting dramatic challenge for them both, of course, had Bassanio failed the casket test. But Shakespeare didn't write that play.

Portia – like Viola – has the opportunity dramatically to explode her identity more explicitly, and ambiguously, than have the characters whose fluid presence is activated only through poetic release.[154] Her appearance as Balthazar, in Act 4, Scene 1, marks her re-entry as an alternative presence in the narrative: she, like Viola-Cesario, plays a character without independent future representation, but one that, nonetheless, furthers the narrative through ironic intervention. Like Cesario, Balthazar could be considered to operate as a metatheatrical vehicle for the manifestation of the multiple gap in the order. Portia's decision that she and Nerissa will arrive in Venice 'both accoutered like young men'[155] is made in response to

[153] 'Othello', 1.3.248.
[154] The tragic heroines and the comic / last women who remain in their feminine attire.
[155] 3.4.63.

another apparently combined presence in Antonio-Bassanio, with their 'like proportion / Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit'.[156] For Portia, they seem to achieve a double identity; and the performing of her own double identity will be the most effective means, she thinks, of harnessing the dangerous energy that might void them both – inextricably linked as they seem to be. If, then, Antonio is the very 'semblance of [her] soul' – that is, Bassanio – then, in 'purchasing' Antonio '[f]rom out the state of hellish cruelty' (as Balthazar), she (as Portia), is also releasing Bassanio. In other words, she considers that the demands of their multiple presence – their intimate relation – are most effectively met by the expansive influence of her own fluid one.

In playing another self, Portia may manage to influence the shape of the narrative in activity that would be beyond the scope of her singular character. In adopting a masculine persona, she has access to the ultimate symbol of patriarchal authority: the Law. But, even in her masculine disguise, she, as the female gap, exceeds its limits: by exposing a gap in the Law. In her quibble over the blood contained in the 'pound of flesh' Shylock demands from Antonio, Portia alters the expected outcome of Antonio's trial. Indeed, she reverses the linguistic markers of accuser and accused by dislocating them from their referents. Shylock's demand for absolute justice – for the honouring of his bond – is turned against him: the 'very words'[157] that dictate the terms of the bond leave an excess that, once made visible, complete the bond's entire meaning. According to Hegelian reasoning, the definition must necessarily be informed by what is left out: so if, as Portia says, '[t]he words expressly are "a pound of

[156] 3.4.14-5.
[157] 4.1.248.

flesh"',[158] they also entail the remainder that is the *blood* that would be spilt in the cutting of it; and the spilling of Christian blood in Venice has the legal consequence that Shylock's 'lands and goods' will be 'by the laws of Venice confiscate / Unto the state of Venice'.[159]

It is Portia's presence of mind that spots the loophole; and her revelation of the semantic split that refuses the complete identification of the signifier and signified (the bloodless pound of flesh) exposes the Real remainder (the blood). What is voided in the process is the security of the symbolic order itself. It is a more radical move, I think, than it might first appear; and it is important for my thesis that it is made by a female character: Portia's linguistic game exposes the whole symbolic order – figured here as the ultimate machine of legislative patriarchy – as an arbitrary structure manipulated by the powerful for their own gain. In her masculine role, Portia plays a cynical part: and actually wins the game. But in the system's ugly self-exposure, its victims – its subjects – are, clearly, more numerous than Shylock.

Portia has already had a trial run – in the trial – in systemic exposure. Her famous speech about mercy is not legalese; but, in it, we hear her plead against the application of the bald justice the legal scheme dictates. Mercy, she claims, is not a compulsion of the order; indeed, it precisely exceeds it: '[i]t droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven' – 'an attribute to God himself'.[160] The use of a specifically Christian argument against the Jewish merchant feels uncomfortable to a modern audience, especially if Portia considers God's mercy to be unavailable to Shylock. But Portia's faith in a higher, universally-available spiritual authority

[158] 4.1.301.
[159] 4.1.304, 305-6.
[160] 4.1. 179, 189. Note reference to *Holy Bible*, 'Ecclesiasticus', 35.26: 'The mercy of God is beautiful in the time of affliction, as a cloud of rain in the time of drought.' <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Ecclesiasticus-Chapter-1> [Accessed 17th May, 2020].

can be regarded as much more positive: going beyond any hints of coercive religiosity, and, at the same time, exposing the system's limitations – reducing its own authority and, thus, rendering the temporally-powerful powerless. Portia's invocation of heavenly mercy could, though, be read more cynically – if we regard 'mercy' as a conceptual tool for self-preservation. Since, then, 'in the course of justice none of us / Should see salvation', we are clearly acting out of pure self-interest – seeking equalising measure for measure – when 'we do pray for mercy'; and it is only if we 'render / The deeds of mercy' to others'[161] that we can hope, by return, to be ourselves spared. In pointing out the behavioural circularity here, Portia intrudes as agent of the dramatic Real: destroying trust in the frame that has identified, and will then invert with her help, Shylock and Antonio as accuser and accused, respectively – and rendering the signifying system, and any higher system, ultimately precarious. I do, however, think there is a position between these two readings that finds Portia performing a more virtuously ethical gap in the system: introducing the radical energy of compassion to promote connectivity between its isolated elements, and to instate 'gentle[ness]' as its more productive medium of authority.

The Merchant of Venice is – whether the merchant is Antonio or Shylock – Portia's play, as Bloom also observes.[162] What her disruption of the trial does is to link the merchants with each other and to expose their mutual cruelty as endemic to the power structure. Shylock is, certainly, a more ostentatious and provocative advocate for his brutal form of justice; but Antonio's parting shot is barbarous too, since to force Christian baptism on a Jew is the spiritual equivalent of fleshly mutilation. There is always a question mark left in performance

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[161] 4.1.193-4, 194, 195-6.
[162] Bloom, p. 172.

over Shylock's acquiescence – 'I am content'[163] – to his enforced conversion. And there is much in Shakespeare's characterisation and treatment of his Jew of Venice that we, as a post-holocaust audience, find difficult to take. But the darkness of Jewish history does not transform Shylock, for all our squeamishness, into a sympathetic dramatic figure; and, finally, neither 'merchant' comes out well, although Antonio has his monetary fortune restored. The 'justice' of the Belmont of the last act centres on human affection rather than capital, and – since it is Portia who is judge – there is no recognised plea for Antonio's personal cause.[164] As with the ethical darkness hanging over Shylock at the play's close, the emotional shadow on Antonio – especially apparent in glittering Belmont – is either played up or down in performance.

At the beginning of Act 5, 'Balthazar' has apparently retreated from the narrative, 'his' gap closed. But Portia continues to challenge limiting definitions that restrict her orderly identity – even ironically with regard to her wifely virtue: 'Pardon me, Bassanio / For by this ring, the doctor lay with me'.[165] In her own admission – as well as in the style of her argument – Portia is still the teasing lawyer: Balthazar remains present in her presence. Portia's overt playing of the gap continues, then, to produce the narrative – and to direct its subjects – as it draws to a close. Unlike Viola, who never speaks again after she has agreed to change into her 'woman's weeds',[166] Portia instructs her party to 'go in'[167] and listen to her account of the drama we

[163] 4.1.387.
[164] Antonio's friendship with Bassanio is usually imagined as a homosexual one. Both merchants of Venice lose their 'bonds' in this dark comedy named after them.
[165] 5.1.257-8.
[166] 'Twelfth Night', 5.3.260.
[167] 5.1.296.

have just witnessed – to expose to them the gaps. She is, in all her manner of conduct, ‘triumphant’ in a way that Viola never seems to be.

Portia was one of Terry’s first important Shakespearean roles, and one of her most successful. She played the part in the Bancrofts’ production at the Prince of Wales’s Theatre in 1875, to great acclaim, despite the production’s mixed critical reception.[168] Charles Hiatt described it as ‘a failure redeemed by the unqualified personal triumph of Ellen Terry’, and quotes the rapturous report in ‘The Daily News’ of Terry’s characterisation:

> The bold innocence, the lively wit and quick intelligence, the grace and elegance of manner, and all the youth and freshness of this exquisite creation can rarely have been depicted in such harmonious combination…Nor is there to be found in it a trace of the ‘pedantry and affectation’ which distinguished critics have erroneously imagined to be essential features of the character.[169]

Terry described the ‘elation’ and ‘triumph’ she felt when playing the role, claiming never to have experienced the same ‘feeling of the conqueror’ as she did during the short run of that production: ‘it was’, she declares, ‘as Portia that I had my first and last sense of it’.[170] The production ran for only three weeks, apparently because of Charles Coughlan’s poor performance as Shylock. Terry’s rather brutal assessment was that ‘Coghlan’s Shylock was not even bad. It was *nothing*’, so that ‘[p]eople felt that they were witnessing a great play with a

[168] The play opened on 17th April, 1875, at the Prince of Wales’s Theatre, under the management of Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft (Marie Wilton), 1867-79.
[169] Hiatt, pp. 72-3.
[170] Terry, *Memoirs*, pp. 86-7.

great part cut out'.[171] When Irving's production opened at the Lyceum on 1st November 1879, with Terry as Portia, it was Irving who took on the role of Shylock.

The production was, according to Terry, 'a safe "draw" both in England and America'.[172] During its first run, however, Terry was criticised in *Blackwood's Magazine* for her lack of decorum as Portia in the Casket Scene (Act 3, Scene 3): for showing 'too much of what Rosalind calls "a coming-on disposition"' in her 'bearing towards her lover'.[173] It was a criticism Terry claimed, 'affected me for years, and made me self-conscious and uncomfortable'.[174] Terry justified her open display of affection through two examples in Shakespeare's text: one being Bassanio's confidence that '[s]ometimes from her eyes / I did receive fair speechless messages';[175] and the other, Portia's confession (*before* Bassanio's choosing) that '[o]ne half of me is yours, the other half yours – / Mine own, I would say, but if mine, then yours, / And so all yours'.[176] The ready commitment Terry played in Portia here seems in line with my reading of her willingness, as the gap, to engage directly with Real energy – with full awareness of the risk involved. Her emotional agency – reminiscent of Juliet's – draws Bassanio into dramatic immediacy with her presence, beyond the formal rules of the game, and yet, fortuitously, in accordance with them – since Bassanio makes the appropriate choice of casket. Terry's acting choice was, then, for my thesis, an appropriate one.

The same reviewer apparently challenged the tone she adopted as Balthazar, too, in the trial scene: commenting that '[t]he words are spoken, but so spoken that one marvels they should

[171] Terry, p. 87.
[172] Ibid., p. 141.
[173] *Blackwood's Magazine*, Edinburgh (1879), qtd. in Terry, p. 141.
[174] Terry, p. 141.
[175] 1.1.162-3.
[176] 3.2.16-8.

issue from the lips of one who looks so little in earnest'.[177] From Terry's defence, it is clear that her performance of the scene was heavily influenced by the characterisations of other actors in the scene. As I said in an earlier chapter,[178] Terry was particularly sensitive to Irving's acting choices, adapting her part, and her pace, to suit his in the overall dramatic context. This is the only scene in the play where the two actors would have confronted each other directly; and Terry explains, in her *Memoirs*, how Irving's acting choices for Shylock directly affected her playing of Portia. Her revelation that she made an 'entire revision' of her own part draws attention to her dramatic responsiveness:

> In "The Merchant of Venice" I found that Henry Irving's Shylock necessitated an entire revision of my conception of Portia, especially in the trial scene...I had considered, and still am of the same mind, that Portia ought to be very *quiet.* I saw an extraordinary effect in this quietness. But as Henry's Shylock was quiet, I had to give it up. His heroic saint was splendid, but it wasn't good for Portia.[179]

Bloom points out that 'Portia would cease to be sympathetic if Shylock were allowed to be a figure of overwhelming pathos'.[180] I agree that, for the balance of the play's *comic* energies, Shylock must figure as a traditional 'comic villain'. But there is something deeply unsettling about Shylock's potent dramatic presence that exceeds neat generic definitions – even outside our ethical concerns with the play's entrenched anti-Semitism. More disturbingly even than *Twelfth Night*'s Malvolio (a role also played by Irving), Shylock rides a vengeful, bitter and impassioned dramatic current that unsettles the romantic comedy of Portia and her Belmont

[177] *Blackwood's Magazine* (1879), qtd. in Terry, p. 142.
[178] See Chapter I: 'Lady Macbeth'; and 'Beatrice'.
[179] Terry, p. 128.
[180] Bloom, p. 171.

friends. Irving's portrayal, it seems, focused the spotlight on Shylock's jaundiced presence at the expense of Terry's Portia, and denied her, in performance, the agency that I have identified in Portia-Balthazar's dismantling of the legal scheme that is Shylock's obsession. Perhaps, though, her delivery of her lines as 'one who looked so little in earnest' could be interpreted as an ironic disclosure of the artificiality of the system by which Irving's Shylock set so much store.

Terry's dramatic flexibility has been recognised as one of her major strengths; but her adaptability, however 'useful'[181] to him, was not explicitly appreciated by Irving himself – who, Terry claims, 'never notices'.[182] Her analysis of fixity and change in dramatic technique is illuminating of her fluid responsiveness to the moment – and to another actor – when she argues that fixing 'is to lose the impression that I have created, not to increase its intensity'.[183] It is this capacity to respond to the momentary context that releases the vitality of her performance: not in subordination to the player of the primary role (Irving) but in being entirely, unrestrictedly *present*. Shaw points out – typically damningly of Irving – the urgent necessity for Terry's adaptability in the partnership: 'His [Irving's] method was so slow that it was almost impossible to act with him. She [Terry] had to stop too often and wait too long to sustain her part continuously when he was on the stage'.[184] But this availability to the pause seems to have been one of Terry's most significant and effective professional qualities.

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[181] Terry made much of the necessity for actors to be 'useful' to one another in role: '*Usefulness!*' she says in her *Memoirs*, 'is not a fascinating word, and the quality is not one of which the aspiring spirit can dream o' nights, yet on the stage it is the first thing to aim at. Not until we have learned to be useful can we afford to do what we like' (p. 35).

[182] Terry, qtd. in Auerbach, p. 203.

[183] Terry, p. 80.

[184] Shaw, 'Preface', *A Correspondence,* p. xxiv.

Auerbach describes Terry's mercurial stage presence as one 'impossible to recreate', since it 'elicited abstract rhapsodies, not precise descriptions'.[185] Such a response to Terry's magnetic quality might be considered a stereotypical one that sees actresses' performances as primarily decorative; but I think there is something more philosophically interesting about the contrast drawn between Terry's elusive dramatic presence and the sharply-drawn figure of Irving. Her great admirer, artist Walford Graham Robertson's description of her Portia, for all its hyperbole, reaches towards a distinction that seems to conjure something of the presence gap, as I have conceived it:

> The memory of the Lady's Portia…is like a dream of beautiful pictures in a scheme of gold melting into one another; the golden gown, the golden hair, the golden words all form a golden vision of romance and loveliness; but of Irving's Shylock I seem to remember every movement, every tone.[186]

This rhapsody expresses more than just rather cloying enthusiasm, I think; what is veiled in Robertson's words is an acknowledgement of Terry's capacity to elicit reaction, through her own reactiveness. Irving's performance was measurable, since fixed – however brilliantly. If Terry's exists only as indeterminate 'melting pictures' in the record, it is not because she did not prepare her part meticulously, but because her performance was, ultimately, responsive to the shifting energies of the dramatic moment. In Robertson's description, then, Terry's performance eludes the record that defines Irving's; it is an apt example of the performance of the excessive female gap – in life and in art.

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[185] Auerbach, p. 194.
[186] W. Graham Robertson, *Life Was Worth Living: The Reminiscences of W. Graham Robertson*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 55.

ROSALIND

To her great regret, Ellen Terry never played Rosalind on the professional stage.[187] Henry Irving avoided *As You Like It*, since it was not as *he* liked it: at least, none of the male roles – including, perhaps surprisingly, Jacques – appealed to him. But Terry was, according to her admirers, born to play the part of Rosalind. Indeed, her successful portrayals of other cross-dressed Shakespearean heroines – Portia and Imogen – were commended most significantly with reference to the role she never performed. *The Atheneum* reviewer of Irving's 1896 production of *Cymbeline* uses Terry's Imogen as a catalyst to lament her lost Rosalind: 'we have not gained from the superbly endowed and most winsome artist all that we have to hope. That she has not already been seen in Rosalind is a matter for surprise and complaint'.[188] Thomas Edgar Pemberton quotes Clement Scott, who also used Terry's Imogen as a veiled reproach to Irving:

> when we get to the Fidèle scenes then came the revelation, the touching of the heart, the true tears. There was only one remark in the house, 'Oh what a Rosalind she would have made!' And many added, 'and ought to make'.[189]

Pemberton goes on to describe Terry as the 'model Shakespearean boy'; but it is her imagined incarnation of Rosalind, and not her actual performance of Imogen, that provides him with the evidence:

[187] Dame Judi Dench is another great actress who never played the part professionally, but who would have been a superb Rosalind.

[188] *The Atheneum* (26th September, 1896), qtd. in Auerbach, p. 231.

[189] Scott, qtd. in Thomas Edgar Pemberton, *Ellen Terry and Her Sisters* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1920), pp. 284-5.

> The loss of such a Rosalind to the stage as Ellen Terry would, and must have been, has ever formed a subject for regret with her warmest and most enthusiastic admirers. If ever a woman lived who displayed in advance the temperament of Rosalind, it was Ellen Terry.[190]

Her 'lost' Rosalind became, according to Auerbach, 'more powerfully associated with Ellen Terry than the acceptable parts she did play', and 'to stand for [her] banished comic spirit and integrated self, for all of her wounding disjunctions from her roles'.[191]

This unsettling sense of role-disjunction was identified by Shaw early on in Terry's career as 'an impression of waywardness; of not quite fitting into her part and not wanting to'; and, he continues, 'she gave no indication of her full power, for which the part offered no scope'.[192] Shaw's comment, characteristically, not only flags up Terry's artistic capability, but also laments the limitation of her Shakespearean roles. In this thesis, I argue, against Shaw, that Shakespeare actively releases the female character from symbolic limitation – both poetically and dramaturgically. Terry's 'not quite fitting' is, I think, revealing of a more creative mismatch – more dramatically productive – than the editing of the actor's own personality to fit the character might suggest. The 'full power' that Shaw finds unrepresented in Terry's part is, for my thesis, the unrepresentable excess that actively haunts her performance – in life, as much as in art: the female gap that exceeds the limitations of female representation in and by the order. Terry's 'full power' could be explored in the dramatic excess released by her Shakespearean part; but only if the part were available to her. So, the excessive Rosalind,

[190] Pemberton, p. 286.
[191] Auerbach, p. 233.
[192] Shaw, 'Preface', pp. xx-xxi.

denied in her acting repertoire, could only haunt her other roles as a displaced kind of presence.[193]

Terry herself regretted her un-played Rosalind.[194] In her *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, she declares, 'I have been Beatrice! Would that I could say "I have been Rosalind". Would that the opportunity to play this part had come my way when I was in my prime!'; she goes on, 'I reckon it one of the greatest disappointments of my life that it did not!'; and she concludes, 'In my old age, I go on studying Rosalind, rather wistfully, I admit'.[195] She told the famous Shakespeare scholar Horace Howard Furness that, although she had never played Rosalind, she had 'longed for centuries to make the attempt'.[196] But Terry made her name, thanks to Irving, as a tragedienne. Auerbach observes that, '[l]ike a true Meredithian patriarch, Irving crowned her by subduing her comic spirit'; and she comments ironically that 'if Ellen Terry's impulse to laugh had not been mutilated into pathos, she would probably never have become a triumphant heroine'.[197] It is clear from Terry's *Memoirs* and her prolific written correspondence that the comic impulse was very natural to her; but laughter was, apparently, threatening to Irving, who guarded his dignity closely.[198] And seriousness, for women at least, was then – and perhaps still is – a pre-requisite for building status. In contemporary Victorian

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[193] As I have noted in Chapter II, 'Cleopatra'.
[194] The most substantial female part in Shakespeare's plays: with 736 lines (Orlando has 321).
[195] Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 97.
[196] 'To Dr Furness (1894)', *Furness Collection*, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, qtd. in Auerbach, p. 231.
[197] Auerbach, p. 233.
[198] Terry suggests that Irving never recovered from his early repertory experience in Dublin, where he continued his performance 'in spite of the howls of execration with which I was received'. (Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 130.).

feminist fiction, heroines were generally characterised as either martyrs or militants:[199] humour might seem to trivialise women's suffering.

But Terry used her humour as a protest – a response that might seem more deeply offensive than anger to both the perpetrators of oppression and the women who struggled beneath it. 'For both patriarchs and their most eloquent victims', as Auerbach says, 'oppression was more comfortable than comedy: both knew how to talk about the roles of master and victim, but from a woman at least, they could not face a laughter that transcended and subverted all roles'.[200] Terry, nevertheless, found – even in her tragic Shakespearean roles – scope to release a more ambiguous kind of dramatic agency than the conventional female parts she played would ordinarily allow. And it might be claimed that the full range of her personal power could be freed *only* here: in playing the women who perform the presence of the gap more overtly than she could herself. Auerbach says of Terry's Portia, '[t]he most intent spectators' might see something more of Terry herself emanating from the role: 'the ghost of an Ellen Terry, rarer, freer, and funnier than the woman who was making herself assiduously useful on the stage'.[201] I suggest that this 'ghost' is affectively and dramatically present as the excessive female gap, available only in the moment of her performance.

It is an irony for my thesis that Terry's Rosalind was a gap in her own repertoire: that she was denied the chance to play the part that most clearly demonstrates the freedom of the gap's

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[199] Examples in women's writing: Jane Eyre (Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, 1847); Maggie Tulliver (George Eliot, *Mill on the Floss*, 1860); Dorothea Brooke (George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1871-2).
[200] Auerbach, p. 234.
[201] Ibid., p. 224.

presence in performance. Auerbach imagines Terry's lost comic part haunting her performances from above:

> The comedienne Ellen Terry might have been, instead of the beloved woman she was, hovered over the theatre like a poltergeist, hinting to all who entered of identities beyond the acceptable.[202]

But I want to suggest that those 'identities beyond the acceptable' that Auerbach imagines were as present as was the 'beloved woman' – not beyond identity in some ghostly way, but operating as its actively-informing excess. And, as a comic excess, it performs a peculiarly inclusive and positive accommodation of multiplicity and fluidity – in line with the life-affirming impulse of Shakespeare's comedies.

In *As You Like It*, the disguised heroine exposes the limitations of orderly identity in a similar way to Viola and Portia in their plays. All three release another version of themselves that performs a differently-gendered role. But there is an extra comic twist in Rosalind's symbolic splitting: so that Rosalind-who-plays-Ganymede also plays a consciously scripted 'Rosalind'; and this 'Rosalind' is posited as the object of Orlando's desire, so that he can hone his wooing technique, for (the original) Rosalind's sake. This 'Rosalind' is, of course, *assumed* to be a construct by Orlando – who knows she is a mere role played by Ganymede; but Ganymede is also *both* Rosalinds, not only in playing the roles, but in *being* the object of Orlando's desire, according to orderly definition. So, Rosalind is Ganymede, who is also, and equally, 'Rosalind'; and all three are congruent in the body of the actress[203] who plays the role – all present only

[202] Auerbach, p. 234.
[203] For my theory, the actor who performs the female part is also female.

for their time on stage. At the end of this comic exercise in fluid identity – played for laughs in a way Viola's and Portia's games are not – Rosalind takes her multiple selves off back to the court: assimilating the excessive Ganymede as one of her 'rarer, freer, and funnier' fluid selves; unless, of course, we find, more conventionally, that the gap really does close with the re-establishment of the order – with Ganymede left behind in a lost Arden.

There is, I think, something especially illuminating of the gap in Rosalind's self-conscious performing of the imaginary 'Rosalind' in Arden. Here, it is not that Rosalind uses her Ganymede persona as a mask through which to reveal *herself*, but that she offers to Orlando his imaginary 'Rosalind' as she might appear in the conventional terms legible by the order. Jean E. Howard describes the 'Rosalind' that Rosalind-Ganymede impersonates as 'the logical conclusion of Orlando's romantic, Petrarchan construction of her'.[204] In playing one of the parts 'scripted for women by her culture', Rosalind-Ganymede exposes the 'constructed nature of patriarchy's representations of the feminine and shows a woman manipulating those representations in her own interest'.[205] The 'Rosalind' produced symbolically by Ganymede, is more recognisably present – since more readable – to Orlando than would be the fluid Rosalind-Ganymede. What Rosalind's parody draws serious attention to is the arbitrary and limited nature of identity. The 'Rosalind' who is representative of the constructed feminine of the masculinist order might have been enough for Orlando; but we hope that Rosalind-Ganymede-'Rosalind' will continue to take her space, and perform her agency visibly in a more flexible future order.

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[204] Jean E. Howard, 'Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggles in Early Modern England' (1988), in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. by Leah Marcus (London: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2012), p. 351.
[205] Ibid.

The identity slippage between 'Rosalind' and Rosalind-Ganymede provides the central comedy of the play – and is made amusingly clear to on-and-off-stage audiences. Although Orlando considers that his desire for his imagined 'Rosalind' has, during the game, been provoked entirely through his own 'thinking', and can be satisfied once Rosalind-Ganymede 'set[s] her before [his] eyes tomorrow, human as she is, and without any danger',[206] the situation is more complex than this. The obvious identity slippage draws attention to the undisclosed one: that between Rosalind and Ganymede – of which Orlando is, of course, unaware. But, because of this, there is, in the symbolic game they are playing, an energy released that is more than symbolic: more actively and dramatically produced by Rosalind's multiple identity. This energy is, I suggest, the Real force of their attraction, catalysed in the dynamic relation between the fluid Rosalind and Orlando: the gap and the order. Orlando's desire has been provoked, then, not through 'thinking' about 'Rosalind', but through his dramatic encounter with the multiple Rosalind.

This leads me to a consideration of the changing nature of this desire through the course of the play – which I shall briefly trace. Before their removal to Arden, Orlando and Rosalind have, separately, acknowledged their initial attraction: an emotional event that immediately precedes, whilst not directly precipitating, the political rupture of their separate retreat from the hierarchical structure of the court at the end of Act 1. Celia, Rosalind's cousin and confidante, identifies Rosalind's emotional disturbance in her uncharacteristic reserve:

> *Celia*: Why cousin, why Rosalind! Cupid have mercy, not a word?
>
> *Rosalind*: Not one to throw at a dog.

[206] Shakespeare, 'As You Like It', ed. by Francis X. Connor, 5.2.39, 51-2.

Celia: No, thy words are too precious to be cast away upon curs. Throw some of them at me. Come, lame me with reasons.

Rosalind: Then there were two cousins laid up, when the one should be lamed with reasons and the other mad without any.[207]

The madness to which she confesses is exhibited as a loss of reason that absents her from the order – lays her up.[208] And Orlando's linguistic facility is, apparently, similarly arrested by the presence of 'heavenly Rosalind':[209] he asks himself, 'What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue? / I cannot speak to her, yet she urged conference'.[210] This is reminiscent of Othello's inarticulacy at the onset of sudden passion for Desdemona, and of Macbeth's raptness in the presence of the witches. Desire is, in Lacanian theory, Real: the excessive remainder of the order that unsettles its subjects with its extra-ordinary power – felt as unassuageable longing.[211] As Lacan has it:

> [D]esire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting.[212]

The precarious subject, however, imagines that his desire can be satisfied in the 'other'; and, by conceiving of that other as the locus of his desire, he preserves his – and their own – imagined unity. What Shakespeare's characters learn is that desire has a voiding function, so

[207] 1.3.1-6.
[208] Like Lady Macbeth and Ophelia (See Chapter I).
[209] 1.2.235.
[210] 1.2.203-4.
[211] I find the final two lines of Robert Browning's poem, 'Two in the Campagna' (1855) - 'Infinite passion, and the pain / Of finite hearts that yearn' – illuminating of this experience of desire. In *The Poems of Robert Browning*, ed. by Tim Cook (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), p. 354.
[212] Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', *Écrits*, p. 287.

that the desiring subject loses self-determination in the gap that renders their singular identity precarious and the definition of the 'other' uncertain.

But dramatic comedy is, as Joseph W. Meeker has observed, 'the art of accommodation and reconciliation',[213] and the void opens here very differently from the way it does in Shakespeare's tragedies. In *As You Like It*, it reveals itself with a paradoxically conservative force that, whilst performing ruptures in the subject and in the wider narrative, provides an energetic space wherein subjectivity can be more safely negotiated outside the strictures of the hierarchical order. The female gap harnesses its disruptive energy positively to produce and support narrative futurism.[214] Interestingly and importantly in this play, though, female presence performs a much more visible gap in the narrative than in either *Twelfth Night* or *The Merchant of Venice.* Although Viola and Portia, as multiple presences, shape the historical narrative for a time, from outside of its frame, their symbiotic relationship with its progression is, as I have discussed, much more intense. In *As You Like It*, on the other hand, the gap is given greater dramatic space: with the narrative pared back, becoming the rather ordinary vehicle – really only a sketch – for the play's extra-ordinary energy.

In the play's ordinary narrative terms, then, nothing much seems to happen. But the 'nothing much' is, in dramatic terms, extra-ordinarily active and purposeful; and I shall suggest that it is in this play that the female gap is performed, most significantly of all, as dramatically *primary*. The patriarchal narrative of inheritance and political power with which the play opens quickly peters out, opening up a void – in Arden – that facilitates a more expansive, non-linear and inter-subjective kind of flourishing. In Lacanian terms, the presence of the subject in the

[213] Joseph W. Meeker, 'The Comic Mode' (1996), in *As You Like It: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 233.
[214] See my discussion of Edelman's *No Future*, in 'Viola' and 'Portia'.

void is, of course, impossible: since subjectivity can only arise from the energy-split that assimilates the nameable subject into the socio-symbolic order, where it is imagined as whole. But my own concept of the female gap can, I think, accommodate a more positive vision of the void: that finds it, as the generator of being, not only subject-threatening, but also actively productive of an enriched network of newly-connected, ethical subjects in precarious balance. Subjective independence, achieved through the kind of desperate self-assertion witnessed in Shakespeare's tragic heroes, is the ambition of the order, and of historical patriarchy. In existential theory, the (male) subject is voided through exposure to dangerous Real energy that undermines its systems of identity control. But, if the female gap in representation is opened up, to facilitate the easier passage of Real energy through its more flexible boundaries, the order might become less rigid and allow for the presence of a greater variety of flexible identities with their respective and mutually-achieved agencies.

If this all sounds naïvely utopian, it also seems appropriate to a dramatic reading of Shakespeare's experimental Arden space, with its playful, free energy. Although Arden has a voiding function – since the subjects of the court are disorientated and their identities dissolved – Rosalind opens a gap there that enables their regeneration, recasting them for a more hopeful renewed narrative. Unlike the order reaffirmed in the closing stages of Shakespeare's tragedies, the projected future of Duke Senior's court is to be shaped by the subjects who emerge, differently and *together*, from the disturbing and reconfiguring void: there is, in the comic resolution, a confidence that the old order will indeed change, and that the inclusive and allowing spirit of Arden will be carried forth into a new world of shared community. It is, surely, resonant with us that the productively various ecological model of

the forest is set against, and then finally – and promisingly – projected into, the re-educated man-made court.

In her essay, '*As You Like It*: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending', Anne Barton proposes that the play 'derives much of its classical stability and poise from the fact that its plot barely exists'.[215] Rather than relying on 'a complex story line' for its forward movement, the comedy derives its dramatic momentum from 'shifts in the grouping of characters'.[216] She refers to Henri Focillon's description of classicism as a 'condition of poise: "a brief, perfectly balanced instant of complete possession of forms"', where the poise is 'not a slow and monotonous application of "rules"', but a 'stability, security, following upon experimental unrest';[217] and she suggests that *As You Like It* is 'in Focillon's sense, Shakespeare's classical comedy'.[218] The plot, she continues, is subordinated to 'an intricate structure of meetings between characters, a concentration upon attitudes rather than action', with the result that the 'normal functions of plot are fulfilled almost entirely by form';[219] so that 'a curious stillness' is produced 'at the heart of the play'.[220] The 'stillness' Barton identifies is, I think, 'curious' precisely because it is extra-ordinary; and 'still' only in terms of narrative demands. If figured as the productive void, the stillness can be found to be paradoxically more *energetic* – since less fixed – than the conventional and sequential events of a plot. Indeed, Barton's reading reaches towards mine

[215] Anne Barton, '*As You Like It*: Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending', *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (1994), in *As You Like It: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 248.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid., p. 247.
[218] Ibid.
[219] See my discussion of Guy-Bray's queer theory in 'Viola'.
[220] Barton, p. 248.

in her description of Arden as ‘a place people yield themselves for a time to the extraordinary, and emerge transformed’.[221]

The Arden gap is, then, a dramatic space where identity is rendered negotiable and multiple. For the characters who are banished there, there is both danger and opportunity: danger, because the narrative void denies their security as delimited subjects of the order; opportunity, in that they are released from subjection to the limiting conditions of their birth, gender and occupation. Their banishment – or what Linda Woodbridge terms ‘rustication’[222] – is not only a political punishment, but also an extra-ordinary dramatic liberation from the hierarchical structure. For example, Orlando escapes his low status as Sir Roland de Bois's disinherited youngest son and subordination to his elder brother, Oliver. He is, in any case, already only partially represented there, since, as Louis Adrian Montrose has pointed out, ‘in a rigorously hierarchical and patriarchal society…full social identity tends to be limited to propertied adult males who are the heads of households’.[223] Orlando's retreat to Arden is, he himself declares, a move to reclaim ‘[t]he spirit of my father’ that ‘begins to / mutiny against this servitude’.[224] This statement of filial piety also, and paradoxically, releases him from the filial position that disenfranchises him. In Arden, Orlando is nobody's son – no longer one of the boys (Bois) of the court: his ‘rustication’ produces him afresh, as a mock-shepherd, strongly attracted to a girl-masquerading-as-a-boy, who both is, and also impersonates, the woman he claims to love.

[221] Barton, p. 248.
[222] Linda Woodbridge, ‘Country Matters: *As You Like It* and the Pastoral-Bashing Impulse’, in *As You Like It: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 274.
[223] Louis Adrian Montrose, ‘“The Place of a Brother” in *As You Like It*: Social Process and Comic Form’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 32:1 (1981) 28-54 (p. 24).
[224] 1.1.16-7.

Subjective identity is, then, exposed in Arden as dramatically flexible and replaceable, as the script demands. As Cynthia Marshall has asked, '[W]hat is the love-cure but a glorification of the symbol's substitutive power, an intoxicating revelry in the capacity of language to construct a character, a relationship, a love affair?'.[225] But although Orlando accepts Ganymede's claim 'I am your Rosalind'[226] at the *linguistic* level – since he 'take[s] some joy to say you are, because I would be talking of her'[227] – such an acceptance draws attention to the claim's artifice, and thus suggests that something, someone, *more real* underlies the symbolic act. Here, the substantial actor appears to be Ganymede. But Ganymede is, as we know, a role assumed by the Rosalind who 'did suit me at all points like a man'[228] in order to enter the Forest of Arden safely – and Rosalind is, of course, Shakespeare's own linguistic construct: a scripted role, played (originally) by a boy actor. But, sadly, not by Ellen Terry.

Here, it is clear that there is an essential absence – a gap – that is made present by the linguistic signifier, as, for example, in Sigmund Freud's *Fort/Da* (gone/here) formulation,[229] where the signifier accesses a mental image, or memory, not a present and substantive signified. In Arden, however, the name is not a direct substitute for the person who is absent, but, rather, seems to call the absence itself dramatically into being: so that a new 'Rosalind' is produced by her naming. Whilst the artifice of producing 'Rosalind' is generally acknowledged, 'Ganymede' is recognised as insubstantial only by Rosalind, Celia and the audience; and Rosalind herself provides the original layer of linguistic displacement, since she is not, of

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[225] Cynthia Marshall, 'Constructions of Negation in *As You Like It*', in *As You Like It: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 388.
[226] 4.1.68.
[227] 4.2.67-8.
[228] 1.3.105.
[229] See Sigmund Freud's theory of absence and presence in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other* Writings, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 53.

course, absolutely identifiable with the bodily presence of the actor. Lacan describes the essence of human discourse as the introduction of a symbol that 'opens up the world of negativity, which constitutes both the discourse of the human subject and the reality of his world in so far as it is human'.[230] In this linguistic reality, the *thing* that coincides imperfectly with the *symbol* is itself elusive. The disjunction between the signifier and the elusive signified produces an excess that is more dramatically present – more *real* – than either: this is the vital gap, present beyond and yet within the symbolic system, in the moment of its energy-play.

Marshall's observation that the 'demonstration of [any] character's purely linguistic reality is gravely taxing to theatrical mimesis'[231] misses this gap, but is useful in underlining the existential threat posed by the symbolic order to those disenfranchised by the signifying structure. If female presence is truly unrepresentable – being a gap in the delimiting narrative – then its impact on any narrative future must be difficult to describe; and I have illustrated this point in the detachment of Desdemona, Lady Macbeth and Ophelia from their plays' schemes. In *As You Like It*, however, Shakespeare dramatises female presence in performable symbolic terms that conserve – even create – its material flexibility: rather than delimiting its fluid possibility through simple signification, Shakespeare's language, conversely, somehow activates and sustains the gap's enactable multiplicity. I argue that, in this comedy most explicitly, Shakespeare harnesses the energy of the female gap in extra-ordinary dramatic terms that open up Lacan's 'world of negativity' in a kind of fourth dimension that is not 'purely linguistic', but is actively *performable*, excessive possibility.

[230] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, trans. by John Forrester, ed. by Jacques Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 173.
[231] Marshall, p. 388.

A hint of such possibility is inscribed in Oliver's response to Celia's question, 'Was't you that did so oft contrive to kill [Orlando]?':[232] to which he replies, ''Twas I, but 'tis not I'.[233] Oliver's self is re-negotiated not through absolute transformation but through a linguistic negation: one that produces a new identity that does not entirely replace the old one (since they are both 'I'), but enables the slippage – the gap between the thing and the symbol – to be dramatically present. What emerges is a kind of excessive third presence that incorporates both the old Oliver and the new one, but is not merely either. This example does, of course, highlight the arbitrary nature of symbolic definition: we are what we say we are. But Shakespeare suspends the absolute conversion of one definition to another by holding alternative identities in tension, and in dramatising the gap – the excessive remainder – between them. The example I have quoted makes clear the linguistic split in male subjectivity; but the 'I-but-not-I' formulation of female identity is more explicitly dramatic in being also a condition of *spatial* concurrency rather than of temporal lapse. Being unavailable to 'his-story', female multiple identity is visible always and only in the dramatic *present*.

The presence of the gap is activated, then, more obviously and elaborately in Rosalind's multiple identity in Arden, where Rosalind-Ganymede-'Rosalind' opens a double gap from which the excessive remainder emerges as dramatic presence. None of these three symbolic alternatives is absolute, nor are they mutually exclusive, since this multiple identity cannot be read as the equation, Rosalind=Ganymede='Rosalind'. Lacan's 'world of negativity' is apparent in the uncountable remainder produced by Rosalind's identity-shift: what escapes the act of redefinition is all that cannot be assimilated by the changed signifier. And, in Arden, this

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[232] 4.3.130.
[233] 4.3.131.

remainder is made apparent as a fully-present, dramatic character, who is, nevertheless, unreadable as a singular identity.

It would be convenient to assume that the only Rosalind who can leave Arden is the woman Orlando made the object of his desire in Duke Frederick's court – a woman in his eyes as conventional as the 'Rosalind' cynically produced by Ganymede's masquerade. This 'Rosalind' is exposed as a delimited and inadequate feminine construction by Celia's outraged reproof: 'You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate';[234] but she is also produced, ironically, as an acceptable version of femininity in Orlando's playful reception of Ganymede's 'very, very Rosalind'.[235] Orlando seemingly commits himself to neither of these Rosalinds when he confesses his love to 'her that is not here, nor doth not hear'.[236] It is an *absent* Rosalind of whom he asks, 'why blame you me to love you?'.[237] Rosalind's absence is, however, complicated by the fact that she is also present in the figure of Ganymede. But Ganymede is not only, nor entirely, Rosalind: she is the gap (the 'nothing'), as discussed above, between the *signifier* and the *thing* – the name and the woman – and it is to this presence gap that Orlando finally dedicates himself.

It might seem that the gap can be visibly present only in Arden: a rural playing-space for the negotiation of these lovers' identities. Certainly, we never witness their proposed return to the court. But Rosalind-Ganymede is the central consciousness of Arden; and although she plans, with Celia, to leave the forest '[*as themselves*]',[238] in her appearance as the Epilogue

[234] 4.1.157.
[235] 4.1.53.
[236] 5.2.88.
[237] 5.2.86.
[238] [Stage direction] 5.4.89-90.

she presents yet another identity, achieved momentarily beyond the forest and beyond the court. In his essay, 'Fiction and Friction' in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that Rosalind's 'improvisational self-fashioning' is temporary, and 'longs for self-effacement and reabsorption in the community' at the end of the play:

> [T]he unique qualities of [Rosalind's] identity – those that give Rosalind her independence, her sharply etched individuality – will not, as Shakespeare conceives the play, endure: they are bound up with exile, disguise and freedom from ordinary constraint, and they will vanish, along with the playful chafing, when the play is done.[239]

But I think that Rosalind's 'unique qualities' cohere as a more fluid presence than Greenblatt's 'sharply-etched individuality' might suggest: and it may be precisely her *lack* of clear subjective boundary that makes her character so compellingly present. Furthermore, if her qualities are 'bound up with exile', that exile is the condition of the female gap itself. The 'long[ing] for self-effacement' Greenblatt describes is apt only if the 'self-effacement' involves a dissolution of limiting singularity and an embrace of a multiplicity of selves. The final point is that, 'when the play is done', all the characters – whether ordinary or extra-ordinary – will, of course, 'vanish'. But I shall argue that Rosalind-Ganymede is, whilst the play lasts, *always* excessive – not only, and more obviously, in the metatheatrical dimension of the Epilogue, but also in what can never be absorbed by the 'ordinary constraint' of the 'community'.

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[239] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Fiction and Friction', *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 90-1.

Without Rosalind-Ganymede as its central (and multiple) consciousness, Arden would be merely a physical locus for the unfolding of a rather slow linear narrative. But Arden could, according to my theory, be conceived of as the externalised and dramatised environment of the void: filtered into the order through the presence of Rosalind-Ganymede, as both a Real threat to the security of the delimited subject (Orlando, Phoebe, the symbolic 'Rosalind') and – in this *comic* mode – a positive source of personal flexibility. Immersion in the secular baptismal capacity of Arden does not offer the courtiers complete freedom from responsibility to the order, however. As in the Classical literary pastoral mode – which could be considered Arden's model – removal from *negotium* to *otium* is not a release from political obligation, but a shift in its focus: in the 'golden world',[240] immersion in the capitalist network of exchange and transaction is replaced by concern for community and a valuing of the people who comprise it. This does not mean, though, that the alternative forest court is a countercultural, escapist fantasy of love and peace, in which all negative experience is denied: the inhabitants of the Arden are exposed to physical discomfort – 'the icy fang / And churlish chiding of the winter's wind'[241] – and emotional disorientation, played out, if often humorously, in the desires of Touchstone, Orlando and Phoebe. There is nothing simple about this natural space; it offers, rather, a challenging arena for the pitching of human experience within the challenging complexities of the wider ecological system. As Joseph W. Meeker puts it:

> If a 'return to nature' were to be based upon a model of a climax ecosystem, civilisation would have to become far more complex than anything man has yet produced. Human values could no longer be based on the assumption that man is alone at the center of

[240] 1.1.90.
[241] 2.1.6-7.

> creation; allowance would have to be made for the welfare of all the plants, animals, and land of the natural environment. Mankind would have to cultivate a new and more elaborate mentality capable of understanding intricate processes without destroying them. Ecology challenges mankind to vigorous complexity, not passive simplicity.[242]

Touchstone describes the ambivalent pleasure of the pastoral idyll in his reply to old Corin's question, 'And how like you the shepherd's life, Mr. Touchstone?':

> *Clown*: Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in
> respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary,
> I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life.
> Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is
> not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life – look you – it fits my
> humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against
> my stomach.[243]

The ambivalence he amusingly identifies very clearly chimes, more seriously, with the disorientating condition of the void – as I have conceived it – that is here represented by the Arden dramatic space: where the performance of multiple identity is explicitly dramatised, and relationships re-negotiated. It is my contention that the conserving power of nature that threatens the position of egocentric man as director of a superior order exemplifies the dramatic conserving influence of the female gap. And if the tragic mode, as both a pattern of behaviour and its literary representation, is a masculinist strategy for achieving ultimate

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[242] Meeker, p. 233.
[243] 3.2.12-8.

individualist ascendancy, then the comic mode is a more ambitious, and more feminist, communal approach to the resolution of conflict. And if the existential split intrinsic to subjectivity is experienced as essential conflict – a struggle for survival – then the tragic (male) response, as dramatised in Shakespeare's plays, is one that seeks the ruthless eradication of all opposition; and the comic (female) response – less aggressive, but no less active – has a more conservative character, where divisions are accommodated and negotiated: as a method less wasteful, and more productive, of a richer resolution. It may not be so heroic as would be the pursuit of a fixed ideal, but the comic approach to survival is *provisionality*. But this more flexible approach is, I suggest, far from being either simple or safe: assimilating, as it does, the Hegelian split. It is an activity of, in Meeker' s words, 'vigorous complexity, not passive simplicity'. And, to quote Meeker again (ignoring his generic masculine noun and pronouns):

> If the lesson of ecology is balance and equilibrium, the lesson of comedy is humility and endurance. The comic mode of human behavior represented in literature is the closest art has come to describing man as an adaptive animal. Comedy illustrates that survival depends upon man's ability to change himself rather than his environment, and upon his ability to accept limitations rather than to curse fate for limiting him.[244]

As You Like It's Arden is not, then, an idyll of ease and simplicity, where the characters find release from serious business; it is, conversely, less time out than time *in*, with serious exposure to the risk of identity-dissolution. Both Rosalind and Orlando leave their melancholy behind on entering the Arden-space; but the gloom that hangs over the beginning of the play

[244] Meeker, pp. 233-4.

cannot be so easily dispersed. The melancholy energy associated with the order cannot be simply lost, but is contained and dramatised in the character of Jacques, who, as Marshall observes, 'takes on the melancholic burden set down by the other characters upon their entry into Arden'.[245] With Jacques dramatised as the symbol of universal melancholia, the other characters are, in Marshall's words, 'freed to practice the proliferating substitutions of happy linguistic function'.[246] But in his final departure to join Duke Frederick in the forest, Jacques closes off this artificial freedom: Barton observes that 'his withdrawal at the end impoverishes the comic society…Like a ship which has suddenly jettisoned its ballast, the play no longer rides quite evenly in the waves'.[247]

But I agree with Marshall that Jacques positively bequeaths his melancholy to the other characters in the final scene: for their uncertain futures beyond Arden, where their pleasures will always be mixed with pain. The playful void, in which 'the easy erotic attractions…proliferate'[248] is recalibrated with the 'reassertion of gendered order and heterosexual coupling'.[249] But the phenomenon of fluid identity is not entirely, I think, 'bequeathed' to Arden – since Rosalind takes Ganymede with her, as a very present part of her identit(ies) in the new order. Marshall says that '[b]oth Orlando and Rosalind must disavow an aspect of desire that has emerged in Arden so that a proper marriage can occur'.[250] But my more positive view is that Rosalind need not disavow Ganymede in their 'proper marriage', her multiplicity being actively accommodated within a more adaptive and complex

[245] Marshall, p. 393.
[246] Ibid., p. 394.
[247] Barton, p. 171.
[248] Marshall, p. 394.
[249] Ibid., p. 395.
[250] Ibid.

comic union. If comedy is, as Meeker says, the 'art of accommodation and reconciliation', then this, rather than tragedy, offers us the more viable dramatic mode for performing the extra-ordinary, and, so, is more enabling of the performative freedom of the female gap.

This availability of comedy to dramatic agency is, perhaps, why Terry identified Rosalind as her most natural Shakespearean part: as the heroine who exhibits most adequately her own fluid agency, and holds up for scrutiny the 'woman's part' created and used for her own purposes. Rosalind could also, in her activity within and yet beyond the order, be considered a prototype of Victorian female agency at its most creative and positive. Terry's willing presentation of herself in roles others designed for her allowed her ironically to preserve a personal mobility excessive to the 'acceptable' and 'beloved woman' that Irving – and her conventional audiences – expected her to play. All of her roles were, she claimed, equally her selves and not her selves. In her letter to Charles Coleman, written in 1902, she describes her vision of a free self of myriad character thus:

> I nowadays think that in 'another & better world than this'(!) I may (?) open my eyes and say, 'oh Bottom how art thou translated!!!' & find no E.T. left but some creature begotten of Portia Beatrice Imogen Rosalind Volumnia Cordelia Hamlet Cesar Silvius!!![251]

Auerbach describes Terry's 'intense responsiveness to the roles that were her primary education'.[252] And, in her *Memoirs*, Terry writes, 'I have always been more woman than artist'.[253] But for her – as for Rosalind, the two are the same. There is nothing defeatist, I think,

[251] Letter to Charles Coleman (11th March, 1902), qtd. in Auerbach, p. 222.
[252] Auerbach, p. 135.
[253] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 120.

about the way in which Terry approached her part, and the way she played the 'beloved woman': since her spirit was essentially comic, in accepting and affirming her multiplicity of roles – those seen and those unseen, and un-played. She declares – again in her *Memoirs* – that she 'would always rather make people laugh than see them weep'[254] and her description of Shakespeare's comic heroines as 'Triumphant Women'[255] underlines her association of comedy with active female presence – and with her own particular kind of agency.

[254] Terry, p. 254.
[255] Ibid., *Four Lectures*, pp. 79-122.

Chapter IV

The Numinous Gap

Shakespeare’s Last Women

IMOGEN
HERMIONE

IMOGEN

In *As You Like It*, the narrative is, as I have shown, apparently hijacked by the gap, in a deliberate theatrical experiment: where the subjects of the court are exposed to the levelling – and threatening – energies of an Arden that collapses man-made individualism into community.[1] The network of relations between the order and its gaps achieves, in this space, a more than usual visibility that renders linear narrative-demands secondary. The drama that emerges is the effect of the dynamic action of the fluid gap on the order – dissolving and dispersing identities. But the comedic female gap is intimately concerned with producing narrative *futures*; it actively engenders (re)new(ed) subjects that may emerge more flexibly in their relationship with one another – and so, in the process, the gap works to remake the system itself.

The female gap that expands for a time to overwhelm the linear narrative in *As You Like It*, is, I think, re-balanced, but not reabsorbed, by the narrative of Shakespeare's late plays: so that it occupies a more equal and relative space in the dynamic composition. These later, sophisticated dramatic environments produce a kind of diffused subjectivity – exhibited in the workings of multiple-character and multiple-plot; so that numerous character-presences share the spotlight equally, revealing only their performative exteriority – and denying us privileged interior access. Without the focusing mechanism of an intimacy with any particular perspective, the narrative reveals itself to be more unpredictable and disparate,[2] with meaning available only in glimpses. George Eliot's famous pier-glass image that opens Chapter

[1] In Chapter III ('Rosalind').
[2] Drama is, of course, the most appropriate medium for the generation of democratic perspectives.

27 of *Middlemarch*, is illuminating of this kind of existential randomness – where its rationalisation is achieved only in the individual subjective effort:

> Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun.[3]

Each scratch has its own intensity and shape – its own integrity; and the spaces between the scratches are as significant as the markings in the overall pattern – throwing into relief the randomness of their dimension and direction, when devoid of the centralising influence of the ego.

Much has been made, over the past fifty years or so, of the self-conscious dramaturgy of the late plays and of *Cymbeline*, in particular: Frank Kermode described it as Shakespeare's 'desire to experiment in a new kind of play, in which probabilities and personalities count for less than *coups de theatre*';[4] Arthur C. Kirsch considered that 'its dramatic effect is to keep the audience at least partially disengaged from…the action and the characters';[5] and Richard David also emphasised the play's experimental quality, stating that 'at the end of his theatrical career Shakespeare was prepared to take hair-raising short-cuts in order to get his crucial situations onto the stage with the maximum expedition'.[6] But the play offers, I think, much more than a demonstration of sensational theatrical tricks, or a parade of Shakespeare's 'greatest hits',

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[3] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-2), ed. by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), p. 264.
[4] Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare: The Final Plays* (London: Longman's, 1963), pp. 21-2.
[5] Arthur C. Kirsch, '*Cymbeline* and Coterie Dramaturgy', *EHL*, 34 (1967), 285-306, qtd. in Roger Warren (ed.), 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 10.
[6] Richard David, *Shakespeare in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 181.

however impressively they are staged. And what is regarded as its fundamental weakness – its resistance to coherent interpretation – could be, I shall suggest, conversely its major strength.

The effect of the distancing Kirsch speaks of is not necessarily, I think, to reduce the play's potential for our engagement, but, importantly for my thesis, to decentralise the masculinist narrative, and to diminish its power. Instead of dramatically privileging the male quest for ascendancy – sought by means either good or evil – in a world in which adverse forces must be fought and negated, the late plays distribute their action more democratically amongst all their elements. For traditional character-criticism that focuses its attention on the major protagonists of Shakespeare's plays – especially the tragic heroes – the late plays prove unsatisfactory material: in *Cymbeline*, the apparently primary figures are found to be, at best, extensions of earlier, richer ones, and, at worst, diluted versions. And thematic approaches to analysing the plays' dramatic polyphony that have celebrated their poetic scope over and above convincing characterisation have largely neglected their theatrical effectiveness.[7]

In more recent years, Shakespeare criticism has honoured more fully the plays' dramatic mode; but even as far back as the 1970s, R. A. Foakes was pushing for a greater appreciation, in Shakespeare Studies, of their performative power: in his 'Introduction' to *Shakespeare: The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays*, he insists that '[a] stress on ideas and themes tends to lead our attention away from the plays as drama; and much criticism of them is written as if it were commenting on the ideas in a rather difficult novel, or describing a pattern of symbols'.[8] More

[7] See, for example, Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Last Phase* (California: Stanford University Press, 1955).
[8] R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare, The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays: from satire to celebration* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971), p. 2.

positively, he suggests that Shakespeare's 'daring new development'[9] involved 'combin[ing] techniques learned in earlier plays to create a dramatic world in which human intentions, the will, the act of choice, play a very subdued role, and actions by characters are referrable to a psychological condition or compulsion, or to chance, or the influence of an uncertain heaven'.[10]

A combination of these drivers could be read as something like Badiou's Event, as reconceived by Luke: as a character-shattering rupture in the narrative whereby the subject (himself) arrives.[11] But in *Cymbeline* especially, the narrative appears to be already ruptured from the outset: already a discontinuous dramatic sequence. Causal explanations for character behaviour – either psychological or political – are already entirely dramatically elusive, although the effort to secure them is critically (and philosophically) tempting. Shakespeare does not, however, present us with dramatically-readable evidence: for example, for Leontes's sudden exhibition of jealous rage in *The Winter's Tale* or for Iachimo's maleficence in *Cymbeline*. Indeed, the unpredictable shifts in character-voice, most notably of Cloten, in the latter play – but also of Caliban in *The Tempest* – underline our sense of their already precarious psychology. If their impulses – which include *positive* motivators, such as Imogen's compassion and Paulina's loyalty – are activated by characters' 'psychological condition or compulsion', as described by Foakes, in response to the immediate stimulus of the dramatic moment, then it is unhelpful to look for causal traces, or for any obvious character development. Less deterministically – and more in the spirit of drama – it could be argued,

[9] Foakes, p. 3.
[10] Ibid., p. 95.
[11] See Luke, pp. 6-7.

with Luke, that the dramatic event itself *creates* the subject; but if all dramatic circumstances are, as Foakes also suggests, random, then *every* character is achieved anew with every narrative turn – with little sense of narrative history, little sense of *self.* According to Luke's reading, this means that every character must arrive as a subject in almost every scene: and, so, there is no place for a pre-existing character who *becomes* a subject: presence is all. As Levinas puts it: the subject is shaped 'from the society I maintain with him, and not by quitting this relation in order to reflect on its terms':[12] so, being present in the relation is fundamentally productive of the being that relates. In this environment, the psychologically-compelled character-of-the-moment must respond unselfconsciously to chance, with no expectation of outcome, either favourable or otherwise. As in Eliot's polished mirror, every scratch has its own separate shape, size and intensity: and in the play, every episode its own internal dramatic justification.

This is, of course, to describe the process of drama itself – as an experience of interactive presence; but there are existential implications here, too, that *Cymbeline* seems to examine. For example, *Cymbeline*'s world is an uncertain one, in which there is, in its unfolding history, no necessary sequential – nor consequential – identity. In a dramatic enactment of startlingly improbable events – in which even temporal certainties are sometimes disrupted – there is only sound and fury in which characters momentarily coalesce and disperse. This seems, at its most exciting, to be a theatrical demonstration of the radical untethering of the gap's energy from its associative order: the freeing of the terrifying voiding power of the Real that both drives and explodes subjective integrity – exposing the fragile constructed-ness of the order

[12] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 121.

itself. There appears to be no moral order, nor readable system of justice – either temporal or divine; but, in this apparent ethical void, what we may more positively discover is the renewing power of the gap's radical energy: working not with retributive justice, but with a strangely a-moral performative forgiveness and the grace of a second chance. In *King Lear*, there are glimpses of the possibility of personal survival supported by a forgiveness that breaks the cycle of retribution. But Cordelia's grace does not, finally, allow for subjective restitution: what's done is, in fact, done – and irredeemably so. In Shakespeare's late plays,[13] however, the miracle of extra-ordinary forgiveness somehow dramatically reverses the apparently *irreversible* condition: not primarily for the protagonist's survival, perhaps, nor even as a result of his remorse, but for societal continuation. As such, these plays could be considered to be in some way *post-tragic* – enacting non-causal absolution as an alternative secular reality that converts capital evil into communal responsibility: and, although subjective remorse may occur – after intense suffering – there is no clear and necessary link between its degree and positive personal outcome.

Causal narrative dislocation is, then, exposed as the play's foundational dramatic condition. We may be tempted to ask of the play what Zizek asks of our existential position:

> what if this dislocation is our constitutive, primordial condition, the very horizon of our being? What if there is no previous 'home' out of which we were thrown into this world, what if this very dislocation grounds man's ex-static opening to the world?[14]

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[13] In this section, I identify the 'late plays' as *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles* and *The Tempest* – with a brief reference to *Henry VIII.*

[14] Zizek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 9.

The characters in *Cymbeline* perform this dislocated condition conjured in their 'ex-static' relationship to the random event. In other words, it is their fundamental self-dislocation that both constitutes their presence and drives their behaviour. The a-moral dimension to this argument is that individuals are liberated from responsibility, both to themselves and to the other. What must be then invoked to address such ethical chaos – in all four of the late plays – is the intervention of the uncertain heavens: the remote *deus* (or *dea*) *ex machina*,[15] who might control (or enable) the dangerous radical freedoms of the characters in relation to one another. Such fatalistic off-loading chimes with Zizek's description of contemporary notions of subjective responsibility and freedom in 'today's predominant form of individuality':

> The notion of the subject as an irresponsible victim involves the extreme Narcissistic perspective from which every encounter with the Other appears as a potential threat to the subject's precarious imaginary balance; as such, it is not the opposite, but, rather, the inherent supplement of the liberal free subject…the self-centred assertion of the psychological subject paradoxically overlaps with the perception of oneself as a victim of circumstances.[16]

The 'self-centred' subject imagines its own centrality to the narrative order whilst absolving itself of responsibility to the workings of the complete story, and, at the same time, feeling persecuted by its operation. The effect, in *Cymbeline*, of this kind of conditioned existential freedom is of a patchwork of intensely-lived, but disparate, dramatic moments that have little responsibility one to another, and little protagonist bias. But the fantastical patchwork is – in its mixture of conventional Early Modern plot devices, strange coincidences and multiple

[15] Diana (*Pericles*); Apollo (*The Winter's Tale*); Jupiter (*Cymbeline*); Juno/Ceres (*The Tempest*).
[16] Zizek, p. 124.

discoveries – nonetheless *designed*; and its unevenness paradoxically sustains the characters' personally-engaged and particular interactivity.

Sarah Beckwith comments on the contribution of multiple truth-discoveries to the integrity of outcome in *Cymbeline*: where reconciliation is not about the absolution of the individual (and his-story) but about 'the reconciliation and restitution of the community'; where societal survival depends upon each subject's 'dawning realisation of the claims of another person'.[17] The meaning of the play, then, coheres around multiplicity – of plot and of character – so that it may be discovered only in the ongoing activity of renegotiating the individual threads. The play is, according to this reading, *post-subjective* in its activity of reconciling community through and by means of its gaps. Cordelia's enabling absolution of her father raises the possibility of a different outcome for human endeavour from one produced by capital guilt and punishment: building on this, I want to explore the action of the female gap as redemptive of the *relation* rather than of the subjective other per se.

In *Cymbeline*, Imogen forgives Posthumus: revealing and restoring her relationship to him, whilst performing the relation that links all other revelations – by which families are reunited and political peace is achieved – in the final act of the play. The female gap is found to work positively, here – *between* the storylines – to re-present the order through its relationships, rather than by means of the causal actions of its subjects. Compositionally, it is the adaptable relation – the *no thing* – that connects its parts. And if there is any dramatic perspective at all, it appears to emerge from the gap: from the incongruity of the narrative-turns – the orderly

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[17] Sarah Beckwith, 'The Ethics of Second Chances', The Minefield (14.10.20) <https://www.abc.net.au/.../programs/theminefield/sarah-beckwith/12765324> [Accessed 19th October 2020].

ab-sense – as experienced by those who have no representation within it. But in this play, the traditionally-female receptive role is thrust upon all characters: all are equally disenfranchised in a world where there is no pattern for effective action. When men as well as women are displaced from the (perceived) centre of the existential narrative, they may rage with Gloucester, ‘As flies to th’ wanton boys are we to th’ gods’[18] – except that there are no (impactful) gods, and no divine ‘sport’.[19] An Absurdist view of the late plays, however, can be tempered by my reading of the radically-receptive spirit of the female gap present in a disjointed narrative that has, at least, some chance of progression: so that, even though the void is Real, the female gap converts its energy to produce a newly-connective existential network, adaptive as necessary to its future survival.

If all the characters are subject to narrative chance, there is, nonetheless, a consistent stream of energy driving the vagaries: things *happen* – continually and in profusion – even if only in tenuously associated dramatic eddies that feed the play’s main current. And the actor’s job is to react convincingly to support the narrative movement, however turbulent its flow. But the effort of responding creatively to a script that denies the player anything more than stereotypical representation in the story is especially difficult, and peculiarly resonant with the female role – particularly in a theatrical environment where the script-writer and director are both male. What rescues their part – what gives it a certain amount of freedom – is not only the skill of the script-writer, but also the virtuosity of the performer in exploring and dramatising its gaps. In her performance of Imogen, in Henry Irving’s 1896 production of

[18] ‘King Lear’, 4.1.35.
[19] Ibid., 4.1.36.

Cymbeline at the Lyceum Theatre,[20] Terry was lauded as 'pre-eminently loveable and worthy' – a 'perfect type of womanhood',[21] as Sophie Duncan has indicated in her fascinating essay on Irving's *Cymbeline* – 'Shakespeare and Vampires at the Fin de Siècle' – to which I shall return in the later part of my discussion. In five different publications, Duncan says, Terry's characterisation was deemed, according to Victorian tastes, 'perfect'.[22] Terry's presentation of an Imogen strong in Romantic qualities of 'perseverant love, unconquerable by peril, by neglect, by unkindness, by hopelessness',[23] served to embed this 'most womanly of Shakespeare's heroines'[24] in late Victorian culture. But I contend that the character and the actress are less substantially confined than such descriptions suggest. Charles Hiatt quotes 'one of the lady commentators on Shakespeare's female characters' who described Imogen as a '"conjugal character" in which "so great a variety of tints are mingled together in such perfect harmony"'.[25] And it is this fluidity within the dimensions of the part that, I think, was available to Terry: not only allowed for but actively generated – as I shall show – by Shakespeare's script.

The flexible, creative spirit that liberated Terry in her onstage partnership with Irving – and with her script – also animated the relationship between her roles of both private and public woman. When she describes, in her *Memoirs*, '[her] life as an actress',[26] she seems to acknowledge that acting was where she found herself, if there were a self to find – '(Myself?

[20] The production opened on 22nd September, 1896, and closed on 27th January 1897.
[21] 'The London Theatres (26 September, 1896)', *Era*, p. 10., qtd in Sophie Duncan, 'Shakespeare and Vampires at the Fin de Siècle' (Special Section Article), *Feminist Theory* 17(1) (sagepub.com., 2016), p. 72.
[22] *Leeds Mercury* (1896), p. 6; *Morning Post* (1896b), p. 5; *Penny Illustrated Paper* (1896), p. 195; *W.H.P.* (1896a), p. 615; *Yorkshire Herald* (1896), p. 4. qtd. in Duncan, p. 65.
[23] S. T. Coleridge (1828), qtd. in Jonathan Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 233.
[24] Walter Calvert, *Souvenir of Miss Ellen Terry* (London: Henry J. Drane, 1897), p. 42.
[25] Hiatt, p. 242, 241.
[26] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 276.

Why even I, I often think, know little of myself!)'[27] – in the corporate and shifting identity of her characterisations. As Auerbach has it: '[t]he actress was always the origin of the woman',[28] but, equally, as Terry herself claimed, '[she had] always been more woman than artist'.[29] The point is, I think, that her identity could not be located in either figure, but in the relational process between them. In Henry James's novel of 1890, *The Tragic Muse*, one of the two main male characters, diplomat Peter Sherringham, is unnerved by the elusive power of the actress (Miriam Rooth):

> whose identity resided in the continuity of her personations, so that she had no moral privacy, as he phrased it to himself, but lived in the high wind of exhibition, of figuration – such a woman was a kind of monster, in whom of necessity there would be nothing to like, because there would be nothing to take hold of.[30]

Sherringham feels he could only 'like' a woman who behaved as a seizable object of the system: Miriam's agency – like Terry's – exceeds this definition, cohering both in and also beyond 'the continuity of her personations'; this is the gap 'monstrously' performing presence through the 'high wind of exhibition, of figuration'.

The 'continuity' with which I am here concerned, though, is not primarily the process that connects one defined role with another, but is, rather, the continuous, and more intensive, process of identity-dispersal *within* each role. Every performance was, for Terry, both the playing of a role as she had prepared it, and the exceeding of its apparent limits, in response

[27] Terry, p. 276.
[28] Auerbach, p. 135.
[29] Terry, p. 120.
[30] Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (1890) re-print (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), p. 126.

to the evolving dramatic moment. She played – as I have discussed – the positive disjunction enabled by Shakespeare's subject-diffusing script;[31] and much of her success with the role of Shakespeare's Imogen must, I think, have been down to her recognition in the characterisation of a complex subjectivity that dramatically reflected her own. Auerbach suggests that Terry 'imagined her life not in a coherent sequence, but in scenes':[32] each one an intensely-lived but vividly separate experience, with scope for their continuous renegotiation. She mined her individual part in each one with the closest imaginative scrutiny to release its multiple possibilities – not only to choose a character to play, but also to activate, and paradoxically embody, its dramatic disjunctions.

Terry's heavily-annotated rehearsal scripts for the Lyceum production of *Cymbeline* in 1896, like her *Macbeth* scripts, reveal her extensive input into the play's editing and rehearsal procedures.[33] Further evidence of her agency in determining the shape of both character and scene is to be found in her famous correspondence with critic and playwright George Bernard Shaw, with whom she shared her dramatic and personal insights for nearly thirty years (from 1892 until 1920). And their discussion of *Cymbeline* is especially remarkable in its detail. On 6th September, 1896 – during rehearsals for the Lyceum production – Shaw offered Terry a cynical series of acting points on 'silly old Cymbeline', in a letter entitled, '*The Intelligent Actress's Guide to Cymbeline*'.[34] But, in it, he makes a serious (if scathing) point about the 'double image' of Imogen: first there is the 'real woman…a natural aristocrat, with a high temper and perfect courage, with two moods – a childlike affection and wounded rage'; and

[31] See Chapter III ('Rosalind').
[32] Auerbach, p. 267.
[33] The Ellen Terry Museum.
[34] Shaw, 'Letter XXI: G. B. S. *to* E. T.', *A Correspondence*, p. 36.

then there is ‘an idiotic paragon of virtue…[who] is anxious to assure people that they may trust her with their spoons and forks, and is in a chronic state of suspicion of the improper behaviour on the part of other people (especially her husband) with abandoned females’.[35] He advises Terry to ‘cut the part so as to leave the paragon out and the woman in’,[36] and he recommends particular cuts to manage effectively the ‘pantomime’ of Act 3, Scene 4.[37]

He goes on, however, to scrutinise with a more earnest interest the dramatic plausibility of ‘that other big scene’,[38] in which Imogen awakens next to the decapitated body of Cloten, whom she presumes to be Posthumus on account of his clothing. He shows a playwright’s feel for the dramatic texture of Imogen’s speech;[39] and is adamant that the cutting of the extant text is not only no ‘violation of the Bard’s integrity’, but also absolutely essential to the integrity of the scene.[40] He judges, for example, that the placing of her half-line, ‘A headless man?’ *before* her step-by-step recognition of the body serves to flatten the climax of Imogen’s horror, since: ‘the sequel is spoiled, and you are represented as being surprised at finding no face on a man, who, as you have already observed, has lost his whole head’.[41] He concludes that the positioning of the line must be ‘an overlooked relic of some earlier arrangement of the business’, and should be ‘left out’.[42]

What is interesting about this advice to Terry is not only her positive reception of it – ‘Now this is a real help!’ – but also what her response reveals of her own creative agency; she tells

[35] Shaw, p. 36.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., p. 37.
[38] Ibid., p. 38. The scene is Act 4, Scene 2 – the first ‘big scene’ for Imogen being Act 3, Scene 4.
[39] Shakespeare, ‘Cymbeline, King of Britain, ed. by Rory Loughnane, 4.2.293-334.
[40] Shaw, p. 38.
[41] Ibid., p. 39.
[42] Ibid.

Shaw that she has already cut the text herself, to make it playable: 'I had already cut out nearly everything you tell me in your letter of this morning to cut, just because when I got the words into my thick noodle and began to *act*, I found that I could not speak them or act them'.[43] Shaw also suggested that, in Act 3 Scene 4, *Pisanio* – not Imogen – should read Posthumus's letter (lines 21-9); but Terry had already made an acting decision (based on the capability of the actor playing Pisanio):

> As to the letter (which is fine to act by *not* acting it) that difficulty I got over rather well by appearing to read it to myself. *Of course* she could not "read it to a servant." This is better than your way…because I can act better than Tyars (You know I can).[44]

Apparent here is her freedom to make choices about the performance text, and to make the part fit her own conception of her character and the particular dramatic context. But, as Henry Irving's acting version of *Cymbeline* shows, Terry's decisions were not unilateral ones: she collaborated closely with Irving for a mutually-enabling interpretation of roles. Christopher St. John, who edited the letters, remarks that Terry's attention to the detail of her part would probably have surprised Shaw: 'One surmises', she says, 'that Shaw had been surprised to find from Ellen Terry's annotations of the text of the acting version how profoundly she studied her parts'.[45] Although Shaw dismisses Irving's cuts as 'past all bearing', he agrees that Terry is generally 'unerring' in her judgement, with the ultimate approbation that '[o]ur brains evidently work in the same way'.[46]

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[43] Terry, 'Letter XXII: E. T. *to* G. B. S.', *A Correspondence*, p. 40.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Christopher St. John, Note on 'Letter XXIII: G. B. S. *to* E. T.', p. 41.
[46] Shaw, 'Letter XXIII: G. B. S. *to* E. T.', pp. 43, 42, 41.

Terry's attention to her business was, then, both independent and collaborative. Although, in these letters, Terry reveals herself to be – to use Shaw's words – 'a mass of incalculable contradictions',[47] she is, nevertheless, consistent in her passionate response to every matter with which she, or he, was actively concerned. It is this complete and flexible commitment to the relationship with the moment (and the person) that characterises, for me, her extra-ordinary appeal. The mesmerising effect she had on so many has been well-recorded, including by Bram Stoker in his *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, in which he claims that Terry 'fascinated everyone who ever met her – men, women, and children, it was all the same'.[48] In her personal relationships as much as in her professional ones, her engagement was intense and absolute. Shaw says that all 'her friendships had the character of innocent love affairs': that 'she was incapable of returning their regard cooly [sic]; she either felt warmly or not at all'.[49] But Shaw also points out that 'she was critical, and never lost her head when it was necessary to keep it'.[50] He could, it seems, have been describing Terry herself when he assesses the character of Imogen to be 'an impulsive person, with quick transitions, absolutely frank self-expression, and no half affections or half forgiveness'.[51] Auerbach also draws attention to Terry's quality of presence when she says that 'Ellen Terry let the past rest…Once her life became dull she enjoyed reliving vivid experiences, but it never occurred to her to analyse them'.[52] As in all her dramatic roles, Terry gave her entire attention to the vital concerns of her immediate experience.

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[47] Shaw, Introduction', *A Correspondence*, p. xiii.
[48] Bram Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (London: William Heinemann, 1906), p. 192.
[49] Shaw, p. xiii.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Shaw, 'Letter XXIII: G. B. S. *to* E. T.', p. 41.
[52] Auerbach, p. 267.

In my previous chapter, I argued that Ellen Terry's 'not quite fitting' her role released an 'unrepresentable power' in her performance.[53] In her characterisation of Imogen, however, Terry appears to have *quite fitted* the role to the extent that she reworked the part to her own requirements, even if this meant leaving out '[v]ery many beautiful lines' – an omission which she justified thus: 'but oh dear friend I had to, for these emotional parts just kill me, and a sustained effort at that moment would probably make me mad. I should laugh – or die'.[54] But she did, nevertheless it seems, release some of that unrepresentable power written into Imogen's fluid dramatic characterisation. Shakespeare here provides her with a character that eludes consistency of representation, albeit in a less self-conscious way than Cressida or Cleopatra.[55] Like those earlier characters, Imogen responds necessarily and flexibly to the intense singularity of the moment, for her own survival. And although immediacy of response is necessary to the playing of all stage-roles, here, in *Cymbeline*, the significant discontinuities of plot – with its geographical leaps and sudden shifts in focus – demand more overtly than usual the adaptability of the characters (and the actors who play them).

All of the characters are compelled to act with ingenuity to survive their uncertain circumstances; in the discontinuities of *Cymbeline*, even the apparent certainties of the socio-symbolic order are exposed as artificial constructions, with only imaginary power. But the disempowerment suffered by all characters in their absurdist nightmare is an experience more familiar to the female ones, who are already disenfranchised by the order that, generally, stabilises the male subject. What Imogen shows is a flexible resilience in response to the

[53] Chapter III ('Rosalind'), p. 208.
[54] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 40.
[55] See Chapter II ('Cleopatra').

unfathomable order of chance, practised in response to the constraints of the socio-symbolic one: a willingness to accept, adapt and to *act.* To suggest that Imogen is the passive recipient of her fate seems defeatist: she just has to do the best she can, given her subservience to the will of others. But I contend that there is a radical agency involved in Imogen's receptivity that is also apparent in Terry's energetic acquiescence to Irving's system: neither woman, it seems to me, lacks energy, influence or dramatic power, despite, or perhaps *because of*, their unconfrontational approach to their personally-unfavourable circumstances.

In her fascinating article, 'Shakespeare and Vampires at the Fin de Siècle'[56] – to which I referred earlier – Sophie Duncan comments on the 'disjunction between [her] performed female passivity as Imogen, and the professional, creative activity that underlined Terry's stage practice and agency as a Victorian actress'[57]. She identifies *Cymbeline's* sexually-charged bedchamber scene,[58] in which Iachimo (as played by Irving) preys upon the sleeping – and therefore passive – Imogen (Terry), as Bram Stoker's primary inspiration for the vampiric relationship between Count Dracula and Lucy Westenra in his Gothic novel, *Dracula*. In focusing on this scene, Duncan makes the case for Terry's 'performed female passivity', in accordance with the Victorian obsessions with 'liminal states and female vulnerability'; but she acknowledges 'the written evidence for her agency in rehearsing the scene' as a 'disjunction'.[59] Duncan considers, here, the fin de siècle 'eroticisations of the sleeping woman' and the 'fantasies of sexual access to the actress' that Irving's production clearly exploited and to which Terry acquiesced. The staging, according to Duncan, was clearly designed to titillate

[56] In this article, Duncan discusses how *Cymbeline* and the acclaimed performances of Terry and Irving became a source for literature's most famous Gothic vampire novel: *Dracula*, written by Bram Stoker in 1897.
[57] Duncan, p. 63.
[58] Act 2, Scene 2.
[59] Duncan, p. 64.

the audience; and not only is this choice unsettling, but so is the fact that it is apparently confirmed in Shakespeare's text. But it is also the case that what the scene primarily exposes is Iachimo as predator – with the audience cast as uncomfortable voyeurs. To define this sequence as evidence of 'female passivity' is, I think, to ignore the restriction of her agency exerted by her unconscious state. Beyond this, though, there is an extraordinarily powerful energy in her conscious and radically *active* receptivity to other events beyond her control that works to drive the plot forward in response to, but also despite, its narrative necessity.

The two most obvious examples of Imogen's active receptivity to adversity are apparent in her decisive decision-making: first, to ride to Milford Haven to be reunited, as she hopes, with her banished husband;[60] and second, to ally herself with the Romans and follow their general, Lucius.[61] These instances also exemplify Imogen's contrasting moods: in the first, she exhibits the confidence in herself, and in her husband, that has characterised her uncompromising manner during the first two acts; in the second, she is overcome by grief, and apparently fatalistic. But in both situations she adapts to the evolving dramatic sequence, asserting her right to choose, and demonstrating – in her most famous soliloquies – her capacity to perform the visible gap of her presence, in relation to a reconfigured order.

In his *Preface* to *Cymbeline*, written in 1930, Harley Granville-Barker referred to the lightness of touch exhibited in Terry's delivery of Imogen's 'O for a horse with wings!' speech:[62] he claimed that she seemed 'to fill the Lyceum Theatre with dancing sunbeams'.[63] This

[60] 3.2.76-80.
[61] 4.2.389.
[62] 3.2.46-66.
[63] Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare: Cymbeline; The Winter's Tale*, revised edn, 1930, reprint (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), p. 136.

description chimes with Terry's reflection on her feeling in the part that she was 'light, and bodyless [sic]',[64] as though the language itself released her from the physicality that produced the sound. Terry, who, as I have discussed, lamented lack of pace, above all failings in a performance,[65] took up and ran with Shaw's description of Imogen's 'quick transitions'. Roger Warren, editor of the 1998 *Oxford Cymbeline*, notes that Imogen's speeches in Act 3, Scene 2 – from line 47 to the end of the scene – 'give a rapturous, even feverish sense of excitement and speed, as one idea tumbles out after another, often to be corrected'.[66] This could also be a description of Terry's dynamic letter-writing style, with its multiple exclamation marks, underlinings, parenthetic intensifiers and numerous vocatives. It may be imagined how close the coincidence was between Terry's own impassioned intensity and that conjured by Shakespeare's scripted speech: '[g]lid[ing] thither',[67] both Terry and the Imogen she embodied might address the business of the moment with due urgency. Even the time taken for clear explanation is, as Imogen insists, a delay: 'We'll talk of that hereafter'.[68]

Terry's parenthetic self-correction ('Now don't write to me – but thank you for writing – for I cant [sic] help writing then') is very much in the style of Imogen's, where language dips and turns, reversing and reaffirming meaning; and words are, at times, rendered inadequate to convey precisely the excessiveness of feeling that is 'beyond beyond':[69]

Imogen: Then true Pisanio,

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[64] Terry, 'Letter XXXVI: E. T. *to* G. B. S.', p. 60.
[65] See discussion of Terry's response to Irving's deliberateness in Chapter I ('Lady Macbeth'); Chapter III ('Beatrice' and 'Portia').
[66] Warren, pp. 159-60.
[67] 3.2.50.
[68] 3.2.64.
[69] 3.2.54.

Who long'st like me to see thy lord, who long'st –

O let me bate – but not like me – yet long'st –

But in a fainter kind – O, not like me,

For mine's beyond beyond.[70]

The 'beyond beyond', does not, I think, invoke a further sphere of meaning, but a metaphysical gap *inside* the linguistic order of definition: so that the 'beyond' that locates her love is the beyond *within* – and, as such, is both semantically-unrepresentable, but also insistingly present, like the female gap itself. Warren describes Imogen's language as 'impressionistic, even vague', adding that '[h]er own speeches are good examples of what she calls *speaking thick*'.[71] Although this apparently means speaking *quickly*, according to Warren's note,[72] there is also a sense, here, that the obscurity captures more closely the *density* of feeling – the layering that cannot be teased out for orderly analysis. Imogen seems to be addressing this felt obscurity when she describes the 'fog' that, by covering all else, focuses her on reaching Milford Haven:

Imogen: I see before me, man. Nor here, nor here,

Nor what ensues but have a fog in them

That I cannot look through.[73]

The 'fog' does not just cloud her vision of all that does not directly appertain to her business, but is also the catalysing energy that propels her forward: her action is as much instinct as

[70] 3.2.50-4.
[71] Warren, p. 160.
[72] Ibid, note to line 56, p. 160: 'Cotgraves's *Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (1611) glosses *bretonner:* "To speak thick and short; or, as we say, nine words at a time"'.
[73] 3.2. 76-8.

logical decision-making. Like the parenthetic self-correction I attribute to Terry above, the fog is, for Imogen, not a distraction from meaning, but an essential component of the meaning *beyond beyond* the order of representation. The metaphorical 'fog' is then elaborated as the condition through which Imogen fitfully advances, in Act 3 Scene 4, after reading Pisanio's letter from Posthumus: in which he accuses her of adultery and instructs Pisanio to take her life. The scene is a convoluted one, with digressive Classical allusions and extended similes,[74] and it is often cut in performance. But the difficulties in finding the through-line, to which Pisanio's responses actively contribute, are – as with Imogen's expression of her love for Posthumus in Act 3, Scene 2 – substantive: they *are* the fog through which she finds direction, felt through the obscurity.

Terry speaks to this kind of 'obscurity-as-the-herald-of-action' in her letter to Shaw, written in the hours before her first performance of Imogen in the Lyceum *Cymbeline.* Here, she expresses her anxiety about her depressing lack of inspiration that contrasts with the 'always-in-the-air'[75] quality of full engagement she later describes:

> ...I'm *all earth* instantly I get on stage for this part. No inspiration, no softness, no sadness even. Tight, mechanical, *hide-bound.* I feel nothing. I know some of myself…My head is tired, I cant care, cant think, cant feel [sic]. *Can Not.* After the carefullest thinking and practising every detail of my blessed work, something comes upon me. (This is when things go well and right. It has nothing to do with my will.) I feel exquisitely, and then, then, I realise the situation (in the play) and all is golden'.[76]

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[74] 3.4.30-7; 57-2; 153-64.
[75] Terry, p. 61.
[76] Ibid., 'Letter XXXI: E. T. *to* G. B. S.', p. 55.

She is released into full presence in much the same way as Imogen is resurrected from crisis: both here, in Act 3, Scene 4, and also in Act 4, Scene 2 – where she experiences the trauma of awaking next to the headless body and moves through a cycle of disbelief, recognition, anger and emotional recalibration in a matter of 38 lines. But Imogen's release, in response to Lucius's question – 'What art thou?' – is into 'nothing':[77] in this state, she is fully present as a gap in her (his)tory. She is deprived, as she thinks, of a husband; and having left her father's court, she has no representation, even as an object, in the patriarchal order. That she is dressed as a page-boy is no marker of masculine agency, since her subservience to a new master (in the exchange of Posthumus for Lucius) allows her none of the re-gendered freedom of Rosalind, or even of Viola.

As Dusinberre points out, 'Imogen never sees herself as a man; the moment of her unmasking is as a consequence the least ambivalent dramatically and psychologically of any of Shakespeare's plays'.[78] Imogen remains feminine, so that her disguise functions more as a simple plot-device than as any political gesture or character development. Unlike that of Rosalind, Viola, or Portia, Imogen's disguise does not inform the woman she finally reveals herself to be. Her relationship to Posthumus is never conditioned by the blurring of her gender-distinction; but Posthumus's striking of the 'scornful page' who presumes to steal his scene – 'Shall's have a play of this?'[79] – is uncomfortable to watch, not only in its revelation of his capacity for violence against other men, but also in its being a real assault of a woman. In the Early Modern theatre, the action must have worked ironically to unmask both the

[77] 4.2.369.
[78] Dusinberre, p. 265.
[79] 5.6.228.

performers as male, and to expose the theatrical artifice of Posthumus's threatening behaviour. But in the Victorian theatre, the attack exposed the disguised actress to a different kind of gendered disempowerment, activated within the order of representation: her masculine attire does not protect her from the aggression endemic to the patriarchal pecking-order.

Posthumus's physical assault of Imogen is reminiscent of Othello's of Desdemona, though Imogen's masculine disguise is a distraction from the comparison – at least, in the theatre. Both women are struck down; but where Desdemona is subdued and destroyed, Imogen is preserved so that she can continue to work as the gap that produces and supports a re-balanced narrative future. As I suggested earlier, the gap in *Cymbeline* restores the *relation*, rather than the individual: Posthumus is not subject to justice, nor has he paid for his own restitution through remorse. Imogen, however, earlier draws attention to a 'strain of rareness'[80] within her that could describe, for my argument, an excessive quality of the gap: so that, in fusing the disparate parts of the story – being present in all revelatory strands – Imogen 'rarely' occupies the spaces through which the narrative coheres. Unlike Shakespeare's earlier tragic heroines, she is – to (mis)quote *Much Ado*'s Benedick out of context – a 'good continuer';[81] like Rosalind, her activity of foregrounding the relation, as opposed to the individual psychology, reduces dramatic attention to linear narrative causation – and its corresponding masculinist drive to power – instead, embracing the 'fog' of Real energy that drives all aspects of the existential composition, including its dynamically present gaps.

[80] 3.4.90.
[81] 'Much Ado About Nothing', 1.1.104-5.

HERMIONE

In *Cymbeline*, I found the female gap working powerfully and presently in favour of sustained and future-seeking communal flourishing: where the individual is, I have argued, reconditioned and redeemed through the extra-ordinary presence of grace, to privilege and support a network of relationships in which personal identity is continuously negotiable. Rather than focusing on integrity of character, my analysis continues to acknowledge the primacy of the relation *between* characters as the primary driver of personal change; and, in foregrounding the interactive capacity of the gap, my argument is a specifically dramatic one.

In this chapter, I now want to consider two aspects of this working conclusion: first, the adequacy of linear temporal definitions – especially the projected future – to describe the activity of the female gap; and, second, the capacity of the relationship to accommodate the Real energy filtered through the female gap and released, by its means, into the order. Although my discussion will touch on *Pericles* and *The Tempest* – and, very briefly, on *Henry VIII* – it will be focused mainly on *The Winter's Tale*, since it is as Hermione that Ellen Terry performed her last Shakespearean heroine. My analysis of the 'wide gap'[82] of time will work in dialogue with Michael Witmore's study of Henri Bergson's theory of intensity in relation to *King Lear;*[83] and I shall work with Raphael Lyne's analysis of *Shakespeare's Late Work*[84] in my examination of the elastic relationship for which, in my thinking, the female gap works.

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[82] Shakespeare, 'The Winter's Tale, ed. by Terri Bourus, 4.1.7.
[83] Michael Witmore, 'Lear's Intensity, Bergson's Divided Kingdom', *Shakespearean Metaphysics* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), pp 61-89.
[84] Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare's Late Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1-80.

Underpinning all of this will be my acknowledgement of the dramatic variations – tonal, psychological and imagistic – that disrupt any secure causal reading of character or plot. In the presence of the female gap, the dramatic event is found to be driven by its own organic and immanent intensity: like an atomic particle of reality that coheres with others by virtue of its drive towards an elusive appetitive satisfaction. In the theatre, of course, the dramatic process achieves inevitable resolution at the end of the performance; and the arrangement of dramatic occasions is a controlled rather than random orchestration. But the dramatic experience of Shakespeare's late plays feels more organically-synthetic than designed – as I have already noticed. And this is, I think, an effect produced mainly by the experience of ironic tension sustained – in us and in the characters themselves – between wonder and reason in response to the events taking place on stage. This psychological pressure provokes energy that is felt to exceed the apparently fixed boundaries of the plays' sequential happenings evolving on stage; and the pressure is intensified because the narrative causal chain is so obviously constructed, and then de-constructed, by explicit efforts to control it from within – as I shall explain.

In *The Winter's Tale*, for example, Leontes's irrational jealousy appears truly 'evental', according to Badiou's definition of the truth-event as 'an *immanent break*'[85] within the dramatic situation: the coherence of something from nothing within the 'infinite alterity' – the changeable environment – of the dramatic process.[86] In this specificity, Badiou's event seems to coincide with Alfred North Whitehead's 'occasion': the fundamental processual building block of experience that gathers together place, time and circumstance 'prehensively' in a

[85] Badiou, *Ethics,* p. 41.
[86] Ibid., p. 25.

kind of 'extensive continuum'[87] to generate subjective presence. This fits with my reading of dramatic metaphysics as a dynamic, interlocking flexible system: of a continuous narrative with its excessively expansive and visible gaps. But the gap, the occasion and the event are, I think, more causally disruptive and less schematically advantageous than any of these neat definitions might suggest: their radical rupturing of the narrative is sensed, in their moment of occurrence, as more than just an inconvenient intrusion found to be, finally and happily, beneficial to the play's satisfactory denouement. Instead, they manifest as unassimilable instances of tonal and psychological inconsistency that retains their incongruent status in the narrative as extra-ordinary hotspots of intensity, and of *in-tension.*

According to Whitehead's process philosophy – and to similar theories[88] that take process as ontologically or dramatically foundational – '[*a*]*ll* things *always* change';[89] and so process must be considered integral to, and productive of, being. But Leontes's jealous passion seems excessive, even to this flexible and changeable model of being. As Luke points out, 'even if there is constant change and motion, *not all change is equal* [my italics]'.[90] Excessive change, in my Lacan-influenced reading, marks the intrusion of the unrepresentable Real – the void – in the Order, by way of the permeable boundary of the female gap. Being unrepresentable, the void exceeds all definitions, including those relating to time and space[91]. As such, the kind of wild, destructive passion experienced by Leontes, in *The Winter's* Tale, is singularly irruptive, like a whirlpool working up its particular energy within the temporal flow, but not

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[87] Whitehead, p. 66.
[88] For example, Simon Palfrey's identification of 'points of life everywhere' in Shakespeare: see Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 3.
[89] Whitehead, p. 66.
[90] Luke, p. 23.
[91] There is an obvious parallel here between my theory of the activity of the female gap and theories relating to quantum as opposed to particle physics.

subject to its rules; and yet it moves with the narrative – and itself moves the narrative – by the forcefield of its own occasion.

There has been much recent interesting scholarly discussion that focuses on the active etymology of the term 'emotion' – as suggested by its Latin root 'emovere', meaning 'to move out' – and its Early Modern novelty. In a collection of essays edited by Katharine A. Craik, entitled *Shakespeare and Emotion*,[92] Bridget Escolme examines the motivating power of intense feeling generated in Shakespeare's language as a springboard for effective rehearsal practice;[93] and Gail Kern Paster explores the political implications of the link between emotion and physical action in her essay on *Julius Caesar.*[94] As Craik points out in her introduction to the collection, 'Early Modern emotions were not simply conditions or experiences, but dynamic forces that effected change from one state to another'.[95] Leontes's jealous passion is clearly 'e-motive' in that it charges and *moves* him physically, inciting him to an act of personal and political destruction; and although he stops short of bodily assault (unlike Othello), Leontes indirectly murders his son – and, apparently, his wife and daughter – and thereby eradicates the future of his dynasty. What interests me here is the abrupt emergence of the immoderate feeling – as well as its affective power – that is produced inexplicably in the subject who *moves*, dangerously, towards the void.

In *The Winter's Tale*, dangerous voiding energy is drawn into the play through the presence of Hermione: her active receptivity to her husband's desire that their friend, Polixenes, should remain their guest in the court of Sicilia appears to unleash Leontes's uncontrollable anguish.

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[92] Katharine A. Craik (ed.), *Shakespeare and Emotion,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[93] Bridget Escolme, 'Acting: *The Taming of the Shrew, Coriolanus*', *Shakespeare and Emotion*, pp. 122-136.
[94] Gail Kern Paster, 'Communities: *Julius Caesar*', *Shakespeare and Emotion*, pp. 94-109.
[95] Craik, 'Introduction', *Shakespeare and Emotion*, p. 1.

There is a lot going on emotionally here – and it is tempting to rationalise both the fictional character and the dramatic situation, according to a Freudian scheme of conscious / unconscious motivation. But it is, I think, more interesting to investigate the *exceptional* status of Leontes's emotion and his unaccountable loss of self-control. Unlike the explicitly engineered manipulation of Othello's emotional responses by Iago, there is, here, no obvious causal dramatic prelude to Leontes's breakdown. It just happens: it is itself the cause of the ensuing chaos, just as the unexplained advent of the weird sisters initiates dangerous dark energy in *Macbeth.*

It is also tempting to rescue the plots of Shakespeare's late plays by categorising them as improbable 'romances', and by reading them metaphorically. Ordering confusion, by retrospectively scurrying after (elusive) reasons *why*, is a natural human endeavour when we are hit with catastrophe. But Leontes cannot, himself, justify the onset of his passion; and neither can he accommodate its explosion: 'I have the *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances, / But not for joy, not joy'.[96] Like Othello, his breakdown manifests in linguistic fragmentation, his imagining of Hermione's infidelity clearly putting his phraseology under strain: 'Go to, go to!...Gone already. / Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked one!'.[97] But Leontes is still capable of meditating on his own susceptible affection thus:

Leontes: Affection! thy intention stabs the centre.

Thou dost make possible things not so held,

Communicat'st with dreams – how can this be? –

With what's unreal thou coactive art,

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[96] 1.2.110-1

[97] 1.2.181,184-5.

And fellow'st nothing.[98]

He here recognises that he has opened himself to the 'nothing', not as a passive recipient, but 'coactive[ly]', so that he 'fellow[s]' it *through* the gap: what is 'unreal' in the order is made 'possible' by his new sense of personal precariousness. According to this reading, the 'dreams' with which he '[c]ommunicat'st' are not, I think, existentially 'unreal', but, conversely, the *Real* energy that his affection 'co-joins':

Leontes: Then 'tis very credent

Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost –

And that beyond commission; and I find it –

And that to the infection of my brains

And the hard'ning of my brows.[99]

Leontes, like Macbeth, feels his psychological turmoil physically: just as Macbeth's 'horrible imaginings'[100] makes his hair stand on end and his heart beat unnaturally, so Leontes's expression sets, in what Hermione describes as a 'brow of distraction'.[101] There is the more fanciful suggestion invoked here, of course, that Leontes can feel cuckold's horns sprouting from his forehead, and that Hermione not only notices, but is their cause. Whatever the case, it may be said that the dark energy released in and as the 'occasion' of the gap engulfs Leontes entirely: his previous identity, now perilously adrift on the current, is dramatically and dangerously voided.

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[98] 1.2.138-42.
[99] 1.2.142-6.
[100] 'Macbeth', 1.3.134.
[101] 1.2.149.

We have had no time to trace the process of Leontes's subjective dissolution, however: this is not the focus of the dramatic narrative Shakespeare presents for us in this play. As I have already pointed out, the excessive charge that whirls in and against the narrative's forward momentum strikes early: in the second scene. Leontes's character has, by then, been established only provisionally – in the first short scene – through Camillo's romantic reminiscences about the King of Sicilia's early boyhood intimacy with Polixenes, now King of Bohemia. The characters have barely emerged at the beginning of the following scene, before their sketched definitions are partially erased; and whilst Hermione is as yet undrawn. At line 109, Leontes's morbid sexual suspicion arises from nowhere – rather like the dark energy of *Macbeth*'s weird sisters – before we have settled into the story. Its occurrence is, apparently, out-of-time, although its presence can be felt only within temporal and spatial parameters, since theatre – unlike pictorial art – operates under necessary temporal constraints.

Patricia Parker has discussed the tendency to defer endings as a crucial aspect of the romance quest characterising the late plays: with its emphasis on process rather than on resolutions.[102] In dramatised romance, however, the focus must necessarily be pushed towards its ending: the conclusion of the two hours' traffic of the stage. Once it has hurtled towards its first provisional tragic conclusion, however, the Leontes narrative remains suspended: with the apparent closure of the female gap in the death of Hermione, and the arresting of Sicilia's future line (with the death of Mamillius and the casting off of Perdita). The general narrative remains current, moving on to Bohemia; but the occasional whirlpool that swallows up Leontes's story – and family – dissipates under the force of forward momentum. Leontes's

[102] Patricia A. Parker, 'Introduction', *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 4.

event cannot ground time's flow any more than can Macbeth's; instead, he, also, struggles to deny the rupture and to reassert an order that will sustain his identity, at the expense of all familial relationships – and his important first friendship with Polixenes.

The female gap, however, continues to engage with the narrative present, and with the order, despite its apparently brutal foreclosure. This is where, in this late play – unlike in the earlier tragedies – the gap is found to survive its denial: visibly working outside narrative of space and time and yet finding extra-ordinary dramatic presence within its symbolic frame. This is not the confident community-building activity of Portia and Rosalind in the comic gap, with their optimistic investment in a productive, interconnected future. Like Shakespeare's tragic heroines, Hermione has unwittingly triggered the catastrophe that will subsume her; but, again like them, she responds resolutely to the demands of the *relation* – however strained – upholding its live potential until her gap is (it seems) closed. In the late plays, though, the romance model allows for the dramatised resurrection of apparently lost heroines: of Marina in *Pericles*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, and Hermione and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*. The gap that is tantalisingly and briefly re-opened for Cordelia in *King Lear*, is, in these later plays, held dramatically open by extra-ordinary faith and by grace – two terms I shall discuss in relation to Hermione's revival later in this chapter.

Hermione's network of vital relations is wider than that of Shakespeare's childless tragic heroines; indeed, it is wider than those of all his other heroines,[103] sustaining not only a husband, but also a son and a daughter. Unlike Cordelia's bond with her father, though,

[103] With the exception, perhaps, of Cleopatra; but the only affective relationship for which Cleopatra works in Shakespeare's play is that with her lover, Mark Antony.

Hermione's connectivity reaches towards her own biological future; and her 'honour' is conceived in terms of the three relationships that would condition it:

> *Hermione*: The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
> I do give lost, for I do feel it gone
> But know not how it went. My second joy,
> And first fruits of my body, from his presence
> I am barred, like one infectious. My third comfort,
> Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,
> The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth,
> Haled out to murder.[104]

Denied these vital links, Hermione's insisting connection with the order is broken, and her life has no substance – no 'commodity'[105] – since her presence can be found only in the living bond that is the only relevant commodity. The intimate relation is for Leontes, of course, the site not of commodity but of treacherous uncertainty. Losing faith in the integrity of relationship and pulled off-centre in the dark emotional force-field of relative misconception, Leontes's clings to something apparently readable: his false belief in Hermione's unchastity. But this is no security, since what he feels towards is recognition of another precarious relationship – between Polixenes and Hermione – beyond his control. And although he has fatally misconstrued the tenor of this interaction, the danger of engaging with raw relational

[104] 3.2.91-8.
[105] 3.2.90.

energy *is* Real – being live and volatile: he has been touched – has, indeed, 'seen the spider'[106] – and his is, perhaps, a proper response to its excessive power:

Leontes: Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?

Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career

Of laughter with a sigh? – A note infallible

Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot?

Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift.

Hours minutes, noon, midnight? And all eyes

Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,

That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?

Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing,

The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,

My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings

If this be nothing.[107]

Leontes is working himself into an imaginative and verbal frenzy, conjuring the evidence he requires of their sexual play through his own words, as though he is directing and watching them as he speaks. The repetition of 'nothing', with its slang connotations of female genitalia, serves to intensify the erotic excitement here, and also the misogyny of Leontes's cruel defensiveness. But the extra-ordinary power of the female 'nothing' – in all its manifestations

[106] 2.1.45.
[107] 1.2.284-94.

– to which I have referred throughout this thesis, underpins the provocative relation here.[108] Leontes's opinion is 'diseased', as Camillo says, and the dis-ease is certainly 'most dangerous'.[109] The 'nothing' he invokes is not, however, the ironically affirming display of Hermione's and Polixenes's sexual congress, but the unrepresentable abyss of his unfathomably desperate jealousy: the dark aspect of his desire for impossible possession of the gap. And this particular jealousy is intensified by jealousy of his friend's affections, partially by means of which he has developed his own emotional and sexual maturity.[110] In closing Hermione's gap, he also shuts down his relationship with Polixenes: so that, in the event, Polixenes removes himself entirely, whilst Hermione is accused, jailed and apparently dies of a broken heart – after the loss of her baby daughter and the death of her son. The much-diminished Leontes seems to have escaped the void, reinstating his subjective boundaries but losing in the process all his vital potential.

This is not a tragedy, though there is no hint at this point of any hopeful resolution. Even the intervention of the gods – manifesting as the oracle of Apollo – has offered no relief, since the divine justice to which Hermione appealed was cancelled in Leontes's denial. But long before her extra-ordinary resurrection in the final scene of the play, Hermione's presence lingers beyond the boundaries of the rational order: when she appears to Antigonus as he journeys to Bohemia. It is significant that her provocative appearance coincides with a storm that dramatically heralds the intervention of Time itself, and the birth of a new narrative order. The reported manifestation of Hermione's spirit '[i]n pure white robes'[111] seems to be both a

[108] Biological, sexual, metaphysical and political.
[109] 1.2.297, 298.
[110] 1.2.67-75.
[111] 3.3.21.

confirmation of her death and conversely – since this is romance – a promise of her continued existence, as a metaphysical gap. Dramatically speaking, she certainly remains present: conjured in symbolic terms that may or may not be physically enacted.[112] In an unsettling echo of the weird sisters' departure in *Macbeth* – who 'melted / As breath into the wind'[113] – Hermione's spirit 'melted into air',[114] and, more unnervingly still, 'with shrieks'.[115] It is difficult not to associate her turbulent presence with *Macbeth's* 'modern ecstasy': where 'good men's lives / Expire before the flowers in their caps, / Dying or ere they sicken'.[116] Antigonus is engulfed by the void before *he* sickens, and, like Macbeth, in peculiar weather conditions such as he has never witnessed: 'I never saw / The heavens so dim by day'.[117] His void is, famously, opened by a bear, and not by witches. But Hermione's presence in his fate is still perplexingly ambiguous.

The chasm that Hermione dramatically opens here as the female gap is qualitatively both temporal and spatial: she performs the 'cut' in the narrative at the point of Perdita's survival, that is pasted together with a new future sequence. We arrive suddenly in the pastoral of Bohemia, sixteen years after Perdita's adoption by an old shepherd and his son. Drawn in to the scene as privileged onlookers – together with the disguised Polixenes and Camillo – we find ourselves in a rural space reminiscent of Rosalind's Arden, where identity is found to be flexible, negotiable, and dependent on the integrity of the *relation* between characters who

[112] Like Ophelia's description of Hamlet's strange behaviour ('Hamlet', 2.1.85-98), and Gertrude's of Ophelia's drowning ('Hamlet', 4.4.160-177), this episode (3.3.15-36), being so vividly described, is sometimes presented on stage.
[113] 'Macbeth', 1.3.76-7.
[114] 3.3.36.
[115] 3.3.35.
[116] 'Macbeth', 4.3.170, 172-4.
[117] 3.3.54-5.

cohere through their interaction. We have, of course, by dramatic convention suspended our disbelief to accommodate the gap of time and place here; and the dramatic sequence plays out in real time, whatever the imagined temporal irregularity. But we are nevertheless haunted, I think, by the darkness of lost time, and by a sense that we are missing part of the temporal score. The effect is a bit like that of travelling through time-zones, where life – as measured in seconds, minutes and hours – falls through the disjunction in our present.

Turning to Witmore's discussion of Bergson's account of 'duration' as a specific domain of reality, I find much that chimes with my conception of the female gap's primary fluidity: its *intensive* as opposed to its *extensive* field of activity. Witmore's clarification of Bergson's differentiation between quantity and quality in relation to change and motion is illuminating of my own thinking about the order and the gap:

> When we strip away the mechanistic scaffolding of the world that organises our language and perception into a spatialized set of quantities or line segments in space, we are left with the pure qualities or 'intensities' that are apprehended in consciousness.[118]

Like the female gap, Bergson's 'intensities' are 'moments of pure duration'[119] that have no quantitative value in the mathematical scheme, but affect the tonal quality of the whole experience and function as its mobility. Bergson's most useful image for me, here, is one taken from music, where intensities are intervals of tonal distance between fixed notes: the power of the symphony is effected in the live and variable quality of the rhythm of an entire phrase

[118] Witmore, pp. 67-8.
[119] Ibid., p. 68.

– and in its dynamics. In a similar way, the female gap moves between fixed points in the order, subject not to quantitative meanings, but rather to qualitative change. In this way, the female gap transposes itself to different temporal and spatial fields, essentially independently of systematic definition.

The sixteen-year gap of time in *The Winter's Tale* has a qualitative intensity similar to that of the female gap by virtue of its unrepresentable – since dramatically unrepresented – quantity, and its consistency of 'pure [but unquantifiable] duration'. Indeed, the concurrence of the temporal gap and the absence of Hermione in the story underlines their qualitative sympathy. And the tonal quality of both gaps – their minor key of loss – influences and folds back the second part of *The Winter's Tale* into the first: in our awareness of Perdita's compromised first identity even within the festive dynamic of Perdita's pastoral. To quote Witmore again, on Bergson's musical illustration:

> The phrase is grasped in duration by consciousness in its entirety, as an intensity. Its particular tonal feeling is immanent to every part, rather than projected from a single point in the melody.[120]

As I shall suggest, the Hermione gap is both immanent and changeable – as in Bergson's theory of qualities – coalescing in the intensity that is the Perdita-Hermione relation; and also – with a different kind of intensity – in her relationship with Leontes.

The relation is, in my reading, the permeable boundary between the order and the void that is made flexible through the actively receptive engagement of the female gap with

[120] Witmore, p. 69.

uncontrollable Real energy. In the late plays, the relation – and in particular the familial relation – could be seen as the site of hope for the future. Over and above the valuing of the dynasty for political gain, fathers find redemptive possibilities in newly loving and allowing bonds with their daughters – and with their sons-in-law. Unlike Lear, the fathers of the romance genre – Pericles, Leontes, Cymbeline and Prospero – are given, it seems, a working second chance with their biological and narrative futures. Coppélia Kahn's analysis of Pericles corroborates this psychoanalytic view of the late development of the central character through familial reunion: 'through [Marina] Pericles becomes a father anew, accepting his fatherhood as his identity, and stops vainly trying to deny his mortality'.[121] Even Henry – in *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare's collaboration with John Fletcher – may live on in the noble future of Princess Elizabeth, as prophesied by Archbishop Cranmer: 'God shall be truly known, and those about her / From her shall read the perfect ways of honour'.[122] Janet Adelman's focus, on the other hand, moves away from the psychology of the characters in the plays to illuminate what the late plays might say about Shakespeare's own personal negotiation with family bonds, and especially the mother-figure – and how this relationship might be 'purged', after *Hamlet.*[123] My own focus moves back from the dramatist to the plays, but to something more fluid than the individual psyche: I am concerned less with the personal development of the male subject through the relation than with the relation itself – as the site of intensity, of excessive change and of the occasion of Real dramatic life.

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[121] Coppélia Kahn, 'The Providential Tempest and the Shakespearian Family', in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. by Coppélia Kahn and Murray M. Schwartz (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 229.
[122] 'Henry VIII', 5.4.36-7.
[123] Janet A. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 194.

Misalignments of dramatic and real time as experienced in the theatre are, of course, usual; indeed, it is only in *The Tempest* that Shakespeare adheres closely to the Aristotelian 'unities' of place and time. But the temporal fluidity I associate with the female gap is not the slowing-down or speeding-up of time that Witmore identifies, with reference to Bergson's theory of intensity, in *King Lear.* Rather, the intensity of the female gap is a feature of its *a*-temporality: its extra-ordinary affect, both beyond and within space and time. The named lost mothers of the late plays – Thaisa in *Pericles* and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* – apparently cease as their daughters begin, with their dramatic departures heralded by storms that void their presences.[124] As Marina states, in Act 5, Scene 1 of *Pericles*: 'Thaisa was my mother, who did end / The minute I began.[125] Her statement may seem to underline the linear and causal dramatic time-line: the child's life follows from the mother's death; and in Marina's case in particular, there is a clear circularity implied, in that the birth causes the death from which the new life springs.

But there is something more powerfully and dramatically *continuous* about the maternal presence than relates simply to the transfer of genetic material: a continuity that the romance genre dramatises more explicitly than either the comic or tragic mode. As Lyne points out, 'although fathers and daughters may dominate the plots of the late plays, mothers are powerful forces whether present or absent'.[126] I would enlarge the scope of this power by suggesting that maternal absence is of the same quality – of the same metaphysical *intensity* – as is maternal presence: since the female gap is extra-ordinary, and thus not bound by

[124] Thaisa dies in childbirth during the storm at sea in Act 3, Scene 1 of 'Pericles'; the departure of Hermione's 'ghost' from the play brings on the storm of Act 3, Scene 3, in 'The Winter's Tale'.
[125] 'Pericles', 5.1.199-200.
[126] Lyne, p. 61.

orderly subjective categorisation, it is felt to traverse, dramatically, the boundary of life and death. It seems obvious to claim that, to use Derrida's words, 'what is dead wields a very specific power';[127] but in my reading, the dead mother does not haunt the present from a place beyond the present: a place that would be of a different order from the here and now. Instead, being nothing, she cannot be *located* – differently or as 'other' – and, thus, can never be past (or passed) presence. Furthermore, I propose that the gap is the power that renders uncertain the existential finality of death itself. According to the convention of the romantic genre, that which is lost is miraculously restored – after much suffering. What my reading of the female gap suggests is that, through the relation, the 'no thing' is never lost at all – but continues to insist with unrepresentable presence, as a kind of unfixed – and unfixable – second term.

Existentially speaking, the recovery of these lost daughters is, of course, no miracle: neither Marina nor Perdita has died, so that the reunions of father and daughter, in both plays, could be classed as perfectly plausible, if very happy, accidents – given that we ignore the narrative manipulations of the playwright. The intervention of the gods that, according to Lyne, invites into the late plays 'a greater degree of numinous wonder' is, I think, a red herring here, as Dion's scepticism about 'celestial habits' on his return from Delphi with Cleomenes in *The Winter's Tale* seems to suggest: 'Methinks I so should term them'.[128] The artificiality of the *deus ex machina* that is manifest, as an awkward intervention, in *Cymbeline*'s Jupiter, and in the explicit constructed-ness of Prospero's masque in *The Tempest*, alerts us to the limits of our grasp of what is truly numinous – in our lives as much as in the drama. I want to suggest

[127] Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 6.
[128] 3.1.4-5.

that, metaphysically speaking, even the recovery of the lost *mother* is no miracle of the gods, but extra-ordinarily achievable through the excessive presence of the female gap: in the immanent beyond of the unfathomable, ineffable human relation. It is the wonder inspired by this presence that requires us to 'awake [our] faith'[129] as Hermione's statue comes to life; and that sustains us through Pericles's poignant recognition of Marina as, firstly, Thaisa's daughter and, so, his child too. Thaisa, like Hermione, regains bodily form in this improbable fiction played out on stage; but her presence has already actively intervened – the *mère* from the *mer*, to use Hélène Cixious's matching of phonemes[130] – to produce Marina as 'a mother like', and to provide 'another life'[131] for them both. These phrases are, in fact, alternative versions of the same line: George Steevens, in the eighteenth century, emended 'an other like' in the Quarto (1609) to 'another life', whilst Edmond Malone, later in that century, emended the phrase to 'a mother like'.[132] Both versions, though, discover, for me, the life-producing female gap through the maternal relation.

The calling back of the 'lovely April' of the lost mother's 'prime'[133] in the daughter is, as Raphael Lyne discusses, potentially problematic in these plays, with their 'hints of buried incestuous innuendo'.[134] *Pericles* opens with incest, and ends with a redemption that seems

[129] 5.3.95.
[130] Cixous, in conversation with Alexandra Grant (17.09.13) https://www.youtube.com/Helene+Cixous+in+conversation+with+Alexandra+Grant (4.34-5.15 mins) [Accessed 30th May, 2019].
[131] 'Pericles', 5.1.196.
[132] See: Richard Farmer, William Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson. George Steevens, Nicholas Rowe, Edward Harding, *The Plays of William Shakespeare…Pericles. King Lear. Romeo and Juliet* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010); Edmond Malone, *The Plays & Poems of William Shakespeare: Pericles, Prince of Tyre. Coriolanus. Julius Caesar* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010).
[133] Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 3', line 10, *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*, ed. by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 128.
[134] Lyne, p. 84.

to encompass the original sin alluded to in Antiochus's riddle, though the sin was not that of Pericles himself. Cyrus Hoy, though, sweeps away such dark hints, with his assertion that:

> 'the dramatist is engaged in a quest to free the imagination from all the shrill mistress-wife-mother figures who have inhabited the late tragedies, and to create in their place an ideal of femininity on whom the imagination can bestow its tenderest sentiments, without the distraction of sexual desire'.[135]

But the late plays are about wives too, and the emotional and sexual energies involved in the complex network of relations are not so easily divided. As has already been discussed, the discovery of a lost daughter does, also, entail the recovery of an absent wife. And although the pointing out of the physical resemblance between the two is, in both *Pericles* and in *The Winter's Tale*, overtly innocent, the suggestion of physical attraction is, inevitably, latent. Pericles identifies the mother-daughter resemblance in a sensuous description that recalls Enobarbus's more sensual account of Cleopatra's charms:[136]

> *Pericles*: *[aside]* My dearest wife was like this maid, and such a one
> My daughter might have been. My queen's square brows,
> Her stature to an inch, as wand-like straight,
> As silver-voiced, her eyes as jewel-like
> And cased as richly, in pace another Juno;
> Who starves the ears she feeds, and makes them hungry

[135] Cyrus Hoy, 'Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare's Romances', *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. by Carol McGinnis and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 84.
[136] 'Antony and Cleopatra', 2.2.190-204, 233-6.

The more she gives them speech.[137]

In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes does not, however unwittingly, desire his daughter;[138] but there is an uncomfortable moment at the end of the scene in which Leontes meets Perdita for the first time, when he says to Florizel that he would 'beg [Florizel's] precious mistress' if Florizel's father (Polixenes) will grant him 'precious things as trifles'.[139] This provokes Paulina's reprimand that his 'eye hath too much youth in it';[140] but Leontes's defence is ambiguous and speaks of an amorous energy excessive to his position as penitent husband and father-figure: 'I thought of her [Hermione] / Even in the looks I made'.[141] The intrusive erotic frisson in these 'looks' does not, even so, serve to lessen the poignant emotional intensity of the recognition scene, and may even add another live dramatic element to the complexity of the loving relation.

Lyne describes such incongruous energy – like Leontes's sudden jealous passion in the second scene of the play, or Polixenes's disproportionate condemnation of Perdita's 'enchantment' of Florizel – as 'spare sexual energy'[142] that works within the father-daughter relationships in the romances. And I think that this spare energy coincides with the excessive energy I have identified as the destabilising influence of the void, filtered through the female gap. Another example of the threatening excess swirling around sexual contexts in the late plays is to be found in *The Tempest*, where Prospero seems to overreact to Ferdinand's crime – of falling in love with Miranda – sentencing him to the kind of hard labour with which he punished Caliban

[137] 'Pericles', 5.1.96-102.
[138] Unlike Robert Greene's eponymous 'Pandosto' in his prose romance, *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, first published in 1588 – thought to be the main source for Shakespeare's play. See Lyne, p.85.
[139] 5.1.222, 221.
[140] 5.1.224.
[141] 5.1.226-7.
[142] Lyne, p. 87.

for his (reportedly) attempted rape. Prospero's aside to the audience protests his benign purpose: to ensure that the 'prize' is not made 'light' with 'light winning'.[143] But the pressure of the remembered charges against Caliban conditions our feeling about Prospero's control here, even though we know that he has orchestrated the whole scenario: passions, being essentially disorderly, are not subject even to the mage's staff. Later on, Prospero's concern about his daughter's chastity focuses rather pruriently on the 'union of [their] bed'[144] and increases our sense that he is struggling with things of darkness within himself, as well as in Caliban's unruliness.

Impulses that seem out-of-place or disproportionate – according to the scheme of 'acceptable' relationships – test the elasticity of the interactive network in Shakespeare's late plays. In *The Winter's Tale*, it is not only the father-daughter relationship that comes under strain from the influence of the female gap, but also the bond between the two kings, Leontes and Polixenes, whose youthful innocence has been, as Polixenes insists, complicated by adult desire:

> *Polixenes*: Had we pursued that life,
> And our weak spirits ne'er been higher reared
> With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven
> Boldly, 'Not guilty', the imposition cleared
> Hereditary ours.[145]

It is strange, perhaps, that Polixenes should say this to the woman who was partly to blame for their sexual complication; and his insistence is, anyway, ambiguous, since he does not here

[143] 'The Tempest', 1.2.451-2.
[144] Ibid., 4.1.21.
[145] 1.2.71-5.

explicitly associate the 'rear[ing]' of 'weak spirits' with 'stronger blood' with *hetero*sexual desire. But the live relation is, nevertheless, always complicated, since desire *is* extra-ordinary and destabilising; and inconsistencies and overlaps like this one serve to increase, rather than to dissipate, the Real intensity of the inter-relational dynamic. Such occasions of ambiguous intension are dramatically satisfying precisely, I think, *because* they refuse us easy answers, and also because they prove the elasticity of the relation.

Such irresolvable energy also works, I think, as a Real kind of *numinous* desire, exceeding any easy invocation of conventional gods: being a kind of indeterminate spiritual yearning that intensifies the human relationship by apparently exceeding its equalising affective exchange. This is the yearning Lacan identifies as that born of the incompleteness of symbolisation: a fantasy of the impossible resolution of the subjective split. Like sexual desire that reaches for the complete union of self and *human* other – whilst retaining the subjective boundaries that facilitate that union – numinous desire looks to the *spiritual* other: to 'traverse the fantasy'[146] of subjective separation and achieve an otherwise impossible oneness with the spiritual beyond. But again, the dissolution of the subjective boundary would, if achieved, radically decentre the subject from itself. Any satisfactorily complete union is, for the socio-symbolic subject, beyond the bounds of possibility; but, as both Zizek and Lacan insist – and I have argued – the desire for resolution is Real, and indissociable from the process of subjectivisation itself. Shakespeare's (male) characters – driven by desire through the permeable and extra-ordinary female gap – encounter the terrifying a-moral threat of the Real

[146] Wood, p. 23.

to their bounded selves, with self-destructive, or more provisionally self-conditioning outcomes.[147]

The unexpected grace that is, eventually, poured on catastrophic rifts in the late plays to effect benevolent outcomes for (often undeserving) characters could be conceived as numinous in the traditional sense – of being a divine intervention enabled through faith in a benevolent God, or gods. But I conceive it here as a more benign aspect of the intrusive Real energy of the void: the excessive power drawn in and filtered through the relation between the extra-ordinary female gap and the orderly male subject. In his chapter on 'Wonder', in *Shakespeare and Emotion*, Tom Bishop finds that '[w]onder can reside in extremity of event, extremity of feeling and extremity of language';[148] but he also suggests that the *cause* of wonder itself has, according to the Aristotelian model, the status of the 'known unknown':[149] information currently unavailable to our knowledge, but explicable with the application of clearer evidence or rational analysis. What I want to argue is that defining wonder as the effect of the pre-philosophical position that precipitates rational discovery does not capture the *excessive* quality of the feeling: the sense of the irreducible pressure of the *unknown* unknown; and the intuition that there are more things, always, in our uncertain world than may be dreamt of, or accounted for, in our philosophy.

Shakespeare limits most of the 'wondering' to the characters in his plays, especially the comedies, through dramatic irony; for example, in the puzzling duplication of the Dromios and

[147] The sexual connotations of this description are obvious, and possibly distracting; but they are not unhelpful to my theory, since the active receptivity of the female sexual organs is a *physical* manifestation of the generative *metaphysical* female agency I promote throughout this thesis.
[148] Tom Bishop, 'Wonder', *Shakespeare and Emotion*, p. 318.
[149] Ibid., p. 317.

their Antipholi masters in *The Comedy of Errors,* or Sebastian's amazement at Olivia's overtures in *Twelfth Night.* Even in the late plays, he clearly subverts for the audience the mystical element of romance: it is, after all, Paulina and Prospero who arrange their 'miracles', and not the rather ineffectual gods. But even with this kind of scepticism, we are still impressed by something else – something *more* – working beyond mere organisational efficiency to generate something like *real* wonder. This 'something', is I want to suggest, the dramatic excess of the wider dramatic relation: the Real live energy filtered into the order of the play – and into our own experience of it – by means of the present and dynamic network of relations in the theatrical space.

There is something wonderful about the resurrection of Hermione, even though we are fully aware that a living actor is playing a character who is not really a statue. But even though Paulina herself tells us that this is only an 'old tale', we still feel that something 'rich and strange'[150] is happening in this captivating final scene. On Paulina's command, the statue 'stirs'.[151] Her movement is electric – however many times it is witnessed on stage – and the sound of her voice thrilling: a musical memory that seems to diffuse time and, equally, to gather it in, in this suspended moment. Hermione calls upon the grace of the gods, and makes reference to the truth of the divine oracle. But it is by Hermione herself that our wonder is provoked, since she, much more affectingly than any ostensibly divine apparition, seems to have appeared *out* of time to exceed her own gap's closure: 'preserved…to see' and to *be* 'the issue'. Her reunion with Perdita and Leontes is no miracle – and this is, indeed, an 'old tale'.[152]

[150] 'The Tempest', 1.2.402. (Ariel's song).
[151] 5.3.103.
[152] Shakespeare's source is Robert Greene's *Pandosto: King of Tyre*, published 1588, 1609.

And yet, the spirit of recognition and reconciliation moving in the three-way reconnection is felt as more than merely satisfactory: there is, I think, an excessive dynamic energy working through the gaps for a more precarious and excitingly Real kind of transformation than either the impossible one of stone to living flesh, or the more possible one of remorse to reward. What we experience in this peculiarly powerful resolution is *wonder* – at the extra-ordinarily affective scope of a relationship that can accommodate emotional distress (Leontes), grief (Mamillius) and joy (Perdita): so that we are tempted to a faith in the healing power of some dramatic and excessive force – a numinous gap beyond and within the order of the play – that can offer second chances.

Ellen Terry first stepped onto the professional stage in the role of Mamillius, at the age of nine, in 1856,[153] and she finished her Shakespearean career[154] as Hermione, at the Lyceum, in 1906.[155] It seems ironically fitting that she should have begun by performing the flexible and indeterminable spirit of a stage boy who died too soon – and ended as a martyred queen and beneficent mother: the spirited unconventionality of her childhood-self, tamed to the self-sacrificial stereotype of the all-loving, all-forgiving Victorian mother. There is a correlation, I think, between Hermione's consecration in art and Terry's petrified status as a national treasure of the fading theatrical tradition of the past century: both figure the ideal, timelessly beautiful mother bestowing benediction on her children-in-art, and on all those who worship her image. Hermione's statue is allowed some effect of ageing: as Leontes baldly points out,

[153] In a production of *The Winter's Tale* that opened at the Princess's Theatre, London, on 28th April, 1856; directed by Charles and Ellen Kean.
[154] Apart from a nostalgic cameo as Juliet's nurse in the Lyceum's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1919.
[155] The production opened at the Lyceum Theatre, London, on 27th October 1906; directed by Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

‘Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing / So agèd as this seems’.[156] Terry, on the other hand, was required to arrest her own growth in order to delight and foster her aesthetic children – especially the sons – who adopted, even worshipped, her as their iconic cosmic mother.[157] For her stage-jubilee in 1906, Shaw sought to preserve her exceptional fixity in a poem that begins:

> Oh, Ellen was it kind of Fate
>
> To make your youth so thrifty
>
> That you are young at fifty-eight
>
> Whilst we are old at fifty?

In the third stanza, he proposes that:

> Change plays its part
>
> In every known direction
>
> Save your imperishable art
>
> And our unchanged affection.[158]

Whatever the literary merits of this piece, the sentiments are clear: Terry must, for the benefit of her audiences, remain magically immune to the ordinary rhythms of development and decay. W. Graham Robertson, another of her adoring ‘sons’ (who at least remained with her through her old age) characterised their intimacy as that of ‘the Goddess and the Little Boy’, claiming that ‘as [his] years increased, hers did not’.[159] And Clement Scott – one of her most

[156] 5.3.28-9.
[157] Most notably: George Bernard Shaw; W. Graham Robertson; Oscar Wilde; J. M. Barrie; Edward Burne-Jones.
[158] Shaw, qtd. in Auerbach, p. 278.
[159] Robertson, p. 338.

admiring critics – arrested her mobility, perhaps unwittingly, when he wrote of her: 'Women who have inspired men with love, or loyalty, or homage, or respect, should never be allowed to grow old'.[160] These tributes may read, at first, as attempts to reach towards the extra-ordinary and timeless quality of Terry's presence, on and off-stage; but, on further examination, the terms of the definition could read as misappropriations of that quality as a benefit locked into the service of the very male system. If Terry's power were conceived as 'unchanging' – like the esteem in which it was apparently held – its unpredictable challenge to their ascendancy might be averted.

In public opinion, Terry and her theatrical role had finally coalesced in her performance of Hermione. The mingled identity served, it seems, to elevate Terry beyond the bounds of the human:

> Miss Viola Tree [as Perdita] need not fear that we shall accuse her of superstition when she kneels and implores Hermione's blessing, for we see Ellen Terry not only as a great actress, and a great personality, but as a great religion.[161]

But Terry was no breathing marble Madonna; in fact, she seems to have found the sanctity of her imposed image quite ridiculous. Her privately subversive response to such paralysing definitions is exemplified in her confession to Robertson that she had undercut Hermione's magnificent apotheosis by laughing one night, during the statue scene:

> A dreadful thing – I laughed last night!! As the statue! & I'm laughing now! Who cd help it! With Leontes shouting & Paulina shouting they just roared so I cd not help

[160] Scott, p. 1.
[161] Qtd. in Auerbach, p. 282.

> it!…Oh Graham I was rather glad – for I have not been able to laugh at all lately (& that's downright **wicked**) but I'm so afraid I may do it again if they will shout!! You see (as a statue) I don't look at 'em – I only hear them – & it's excruciatingly funny = I'm mad at myself -[162]

Auerbach writes that:

> 'Laughter had been her weapon against pathos; now it became her weapon against the veneration of mothers, a form of worship which in the supposedly sophisticated new century was taking on a feverish intensity'.[163]

As always, Terry's presence mercurially refused and exceeded any orderly role: without overt confrontation, maybe – but with a, perhaps, more disturbingly insistent challenge levelled through her humour.

Although she never played the part, a moody Ariel trapped in the cloven pine of public expectation, and still in thrall to the magus of the Lyceum (even after his death),[164] seems, to me, a fitting role for the mercurial Terry. In her own 'airy spirit', she continually escaped the moulding of a series of controlling artistic Pygmalions[165] throughout her life; and perhaps most possessive of all was her son Edward Gordon Craig, who carved her post-mortem image as the little mother he would have liked her to be. None of these men managed to subdue Terry to the singular parts they had written for her; but, importantly for my theory, it appears that she

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[162] Terry, 'Ellen Terry to W. Graham Robertson September 6th, 1906' (Huntingdon Library), qtd. in Auerbach, p. 283.
[163] Auerbach, p. 284.
[164] Henry Irving died in 1905.
[165] Her first husband G. F. Watts; her lover Edward Godwin; her theatrical master Henry Irving; her epistolary-adorer G. B. Shaw;

never actively resisted – never fell out with – any of them. Her elusiveness was more subtle than any public rebellion that would have jeopardised her financial and artistic security; but she, nevertheless, still wriggled free from their possession.

It is understandable that Terry found Hermione a sad part to play. She was old for the role at fifty-nine, and perhaps she felt she was parading her own lost mobility: cast as a monumental self-sacrificial mother to free, audacious (and sometimes voracious) youth. She never played the part of Perdita and – like her 'lost' Rosalind – this might have better suited her festive spirit. But my reading of the female gap allows for a certain release of that mobile spirit here: in the dynamic excessive energy of the maternal relation. As discussed earlier, the Hermione-Perdita bond operates with a fluid intensity that exceeds linear narrative progression, thus remaining essentially and dramatically *present*, even beyond death. As a statue who moves (or who laughs, in Terry's case), Hermione visibly performs her own resurrection within the allowing parameters of romance. More importantly for her agency, though, the contrived dramatic representation reflects, as I have already pointed out, an active presence that finds the past (and passed) mother immanent to the live present. Again, as I have argued, the unrepresentable status of the lost mother is continuous with the one who is found, since both perform the dramatic gap in the fixed narrative – through the vital and excessive relation to at least one of its terms.

I have discussed Terry's elusive presence in relation to John Singer Sargent's Lady Macbeth portrait – and her paradoxical reputation as both the most pictorial of actresses and also the most difficult to describe. The many *photographs* of Terry in role – either on stage or in the studio – do not, though, seem to do justice to her extra-ordinary power. In fact, they look

pretty ordinary: heavy and fixed. Even allowing for historical shifts in popular taste, Terry's celebrated beauty is hard to find today. Rather than to undercut the judgement of the time, however, the images work, instead, to reinforce my sense of the female gap as dramatically *live*. The quality that neither the still photograph nor the inadequate verbal definition could capture is that which is essentially excessive to the fixed image or linguistic register: an impact achieved, above all, through movement, shifting expression and vocal cadence – in other words, through her dramatic *presence*. And it is this that is astonishingly captured in Sargent's magnificent painting – somehow activated in the painted figure as a mobility excessive to its static contours and to the scripted parameters of the role itself.[166]

Terry herself – although she commended the vitality in Sargent's portrait as all she meant to 'do' – questioned the appropriateness of enshrining the mercurial spirit of the actor in 'marble' or 'gilded monuments'.[167] When, in the year after his death, a commemorative statue of Henry Irving was being designed – 'a portrait statue in academic robes'[168] – Terry wrote that '[a] statue can never at any time be a very happy memorial to an actor, who does not do the work in his own person, but through his imagination of many different persons';[169] and she goes on: '[i]f a statue it had to be, the work should have had a symbolic character'.[170] The wonder of the Hermione-statue is its freeing from fixity; and Terry – like Hermione – freed herself from the confines of her 'ageless' public role, finding her presence in the relational excess produced in every dramatic moment and by every part she played. In her life, her

[166] See my discussion in Chapter I ('Lady Macbeth').
[167] Shakespeare, Sonnet 55, line 1, All the Sonnets of Shakespeare, p. 181.
[168] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 264.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid. Sculptor Alfred Gilbert agreed with Terry that he 'should rather elect to regard Irving in the abstract, when called upon to suggest a fitting monument, than to promise a faithful portrait' (qtd. in Terry, p. 265).

excessive roles were her blended ungendered child-self, the unconventional artist's 'wife', and the protesting mother. On the stage, she continued to perform the unfixable gap of Mamillius's absent presence as the immanent excess of her Hermione – and of every role (and lost role)[171] in between.

Terry's famous theatrical partnership with Irving had been dissolved by his death by the time she played the part of her final Shakespearean heroine. But, contrary to popular opinion, she never actively dissolved their relationship herself. In her *Memoirs*, Terry writes, 'If I could tell here the whole story of our long partnership, it would show that the accusation that he treated me badly is as silly as the accusation that I treated him badly'.[172] But she insists that the time for the story of her separation from Irving 'has not yet come'.[173] Terry's private notes provide a very detailed study of Irving's character, his approaches to enacting his roles, and her own responses to him.[174] Her mixed feelings of 'contempt and affection and admiration' are, perhaps, best understood in her comment that wonders 'how his other friends and lovers feel to him'.[175] But her commitment to the relationship – in life and after his death – was, as St. John remarks in her own note to the Appendix, clearly unshakable: 'The note "About H. I."…makes perfectly clear that Ellen Terry loyally continued to serve Henry Irving, against her own interests, until she was finally convinced that she could no longer be of use to him'.[176]

Most interesting for my thesis is Terry's claim that she had been the mediator of the creative energy of his company: 'I consider I have been of a good deal of use to him as a buffer between

[171] Most significantly, Rosalind, Perdita and Cleopatra.
[172] Terry, *Memoirs*, p. 250.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Terry, 'Appendix to Chapter XIII: "About H. I." (by Ellen Terry)', *Memoirs*, pp. 268-74.
[175] Ibid., p. 271.
[176] St. John's note to 'Appendix to Chapter XIII: "About Henry Irving", p. 274.

him and his company', since his 'self-concentration' draws his boundaries too rigidly.[177] She laments that he 'is so careful and cautious' and wishes that 'he were more ingenuous and more direct'.[178] But she admires him as one of the 'best and most remarkable men of his time', despite 'his being incapable of caring for people, sons, friends, any one, and his lack of enthusiasm for other people's work, or indeed for anything outside *his own* work'.[179] Terry continued to be useful but also, perhaps, *threatening* to his strongly-drawn boundaries: her presence highlighted for him, as discussed earlier, his own hard-won acting success – hers being of a freer, easier nature. It has been stated that Terry owed her success to her partnership with Irving, and that she would have received much lesser recognition as an actress without his professional support. As Auerbach puts it: 'Cynical colleagues thought that Irving's magnificence had raised Ellen Terry to an eminence she would never have achieved alone'.[180] But Irving might, equally, never have achieved such fame without Terry. Just as the actorly spirit could not be trapped by a statue, so the individual character could not, by itself, produce the dramatic vitality of the performed relation of presence.

On her eightieth birthday, Terry thanked her private and public audiences for their 'delightful fuss',[181] which was not, she claimed, for her, but for the power of Shakespeare's characterisations:

[177] Terry, p. 270.
[178] Ibid., p. 269.
[179] Ibid., p. 270.
[180] Auerbach, p.222.
[181] In a speech delivered by her daughter, Edith Craig, qtd. in Terry, p.328.

> *I know I have to thank Shakespeare for it.* It is because I am associated with him in people's minds because the parts of his I played are more enduring than 'marble or the gilded monument' that I am not forgotten.[182]

What endured in the memory of the performance was the vitality of the unrepresentable dramatic relation between actress and character. For the Victorians, in an era before the availability of either audio or visual recording, stage performances could not outlast their final eye-witnesses – and will ever be a gap in our theatrical history. But in reimagining the performance of the Shakespearean parts Terry played – especially with Irving – we can get closer to accessing her excessive presence: the female experience active outside representation but performing within, and *as*, the gaps of the historical record.

[182] Terry, p. 328. This was a message drafted by St. John, with the approval of Terry.

CONCLUSIONS

In my concluding discussion, I want to return to the point I made in my preface to this study about reading literature theoretically, and, also, about making a contribution to theory through literary analysis. In particular, I want to consider the implications of my reading of Shakespeare's female characters for current feminist theory, and to ask questions about characterisations of femaleness on our contemporary stages. Here, then, I will briefly re-set my own thinking alongside that of some important theorists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries who, like me, have worked with dramatic models of self-hood – and in dialogue with current feminist perspectives. Most significant of the former is Jacques Derrida, who was one of the first philosophers explicitly to 'think with Shakespeare' – to use Julia Lupton's phrase,[1] in developing his perspective on politics and history. As I said in my introduction, philosophy has conventionally been a male-dominated sport; and Derrida's is a very masculine model of identity. Thinking along with Derrida's thinking with Shakespeare, then, I insert the elusive female experience within and yet radically beyond his masculinist frame of reference. Like Derrida, I am interested in processual accounts of being, and in the live relation that drives it; and my dramatic model celebrates the *connectivity* of the order and the gap as the fundamental, energy-fuelled, and yet unrecordable, driver of all presence. This is, I think, an active phenomenon similar to the unknowable essence that perplexes Derrida in his ghostly encounter with the spectral 'other' – as I shall explain. I shall proceed to touch lightly on more recent debates about shared female identity in the work of Judith Butler and

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[1] Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare*.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, before returning to the theatre, with Peter Brook – and finally, and aptly, to Ellen Terry and Shakespeare.

In *Specters of Marx*,[2] Derrida negotiates our relationship to the 'otherness' of history with reference to the ghost in *Hamlet* – through an imaginative encounter with the 'revenant' who mysteriously appears to us from 'beyond all living present'.[3] For Hamlet, he explains, the patriarchal revenant has both personal and political import; whereas, for him, the spectral presence represents Karl Marx, and the continuing influence of communism – beyond the collapse of the Soviet framework. He conceives of an ethics of 'différance' that respects and serves the multiplicity of modalised presents that paradoxically both constitute and also differ from our own.[4] We are – to put it simply – 'haunted' by unreachable spectral presences that stimulate in us a desire for 'the experience of what we are unable to experience'.[5] For Derrida, the fulfilment of desire for knowledge of the other is always deferred – beyond the parameters of the order of being, in a remote, inaccessible future, or, conversely, in an unrecoverable past. And since 'the time is [always] out of joint',[6] and the present is itself not 'docile to time',[7] our experience now – *maintenant* – consists in '*maintain[ing]* that which does not hold together [my italics]'[8] in a 'time and history that is *disarticulated*…deranged, both out of order and mad'.[9]

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[2] 'Specters of Marx' was Derrida's two-part plenary address to a 1993 conference at U.C. Riverside, organised around the question, 'Whither Marxism'. The speech formed the basis for his book, *Specters of Marx.*
[3] Derrida, 'Exordium', *Specters*, p. xviii.
[4] Past present; present; future present: all being continuous.
[5] Derrida, 'Injunctions of Marx', *Specters*, p.3.
[6] 'Hamlet', 1.5.186.
[7] Derrida, 'Exordium', p. xix.
[8] Ibid., 'Injunctions', p. 20.
[9] Ibid.

This is, as I discussed earlier, properly Hegelian dialectical thinking, insofar as the absolute oneness of complete being can be conceived here only in terms of an oppositional split: where *what is not* always occurs as a derivative of *what is*, and the promise of unity is always and only an illusion. Recognition of the radical temporal disjunction is, for Derrida, a chance '[t]o live otherwise, and better', or, as he corrects himself, 'not better, but more justly'[10] in response – and responsibility – to radical 'différance' itself. His awareness of 'the non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present'[11] involves a recognition of the limitations of our structures of knowledge, and the real, unreadable energy beyond our scope of cognition and our 'condition of language'.[12] The intrusive appearance of Derrida's spectral 'other' causes obvious confusion for us insofar as it is decontextualised; but also, and perhaps more disturbingly, by its potential to engage with us *from* that point of difference, with what appears to be a similar capacity to *see us* – what Derrida calls 'the visor effect' (with reference to the armoured ghost of Old Hamlet). What disturbs us is the inaccessibility of the face behind the mask, and the fact that 'we do not see who looks at us'.[13] So, not only are we, presently, aware of otherness, but otherness is also aware of *us* – in a mutually-conscious exchange of energy from differently active centres of being.

The female gap, as I have conceived it, operates as a similar disjunction in the order: continually – and disparately – present. But where Derrida's 'specter' has a representable identity – in armour, or in the figure of Marx, for example – the female gap has no symbolic 'visor': no *recorded* legac[ies]. Responsibility to the other is, for Derrida, a peculiarly masculine

[10] Derrida, 'Exordium', p. xviii.
[11] Ibid., p. xviii.
[12] Ibid., 'Injunctions', p. 9.
[13] Ibid., p.6.

affair: 'The *revenant* is going to come…The spirit of the father is going to come back'.[14] He quotes Paul Valéry's philosophical genealogy: '*Kant qui genuit Hegel, qui genuit Marx, qui genuit*…', suggesting that Valéry appears somewhere on the (re)productive list. And it is to be inferred, of course, that Derrida is himself to be represented there. The 'being with specters' is, for Derrida, 'a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations',[15] but it does not include, it seems, being with *femaleness*: the multiply visor-less spectre *out* of history.

Where Derrida's encounter with spectres entails a temporal deferral, for Emmanuel Levinas – another great late-twentieth century French philosopher, concerned with performative ethics – the spiritual 'beyond' is always already *here*, in the 'face' of the – very human – other. The Levinasian 'face' is a term for the active ethical *relation* through which the subject emerges – somehow 'otherwise than being'.[16] Levinas's theory consciously owes much, as David Ruiter points out,[17] to Martin Buber's earlier 'I-You' paradigm of dialogue: the *activity* of the occurrence though which the subject takes shape only by *being* the occurrence. Buber says:

> In the beginning is the relation – as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul, the *a priori* of relation: *the innate You.*[18]

For Buber, a relationship with the 'other' essentially involves a relationship with God, where God is understood as a 'kind of quintessence of personality'.[19] And, so, the ethical relation accommodates the numinous within the ordinary: the kind of unreadable *immanent beyond*

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[14] Derrida, p. 2-3.
[15] Ibid., 'Exordium', p. xviii.
[16] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*.
[17] David Ruiter, 'Harry's (in)human face', *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. by Ewan Fernie (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 50.
[18] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by W. Kaufman (New York: Touchstone, 1970), p.78.
[19] Ruiter, p. 67.

that I have identified working excessively, and affectively, through the female gap.[20] Where Buber primarily conceives of the relation as the means to self-actualisation through reciprocity, however, Levinas's 'face' involves a kind of radical *emptying* of the self ('kenosis'[21]) that privileges responsibility to the other over self-fulfilment. In his discussion of the aesthetic experience as an overflowing of the 'self-complete world' of the artist, Levinas recognises both human and divine alterity:

> The subject who speaks does not situate the world in relation to himself, nor situate himself purely and simply at the heart of his own spectacle…Instead he is situated in relation to the Other. This privilege of the Other ceases to be incomprehensible once we admit that the first fact of existence is neither being in-itself nor being for-itself but being *for the other*.[22]

Despite their difference in emphasis, Levinas discovers, like Buber, the numinous within the ordinary; or, as Richard Kearney puts it, '[Levinas] confronts us with the paradox of the infinite which is inscribed *within* our historical experience of totality'.[23] The points of definition for this relation are, for both philosophers – as for Derrida – ordinary and representable, even if not intrinsically knowable: 'being *for the other*' assumes that the other – any other – shares similar socio-symbolic references. But in my theory, the authentic connection that supports the wider ethical network cannot presuppose the unified identity of any of its active participants: it is not only the relation that exceeds our cognitive security, but also its

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[20] See Chapter IV, 'Hermione'.
[21] See Lowell Gallagher's discussion of the meaning of 'kenosis' (in 'Paul's Epistle to the Philippians', 2:4-9) in 'Waiting for Gobbo', *Spiritual Shakespeares*, p. 82.
[22] Levinas, qtd. in Sean Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 72.
[23] Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 63.

interactive components. Being with and for *the female* is, then, to engage in a relationship with a gap: opening to an undelimited alterity that is multiple, fluid and always and only present.

Badiou, too, recognises the irreducible 'no thing' that immanently exceeds the definitive 'some thing' of being. Subjectivity senses its own disjunction, and its separation from others; but what overflows its isolating definition is, in Badiou's thinking, not released in ethical responsiveness to other subjects – or between groups of subjects – but within the subjective connection to a higher order of being: the excessiveness of universal grace that transcends the 'predicative, particular and partial', and emerges in the 'supernumerary' divine Event.[24] Badiou draws on the visionary writings of St. Paul to establish divine grace as the extra-ordinary Event that *connects* rather than divides us – since it is impartial and non-causal. But the connection must be made individually and personally. This is Badiou's 'strong, simple idea that every existence can one day be seized by what happens to it and subsequently devote itself to that which is valid for all'.[25] Since this kind of narrative-shaking event is equally available to all, it involves an ethical responsiveness generated in the sphere of the 'Same', rather than in traversing difference.[26] In the sense that this excess operates *beyond* difference, it is more resonant with the excess of the female gap, as I conceive it: since difference seems to entail otherness that can still be registered in the order;[27] but when the otherness is extra-ordinary, it cannot be delimited by the symbolic network – the Lacanian 'big Other'. The relationship is limitless not only in its energy exchange but in its elusive reference points. Such

[24] Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 76, 63.
[25] Ibid., p. 66.
[26] Ibid., *Ethics*, pp. 18-9.
[27] Where the female other is registered as object.

an interactive relation generates energy that exceeds all 'settled senses of the world',[28] and provokes our precarious experience of being *more* – and also perhaps disturbingly *less* – than being, here and now.

This abstract theorising does, though, appear to cast off the affective relation from its physical mooring, from those 'settled senses' through which we must process its dramatic presence. In proposing that female presence may be performed somehow beyond representative identities, it might seem that I am merely playing semantic games that erase over half of the human race from our agreed register of *actual* being, and deny the identity-politics that establish any form of recognisable agency. Feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler have already raised concerns similar to mine about the precarious identity of femaleness. As she says, 'By conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to gross charges of misrepresentation'; and she goes on to insist that the requirement for stable identity-categorisation in representational politics is 'an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations'.[29] The construction of the female as universal (secondary) other – with the kind of embattled solidarity that De Beauvoir once constructed[30] – has been significantly exploded by Butler and, more recently, by the intersectional thinking of theorists, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw: who point out that female experience is fundamentally conditioned and splintered by variables in power relations such as class, race and ethnicity, and religion.[31] What Butler and Crenshaw both expose is the

[28] 'The Winter's Tale', 5.3.72.
[29] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 6-7, 8.
[30] See De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.
[31] See especially: Kimberlé Crenshaw,TED, *The Urgency of Intersectionality* (October2016) <https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality > [Accessed 20th July 2021].

regulatory force of the term *identity* in describing and containing the elusive female subject of feminist discourse. Butler's assertion that '[t]he identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics, if the formation of the subject takes place within a field of power regularly buried through the assertion of that foundation'[32] resonates with my proposal that the female *subject* can only be registered as *object* in the established order: by conceiving of female experience as a *gap* in representation, I actively embrace the diversity of female experience that eludes any specific model of femininity.[33]

Without a substantial model, though, political representation and its associated agency may seem impossible – with a kind of self-denying dispersal into powerlessness. But the female gap has ethical and political force in being dramatic: being dynamically interactive and radically *affective*. What I propose is that the female gap performs a politics not of *identity*, but of *presence*: when identity is essentially achieved through the masculinist hierarchical symbolic structure, presence, on the other hand – being always and only *present* – radically escapes all fixity of definition. Here, I appear to re-enter the territory of late twentieth century French feminist writers, such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, who called for an 'écriture féminine' that would dismantle phallogocentrism and register openly the complexly variable female experience. In its variety, feminine writing would be freed from the grammatical and syntactical rules that imply 'the unified viewpoint of men' and embrace a more metaphorical

[32] Butler, p. 8.
[33] This fluidity accommodates gender variables; but a further discussion of the sex/gender debate is beyond the scope of this study.

and fluid, non-linear style that describes a 'hysterical'[34] reaction to its confines.[35] In particular, Cixous's formulation 'qui sont-je' chimes with my thinking about the multiple female gap: not only in its freeing the subject from its singularity, but also in its making identity always interrogative and present.[36]

But Cixous's deconstructive theory unhelpfully reconvenes a unified viewpoint of women in describing – and thus delimiting – its otherness. What my theory of the female gap refuses is a definitive feminine position. Where feminist writing tends to focus on the points of difference between the masculine and feminine – or, more expansively, across genders – I find a more interesting dynamic working in the *relation* between the order of representation and its present but unfixable excess. My project importantly 'feels backward' to unlock unrepresented female agency operating productively within a secure masculinist socio-symbolic order. I am, as I have made clear, keen to readmit pre-emancipated femaleness to a discussion about presence, as a significant example of overlooked agency; and to re-evaluate its usefulness in challenging our current models of power. There is scope in a further dramatic study, however, to recover other kinds of hidden agency operating in excess of the restrictive system; and more radically still, to consider a projected dismantling of the order itself in the event of a more *general* dispersal of agency beyond delimited identity. Without response to an order of some description, of course, there might be no productive friction – no drama – for the generation of being. But this problem is for another time, and another thesis.

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[34] See Chapter I, 'Ophelia'. Hysteria, according to Cixous, 'reveals repression and at the same time resistance to it', (Diane Griffin Crowder, qtd. in Simon Wortmann, *The Concept of Ecriture Feminine in Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa"* (Germany: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2012), 3.2.

[35] The 'unified viewpoint of men' is, I think, problematically simplifying. But the point is that the system can accommodate variations in masculine positions, since it has been constructed through such variables.

[36] See Conley, 'Writing the Missexual: A Cleopatrician in Her Own Right', *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, pp. 51-94.

Here, then, I want to return to the theatre, and the presences its drama makes available. Cixous, for one, is concerned with locating femaleness physically, insisting that women must find a language that can 'speak the body', to release female sexuality and its expression from repressive objectification.[37] This is why Cixous appeals to women to 'orientate towards the multiple sexual impulses of their body to find a liberating way of writing'.[38] The physical dimension of female experience that Cixous privileges is important to my thinking about the embodied female gap in performance: where the actor provides a specifically *female* physical centre for the release of an extra-ordinary dramatic multiplicity beyond settled identity – generated in response to the confining codes of the linear narrative: so that, although the potential for this kind of myriad selves-dispersal is – as I have discussed – contained within Shakespeare's scripted words, its realisation is dependent on the performative presence of the female body. Peter Brook's discussion of the 'theory of Happenings', in his chapter on 'Holy Theatre' in *The Empty Space*, considers something like the live manifestation of the excess in performance in what he terms 'The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible'.[39] The 'holy', as Brook describes it, is activated in the theatrical encounter where the extra-ordinary assumes sensible life, just as it produces its own transcendence. In the performance, he says, 'we can try to capture the invisible but we must not lose touch with common sense'.[40] Above all, though, he insists, we must avoid 'The Deadly Theatre', where we 'rush' to give things a prescriptive 'label'.[41] The female gap escapes Brook's 'deadly' label in assuming visible, sensible life and by being an interactive dramatic 'happening'.

[37] Crowder, qtd. in Wortmann, 3.1.
[38] Ibid., 3.2.
[39] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), p. 61, 47.
[40] Brook, p. 69.
[41] Ibid., p. 15.

My thesis, then, finds that the female experience can never find real representation in our available symbolic terms, since these have no scope to encompass its unregistered energies: even now, a hundred years after women's political emancipation, it is still a gap. But what the female gap *is* is dramatic presence: elusive since her story is unrecorded – intrusive since undeniably and physically affective. John J. Joughin describes our availability to this kind of presence or 'happening' as an 'aesthetic attitude' that 'refuses to be prescribed by pre-determined categories', being open to 'imagining the possibility that the world and its objects might be otherwise than they are'.[42] In other words – and to quote Theodor Adorno on this theme – insofar as happenings (or art) become actual, 'in appearing empirically', they are, at the same time, 'liberated from the burden of the empirical' by being essentially dramatic and unrecordable.[43] In this the female gap must also be regarded aesthetically – as a happening of presence that is both empirically within and yet beyond the moment's capture. But it is important to emphasise the sensuous rooting of the gap (and of art), since presence – certainly in our known world – is dependent on showing up, and on *being present*.

The rehearsal room and the stage are, then, I conclude, the optimal conditions for dramatising through Shakespeare the presence of the female gap – both to demonstrate its physical form, and also to access its extra-ordinary dynamic excess. It is in these spaces of live dramatic potential that my thesis ultimately needs testing. And here, in the context of the theatre, I want to return, finally, to Terry and her sense of the continuing presence of all past female agency, albeit performed quite differently according to its changing conditions. She acknowledges – in her tribute to the ambition of the contemporary suffragette movement –

[42] John J. Joughin, 'Bottom's secret', *Spiritual Shakespeares*, p. 136.
[43] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by R. Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p. 81.

the vigorous spirit of the Early Modern woman, in terms that resonate powerfully with my own resurrection of Victorian female energy, as exemplified in her. And it is fitting that I should conclude, with her, that:

> [n]othing is more extra-ordinary in one generation than the idea that it is totally different from any other which has preceded it. Such prejudice exists even among the clever women of the present day, who appear quite unconscious that the burning [feminist] questions they are discussing now are as old as the hills.'[44]

And their questions are still present, and will continue to burn – so long as the women who ask them perform real dramatic gaps in our system of political representation and power.

[44] Terry, 'The 1900s, the suffragettes and the Shakespeare lectures at Smallhythe Place', *The 2018 Triumphant Women Exhibition* <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/smallhythe-place/features/the-1900s-the-suffragettes-and-the-shakespeare-lectures> [Accessed 16th December, 2018].

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