Impossible Heroes:
Heroism and Political Experience in Early Modern England

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Abstract

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During the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English commonwealth was caught between competing concepts of the political. England's political culture had traditionally combined monarchy with local autonomy, office-holding, and a republican ethos that understood politics in terms of dynamic individual action and potentiality. In the Renaissance, however, this plural and personalized political paradigm was increasingly at odds with the centralizing tendencies of the Tudor-Stuart monarchs. The tensions that resulted led to both real-world tumults (the Northern Rebellion of 1569, Essex Revolt of 1601, the Civil Wars of 1642-51) and more subtle expressions of political pessimism and anxiety across England's literary and cultural discourses. But this same period also saw a sudden surge of interest in heroism. In a moment when the political impotence of individual action was widely felt, many of England's most prominent writers turned to heroic fictions that imagined personal potential triumphing over constituted political authority.

Impossible Heroes argues that we can understand this paradox only if we recognize that heroism functioned in early modern England as a complex political fantasy, one that tried to suture symbolically the widening rift between individual action and the increasing abstraction and alienation of state power. This political function is apparent across early modern English literature, from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* to Davenant's *Gondibert* and Dryden's heroic tragedies. But while these writers (and others) use heroism to reconcile the individual to the political totality of the state, *Impossible Heroes* focuses on four writers—Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, and William Shakespeare—who deploy heroism to craft a different political fantasy. All these writers worked during the final years of Elizabeth's reign and the early years of James I's, anxious decades when royal authoritarianism went hand-in-hand with a widespread sense of political alienation. But rather than using heroism to alleviate this alienation, they emphasized the growing incompatibility between a dynamic, action-oriented experience of political life and institutional situations that conspired (as the Earl of Essex put it) to "suppress all noble, virtuous, and heroical spirits." Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare portray heroism as *impossible* in practice. But out of this practical impossibility, their work posits heroism's potential as a utopian poetic and political fantasy of individual action.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Jay and Pauline Lowrance, and to my wife, Emily.

Introduction

Heroism and Political Experience in Early Modern England

I

Heroism is a hard topic to talk about today, especially in an academic venue. From the ongoing flood of films based on 1950s comic books to the abundance of manifestos clamoring for moral regeneration by returning to "heroic" role models on the contemporary right, heroism is certainly alive in mass culture.[1] But the figure of "the hero" is understandably something of a *persona non grata* in the academic world. Especially since the mid twentieth century, heroism has been dismissed by most left-leaning intellectuals as a dated but dangerous vehicle of alarming ideological positions and projects—from Thomas Carlyle to modernist reactionaries like Wyndham Lewis all the way up to National Socialism itself ("heroic cruelty" is what Heinrich Himmler once instructed the S.S. to strive for in carrying out the Final Solution—no doubt heroism's all-time nadir).[2] Over the course of the last century, in

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[1] For an instance of a relatively right-wing use of heroism to argue for moral regeneration, see Peter H. Gibbon's *A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002). Gibbons' study is a particularly thoughtful example of a more ubiquitous usage of heroism in the journalistic combat of various right-wing intellectuals against the putative de-moralization of society

[2] The alarming quote from Himmler is taken from Jessica Stern's *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Ecco, 2003) p. 16. Two forgotten volumes by otherwise well-known intellectuals mark intellectual culture's growing, mid twentieth-century skepticism toward the heroic: the theater critic Eric Bentley's *A Century of Hero-Worship: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, with Notes on Wagner, Spengler, Stefan George, and D. H. Lawrence*, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) and the Marxist/pragmatist philosopher Sidney Hook's *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (New York: John Day, 1943). For Carlyle on heroism see Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, ed. Michael K. Goldberg et al. (Berkeley and Los

short, heroism has become what Raymond Williams would have called a residual cultural form. Its tropisms toward masculinity and purity and other ominous abstractions rankle the reverence for diversity, tolerance and openness so central to the standard ideologies of contemporary academia.[3]

In early modern Europe this was, of course, far from the case. Rather than being residual, heroism was a ubiquitous and distinctly *dominant* cultural form. Throughout the Renaissance, the figure of the hero provided a sort of axiological abbreviation for human positivity and possibility. It marked the human tendency toward seeking "ever the sublime … [of the] following, of the utmost greatness and worth."[4]   And across the period's literary discourse, as almost any reader knows, heroism is an almost omnipresent imaginative force—from epic and romance to popular theater and the (proto)novel; from Ariosto, Tasso, Camões, and Spenser to Cervantes to Corneille, Racine, and Dryden.[5]

Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). For Lewis, see *The Lion and the Fox*: *The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Grant Richards, 1927).

[3] On the idea of dominant versus residual cultural forms see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) pp. 121-27.

[4] Giambattista Vico, "On the Heroic Mind" in *Vico and Contemporary Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979) p. 230. Vico, of course, worked and wrote in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But his thought still swims in the water of the previous era's humanistic culture—a culture he endeavored, throughout his career, to defend from the creeping hegemony of Cartesian rationalism. See Donald R. Kelley, *Renaissance Humanism* (Boston: Twayne, 1996).

[5] Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive history of heroism in Renaissance literature, although a good short synthetic summary is provided by Maurice Evans in his article on "The Hero" in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

But in spite of heroism's early modern ubiquity, critics have largely ignored the heroic in recent years. In their groundbreaking study *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello claim that one of the major markers of the cultural triumph of neo-liberal capitalism is the fact that nowadays "virtually no one, with the exception of a few allegedly archaic Marxists" even *refers* to capitalism any longer.[6] *Mutatis mutandis*, one might say that something similar has happened to heroism in English Renaissance studies over the last few decades. Earlier in the twentieth century, heroism was periodically a hot topic, the subject of major monographs by top-tier scholars like Reuben Brower and Eugene Waith and others.[7] But during recent decades, and in conjunction with the leftward drift of literary and cultural studies more generally, heroism has vanished from the radar of most Renaissance specialists—not just as a topic of extensive research but even as a name to critically conjure.[8] Nowadays, the heroic preoccupations of Renaissance

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[6] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Eliot (London: Verso, 2005) p. ix.

[7] For the standard traditional treatments of heroism see Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Eugene Waith, *Ideas of Greatness* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971); Reuben Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Greco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Richard S. Ide, *Possessed with Greatness: The Heroic Tragedies of Shakespeare and Chapman* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[8] Almost the only scholars who have continued to write about heroism in recent decades are feminist critics. A number of feminist scholars have both subjected heroism to gendered critique and rehabilitated the Renaissance's rich discourse of female heroism as a distinct mode of female empowerment, separate from the sentimentalized notions of passive female chastity, silence, and obedience that would become dominant in the eighteenth century. A good instance of a feminist engagement with heroism that combines both these tendencies is to be found in Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) and the essays collected in *The Female Tragic*

texts are usually dealt with by being translated into other, sexier scholarly topics. A text may have explicitly heroic themes. But one does not talk about heroism as such. One talks, instead, about militarism, masculinity, tragic subjectivity….[9]

Impossible Heroes aims at reversing the marginalization of heroism in contemporary early modern studies. It argues for heroism's central place in the literary and political cultures of Renaissance England. And in doing so, it maps a new approach to the heroic literature of the early modern period. Earlier studies have analyzed heroism as a cluster of classical clichés or an ideological formation calling out for critique. I approach it, by contrast, as a powerful form of literary and political fantasy[10]—one centered on what I want to call a *dynamic* model of political experience: a vision of personal potentiality trumping constituted political power, of individual action shaping collective existence.[11]

Hero in English Renaissance Drama, ed. Naomi Conn Liebler (New York: Palgrave, 2002). I return to issues of gender and heroism in my discussion of Sidney's *Arcadia* in chapter 1.

[9] For some influential instances, see Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985); Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Dympna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989). It also worth calling attention to some of the remarkable feminist work done on Shakespeare's Roman Plays—plays that are crisscrossed by classical heroic notions. See, in particular, Janet Adelman, S*uffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origins in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[10] My use of the concept of fantasy in the following pages is informed by psychoanalytic uses of the term. I understand fantasy to mean not so much the realization of desire but, rather, a structure that "constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates … teaches us how to desire" (Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* [London: Verso, 1997] p. 7).

[11] Subsequent pages will provide further evidence for the above generalizations. For now, though, it will perhaps be helpful to cite the generalization about heroism ventured by E.R. Curtius, at the start of the "comparative phenomenology of heroism" elaborated in his *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages.* Throughout its various redactions, writes Curtius, the hero is an "ideal personal type whose being is centered upon nobility and its realization—hence upon 'pure,' not technical, values—and whose basic

The following chapters trace this fantasy through the work of four late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century writers: Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, and William Shakespeare. The work of each of these writers is permeated and powered by heroic concepts and conceits—the "well-doing" glorified in Sidney's *New Arcadia* (c. 1584), the bombastic over-reaching that propels Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1587), the contrarian "cannibal valor" at the center of Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (c. 1603), the unyielding masculine-military heroism that drives Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1606). But Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare are all also deeply ambivalent about the very *possibility* of heroism in the political worlds their texts portray. Each of them represents not just heroism's positive ideality but its simultaneous inadequacy in the face of confusing, aleatory, and often alarming political conditions. From the civil war in the *New Arcadia* to the violent metaphysical meditations of *Macbeth*, each of the writers whose work I address imagines a heroic, action-oriented politics colliding with its own political impossibility.

This joint fascination with and skepticism toward a politics of heroic singularity ties my four texts together. It echoes across the considerable formal and generic and ideological distances of Sidney and Marlowe and Chapman and

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virtue is natural nobility in body and soul. The hero is distinguished by a superabundance of intellectual will and by its concentration against the instincts. It is this which constitutes his greatness of character. The specific virtue of the hero is self-control. But the hero's will does not rest here, it presses on into power, responsibility, daring. Hence the hero can play the role of statesman or general, as in earlier times he played the role of warrior" (*European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953] p. 167).

Shakespeare's writings, where we see a powerful, if polyvalent, fascination with an experience of political life caught between individual political action and its radical inadequacy. But it also links these writers' portrayals of heroism with the broader political culture they inhabited and some of its deepest difficulties and complexities.

The political culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England was a confusing and at times contradictory farrago of different understandings and experiences of collective life. Renaissance England was, of course, a monarchy; but while the Tudor and Stuart sovereigns and their spokespeople emphasized the monarchy's absolute and god-given *plenitudo potestatis*, the realm they ruled lacked a centralized bureaucracy, a paid army, and the other administrative accoutrements of a seriously absolutist form of rule. As a result, the early modern English polity was, in practice, a horizontal distribution of authority, a "network of offices wielding political power derived from a coordinating centre by formal means," as one recent historian writes.[12]   To maintain authority, the monarchs of early modern England had to rely on the consent and the participation of the elite enfranchised who were, as Sir Thomas Smith wrote, "participant of the common wealth" and entitled to "beare office" and act.[13]   Nor was this simply an *institutional* condition of the period.

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[12] Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 19. See also Wallace T. MacCaffrey, "Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics," in *Elizabethan Government and Society*, ed. S.T. Bindoff et al. (London: Athlone Press, 1961) pp. 95-126.

[13] Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum: A Discourse on the Commonwealth of England*, ed. L. Alston (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1906) p. 32. There was, of course, one massive exception to the male dominance of political participation: Elizabeth herself, whose gender, posed serious problems for this civic, action-oriented model of the political. But although Elizabeth was in a structurally singular

The dispersal of authority and strong emphasis on local autonomy and office-holding in English political life provided fertile ground for the development among England's ruling elite of a semi-republican ethos—one that saw collective life through the lens of the classical ideal of the *vita activa*, as a way of living "in actione."[14] The baseline assumptions of this ethos are summed up nicely in the following passage, from a parliamentary speech by John Pym from the late 1620s:

> The form of government is that which doth actuate and dispose every
>
> part and member of a state to the common good; and as those parts
>
> give strength and ornament to the whole, so they receive from it again
>
> strength and protection in their several stations and degrees. If this
>
> mutual relation and intercourse be broken, the whole frame will
>
> quickly be dissolved, and fall in pieces, and instead of this concord
>
> and interchange of support, whilst one part seeks to uphold the old

position, aristocratic women were also "participant" in high-level politics, even if the theoretical frameworks available did not always clearly acknowledge them as being so. For one example of this, see Julie Crawford, "The Case of Lady Anne Clifford; or, Did Women Have a Mixed Monarchy?" *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006) pp. 1682-9. On Elizabeth and the politics of a female ruler see A.N. McClaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth, 1558-1585* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[14] John Case, *Sphaera Civitatis* (Oxford, 1588) A3ʳ. In recent years, a number of historians of English political thought have emphasized the centrality of republican civic culture to early modern England. Although J.G.A. Pocock famously dismissed a serious civic republican sentiment before the civil war, other scholars have emphasized how republican ideals co-existed with monarchical governance from the sixteenth century on, in what the late Patrick Collinson famously called a "monarchical republicanism." For more on this see Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon, 1994) pp. 1-58; Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Mark Goldie, "The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England," in *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* ed. Tim Harris (New York: Palgrave, 2001) pp. 153-94.

form of government, and the other part to introduce a new, they will

miserably consume one another.[15]

It is axiomatic, here, that the "form of government" is hierarchical. But rather than the rigidity of some sort of static *catena aurea*, hierarchy goes hand-in-hand with a dynamic sense of possibility. For the common good to be guaranteed, the constituted power of the ruler must provide avenues for the constituent actualization of the different "parts" of the body politic.

This vision of political life—as simultaneously hierarchical and dynamic, driven toward the actualization of individual potentiality—cuts across each of the texts taken up in the following chapters. It is everywhere in their emphasis on how heroism stages the triumph of individual "potentiality over limitation," on the capacity of individual potential and energy to shape collective existence.[16] But Sidney and Marlowe and Chapman and Shakespeare's simultaneous skepticism about this dynamic political ideal also ties them to the changes English political culture was undergoing during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—changes in which a traditional, dynamic, and personalized model of politics was being gradually worn away by new political realities.

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[15] Quoted in J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) p. 358.

[16] Waith, *Ideas*, p. 6.

Part of this attrition had to do with increasing tension between England's plural civic culture and the increasingly authoritarian claims of the Stuart monarchs: Pym's above-quoted statement, for instance, derives from a speech he made during Parliament's 1628 attempt to impeach one of Charles I's clerics—an early episode in the more capacious collision between the "ideals and experience of active citizenship" and the sovereign claims of the Stuart crown that would eventually precipitate the English Civil Wars.[17] But the shifts in political culture that occurred during the later English Renaissance went beyond specific institutional conflict. Historians have long noted that the later European Renaissance in general saw the emergence of a sharp sense of anthropological and political pessimism as, across elite discourse, an optimistic view of human beings as (to quote Richard Hooker) "somewhat in possibility" gave way to an increased appreciation of their enmeshment (to quote Montaigne) in the "mire and shit of the world."[18] In England, this pessimism had a particularly political inflection: the late sixteenth and

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[17] Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London: Penguin, 2008) p. 112). For more on republicanism and the English Civil Wars see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Blair Worden, "Republicanism, Regicide, and Republic: The English Experience," in *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 307-26.

[18] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. A.S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 66; Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebyond," in *Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987) p. 505. On the erosion of philosophical optimism in the Renaissance see Herschel Baker, *The Dignity of Man: Studies in the Persistence of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949); Herschel Baker, *Wars of Truth: Studies in the Decay of Christian Humanism in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953). See also William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1550-1640* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

seventeenth centuries saw an increasingly bleak view of collective life start to predominate among the commonwealth's elites. This is partially evident in the history of the period's political thought, where we see the displacement of a positive Ciceronian civic humanism by harsher varieties of political thought infused by Tacitism and Stoicism and emphasizing security and *raison d'état*, and which downplayed individual initiative and increasingly saw power as de-personalized and totalized.[19] But these theoretical shifts point to a broader sea change in the period's collective life: the confrontation between a dynamic model of political existence and an increasingly alienated experience of this existence—taking that term not in an existential or economic but rather the *political-ontological* sense of a fundamental fissure between the constituted power of individual becoming and the constituent power of static state-form.[20]

Such an experience of alienation runs through all the texts I take up in the following pages. Sidney's work, for instance, idealizes and valorizes "well-doing" and "praxis" in its portrayal of heroism, but by the *New Arcadia* his vision of political life increasingly sees individual agents as being "like tennis balls tossed on the racket of the higher powers," their own capacity to control their political

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[19] See Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) and J.H. Salmon, "Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England," in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1991) pp. 168-88.

[20] On the tension between constituent and constituted power in the modern European state, see Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

circumstances seriously called into question.[21] Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* models the material-mental aspiration of human minds, but in his later *Doctor Faustus*, he sees heroism not as a concrete becoming but as a set of self-imposed delusions and virtualities that amount to "nothing at all."[22] In his French tragedies, Chapman's heroic vision of over-reaching and "aspiring" runs up against a degraded political world of realpolitik and courtly corruption.[23] In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare shows the spectacular collision of traditional military-aristocratic virtue with political forces and dynamics outside its ken and control. Each of these texts is engaged, then, with a broader alienation of individual, dynamic political action in the later English Renaissance. But while this thesis might, at first glance, seem like a standard exercise in historicist contextualization, I also want to use it as a way of rethinking such historicist practice—of rethinking how we think about the relationship between literature, history, and politics. And this thread of my argument hinges on the term political experience.

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[21] Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (London: Penguin Books, 1978) p. 817.

[22] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* 9.40-1, quoted from *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

[23] George Chapman, *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, in *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, ed. John Margeson (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988) 1.2.99-103.

II

Talking about political experience—or, for that matter, any type of experience—is an odd, and almost awkward, move to make in a contemporary literary- or cultural-critical project. The reasons for this are not hard to discern. The concept of experience has been persistently (and persuasively) problematized over the course of the last century, described as both an irretrievable casualty of urban modernity and a conceptual category whose inherent humanism and metaphysical baggage makes little more than "ideology's homeland."[24] The way that I use the term experience, as we will see, defines it not as a site of *individual* affective plenitude but, instead, as both *collective* (bound up in political life, never reducible to a subjectivity that is bounded and autonomous) and *contradictory* (always fractured by the contradictions of collective existence). [25] But still, the term itself carries a kind of anachronistic, contrarian charge—one that I deploy advisedly and indeed polemically. For *Impossible Heroes* not only aims at outlining a new reading of the texts just mentioned. It also aims at parting ways with a dominant contemporary

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[24] This dismissive description of experience comes from Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1975) p. 15. The point, however, is not unique to the early, Althusserian Eagleton. It is made at greater length (and with greater nuance) in Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991) pp. 773-97. The idea of modernity as a crisis of experience was widespread throughout the twentieth century. One particularly influential version is provided by the work of Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, as Giorgio Agamben writes, "question of experience can be approached today only with an acknowledgment that it is no longer accessible to us" *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* [London: Verso, 2007] p. 15). For a helpful review of the historical fortunes of the concept of experience generally, see also Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

[25] See Hegel's discussion of the concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) in *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 84.

feature of how today's early modern scholars deal with the relationship between politics and literature, and—by implication—literature and history.

This is the tendency of historicist critics to de-emphasize the subjective and experiential features of literary texts in favor of mapping their enmeshment in the concrete coordinates of production, distribution, and reception.[26] Understanding this tendency requires traversing the well-travelled terrain of the history of American[27] early modern studies over the last few decades—particularly the fortunes of the historical study of Renaissance literature during, and in the wake of, New Historicism.[28] Renaissance scholars have, of course, always done various sorts of historical work. But what made New Historicism unique and exciting when it burst on the disciplinary scene in the 1980s was its radical rupturing of the firewall

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[26] It is perhaps worth noting that literary studies is currently in the midst of a broad reaction against the critical objectification of literary texts—whether in terms of historical *context* or theoretical *concept*. The most obvious example of this reaction comes in the affect-oriented, "reparative" mode of reading that has become increasingly influential in queer theory (and beyond) in recent years. On this, see Rita Felski, *The Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008) as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's classic essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2003) pp. 123-52. This broad turn runs parallel to another methodological movement more specific to early modern studies, where a sense of dissatisfaction with the context- and object-mania of contemporary archival historicism has been registered recently in the rise of "historical phenomenology" in early modern studies. For an overview of this rising school of thought, and some relevant points about the decline of the experiential and subjective in early modern studies see Bruce R. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010). As will be evident from the following, the particular political historicism of experience that I propose differs from both of these approaches.

[27] The brief sketch I provide here of the fortunes of Renaissance studies provides a largely American view of the issue.

[28] The literature on New Historicism is multitudinous but—for especially helpful discussions—see Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 16, no. 1 (1986) pp. 13-43; James Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger* (London: Verso, 2000); and Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

separating text and context, textuality and historicity.[29] The New Historicists

variously argued that the two were indissociably connected, and they made this

argument with both a methodological-theoretical panache and a sense of political

purpose (with their focus on topics like power, representation, and resistance) that

spoke strongly to various threads of post-1960s culture.[30] But while the decisive

gesture of New Historicism was extra-literary—its highly political collision of

literature with history—most New Historicist scholars remained focused on the

ultimately *subjective* dynamics that literary texts staged. Such a focus could take

various forms: the gymnastics of self-fashioning in the face of centralized power, the

anxieties produced in male elites by a female monarch, or the various ways in which

political subjects were constituted by the ideologies of Jacobean rule….[31] But, in all

these cases, for the New Historicists, early modern literary texts provided an arena

in which the dialectical back and forth of political and social power and supposedly

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[29] See Louis Adrian Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," in *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) pp. 303-40.

[30] On the post-60s European context of the theoretical thinking that would soon suffuse US academia, see Tony Judt's short but sharp survey in his brilliant *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2006) pp. 398-407. For an interesting (if somewhat myopic) interpretation of New Historicism in terms of a broader post-modern cultural paradigm see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) pp. 181-249.

[31] I am referring (respectively) to the classic New Historicist studies in Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representations* 2 (1983) pp. 61-94; and Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

autonomous subjectivity was revealed in all its *experiential* complexity (however much most of them would have disavowed the term "experience").

In subsequent years, however, this subjective emphasis underwent a gradual attrition as Renaissance studies subtly but perceptibly shifted away from a focus on the *subjective* dynamics staged by literature and toward, instead, its objective coordinates and contexts. The most obvious form of this was the methodological critique, launched by a number of critics in the mid-nineties, of the putative socio-symbolic idealism of New Historicist work: these critics urged a (re)emphasis on "materiality" as a corrective to such idealism—whether this pliable term signaled the multiplicity of textual variants or the material remnants of Renaissance culture.[32] But this emphasis on materiality was only one part of a broader shift in the methodological leanings of early modern studies. It went hand-in-hand with a more subtle shift in professional common sense that Marjorie Garber describes in noting how New Historicism was paradoxically "eroded by its success": while the movement's early proponents stressed "that history, or histories, could not be understood as determinative or lineal causes but rather as complex networks of cultural effects," this point, she suggests, was gradually lost in subsequent years as more and more critics found their way back to a methodological paradigm where

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[32] On this usage of materiality see Peter Stallybrass and Margreta de Grazia's groundbreaking and highly-influential manifesto "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1993) pp. 255-283.

context could fully explain text.[33] New Historicism, as another commentator puts it, has been gradually displaced in the US by "a 'new materialism' which appears indifferent to the large-scale historical issues (on the nature of modernity, the historicity of selfhood, for example) which were central in founding new historicist (and cultural materialist) works"; by a "historicism so finely textured and detailed" that any *longue durée* developments are "occluded" and a premium is placed on increasingly specific, increasingly archival modes of knowledge.[34]

I do not mean to dismiss this archival and thick-descriptive turn, or its re-entry to the field's forefront. No doubt, the critical turn to the archive and toward more contextually rich thick descriptions of historical contexts—and accounts of how literary texts, of various sorts, interact with them—has been salutary: it greatly increased knowledge of the historical (and especially the political) particulars of the period, particulars that were often glossed over by New Historicist accounts which left the historical heavy lifting to the historians.[35] But as with all shifts in emphasis, something got lost in Renaissance studies' archival turn. In this case, what was lost was the older focus on the *subjective* side of political life, on its "experiential" dimensions. As I have already suggested, such subjectivity is, of course, never

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[33] Marjorie Garber, *A Manifesto for Literary Studies* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003) p. 47.

[34] Hugh Grady, "Tragedy and Materialist Thought," *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) p. 136.

[35] See David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

singular, never autonomous—the insufficiency of autonomous models of selfhood and aesthetic production to account for literature's complex imbrications in politics was one of the major arguments that New Historicism made. But the subjective side of collective life nevertheless has its own dimensionality, what we might describe (using Martin Heidegger's terms) as an *ontological* thickness in excess of its ontic embeddedness, which cannot always be retrieved through strictly archival-contextualizing work.[36] It is this ontological level that I want to foreground in focusing on the category of political experience. In the pages that follow, political experience marks the way in which collective life occurs and unfolds not only in the particulars of individual events and institutional transformations, but also within the complex ligature of reality and unreality, of external input and fantasmatic filtering, which are as much a part of politics as the factual practicalities to which the term is typically tied. [37]

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[36] Heidegger distinguishes between the *ontic* realm of mere material *beings* (*Seinede*) and the overall frameworks and coherence and ground that makes them a meaningful part of human *Being* (*Sein*). See *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). See also Graeme Nicholson, "The Ontological Difference," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33 no. 4 (1996) pp. 357-74.

[37] The concept of political experience that runs through the chapters that followed has been heavily influenced by contemporary and past theorists who have elaborated the concept of 'the political" as a distinct ontological space that is at least semi-autonomous from the empirical (ontic) particulars of "politics." Claude Lefort, for example, identifies "the political" as the "primordial dimensionality" of collective life that allows any sort of individual political scenario or situation to make sense ("The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan [New York: Fordham University Press, 2006] p. 153). On the concept of "the political" more generally Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Pierre Rosanvallon, "Towards a Philosophical History of the Political," in *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. and trans. Samuel Moyn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) pp. 59-77; and Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

Specifically, *Impossible Heroes* argues that the plays, prose, and poems of Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, and William Shakespeare use heroism as a way of imagining a fundamentally *fissured* political experience, one caught between a personalized politics of individual action and an alienated and abstracted politics increasingly organized and oriented around political power detached from personal initiative. In Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman, and Shakespeare heroism, in other words, emerges not as the pure fiction of autonomy and power, of (as Freud famously put it) "His Majesty the Ego" impervious and impermeable to external forces, enacting his will on the world.[38] It emerges instead as a site where both the potentiality of human agency to act and shape its socio-political surround and the *negativity*, the *impossibility* that haunts any attempt to do in an increasingly complex and abstract and *modern* society go hand-in-hand.[39]

However I also want to argue that Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare do not just passively *reflect* the complexities of political experience in their own period. Each of them, also, self-consciously transforms the experience of political impossibility they stage via heroism into a sense of the increasing potential of literary practice itself. This claim, of course, opens itself up to the obvious objection that the term and concept of literature did not exist in the late sixteenth

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[38] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1987) p. 441.

[39] On negativity/impossibility as a feature of the modern form of the political see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985). See also Mouffe, *On the Political* and Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Politcial."

and early seventeenth centuries. But while, as Raymond Williams writes, the "concept of 'literature'" in its "modern form … did not emerge earlier than the eighteenth century and was not fully developed until the nineteenth century," still "the conditions for its emergence had been developing since the Renaissance."[40] These conditions were various. As we will see in the following chapters they included the rise of vernacular languages, the collapse of traditional modes of (chiefly clerical) authority, and the emergence of print technology and culture.[41] But all of these *ontic* dimensions of the period's literary production went hand-in-hand with the *ontological* element of what Williams describes as an increasing emphasis on literary creativity; what Shakespeare describes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as poesy's power to produce "shaping fantasies," its capacities to "apprehend" more than "cool reason ever comprehends"; and what Philip Sidney describes in the *Defense of Poesy* as the poet's capacity to create an autonomous fictional world over and above things as they are; his belief that

> only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up
>
> with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another

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[40] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 47.

[41] See Timothy J. Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) and Michael McKeon, "Politics of Discourses and the Rise of the Aesthetic in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) pp. 35-51; and Robert Weimann, *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse*, ed. David Hillman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or,

quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes,

Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth

hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of

her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.[42]

In their various portrayals of the first of Sidney's "forms that never were," the hero,

each of my writers engages in this increasing sense of literature's fantasmatic power

and autonomy—a sense that emerges precisely out of political failure. For Sidney,

heroism emerges as an ethical ideal in the *Defense of Poesy*, but it assumes, in the *New

Arcadia*, a different form: it models an ethical and political transcendence in the face

of increasingly contingent political conditions. Marlowe's portrayal of heroism in

Tamburlaine and *Doctor Faustus* first embraces but later recoils from heroism's

imbrications in the fantasmatic virtuality of poetic wit.   And Chapman and

Shakespeare, in developing the genre of heroic tragedy in the early seventeenth

century, both stand ambivalently between heroism's political impossibility and its

aesthetic potential. For all these writers, the contradiction between individual

dynamic potentiality and the static structures of constituted state power is not a

antinomy or impasse but, instead, heroism's fissile core. For each of them, *political*

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[42] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979) 5.1.2-17; Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, in *Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 216.

impossibility is the source of heroism's *poetic* power. Like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, literary heroism spreads its wings only when the sun sets on the possibility of real-world heroes.

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III

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Such is the basic argument of *Impossible Heroes*, and later on in this introduction I will return to Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare and their place in the literary and political cultures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. But before doing this I want to discuss heroism a little more broadly. For heroism, of course, is not a uniquely Renaissance phenomenon, and its instantiations in the texts I discuss below cannot be understood in isolation from its broader history. This history is vast, and giving it any kind of comprehensive coverage is far beyond the scope of this introduction. But still I want to provide a partial, literary-political history of heroism—one that will frame the particular political uses to which heroic fantasy is put in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Heroism's association with what I have been calling dynamism—with individual potentiality shaping and directing collective life—stretches far back into the pre-historic origins of the heroic, origins that comparative philologists and anthropologists have traced into the deep roots of Indo-European culture. Specifically, it can be traced back to what Georges Dumézil called the "warrior"

function in Indo-European culture.[43] We see a relatively primitive and "pure" form of heroism as military dynamism in the competitive aristocratic world of Homer's epics. The fictional worlds of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are, of course, not simply military. But their portrayal of the Greek aristocracy centers on a militarily-inflected model of competitive pursuit—seeking after *timé* and *kléos*, honor and distinction. The Greeks called this competitive drive *thumós*, and it finds its paradigmatic classical example, of course, in Homer's Achilles, who lives between

> … two sorts of destiny toward the day of my death. Either,
>
> if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
>
> my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;
>
> but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
>
> the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life
>
> left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly.[44]

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[43] See Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, trans. Alf Hiltebeidel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Dean A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and M.L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[44] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 9.410-16. On *thumós* see also Plato's famous chariot metaphor in *Phaedrus* 253d as well as the classic discussions in Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Dover, 1981) p. 44 and R.B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951) p. 36.

We see here both a dynamic drive toward action and a sense of the need for this action to be transformed into honor and reputation. From the outset, in other words, the figure of the hero is bound up in the *ism* of representation. However—as the *Iliad* shows—the very drive also comes into conflict with the forces of political power, stability, and rule.

The sort of active, dynamic heroism Achilles modeled had a long life in Greek culture, and beyond.[45] The ideal of the "god-like hero man" (as Hesiod put it) persisted in various Hero Cults, as well as the praise poetry of writers like Pindar.[46] But this ideal was also politically problematic, for although heroic poetry treats positively of "action, and appeals to the love of prowess" (as one critic puts it), the prowess it staged was profoundly at odds with the emergent culture of the Greek (especially the Athenian) *polis*, with its emphasis on political stability, plurality, and the rule of law.[47] This tension runs through Greek tragedy, which pits the norms and laws of the *polis* against the individual dynamic drives of heroic figures (like Oedipus or Ajax) who cannot be accommodated to its order.[48] And it is captured by Aristotle, who sees heroism—the "heroic (*heroiken*)" and "divine sort of virtue"

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[45] On the afterlife of Achilles see Katharine King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

[46] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) ll. 156-7. On Pindar and heroism see Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[47] C.M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's, 1961) p. 91.

[48] See Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

embodied by a figure like Homer's Hector—as the paradoxical flipside of bestiality: like both the "beast" and the "god," he claims, the hero cannot be accommodated within the confines of the city.[49] For Aristotle, the hero is an instance of the broader category of the "great-souled man," the *megalopsychos* who is "so pre-eminently superior in goodness that there can be no comparison between the goodness and political capacity which he shows … and what is shown by the rest," and who, thus, can "no longer be treated as part of a city"; to whom an "injustice" will be done if he is treated as partaking of the equality that grounds the plurality of the *polis*.[50]

But while the Greek ambivalence toward the figure of the hero has been well-known and observed as far back as Hegel, the political contradiction it embodies— between the dynamic drive to personal prowess, performance, and distinction and the constituted constraints of collective life—is not unique to the Greeks.[51] This tension runs through the weft of western heroism in general. It stands—to take one, prominent example—at the forefront of what would become one of the dominant literary wellsprings of Renaissance English heroism: Senecan tragedy. Written centuries after the work of Sophocles and Aeschylus and Euripides, Seneca's closet dramas nevertheless stage a similar collision between heroic prowess and political circumstance. But while Greek tragedies are concerned with the clash between the

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[49] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) 1145a. Aristotle famously claims that only a beast or a god can live outside the *polis* in *Politics* 1253a.

[50] Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 1284a 3-16.

[51] I will return to Hegel's formulation of the heroic in chapter 4.

heroic *arête* elaborated by Aristotle and the requirements of the (Athenian) *polis*,

Seneca projects heroism into different political circumstances. Particularly, his

heroism emerges from the frisson between the drive to honor and distinction and

autonomy bound up in Roman aristocratic models of virtue (*virtus)* and a political

situation in which, to quote Tacitus, "all power" (*omnem potentiam*) had been

consolidated into the one personage of the emperor, and collective life was

experienced, *ut alienae*, "as alien."[52]   The contradictions of the imperial political

climate in which Seneca wrote, as Gordon Braden has argued, infuse the central

basic plot of all of Seneca's tragedies—the explosion of a heroic passion and *ira*

(anger) onto and into an "unexpecting and largely uncomprehending world, an

enactment of the mind's disruptive power over external reality."[53]   Anger and

heroism are obviously linked as far back as Achilles: anger is, in fact, the *Iliad*'s very

first word. But for Seneca, heroic anger takes on a new, particularly powerful and

peculiarly intense form. In, for instance, Hercules's desire to rush upon and destroy

everyone he encounters (*ruat…in omnes*) in *Hercules Furens,* or Medea's irrepressible

lust for vengeance against Jason and his children, we see a bleak version of heroic

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[52] Tacitus, *Historiae*, ed. Clifford H. More (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925) 1.1.

[53] Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 39.

dynamis lashing out in the face of the tyranny of constituted political authority of the most corrupted and degraded sort.[54]

Seneca's vision of heroism had a long life in the Renaissance: I will return to it more extensively in our discussion of *Bussy D'Ambois*. For now, though, it is important to emphasize that although—from Homer to the Greek tragedians to Seneca—heroism was often at odds with political power the heroic impulse was also, in various ways, *reconciled* to political authority outside of and beyond itself in classical literature. The most canonical and influential instance of such reconciliation is provided in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Here, the heroism of the text's protagonist is a heroism less of *thumós* than of *pietas*. Aeneas is militarily capable, of course. But he is also— and more importantly—a figure of endurance. Take, for instance, the following epic simile from the *Aeneid*'s fourth book:

As when among the Alps, north winds

will strain against each other to root out

with blasts—now on this side now that—a stout

oak tree whose wood is full of years; the roar

is shattering, the trunk is shaken, and

high branches scatter on the ground; but it

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[54] Seneca, *Hercules Furens*, in *Tragedies*, ed. John D. Fitch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) l. 1167.

still grips the rocks; as steeply as it thrusts

its crown into the upper air, so deep

the roots it teaches down to Tartarus;

no less than this, the hero [*heros*]; he is battered [*tunditur*]

on this side and on that by assiduous words;

he feels care in his mighty chest, and yet

his mind cannot be moved; the tears fall, useless.[55]

This simile is meant to describe Aeneas's withstanding of the pleas of Dido's sister, Anna, for him to stay in Carthage and give up his mission to settle Italy. But the passage is also paradigmatic of heroism's articulation in the *Aeneid* more broadly. The heroisms of Homer and the tragedians and Seneca all variously hinge on a *dynamic* ideal that refuses to give up on its self-reflexive *immanence*. Virgil's heroism, by contrast, is a heroism of *transcendence*: of the reconciliation between personal action and capacity and the higher horizons of divine imperial *fatum*.

Virgil's version of heroism would, of course, be immensely influential in subsequent centuries (and millennia)—Sidney's *Defense*, for instance, sees Virgil's hero as emblematic of heroism's capacity to inflame the desire to "be worthy."[56] But it also models a broader shift in the structure of heroism as a literary and political

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[55] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Alan Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1962) 4.607-19.

[56] Sidney, *Defense*, p. 231.

fantasy—one that would be solidified in the following centuries by classical Latin culture's suffusion with the influence of Christianity. From Saint Paul's injunction to put "on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's scheme" to Prudentius' vision, in the *Psychomachia*, of the good Christian's "war against the ungodly tribes," heroism is repeatedly referenced in Christian writings— again and again it provides a fantasmatic means of imagining what Michel Foucault called the "art of existence dominated by self-preoccupation" that Christianity introduced into Western culture.[57] And—in conjunction with the stoically-tinged heroism we see implicit in Virgil and which is more extensively elaborated by later writers like Boethius—Christianity moved heroic fantasy in the direction of an emphasis on *inner ethical self-control* rather than the outwardly-directed drive to actualize one's potentiality. This ethical transformation of heroism was codified in Isidore of Seville's definition of heroism in terms of both fortitude and sapience.[58] And it continued on into the Middle Ages, as heroism was transformed by its encounter with new, more parcellized forms of political organization and culture. In the Middle Ages, heroism continued to function as a marker of dynamic activity, becoming associated with the feudal-military ideal famously summarized in the *Song of Roland*'s adjectival heroic hendiadys of being both "proz" and "sage," brave

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[57] Eph 6:11; Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, ed. H.J. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949) Pref.10-13; Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988) p. 238.

[58] Cited in Curtius, *European Literature*., p. 175.

and wise.[59] But, especially in the later Middle Ages, heroism was also yoked to the

cultivation of courtesy, refinement, and inner ethical-political control. This is

particularly evident in the various late-medieval transformations of the heroic ideal

we see in writers and texts like Chrétien de Troyes, *Romance of the Rose*, and

Raymond Lull's discussions of chivalry.[60] By the cusp of the early modern period

heroism had once again come to encompass fantasmatic and political possibilities

that were both immanent and transcendent. It had come to model both a dynamic

individual potentiality and the reconciliation of this potential to broader political

totality.

These two poles are central to heroism's life in the English Renaissance—and

its place in mediating this period's own political transformations. The work of

Sidney and Marlowe and Chapman and Shakespeare—as I have suggested—

presents one particular instance of how heroism served such a mediatory function.

But to fully understand their use of heroism we first need to turn to *another* and

indeed opposite way that heroic fantasy functioned in the shifting political climate

of early modern England: as a way of symbolically suturing an emergent sense of

national English identity. This emergent sense is famously captured in the

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[59] *The Song of Roland*, trans. and ed. Gerard J. Brault (University Park: Penn State, 1978) ll. 1093-6.

[60] On heroism in Arthurian legend and Chrétien's transformation of it, see Norris J. Lacy, "The Arthurian Legend Before Chrétien," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005) pp. 43-51; for Raymond Lull's late-medieval transformation of chivalry see *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, trans. William Caxton, ed. Alfred T.P. Byles (London: Early English Text Society, 1926). On medieval chivalry see Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

prosopopoeic projection of England's integrity and essence in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1595):

> This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
>
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
>
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
>
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
>
> Against infection and the hand of war,
>
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
>
> This precious stone set in the silver sea…[61]

In these lines, we see a combination of a number of common threads of the emergent early modern discourse of English nationhood: an emphasis on monarchy, for instance, and on England's unique place as an island.[62] We also, however, see the degree to which emerging notions of national identity were bound up with a sense of military facility. Here, England is the "seat of Mars," and indeed throughout proto-nationalist literature more broadly military heroism becomes a key way of

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[61] William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Charles Forker (London: Thompson, 2002) 2.1.40-6.

[62] On these themes in the discourses surrounding the consolidation of English national identity see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*: *The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

consolidating the emerging "imagined community" of England.[63] Various instances

of this can be adduced. Take, for instance, the classical scholar Christopher

Occland's *Anglorum Praelia* (1580), a Latin epic that was commissioned by the

government to replace heathen literature in the school curriculum and where a

classical ideal of heroism is consciously sutured to a sense of the English nation as a

whole: the opening lines of the poem, for example, talk about the how the

gens…Britanni, the "English people," have again and again discharged themselves

heroically in battle against their various enemies.[64] This same use of heroic fantasy

to both constitute and valorize the emergent English nation is also evident a few

years later in Philip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), where he speaks of the

English as a "strong kind of people, most audacious, bolde, puissant, and heroicall,

and of great magnanimitie, valiancie, and prowes, and of incomparable feature of

body, of an excellent complexion, and in all humanitie, inferiour to none under the

Sunne."[65]   Nearly a half century later, John Milton would again draw on this trope

in the *Areopagitica* (1644), where he writes of England as a "noble and puissant

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[63] For this concept see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). On the place of masculinity—and, in tandem with this, militarism—in the construction of the English nation see Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[64] Christopher Occland, *Anglorum Praelia* (London: 1580) p. 4.

[65] Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie (Tempe, AZ: Renaissance English Text Society, 2002) pp. 59-60.

nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible

locks."[66]

As these instances show, the idea of England as a heroic nation was part of

the commonplace political-national language of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries. But it finds its extensive elaboration not in political theory but, instead, on

the popular stage—particularly in the period's history plays. A good instance of this

is provided by Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Although, as Phyllis Rackin writes, the

"episodic plots… large cast of characters, and the rapid whirl of events" in the *Henry*

VI plays "all work to frustrate any attempt by the audience to discover a clear

principle of causality" or even overall political coherence, a few key moments

provide evidence of heroism's central place in an emergent sense of integrated

national identity.[67] One particularly powerful instance of this occurs in the scene

(from the first *Henry VI* play) where Talbot—Shakespeare's paradigmatic heroic-

aristocratic warrior—is captured by the Countess of Auvergne. The Countess

expresses surprise at how puny Talbot is in person, compared to his fearsome

reputation: while she expects a "second Hector" she gets a "dwarf." But this

disappointment, according to Talbot, is misplaced: his *individual* heroic valor, he

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[66] John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *Complete Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003) p. 745.

[67] Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) p. 27.

proclaims, is precisely a function of the heroic military *community* to which he belongs:

> These [his troops] are his substance, sinews, arms and strength,
>
> With which he yoketh your rebellious necks,
>
> Razeth your cities and subverts your towns
>
> And in a moment makes them desolate.[68]

What Talbot explicitly posits, here, is the fantasy of a cross-class heroic community forged in the crucible of heroic combat and shared military belonging. But when viewed in the broader context of its theatrical medium, this passage points to the place of the institution of theater itself in the construction of such community. In his *Apologie of Pierce Pennilesse* (1592), Thomas Nashe famously reflects on the theatrical power that Talbot presented on the English stage, asking rhetorically "[h]ow would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times) who in the tragedian that represents his person imagine they behold him

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[68] William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 1*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 2.3.63-5.

fresh bleeding?" [69]   For Nashe, Shakespeare's portrait of Talbot is not simply historical representation: it is the active production of a community, the "ten thousand spectators," whose tears newly embalm Talbot's heroically fallen corpse. This dynamic would, indeed, become even more explicit in Shakespeare's own hands in the meta-theatrical meditation that precedes *Henry V* (1599). Here, the Prologue's invocation of the "imaginary puissance" sutures the political and the poetic as theater itself becomes an engine for imagining the national communities whose bloody heroic actualization the plays portray. [70]

Heroism's place in projecting and consolidating national community was, however, not confined to history plays—or even to just to the popular stage. It is also at the center of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590/6)—arguably the period's most extensive literary engagement with heroism. Spenser's vision of the place of heroism in forging loyal political subjects comes through with particular clarity in the "Letter to Raleigh," where he lays out the *Faerie Queene*'s overall plan and purpose:

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[69] Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveler and Other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (London: Penguin, 1971) p. 113. For a recent account of theater and the production of communities see Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[70] William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik (London: Routledge, 1995) Prologue 25. For a consideration of the production of national community in *Henry V* and the history plays more broadly, see Peter Womack, "Imagining Communities: Theatres and the English Nation in the Sixteenth Century," in *Culture and History 1350-1600*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992) pp. 91-145. On violence and the production of community in *Henry V* specifically see Joel Altman, "'Vile Participation': The Amplification of Violence in the Theater of *Henry V*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 no. 1 (1991) and Rackin and Howard, *ibid*., pp. 186-214.

The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceiued shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profite of ensample: I chose the historye of king Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being most famous by many mens former works, and also furthest from the daunger of enuy and suspition of present time.[71]

For Spenser, the heroic-historical fiction of Arthur—the central thread running through the *Faerie Queene*'s immensely complex narrative weft—is a far more powerful way of "fashioning" political subjects. Far more than simple political-ethical "matter," it is—he hopes—capable of producing the political subjects proper to the centralized Elizabethan state apparatus the poem quite explicitly symbolically mediates. Heroism in the *Faerie Queene*, then, is also engaged in the project of projecting and consolidating national entity. Its heroic ideal of

The noble hart, that harbours virtuous thought,

And is with childe of glorious great intent,

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[71] Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2001) p. 715.

Can neuer rest, vntill it forth haue brought

Th' eternall brood of glorie excellent.[72]

strips heroism of any centrifugal or autarkic impulse and instead makes it an ethical

vessel of producing self-disciplining of monarchical authority.[73]

But, as any reader soon realizes, Spenser's *actual* portrayal of heroism is far

from univocal or straightforwardly ideological in the way that the "Letter to

Raleigh" promises. As the text proceeds, Spenser seems to become more and more

ambivalent about heroism's place in, and consequences for, the national project in

which the "Letter" enlists it. This ambivalence finds a complex culmination in the

Faerie Queene's fifth book, where the gap between the heroic ideality of Arthur and

the heroic brutality of his semi-eponymous half-brother Artegall (along with his

"yron page," Talus) seems almost intentionally extreme. Shakespeare—by the time

he composed *Henry V*—also registers a strong cynicism about heroism's place in the

production and maintenance of national community. The play's prologue, as we saw

a moment ago, provides an explicit statement of the function of heroic fantasy in the

symbolic production of a national community. But as with the *Faerie Queene*, there is

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[72] *Faerie Queene*, 1.5.1.1-4.

[73] See Louis Adrian Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," as well as his more recent "Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary," *ELH* 69, no. 4 (2002) pp. 907-46. More recent scholarship on Spenser, however, has retrieved some of the republican elements of his political vision: see Graham Hammill, "'The thing / Which never was': Republicanism and *The Ruines of Time*," *Spenser Studies* 18 (2004) pp. 165-83 and Andrew Hadfield, "Was Spenser a Republican?" *English* 47 (1998) pp. 169-88.

a striking caesura between this theoretical statement and Shakespeare's actual portrayal of heroism's place in the political realm—a portrayal in which the ideological use of heroic community, of the fantasy of a heroic "band of brothers," is revealed as part and parcel of ethically-ambiguous monarchical ambition.

Indeed, Spenser and Shakespeare—writing in the last years of the 1590s—point to a broader disenchantment of heroic politics that occurred in the closing years of the sixteenth century, and which provides the context for the different but equally pessimistic presentation of political heroics that we find in the work of Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman, as well as in Shakespeare's own later tragic plays. It is something of a historiographical cliché that *fin-de-siècle* moments tend to be times of anxiety. But in the case of the sixteenth century, the verity turns out to be true.[74] The final years of Elizabeth's reign and the early years of James I's were decades during which the penury of the state, the increasing authoritarianism of the crown, and both the Queen's lack of a successor and uncertainty about the Scottish monarch who eventually filled the role resulted in a situation where "the anxiety of courtiers fused with the poverty of the crown and the competition for patronage to kindle factionalism, self-interest, and instability which—in the shape of Essex's frustrated ambition— sparked an attempted coup."[75] And these particular political and social

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[74] See Margreta de Grazia, "Fin-de-Siècle Renaissance," in *Fin-de-Siècle: English Poetry 1590, 1690, 1790, 1890, 1990*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) pp. 37-63.

[75] John Guy, "Introduction," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 1. See also Paul F.J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge:

tensions were also bound up in a more ephemeral but nonetheless significant crisis in political experience itself—one in which, as we already noted, a broadly-based faith in the civic function of (elite) individual action was coming under increasing skepticism. This is not to say, of course, that earlier traditions of civic humanism and republicanism went away during the last years of the sixteenth century—they would persist into the English Civil War. Nor is it to say that the positive visions of national identity we just discussed somehow fell by the wayside. But the later years of the sixteenth century and the early years of the seventeenth were, in England, a period when the constituted power of the *state* was seen increasingly seen as being in opposition to an active political life.[76] They were a period when an experience of political alienation—of a contradiction between the compulsion to (as Essex himself put it) "be active" and an institutional situation that conspired to "suppress all noble, virtuous, and heroical spirits"—was particularly prominent.[77]

Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the continuities and discontinuities between late Elizabethan and early Stuart cultures, see Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

[76] On the language of "the state" in this period, see also Quentin Skinner, "The State," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terrence Ball et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 90-131.

[77] The first of the above quotations comes from Essex's letter to Cecil on 5 April 1596 and is quoted from *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth 1595-7* (London, 1896) p. 200. The second is from Essex's letter to James VI, written on 25 December 1600, shortly after his famously barging in on the un-wigged Queen and being imprisoned and which is reproduced in *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603*, vol. 13, pt. 2 (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1969) p. 755. For an analysis of the culture of the Essex circle and revolt that sheds substantial light on this period's elite political culture generally see Mervyn James, *Society, Politics, and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare are all engaged with this alienation of political experience. The work of Sidney—who was, like Essex, a member of England's aristocratic stratum—demonstrates a perspective on political experience parallel to that of Essex: by the end of the *New Arcadia*, Sidney is preoccupied by the inadequacy of aristocratic activity in collective life. And while Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare all occupied a different place in the social structure of the period, their texts also grapple with a political experience fissured by the discontinuity, the contradiction, between individual "action and capacity" and the harsh realities of political life. But while all of these writers use heroism to imaginatively work through the transformations political experience was undergoing in their own time, they also transform this collective crisis into the basis of a new sense of the autonomy of poetic production itself.

In each of the chapters that follow, I want to trace this complex dialectic of political and poetic (im)possibility by tracking a particular key term in each writer's work. In each of their texts, one particular signifier comes to function both as an *object of heroic fantasy* and a *locus of that fantasy's failure.* Out of this failure, however, out of each writer's encounter with heroism's political impossibility, comes a newer sense of poetry's own imaginative potentiality.

IV

In my first chapter—on Philip Sidney's *New Arcadia*—the key term I focus on is *virtue*. In the *Defense of Poesy*, Sidney extols heroism as poetry's greatest product, its most powerful way of leading "a man to virtue," in the term's Renaissance sense not only of conformity to moral norms but the possession of "divinely endowed gifts and powers," of "properties" that "if cultivated by education" could "carry the authority of example and … change the world."[78] But although this coupling of heroism and an active, dynamic virtue runs through Sidney's theoretical manifesto, his fictional writings reveal a remarkable ambivalence about the very *possibility* of an action-oriented and virtue-driven heroic practice in the real political world. Such skepticism is hinted at in earlier efforts like the so-called *Old Arcadia* and the sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella.* But Sidney's doubts about the possibility of an heroically-active virtue only become undeniably and acidly corrosive in the *New Arcadia*, the vast and variegated prose romance he left incomplete at his 1586 death. In the *New Arcadia* we see the same dynamic drive, the same dynamic desire for action, that propels Sidney's earlier writings. But increasingly—across the text's almost Ariostoan abundance of character and incident—active heroism is portrayed as an *impossible* experience, undercut by a pervasive sense of alienation from the *vita activa* and of the aleatory and contingent character of a political world that seems

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[78] Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia' and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 22.

more and more outside the mastery of any individual agent. This progressive disenchantment culminates in the *New Arcadia's* elevation of the Princess Pamela as a new heroic model, embodying a heroism where the dynamic *activity* of virtue is coupled with a constancy and passivity that *internalize* political potentiality in the face of collective life that no longer seems its unproblematic playing field.

In the *New Arcadia*, then, Sidney confronts dynamic heroism's impossibility by turning to a new, withdrawn, and passively powerful heroic form. But while scholars have often taken this late watershed in his work as being simply a symptom of the spread of withdrawn neo-stoic visions of ethics and politics in Europe's late-Renaissance elites, I argue that Sidney's turn to Pamela at the end of the *New Arcadia* has another implication.[79] In the *Defense*, Sidney claims heroism is not only exemplary of how the poet can foster ethical action but also an indication of how the power of poetic creativity, "disdaining to be tied" to the tether of things as they are and "lifted up with the vigour of his own invention," can "grow in effect another nature," can pass from the "foolish world" of actuality into the pure potentiality of creative imagination.[80] And I would argue that Pamela— although she certainly functions as an ethical exemplum (so much so that, as we will see, Charles I supposedly quoted her on the scaffold)—also embodies this poetic power: in her

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[79] For the classic statement of this historiography of early-modern Neo-Stoicism see Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); for a more recent redaction of the argument see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[80] Sidney, *Defense*, p. 216.

aggressively aestheticized resistance to torture and bad luck and fortune she

emerges not just as an *ethical* model of "conquering … doing with … suffering" but

an *aesthetic* apparition of the autonomy fantasy from reality, of the poet's "zodiac of

wit" from the "truth of a foolish world."[81]

But while Pamela's presentation in the *New Arcadia* suggests Sidney's belief in

the power of poetic imagination to transcend the limits of the political world, my

second chapter, turns to a pair of texts—Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*—

where heroism's confrontation with the imaginative and fantasmatic virtuality that

results from its political impossibility is cast in a much bleaker light. Although

Marlowe's plays—and his literary career in general—have long been read through

the lenses of cultural marginality and otherness emphasized by the New Historicists,

I start by suggesting that we should also read Marlowe's life as characteristic of late

sixteenth-century England's substantial class of "alienated intellectuals," the London

lumpenliterati who had been trained, in the grammar schools and universities, for a

gentlemanly life of participation in the polity, but whose hopes for translating their

learning into political practice, their *meditatio* into *praxis* (as Gabriel Harvey wrote),

faded in the later years of Elizabeth's reign. [82]   In his erotic epyllion *Hero and Leander*

Marlowe speaks of these men as "fruitful wits" who, "aspiring" without an avenue

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[81] Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (London: Penguin Books, 1978) p. 492; *Defense*, p. 216.

[82] *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia*, ed. G.C. Moore Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913) p. 145. On the period's "alienated intellectuals" see M.H. Curtis, "The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England," *Past and Present* 32 (1962).

for ascent, "[s]hall discontent run into regions far"—and in fact the word *wit*, I suggest, serves in Marlowe's work as a marker of the alienation of learning and poetic and political potentiality from actualization in collective life.[83] But while many of Marlowe's contemporaries tried to resolve this dilemma by portraying prodigal wit that actively retreats from political participation and responsibility (the prodigal wit of Robert Greene, say, or John Lyly's Euphues),[84] Marlowe organizes *Tamburlaine* around the fantasmatic reunification of wit and political life, of wit and the absolute action and absolute political becoming that the play dubs sovereignty. *Tamburlaine*, in other words, attempts an *imaginative sublation of wit into sovereignty*; a creative suturing of the split between potentiality and actuality, expectation and reality that beset Marlowe's milieu. But as Marlowe realizes in *Doctor Faustus*, the attempt to enact this sublation is itself undeniably the product of a marginalization, of the negativity of political frustration. For Marlowe, in other words, heroism's autonomous poetic power and its alienation from political life go symptomatically hand-in-hand.

My third chapter takes up George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*, where we see a similar ambivalence between heroism's political impossibility and its poetic power. Chapman had a lifelong preoccupation with the heroic, as evident as his three-

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[83] *Hero and Leander*, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems and Translations*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New York: Penguin Books, 1971) ll. 475-82.

[84] See Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

decade project of translating Homer's complete works. But he also had a strong

skepticism toward the active and dynamic experience of the political initially

embraced by Sidney and Marlowe, toward the "*Actiue*" men—as he puts it

sneeringly in one later poem—who "consume their whole lifes fire, / In thirst of

State-height, higher still and higher," a skepticism that often leads him to try to strip

the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of their concrete political content with allegorical gymnastics

that often baffle revved-up readers of Keats.[85] But what is awkward in the Homer

translations becomes the central and propulsive paradox of *Bussy D'Ambois*, a play

whose portrayal of its titular lead-character oscillates (at times dizzyingly) between

awe-struck admiration of his almost Herculean prowess and a harsh and satiric

skepticism about such an identity's hypocritical dissonance with both Bussy's

behavior and the Machiavellian milieu of the French royal court in which he rapidly

ascends. In Chapman's play, this central ambivalence orbits around the term *policy*, a

marker of both political disenchantment and a dynamic heroic transcendence of it

that are the play's major and never-resolved alternatives. In *Bussy D'Ambois*, in other

words, we see a productive tension between heroism as a spellbinding fantasy of

dynamic potentiality—of a "complete man," whose flames will join in the firmament

with those of Hercules and "th'aged sky / Cheer with new sparks of old

humanity"—and the comic absurdity of this figure's real-world.

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[85] George Chapman, *Tears of Peace*, 412-13, quoted from *The Poems of George Chapman*, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).

But while Chapman ultimately acknowledges the imaginative power of heroism, a harsher view of the heroic is evident in the text my fourth and final chapter examines: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Taking up *Macbeth* at the tail end of a study of heroism is a somewhat counterintuitive move. When one thinks of Shakespeare and heroism the Scottish play does not usually spring to mind, and indeed *Macbeth* lacks any overt thematization of the heroic. But I argue that while *Macbeth* does not overtly thematize heroism, the play's titular protagonist fully embodies the heroic ideal of violent action. At the same time, however, *Macbeth* also stages this ideal's absolute failure. While other Shakespearean heroes (Hamlet, Brutus, Coriolanus) experience heroic action as being at odds with their *circumstances*, *Macbeth* presents individual heroic action as being essentially— ontologically—inadequate. The play portrays a realization of the deep metaphysical inadequacy of human action to shape its political surroundings. In *Macbeth*, action can never exist as a "be-all" and "end-all." Instead, action is essentially *ecstatic*, displaced from itself. My final chapter traces these two themes of action and ecstasy through Shakespeare's play. While critics have read *Macbeth* in terms of monarchy, witchcraft, and other contextual connections that hover on the play's margins, I argue that *Macbeth*'s seemingly ahistorical philosophical preoccupations with action and free will actually position it as a final elegy for a political culture of action that was declining in the English Renaissance.

Macbeth, then, provides a fitting conclusion to *Impossible Heroes*—a final gesture toward an understanding of heroism as both politically problematic and poetically powerful, as both speaking to the deep drives for individual autonomy and self-actualization that run through political life and posing a threat to the stability of collective existence. In the decades that followed Shakespeare's play, heroism would be successfully tamed and incorporated into a state-based understanding and experience of the political: in a text like William Davenant's *Gondibert*, for instance, heroic poetry is said to provide "collaterall help" to monarchical governance through its capacity to fashion militarized monarchical subjects.[86] For Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare, however, heroism provides a much more complex nexus of both political impossibility and poetic potential, a final imaginative apparition of individual "action and capacity" at the cusp of political modernity where collective life would be increasingly mediated through the totalities of state, sovereignty, and representation.

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[86] William Davenant, *Preface to Gondibert*, in *Elizabeth Critical Essays*, ed. Joel Spingarn (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1904) v. 2, p. 44.

Chapter 1

Sidney's Virtue

I

Although it goes without saying that all of the writers taken up in the following pages were preoccupied with heroism, Philip Sidney is the only one them who has ever *himself* been described as heroic. Prominent bardolaters of various stripes—from Carlyle to Wyndham Lewis to Harold Bloom—have seen Shakespeare as a kind of artistic/intellectual hero. And of course Marlowe has seemed, to some modern sensibilities, like his own sort of intellectually heroic critic of the *tempora et mores* of late Elizabethan England, a poet of otherness and inchoate ideology critique. But only Sidney has been attributed the traditional heroic hendiadys of sapience and fortitude and portrayed as a figure combining cultivation and literary élan with the military valor that was retroactively attributed to him after he was struck down by a Spanish bullet near the Dutch town of Zutphen in 1586. Sidney's death was not, in itself, especially glorious or glamorous: he slowly withered away from gangrene over the course of a month, as a result of an accident in a skirmish in a largely fruitless war.[1] But, like Byron and Jesus (and Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix)

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[1] For biographical information, the following draws chiefly on Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney, a Double life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000). On Sidney's life see also Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Philip Sidney, Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) and, on the Sidney family more generally, see Michael Brennan, *The Sidneys of Penshurst and the Monarchy, 1500-1700* (Ashgate, 2005). I use the following abbreviations in citing from Sidney's work below: *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) = *MW*; *Old Arcadia*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford

Sidney attained in dying a stature he never would have been able to in life. He became the English Protestant military hero *par excellence*, a reputation that was consolidated in the so-called "Sidney Legend" that started with his lavish funeral, was further fostered by a slew of near-hagiographical memorial volumes and biographies published well into the seventeenth century, and persisted in England's patriotic lore well after the Renaissance (Shelley, for instance, called Sidney "a spirit without spot" while Yeats cast him as a "perfect man").[2]

More recent scholarship on Sidney's life, however, has uncovered a political career far more frustrated and fraught with complexities and difficulties than this older hagiographic tradition suggests.[3] Born the son of a gentleman, Sidney was also the distaff nephew of and, for much of his life, heir presumptive to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, one of Elizabeth's most highly-placed and influential courtiers.[4] While he was not fully aristocratic in lineage Sidney, throughout his early

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University Press, 1985) = *OA*; *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia,* ed. Maurice Evans (London: Penguin, 1977) = *NA*.

[2] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Adonis," *Selected Poems* (New York: Dover, 1993) p. 109; William Butler Yeats, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 109. For more on Sidney's afterlife see J.A. van Dorsten, Dominic Baker-Smith and Arthur F. Kinney eds., *Sir Philip Sidney: 1586 and the Creation of a Legend* (Leiden: Brill, 1986) and Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney: The Literary Response 1586-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For a collection of primary sources relating to Sidney's reputation see Martin Garrett ed., *Sidney: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[3] For the seminal work in this vector of Sidney scholarship see F.J. Levy, "Sir Philip Sidney Reconsidered," reprinted in *Sidney in Retrospect*, ed. Arthur Kinney (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) pp. 3-14. For a more recent and comprehensive biographical account sensitive to the difficulties of Sidney's political position see Stewart, *Philip Sidney*.

[4] On Leicester see Simon L. Adams, *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

education and continental tour (1572-75), was seen (and saw himself) as an up-and-

coming player in England's politics, an aristocratic agent "born"—in the words of

one contemporary writer—"for command."[5] But nevertheless, for almost all of his

brief life Sidney was deeply frustrated in his ambitions and deprived, as his friend

and later biographer Fulke Greville would write, of a "fit stage" for his "eminence to

act upon."[6] Like many of England's aristocrats in the late sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, Sidney's political career was characterized by a lack of opportunities for

"Action and Honor."[7] It was characterized by a contradiction between the

aristocratic impulse to "be active" and an increasingly authoritarian political

situation that conspired to "oppress innocency, cancel merit … bury freedom, usurp

sovereignty" and "suppress all noble, virtuous and heroical spirits."[8] I quote here,

again, from the letters of Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, whose botched 1601

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[5] The writer was Daniel Rogers: for a translation of the full text of the poem see Stewart, *Philip* Sidney, p. 157.

[6] Fulke Greville, *The Life of the Renowned Philip Sidney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907) p. 38.

[7] The statement about honor and action is from Greville, p. 149. For more on the complex position of the English aristocracy during this period see Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965); G.W. Bernard, "Introduction," *The Tudor Nobility,* ed. G.W. Bernard (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1992) pp. 1-48; G.W. Bernard, "The Continuing Power of the Tudor Nobility" in *Politics and Power in Tudor England: Essays* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000) pp. 30-37; Adams, *Leicester and the Court*; and David Starkey, ed., *Rivals in Power: Lives and Letters of the Great Tudor Dynasties* (London: Macmillan, 1990). Also worth keeping in mind, here, is the work of revisionist historians of the Civil War who have argued for the longstanding and previously underestimated power of the House of Lords in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See, for example, Conrad Russell, *Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) and J.S.A. Adamson, "The Baronial Context of the English Civil War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 40 (1990) pp. 93-120.

[8] Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, Letter to Cecil, 5 April 1596, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth 1595-7* (London, 1896) p. 200; Essex, Letter to James VI, 25 December 1600, *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603*, vol. 13, pt. 2 (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1969) p. 755.

rebellion was the period's most violent symptom of this contradiction. But Sidney's

own life was characterized by a similar tension, a similar sense of the *alienation* of

aristocratic virtue from the *vita activa* that it demanded.

The following chapter charts this alienation across Sidney's writing by

focusing on the place of virtue in his lifelong literary engagement with heroism.

Throughout its complex history in classical, medieval, and early modern political

culture, virtue marked a vision of collective life that was understood and

experienced not through the abstract totalities of sovereignty, state, and

representation but, instead, as the site of individual action on a heroic scale. Jointly

derived from the Latin *vir* (man) and *vis* (power, strength), the term encompassed

both a masculinized, militarized violence and a more capacious civic ideal of

individual potentiality and excellence.[9] These two senses run through virtue's

polymeric history in political thought, from classical Latin representations of *virtus*

through Machiavelli's princely and republican *virtù*.[10] And they filter into the

classicized aristocratic humanism of Sidney's own milieu, a milieu where, as

historian Blair Worden writes, virtue marked not just an adherence to moral norms

but also, and more importantly, "the possession of divinely endowed gifts and

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[9] Virtue's dual etymological derivation was common knowledge in the "Varronian" folk etymologies of classical and late antique Latin culture. Boethius, for instance, riffs on it in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H.R. Stewart (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) p. 231. For a short summary of classical Roman uses of the term, see Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "virtus." For a more comprehensive consideration of virtue's history see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978) pp. 49-81.

[10] See Pocock, *ibid.*

powers"—"properties" that, "if cultivated by education" could "carry the authority of example and … change the world."[11]

Such an understanding of virtue runs across Sidney's work, from the extolling of "gallant activity" in his early masque *The Lady of May* to the *Old Arcadia's* "praise of honourable action" and an active life through which the "mind should best know his own good or evil by practice" (*MW* 11, *OA* 113).[12] This active version of virtue, however, is treated with increasing skepticism in Sidney's later writings— a skepticism that fundamentally alters his attitudes toward and representations of heroism. In the *Defense of Poesy*, Sidney sees heroism as *the* poetic form most capable of cultivating virtue, of blasting away "foggy desires" with a magnanimous vision of

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[11]Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia' and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 22. Many scholars have noted the uniqueness of late sixteenth-century English humanism—a uniqueness based in the fact that it was increasingly organized through "transactional" relationships between humanistic learning and aristocratic political action. See Warren Boutcher, "Humanism and Literature in Late Tudor England: Translation, The Continental Book, and the Case of Montaigne's *Essais*," in *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*, ed. Jonathan Woolfson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002) pp. 243-68; Warren Boutcher, "Pilgrimage to Parnassus: Local Intellectual Traditions, Humanist Education and the Cultural Geography of Sixteenth-Century England" in *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Ancient Learning*, eds. Niall Livingstone and Yun Lee Too (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 110-47; Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "Studied for Action: How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy," *Past and Present* 129 (1990) pp. 30-78; William Sherman and Lisa Jardine, "Pragmatic Readers: Knowledge Transactions and Scholarly Services in Late Elizabethan England," in *Religion, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essay in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, ed., Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 102-24; Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Alan Stewart, "Instigating Treason: The Life of Henry Cuffe, Secretary," in *Literature, Politics, and Law,* ed. Lorna Hutson and Erica Sheen (New York: Palgrave, 2005) pp. 50-70; and Paul E.J. Hammer, "The Uses of Scholarship: The Secretariat of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, c. 1585-1601," *English Historical Review* (1994) pp. 26-51.

[12] For more on Sidney and the humanistic ideal of the *vita activa* see Peter Lindenbaum, "Sidney and the Active Life," in *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. M. J. B. Allen et al. (New York: AMS Press, 1990) p. 176. For a recent review of scholarship on Sidney's humanism see Steve Mentz, "Reason, Faith, and Shipwreck in Sidney's New Arcadia," *SEL* 44, no. 1 (2004) pp. 1-18. See also A.C. Hamilton, "Sidney's Humanism," in *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, pp. 109-16; Levy, *ibid*.; Jan Van Dorsten, *Poets, Patrons, and Professors—Sir Philip Sidney, Daniel Rogers, and the Leiden Humanists* (Leiden: Sir Thomas Browne Institute, 1962); Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986) pp. 230-91.

virtuous action capable of remaking the world through its "well-doing" (*MW* 231). But in Sidney's most intensive and extensive fictional portrayal of heroism—the revised version of the *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* that was left unfinished at his death in 1586—virtue is represented as increasingly inadequate and impotent in a collective world Sidney increasingly sees as being beyond the control of individuals who are knocked about "like tennis balls tossed on the racket of the higher powers" (*NA* 817).

But the *New Arcadia*'s attitudes toward virtue and heroism are not completely negative. Even as Sidney's text becomes increasingly skeptical of an actively- and outwardly-oriented politics of virtue, it also articulates a *new* vision of virtue, not as an active principle of "well-doing" but rather as a passive strength in the face of uncontrollable contingency. This new version of virtue is at the core of his portrayal of the Princess Pamela. In the *New Arcadia*, Pamela embodies a heroism where the calamities and contingencies of an aleatory, alienated vision of politics are portrayed as the "exercise" rather than the "overthrow of … virtue" (464). And, in doing so, she models a new mode of political experience—one in which the alienation of an active political impulse is dialectically overcome through the internalization of dynamic, heroic individual potential. Scholars have long seen Sidney's portrayal of Pamela as signaling a watershed in Sidney's idea of the heroic. Some critics have called her a "complete study" in the "reconciliation" between the traditional heroic binary of active military feats versus passive constancy, while more recent writers

have wanted to read Pamela as reflecting shifts in Elizabethan and Jacobean high culture away from a Ciceronian ideal of public participation and into a more withdrawn stoic perspective of political disenchantment.[13]   But while my analysis draws on both approaches, I claim that Pamela's transfiguration and transformation of virtue and heroism should be ultimately understood in terms of the *internal* dynamics and dialectics of Sidney's own work. It should be understood as the final moment of Sidney's lifelong use of heroism to come to grips with the contending concepts of the political at play in late sixteenth-century English culture.

Thus, to fully understand the *New Arcadia*'s presentation of Pamela's heroism I first need to turn to Sidney's work more broadly. Particularly I need to deal with the fact that the *New Arcadia* is not a stand-alone composition but, rather, a kind of literary palimpsest, one that Sidney constructed on the foundation provided by the first three books of an earlier composition critics commonly call the *Old Arcadia* (c. 1579-81). Composed in the late 1570s and early 1580s, the *Old Arcadia* is a tightly-

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[13] For traditional treatments of Pamela's heroism see Myron Turner, "The Heroic Ideal in Sidney's Revised *Arcadia*," *SEL* 10 (1970) p. 71; Alan D. Isler, "The Allegory of the Hero and Sidney's Two *Arcadias*," *Studies in Philology* 65 (April 1968) pp. 171-91; Josephine A. Roberts, *Architectonic Knowledge in the New Arcadia (1590): Sidney's Use of the Heroic Journey* (Salzburg: Salzburg University Press, 1978)**.** On passive heroism in the period more generally see Merritt Y. Hughes, "The Christ of *Paradise Regained* and the Renaissance Heroic Tradition," *Studies in Philology* 35 (1938) pp. 254-771. For a more recent overview of this passive heroism and its gendered implications (one that does not explicitly focus on Sidney's Pamela but which is nevertheless relevant) see Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For more recent work on the stoic turn in elite culture in late sixteenth-century England—one which cites Sidney's Pamela particularly—see Peter Burke, "Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State," in *Cambridge History of Political Thought,* ed. J.H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 493. See also Adriana McCrea, *Constant Minds: Political Virtue and the Lipsian Paradigm in England 1584-1650* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) and Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

structured prose romance interspersed with verse eclogues, indebted in foreconceit to continental writers of pastoral romance like Jacopo Sanazarro.[14] It circulated privately, but was never published. Instead, in the mid-1580s Sidney decided to revise and expand the text—a project that ended when he was fatally wounded in battle in 1586. In the wake of Sidney's death, these two versions of the *Arcadia* had a complex, gnarled publishing history: both Sidney's sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, and his friend Fulke Greville published rival and different versions of the revised *Arcadia*.[15] But for our purposes the particulars of this history are less important than the fact that the original *Old Arcadia*—not discovered in its entirety until 1908[16]—reveals a vision of the political and political experience sharply at odds with the view of collective life and of heroism that emerge in the *New Arcadia*. And it is with this earlier vision of politics and heroism that I want to begin.

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[14] On the generic elements present in both the *Old* and *New Arcadias* see A.C. Hamilton's excellent article "Sidney's *Arcadia* as Prose Fiction: Its Relation to its Sources," in *Sidney in Retrospect*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) pp. 29-60. On generic multiplicity in the *New Arcadia* specifically see also Stephen Greenblatt, "Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Mixed Mode," *Studies in Philology* 70, no. 3 (1973) pp. 269-78.

[15] In 1590, with Sidney's postmortem cult burgeoning, Fulke Greville and possibly a few others published the manuscript he had left behind, the revised first two books and the unfinished third book, a text which is typically referred to nowadays as the *New Arcadia*. To makes things even more complicated, however, in 1593 Sidney's sister Mary, the Countess of Pembroke, published a version of the text that combined Sidney's revisions with the last two books of the *Old Arcadia*, adding a few other passage revisions. This text became the standard form in which Sidney's *Arcadia* was read until the twentieth century. In what follows I will be focusing mainly on the *New Arcadia* as it appeared in 1590. For a comprehensive overview of the relevant textual issues see H.R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[16] On the text's discovery and publication see Woudhuysen, p. 399.

II

First, though, I want to provide some preliminary plot summary, as both the *Old* and the *New Arcadia* have an almost Ariostan abundance of accident and character that are so difficult to keep track of that even readers in Sidney's own day had to resort to *dramatis personae* and summary overviews.[17]

The story of the *Old Arcadia* is set in a semi-historical Greece and begins when the ruler of Arcadia, Duke Basilius, seeks the advice of the Delphic Oracle about the future. He is informed that his older daughter, Pamela, "shall from thy careful face / By princely mean be stolen"; that his younger daughter, Philoclea, "shall with nature's bliss embrace / An uncouth love"; that "with thy wife adult'ry thou shall commit"; and—finally—"in thy throne a foreign state shall sit" (*OA* 5). Understandably upset with this prediction, the Duke decides to retire to a rural existence with his family, placing the care of his kingdom in the hands of his "friend" and counselor, Philanax. Meanwhile two foreign princes—the cousins Pyrocles and Musidorus—are traveling through Arcadia when Pyrocles, after chancing across a portrait of Philoclea, finds himself incapacitated by sudden love for her. Though reprimanded by Musidorus, Pyrocles discovers the location of the royal family's rural retreat and decides to disguise himself as an Amazon named (appropriately enough) Cleophila, to get closer to the Princess. Musidorus

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[17] See William Blount's copy of the *New Arcadia* in the Folger Shakespeare Library (shelfmark STC 22540 copy 1). On this copy, see also Fred Schurink, "'Like a Hand in the Margine of a Booke': William Blount's Marginalia and the Politics of Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008) pp. 1-24.

disapproves, but ends up following Pyrocles into Basilius' rural retreat, disguising himself as the shepherd Dorus, and before long falling in love with the other princess, Pamela.

This complex set up soon leads to an even more contorted series of events. Philoclea starts reciprocating the feelings of the disguised Pyrocles (with much confusion ensuing, since she still thinks he's a woman). Gynecia, the mother of the princesses and the wife of Basilius, falls for the disguised Pyrocles (whom she realizes is not a woman). And, to top it all off, Basilius falls for the disguised Pyrocles, too (thinking that he *is* a woman). This comic situation forms the nexus of the *Old Arcadia*. But in the text's later books, it leads to tragic results. The princes decide to defy parental and paternal authority, each absconding with the sister with whom he is enamored. And this results in a chain reaction that ultimately ends up with Basilius apparently dead, the princes, princesses and Gynecia imprisoned, major unrest among the nobility and the people, and, ultimately, the arrival and temporary elevation of Euarchus, the King of neighboring Macedon, and the father of Pyrocles, to preside over the fallen royals' trial and dispose the disjoined and disheveled Arcadian polity. The *Old Arcadia*'s last two books focus on the trial, which results in the Princes being sentenced to death. This tragic conclusion, however, is ultimately avoided when Basilius (only apparently dead) comes to and all is set right.

As this short summary demonstrates, the plot of the *Old Arcadia* is complex, and most critics have understandably approached this complexity in terms of Sidney's borrowings from and adaptations of earlier Spanish, French, and Italian pastoral romances. But in terms of the *Old Arcadia*'s engagement with politics, I would argue that equally important is Sidney's use of Terentian comedy as an overarching generic framework. Sidney's text explicitly emphasizes its debts to Terentian comedy: the *Old Arcadia*'s five "books" are also referred to as "acts," and the narrator repeatedly turns to theatrical tropes to describe the action he portrays, claiming in the first book, for instance, that "love had purposed to make in these solitary woods a perfect demonstration of his unresistable force, to show that no desert place can avoid his mark" and that "fortune had framed a very stage-play of love among these few folks" (*OA* 45, 49). Commentators have noted this debt to comedy's generic framework, but have read it largely as a literary-historical phenomenon. [18] I want to argue, however, that the *Old Arcadia*'s Terentian framework cuts to the core of the text's assumptions about the political and about political experience.

But first, a basic point about how comedy was understood when Sidney wrote. Renaissance writers understood comedy through a theoretical framework that derived from classical commentaries on the texts of the Roman playwrights,

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[18] See, for example, Clark L. Chalifour, "Sir Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* as Terentian Comedy," *SEL* 16, no. 1 (1976) pp. 51-63.

particularly Terence.[19] This tradition's most influential text was Donatus' fourth-century fragment *De Comoedia et Tragoedia*, where comedy is seen as being structured around the fundamental binary of desire and social norm. "Comedy," Donatus claims, is a form of "drama containing the various designs of public and private individuals' desires."[20] Through seeing such desires unfold, comedy's audiences learn "what is useful in life and what, on the other hand, ought to be avoided."[21] Comedy, that is to say, has a profoundly pedagogical function—a pedagogical function based in the norms of community, in the imperative to communal political stability. Indeed, Donatus suggests that the primal "motive and origin of comedy" came from the ancient Athenians' wish "to preserve the propriety of Attica and brand those who were living an immoral life" by publically performing and thus rebuking the vices of those in the community.[22] And while the idea that comedy is based in the dialectic of desire versus norm is, of course, ubiquitous across the comedic writing of the English Renaissance (from Shakespeare's portrayal of how Mistresses Page and Ford thwart Falstaff's intrusion on the communal stability of Windsor to Jonson splaying and scourging of the "humorous" excesses of London),

[19] On Terentian theories of comedy and their influence in the Renaissance see Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (New York: Routledge, 1994) pp. 163-87; Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) esp. pp. 130-47; and Marvin T. Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

[20] Cited from the translation provided in *Sources of Dramatic Theory Volume 1: Plato to Congreve*, ed. M.J. Sidnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 79.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 80.

Sidney's *Old Arcadia* gives it a unique political inflection.[23]   Particularly, the *Old Arcadia* uses its Terentian framework to present the traditional aristocratic model of political experience and political organization that the *New Arcadia* will go on to radically undermine.[24]

In the introduction I argued that traditional English political culture balanced political-theological hierarchy with an emphasis on the dynamic participation, the dynamic action, of the enfranchised elite. The monarchical "form of government," as John Pym wrote in the 1620s, was meant to "actuate and dispose every part and member of a state to the common good; and as those parts give strength and ornament to the whole, so they receive from it again strength and protection in their several stations and degrees." This notion of politics as involving a kind of dynamic reciprocity between ruler and ruled was particularly important in England's aristocratic political culture, a political culture that was, as historian Mervyn James puts it, "essentially pluralistic," had "little room" for concepts of abstract, alienated, and absolute sovereignty, and orbited—above all—around an ideal of politics-*qua*-personal self-actualization.[25] It conceived political life as an aristocratic *vita activa* in which nobility could find an avenue of self-actualization, in which it could chart an

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[23] For an overview of comedy in this period see M.C. Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[24] See Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, and Debora Shuger, "Castigating Livy: The Rape of Lucretia and *The Old Arcadia*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998) pp. 526-48.

[25] Mervyn James, "English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485-1642," in *Society, Politics, and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 327.

active, dynamic, "forward"-moving "virtuous course."[26] From the point of view of this understanding of the political, kingship was less about absolute rule than it was about fostering well-doing and virtuous activity. Good kingship entailed a model of rule that Sidney sums up well in his portrait of the Macedonian king Euarchus, whose very name (meaning "good rule" in Greek) signals his exemplarity:

> Euarchus did not further exceed his meanest subject with the greatness of his fortune than he did surmount the greatness of his fortune with the greatness of his mind; in so much that those things which oftentimes the best sort think rewards of virtue, he held them not at so high price, but esteemed them servants to well doing, the reward of virtue being in itself; on which his inward love was so fixed that it never was dissolved into other designs, but keeping his thoughts true to themselves, was neither beguiled with the printed gloss of pleasure nor dazzled with the false light of ambition. This made the line of his actions straight and always like itself, no worldly thing being able to shake the constancy of it … and [he] never forgot that his office was to maintain the Macedonians in the exercise of goodness and happy enjoying their natural lives. (*OA* 309)

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[26] James Cleland, *Heropaideia: The Institution of a Young Noble Man* (Oxford, 1607) pp. 9, 4, 6.

Here, monarchy is not an absolute "greatness" overawing its subjects. It is, rather, a mode of exercising virtue and allowing subjects to do the same. But while this is the baseline political ideal of the *Old Arcadia*, what the text actually shows is the erosion of this ideal by sexual desire. Erotic passion is what distracts Basilius from his monarchical duties in his fearful flight from the Delphic oracle as well as in his pursuit of the disguised Pyrocles. It is what distracts Gynecia as well as the disguised Princes from their own political duties. And while at first, in the early books of the *Old Arcadia,* passion's triumph over political norms is treated with a fairly gentle levity, the result of this triumph is treated with increasing bleakness in the later sections of Sidney's text.

The consequences of aristocratic passion run amok start to become clear at the end of the *Old Arcadia*'s second book, where Arcadia's peasants, upset by Basilius' absentee monarchy, rebel. Significantly, Sidney juxtaposes this rebellion with what is probably the most egregious example of the two Princes' failure to live up to their aristocratic social roles. This is the scene when Musidorus, overwhelmed with desire, decides to rape Pamela. In Sidney's description of this decision, political and military metaphorics are ubiquitous. Desires, he writes,

… did so tyrannize over Musidorus's affects that he was compelled to put his face as low to hers as he could, sucking the breath with such joy that he did determine in himself there had been no life to a

chameleon's, if he might be suffered to enjoy that food. But each of

these having a mighty working in his heart, all joined together did so

draw his will into the nature of their confederacy that now his promise

began to have but a fainting force, and each thought that rase against

those desires was received as but a stranger to his counsel, well

experiencing in himself that no vow is so strong as the avoiding of

occasions; so that rising softly from her, overmastered with the fury of

delight, having all his senses partial against himself and inclined to his

well beloved adversary, he was bent to take advantage of the

weakness of the watch, and see whether at that season he could win

the bulwark before timely help might come. (*OA* 177)

Amidst his own crisis of conscience, Shakespeare's Brutus observes that in moments

of ethical confusion the "state of man" is like "to a little kingdom" that "suffers" an

"insurrection."[27] And here, inner *psychomachia* and outward civil strife also go hand

and hand. The triumph of sexual desire over moral restraint is framed as the

triumph of a "confederacy" of libidinal forces over the Princely superego. For

Sidney, however, the political inflection of Musidorus's internal crisis is not merely

metaphorical. For almost immediately after he attempts to rape Pamela, a real-world

rebellion interrupts him as a "dozen clownish villains, armed with divers sorts of

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[27] I will return to this moment from *Julius Caesar* in chapter 4.

weapons" and in the process of rebelling against the Arcadian government arrive on

the scene and promptly capture the Princess and the disguised Prince (177). [28]

Musidorus' failed rape and the peasant rebellion with which it coincides (and

which is, we should remember, caused by Basilius' absentee rule) set into motion the

turn from Terentian comedy to tragedy that runs through the *Old Arcadia's* last two

books.[29] In these books, the consequences of letting passion trump reason are driven

home with great force, and the concluding restoration of order suggests a final

endorsement of what Jeff Dolven has recently dubbed the "stoic note" that sounds

throughout the *Old Arcadia*'s ethical thinking: an ultimate acceptance of the

combination of rational autonomy and devotion to public duty folded into Cicero's

category of *officium*—an idea of almost immeasurable influence in the Ciceronian

popular philosophy so dominant in the political culture of later sixteenth-century

England.[30] Sidney's ultimate acceptance of this Ciceronian framework, I would

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[28] Indeed, the *Old Arcadia*'s second eclogues, which follow and explicitly comment upon this peasant rebellion, provide the text's most extensive elaboration of the philosophical and ethical problematic of passion versus reason. For more on this split, in the *Old Arcadia* and throughout Sidney's work, see Richard McCoy, *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979).

[29] Sidney's narrator repeatedly notes that, in these books, the text turns from comedy to tragedy. Book 4 begins: "The everlasting justice (using ourselves to be the punishers of our faults, and making our own actions the beginning of our chastisement, that our shame may be the more manifest, and our repentance follow the sooner)" (*OA* 230). Subsequently, the events unfolding are referred to as "tragedies" (238).

[30] Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) p. 106. I have already discussed this dominant Ciceronian humanism above, and however much Sidney, as McCoy's reading of the *Old Arcadia* makes clear, bridled against it, he also, in his literary and political career, professes himself to be in agreement with its basic postulates. For Sidney's endorsement, see his letter of pedagogical advice to Edward Denny (in Osborn, p. 56), in which Cicero's *De Officiis* is highly recommended reading, right alongside the scriptures. For more on office, see Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). I borrow the notion of "Ciceronian Popular Philosophy" from Hegel,

suggest, is *the* basic political postulate of the *Old Arcadia.* This is not to say that Sidney's text can be reduced to a simple, standard Ciceronianism. From Blair Worden's work on the *Old Arcadia*'s topical political allegory to Debora Shuger's analysis of its complex engagement with issues of judicial equity, Sidney scholarship has shown the thick multiplicity of the text's political investments and engagements.[31] But I want to emphasize that the *Old Arcadia*'s baseline political point of view defines the political in terms of the horizon of a polity understood in terms of offices, duties, and roles.[32]

However, the text also hints at another important component of Sidney's political understanding and his work's preoccupation with political experience. This is what I have earlier called a *dynamic* political experience—which is connected with a dynamic model of virtue. Such a model of virtue is emphasized very early in the text. When Pyrocles first falls in love with Philoclea, he has a debate with Musidorus about the traditional *topos* of the active versus the contemplative life. During this

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whose discussion is perhaps less valuable than the coinage itself: see Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 1955) p. 113.

[31] See Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, and Debora Shuger, "Castigating Livy: The Rape of Lucretia and The Old Arcadia," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998) pp. 526-48.

[32] For reasons of space I am shunting the rather complicated issue of just where Sidney's opinion finally falls on the matter of the Princes' condemnation. Shuger sees Euarchus' condemnation as a flagrant violation of the expectation that Princes deserve equity for their sexual peccadilloes—a reading also endorsed by David Norbrook, for whom "Sidney clearly expects his readers to feel the injustice of treating nobles and magnanimous princes in the same way as anyone else" (*Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002] p. 101). Even if we accept this point, however, I would argue that Euarchus is still set up as an ideal ruler: there is not the faintest whiff of irony in the praise that is heaped upon him, in both the *Old* and the *New Arcadia*, and that the issue of equity is ultimately peripheral to the basic kingship-based political understanding that undergirds the *Old Arcadia*.

debate, Musidorus provides a compact summary of Sidney's concept of a political *vita activa*, organized and oriented around political virtue:

> A mind well trained and long exercised in virtue, my sweet and worthy cousin, doth not easily change any course it once undertakes but upon well grounded and well weighed causes; for being witness to itself of his own inward good, it finds nothing without it of so high a price for which it should be altered. Even the very countenance and behaviour of such a man doth show forth images of the same constancy by maintaining a right harmony betwixt it and the inward good in yielding itself suitable to the virtuous resolutions of the mind. (*OA* 12)

The *Old Arcadia* thus establishes this vision of virtue early on. However, the rest of the text portrays the *negation* of this active model of political experience by the forces of desire. But when Sidney turned to revise the *Old Arcadia*, he went back to this dynamic vision of the political. This is particularly true in the *New Arcadia*'s second book, where Sidney elaborates the back-story of Pyrocles and Musidorus, filling in (through the retrospective accounts of several narrators) the heroic exploits the Princes engaged in before entering Arcadia and falling in love with Basilius' daughters—exploits that the *Old Arcadia*'s humbler narrator claimed was "for a

higher style than mine" (*OA* 37). In the *New Arcadia*'s retrospective narration, Sidney demonstrates the concrete playing-out of a dynamic model of political experience. In the rest of the *New Arcadia*, however, he goes on to stage the failure of this heroic model of political experience and the understanding of virtue on which it is based, while also putting forward a new model of heroism and a new model of virtue in the form of his revised version of the Princess Pamela.

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III

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Sidney starts his retrospective narration of Pyrocles and Musidorus with an account of their education. The two Princes, we learn, are the heirs to different Greek kingdoms, but they grew up together at the Macedonian court, where they were schooled in princely, heroic virtues. Sidney describes such schooling in great detail, and his account draws heavily on the long line of education-of-rulers literature that goes back as far as Plato's *Republic* and Xenophon's *Cyropaeidea* and which found Renaissance variations in texts like Thomas Elyot's *Book of the Governour* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene.*[33] But while oftentimes this sort of writing tries, in fictional and semi-fictional forms, to stage the *particulars* of how ideal rulers are trained and brought up, Sidney's truncated account of princely education focuses less on particulars and more on the subjective scene of their training. In it, he provides a

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[33] On education and Sidney's Arcadia, see Jeff Dolven's account of both redactions of the text in *Scenes of Instruction.* On the *Cyropaeidea*'s impact on Sidney's account of the Princes' education more particularly see Lorna Hutson, "Fortunate Travelers: Reading for the Plot in Sixteenth-Century England," *Representations* 41 (1993) pp. 90-3.

sketch of a fully dynamic and fully heroic form of political experience—precisely the experience that the Princes will go on to actualize in the world (but whose inadequacies Sidney also eventually suggests).

Sidney begins his account with his own heroic-aristocratic version of what Lacan called the mirror stage. [34] Even as pre-linguistic infants Pyrocles and Musidorus are bombarded with practical knowledge regarding the rudiments of aristocratic public life—with "images of battles and fortifications" (*NA* 258). But they are also bombarded with powerful and passion-raising *exempla*, stories of "worthy princes" aimed at both *teaching* them how to "do nobly" and giving them the impetus to put that knowledge into practice. In *The Defense of Poesy*, Sidney speaks of the ways in which heroic poesy directs desire at the "beauty of virtue," of fully heroic actualized potentiality. And this proper channeling of desire is what is fostered by the Princes' education, a process that comes through in the following passage:

> … almost before they could perfectly speak, they began to receive
> conceits not unworthy of the best speakers, excellent devices being
> used, to make even their sports profitable: images of battles and
> fortifications being then delivered to their memory, which after, their

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[34] See, of course, Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002) pp. 3-9. My comparison between Sidney and Lacan here is obviously a loose one.

stronger judgments might dispense, the delight of tales being

converted to the knowledge of all the stories of worthy princes, both

to move them to do nobly and teach them how to do nobly; the beauty

of virtue still being set before their eyes, and that taught them with far

more diligent care than grammatical rules; their bodies exercised in all

abilities both of doing and suffering, and their minds acquainted by

degrees with dangers; and in sum, all bent to the making up of

princely minds… (*NA* 258-9)

The first thing to notice, here, is Sidney's striking departure from his usual stylistic

tendencies. The "Arcadian Rhetoric" that characterizes Sidney's prose across his

entire career is usually characterized by a patterned balance similar to other

rhetorical schools (Ciceronianism, Euphuism). But it also puts far less emphasis on

"blocked out … parallel clauses of more or less equal length" and more emphasis on

what Jonas Barish calls "logicality"—that is, "treating a piece of discourse as

argument … tracking effects back to causes … discovering consequences from

antecedents, elucidating premises, proposing hypotheses, and the like."[35] This

tendency is evident everywhere in Sidney's writing. It shows up (to take a semi-

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[35] The first of these quotations is from Frances Yates's description of the style Sidney instituted in *John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934) p. 226; the second is from Jonas Barish's brilliant *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960) p. 23. Barish is not talking specifically about Sidney, here, but his comments still apply.

random instance) in the letter that Basilius' advisor, Philanax, writes to him early in

the *New Arcadia,* in a failed attempt to persuade the King not to abdicate his throne

in order to prevent the Delphic Oracle's prophecy from coming true:

> I would then have said that wisdom and virtue be the only destinies
> appointed to man to follow, whence we ought to seek all our
> knowledge, since they be such guides as cannot fail; which, besides
> their inward comfort, do lead so direct a way of proceeding as either
> prosperity must ensue, or, if the wickedness of the world should
> oppress it, it can never be said that evil happeneth to him who falls
> accompanied with virtue. (*NA* 80)

The sinews of Sidney's prose, here, are logical. His clauses are balanced and

symmetrical as Sidney has Philanax put forward a model of virtue based on

prudence, reflection, and mental-moral constancy. But both this stylistic structure

and the model of virtue it uses to advocate are pushed aside in the *New Arcadia*'s

account of the Princes' education. Take, for instance, the one long sentence that

constitutes his description of the Princes' upbringing just quoted. In it, we see a

breathless forward momentum that is facilitated by a sloppy and at points confusing

use of present participles ("being used…" "being then…" "being converted…"

"being set before their eyes…") to coordinate the sentence's subsections. Sidney's

writing, here, reads less like the *Arcadia*'s usual sentences and more like the "exploded periods" that appear in later, seventeenth-century prose writers like Robert Burton.[36] With each clause, the *tabulae rasae* of the young Princes are filled with an ever-ripening knowledge and capacity. And this hurtles forward, on the syntactic level, toward the ultimate *teloi* of action and agency as the two of them are

> brought up so that all the sparks of virtue which nature had kindled in
> them were so blown to give forth their uttermost heat, that, justly it
> may be affirmed, they inflamed the affections of all that knew them.
> (*NA* 258)

What Sidney sketches here—in other words—is a vision of virtue as both the origin and the terminus of a fundamentally dynamic experience of political life.

In the rest of the *New Arcadia*'s retrospective narration of Pyrocles and Musidorus, this model of political experience is at the core of their heroic exploits. Sidney's portrayal of these heroic exploits is interesting, particularly his initial account of their educations. At one point, the narration notes that the Pyrocles and Musidorus are instilled with a "habit of commanding" that makes them opposed to

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[36] For a classic account of the history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English prose see Morris W. Croll, *'Attic' and Baroque Prose Style: The Anti-Ciceronian Movement*, ed. J. Max Patrick and Robert O. Evans (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969). For a more recent (though shorter) overview see Debora Shuger, "Conceptions of Style," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 3: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 176-86.

"tyranny" (*NA* 259). In its immediate context, this mention of tyranny seems puzzling, strange, and almost asyndetic. But in the rest of Sidney's narration of the Princes' active, heroic adventures will, in fact, repeatedly juxtapose their heroic political experience with tyranny. Tyranny becomes the dialectical opposite of virtue throughout the *New Arcadia*'s second book, and by tracing the Princes' encounters with tyrannical regimes we can trace the way in which Sidney both elaborates and extols an active model of virtue based in a dynamic mode of political experience.

This is evident in the first of their adventures. Toward the end of their education, Pyrocles and Musidorus develop the desire to embark "to the practice of those virtues which they before learned," and so they depart from Macedon by sea (259). Before long, however, they encounter a storm and are separated after their ship sinks. This storm delivers "sweet Pyrocles into the stormy mind" of a tyrant, the tyrannical king of Phrygia who, fearing some sort of Macedonian invasion of his territory, decides to execute the Prince (266). The story that follows, as many readers would have known, presents the Princes through the lens of the famous story of Damon and Pythias and their encounter with the tyrant Dionysius—a myth that was often read as exemplifying both friendship (in the classical Aristotelian-Ciceronian tradition) and opposition to tyranny.[37] In the classical tradition, from Aristotle to

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[37] Familiar to any classically-trained reader, the story of Damon and Pythias was also the topic of Richard Edwards' popular play of the same name in the 1560s: see Ros King's recent edition and introduction in *The Works of Richard Edwards: Politics, Poetry, and Performance in Sixteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

Aquinas, tyranny was seen as being opposed to both friendship and virtue.[38] And Sidney reworks this classical legacy in his portrait of the Princes' conflict with the Phrygian king to emphasize the binary distinction between the constituent power of virtue and the frozen, dead, constituted power of tyranny.[39]

The King of Phrygia is described as "a prince of melancholy constitution of both body and mind; wickedly sad, ever musing of horrible matters; suspecting, or rather condemning all men of evil, because his mind had no eye to espy goodness" (265), and Sidney's emphasis on melancholy here is significant. This humoral affliction is, of course, a familiar concern in the early modern period broadly, from the Florentine Platonists to the malcontents of the English popular stage.[40] But one particularly frequent feature of how melancholy was understood in the Renaissance was as being a state-of-mind prone to the total *negation of human virtue*. Shades of this appear throughout the great melancholic writers of the period—for instance Montaigne, who saw classical concepts of virtue as an heroic activity and actualization of human potential as patently absurd in the face of the inherent

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[38] For a short but helpful overview of the history of western notions of tyranny see Mark Blitz, "Tyranny, Ancient and Modern," in *Confronting Tyranny, Ancient Lessons for Global Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005) pp. 9-24. For Aristotle's influential account of tyranny and friendship see *Politics* 1295a1-24 and *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book 8, *passim. F*or Aquinas see *Selected Politics Writings*, ed. A.P. Entrévès (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1981) pp. 28-9.

[39] On the terminology of constituted versus constituent power, see Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies*: *Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[40] See Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971); Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature, 1580-1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1959).

fragility and weakness of human subjects.[41] And this sense of melancholy is also

present in Sidney's account of Phrygia's nameless king. In Sidney's portrayal of the

king, tyranny is presented as a *repression of potentiality*, of the *dynamic becoming of*

virtue. The Phrygian king lets "nothing pass which might bear the colour of a fault,

without sharp punishment: and when he wanted faults, excellency grew a fault; and

it was sufficient to make one guilty, that he had power to be guilty" (265). He is a

perfect fictional embodiment of the common classical, medieval, and early modern

idea that tyrants, as Thomas Aquinas wrote, "always suspect the good rather than

the wicked, and are ever afraid of virtue"; that

> They seek always to hinder their subjects from becoming virtuous,
>
> and from growing in magnanimity of soul, lest they become restless
>
> under unjust government: they prevent them from establishing ties of
>
> friendship and from enjoying the benefit of fraternal peace, so that
>
> being always suspicious one of the other they can never combine
>
> against the tyrant's power.[42]

In Aquinas' account, tyranny represses the constituent power, the dynamic

becoming, of virtue.   And indeed this is how Sidney understands tyranny

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[41] See "Apology for Raymond Sebond," in *Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1993); see also Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (Boston: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000).

[42] See Aquinas, *Selected Politics Writings*, p. 10.

throughout his work. Scholars of Sidney's work have long noted his preoccupation with tyranny, and have especially emphasized Sidney's personal and intellectual connections with a number of continental Protestant intellectuals—most significantly Hubert Languet—who were at the forefront of an anti-tyrannical discourse of resistance theory which argued for the right and power of aristocrats to resist monarchical power, especially on issues of religion.[43]   It is beyond doubt that Sidney was familiar with this particular political theory, and with the skeptical view that (as Languet wrote to him in an early letter) "virtue is more often the cause of ruin than vice for men of high rank" under monarchical forms of government.[44] But despite Sidney's obvious sympathy to continental Protestant activists, I would argue that his understanding of tyranny is differently inflected than the vision of tyranny that we see emerge in Languet's letters, or in the influential anti-tyrannical tract *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* which many modern scholars conjecture Languet at least partially authored.[45] Thinkers like Languet were concerned with the ways in which tyranny could serve as a theoretical justification for the autonomy of the Protestant aristocracy throughout continental Europe.[46] But Sidney's political assumptions (as

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[43] For a classic overview, see Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[44] Quoted in James Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney 1572-1577* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) p. 155.

[45] See *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos, or, Concerning the Legitimate Power of a Prince Over the People, and of the People over a Prince*, trans. and ed. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. xix-lxxvi.

[46] See *Ibid*.

Martin Ratiere has persuasively argued) came out of a more conservative English political culture, one that assumed the necessity of monarchical governance and was less concerned with overthrowing monarchical regimes than it was with preserving aristocratic enfranchisement, activity, and virtue.[47]

This set of assumptions colored Sidney's own view of tyranny—as becomes clear in his most extensive elaboration of the concept, the so-called "Ister Bank" eclogue that appears in the *Old Arcadia*. "Ister Bank" interrogates the origins of political authority and the relation between aristocracy and monarchy by way of an Aesopian beast fable. Once (the story runs) the world was inhabited solely by animals. But while this pre-human political order was fairly placid, eventually a desire emerged among the animals for a single ruler. So the "multitude" presented a suit to Jove "for to have a king" (*OA* 223). Reluctantly, the god plucked properties from each animal kind: craft from the fox, melancholy from the cat, and so forth, eventually creating man. But man quickly started behaving not like the benevolent monarch he was intended to be. Instead, "when his seat so rooted he had found" that the origins of his power in the animal aristocracy were forgotten and the beasts "now skilled not how from him to wend" man turned into a tyrant, murdering, pillaging, and sowing dissent among his subjects (223). Sidney's fable ends with an admonition to the animals to "Deem it no glorie to swell in tyranny" and that they

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[47] See Martin Ratiere, *Faire Bitts: Philip Sidney and Renaissance Political Theory* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1984).

should "in patience bide your hell / Or know your strengths, and then you shall do well" (*OA* 225).

"Ister Bank" paints a fairly conventional portrait of the origins of political authority as involving a fall from a more equal golden age.[48] We see a similar account of the pre-historic origins of political authority, for instance, in one of his friend Fulke Greville's sonnets from his sequence *Caelica*:

> The Golden-Age was when the world was yong,
>
> Nature so rich, as Earth did need no sowing,
>
> Malice not knowne, the Serpents had not stung,
>
> Wit was but sweet Affections ouerflowing.[49]

For Greville as much as Sidney, this golden age is an inaccessible utopian past, opposed to a postlapsarian political present that requires monarchical rule. In "Ister Bank" the issue is not ultimately *whether* there should be monarchical governance but, rather, whether such monarchical governance generates a situation in which the individual potentialities, the individual virtues, the individual "strengths" of those subject to monarchy are repressed. This failure of such "strengths" is what happens in the fable, and this—for Sidney—is the definition of tyranny. In the face of such

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[48] On the sources of the fable see Ratiere, *ibid*.

[49] Fulke Greville, *Certaine learned and elegant vvorkes of the Right Honorable Fulke Lord Brooke* (London, 1633) p. 191.

tyranny, "Ister Bank" concludes by advocating that the fable's animals "know their strengths" while patiently enduring the "hell" of their repression. But in the *New Arcadia*'s retrospective narrative, Sidney provides *another* version of how active virtue can relate to political repression: one in which virtue allows for the *restitution* of proper monarchical governance embodied by Pyrocles and Musidorus (who are themselves *monarchical*, the children of monarchs and the heirs to kingdoms who have been trained to "command" and "rule") rather than its more radical rejection.

We see the contrast between proper and tyrannical monarchy with particular clarity in the contrasting character sketches Sidney provides of the king of Phrygia and Musidorus (who, at this point in the narrative, has arrived on the scene to try to save Pyrocles). When he arrives, Musidorus seeks refuge with a Phrygian nobleman and decides to offer himself up to take the place of his cousin on the scaffold. In setting up the dramatic pre-execution scene that ensues, Sidney begins by describing the tyrant. His initial description of the Phrygian king emphasizes his choice of "terribleness" over "nobleness"—a term that, in Sidney's milieu, had a similar set of associations as "virtue" and marked a political practice based in a "forward"-moving "virtuous course."[50] Instead of pursuing this course of action, however, the Phrygian tyrant

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[50] James Cleland, *Heropaideia: The Institution of a Young Noble Man* (Oxford, 1607) p. 9, p. 4, p. 6.

> … having quite lost the way of nobleness … strave to climb to the
>
> height of terribleness; and thinking to make all men a-dread to make
>
> such one an enemy who would not spare nor fear to kill so great a
>
> prince, and lastly, having nothing in him why to make him his friend,
>
> he thought he would take him away from being his enemy. (266)

An aristocratic ethical life of friendship and virtuous "well-doing" is displaced, here, by a grim, almost proto-Schmittian version of politics as a sphere of constant antagonism bordering on the brink of bloodshed.[51] For Sidney's unnamed tyrant, power is *totally constituted*, walled off from what it rules over. We see, here, the polar opposite of the model of monarchy earlier embodied—in the *Old Arcadia*—by Euarchus. And unsurprisingly, Sidney's portrait of the nameless tyrant contrasts strongly with his portrait of Musidorus:

> … the princely youth, of invincible valour yet so unjustly subjected to
>
> such outrageous wrong, carrying himself in all his demeanour so
>
> constantly, abiding extremity, that one might see it was the cutting
>
> away of the greatest hope of the world and destroying virtue in his
>
> sweetest growth. (266)

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[51] On friendship and the impossibility of tyranny see Aristotle's discussion in the *Politics*, book 5, chapter 2.

At the core of this moment of *ethopoeia* is a vision of virtue as the site of a dynamic becoming that cannot be thwarted even by extremely adverse circumstances. Even under the shadow of "outrageous wrong" and imminent death, Musidorus is still an exemplary vision of dynamic heroic becoming—such that his pending execution will signal the "cutting away of the greatest hope" of the world, a suffocation of virtue's "sweetest growth"—an organic metaphor that further foregrounds the contrast between the dynamic, almost biological vitality of Musidorus and the deadened, frozen authority of Phrygian tyrant.

The subsequent events of Sidney's story bear out this opposition between these two figures. On the verge of execution—"acknowledging themselves subject to death" and "meaning only to do honor to their princely birth"—Musidorus and Pyrocles join forces in a near-suicidal final stand against the military forces of the Phrygian king. After doing "such wonders beyond belief" in their "just rage and desperate virtue," they force the king to flee (*NA* 270). Eventually he is killed, and in the ensuing tumult the Princes are forced to dispose of the Phrygian government. Here, Musidorus and Pyrocles further prove their princely *bona fides* by steering Phrygia away from a "popular license" that Sidney equates with its own form of "many-headed tyranny" (270). After they manage to restore order, Musidorus is, in fact, offered the Phrygian crown. However, he installs an estranged (and thus unsullied) cousin of the king on the throne. Richard McCoy writes that this episode

shows the Princes engaged in something like "a systematic test of political wit," of their capacity to rule.[52]   But Sidney's emphasis, I would argue, is still on the *kinesis* of heroic exploits rather than the stasis of governmental procedure.

Here, the difference between the *Old Arcadia*'s emphasis on monarchical governance and the *New Arcadia*'s emphasis on dynamic heroic becoming is made clear. And this difference of emphasis is made even clearer in the next episode of the *New Arcadia*'s retrospective narrative. Following their deeds in Phrygia, the two princely "tyrant-killers" hear that the two servants with whom they set out from Macedonia have subsequently washed ashore in the nearby country of Pontus (270). The servants, on encountering that country's (also unnamed) tyrant, are first favored but later viciously and arbitrarily executed. Pyrocles and Musidorus's response to this news is immediate and decisive. "Making forces in Phrygia (a kingdom wholly at their commandment by the love of the people and gratefulness of the king)," they "entered his country, and wholly conquering it, with such deeds as at least fame said were excellent." Once again, they overthrow and eventually execute the king (272-3). And subsequently, events in Pontus prove similar to those in Phrygia: Pyrocles might "quietly have enjoyed that crown by all the desire of the people," we are informed, but instead the Princes locate a "sister of the late king's" and so reinstitute a properly-derived aristocratic mode of governance (273). Once again, this episode echoes some of the political proposals and assumptions of the *Old Arcadia*—with its

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[52] McCoy, *Rebellion in Arcadia*, p. 141.

emphasis on aristocratic inheritance and the righting of monarchical malfeasance. But again, the *New Arcadia*'s retrospective narrative's emphasis is on the dynamic rather than the static, the heroic rather than the kingly. In their interventions and tyrant-slayings in both Phrygia and Pontus, Pyrocles and Musidorus demonstrate an unwillingness to forego their forward-moving, kinetic, and peripatetic style of heroism, their ongoing actualization of virtue. They show what the people of Phrygia describe as marvelous "magnanimity" (270). This term was understood, in the Renaissance, as a "greatnesse" characterized by a "puissant resolution to enter vppon the brauest enterprises"; it was seen as the "vertue," as Pierre de la Primaudaye puts in *The French Academy*, of which "Heroical men" are "prodigall."[53] And in these episodes from the *New Arcadia*'s second book, Pyrocles and Musidorus become avatars of magnanimity—of a politics of heroic greatness and becoming that vaults over any limits. The Princes, that is to say, demonstrate precisely the heroic ideal that Sidney had outlined in the *Defense of Poesy* … the "heroical" sort of Poesy, "whose verie name" daunts "all backbiters; which, through "champions" like "Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tideus, Rinaldo" not only teaches and moves to truth "but teacheth and mooveth to the most high and excellent truth" and makes "magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires"

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[53] The first quote here comes from Robert Johnson's essay "Of Greatness of Mind," in *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers* (London, 1601) p. 8. The second derives from Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French Academy*, (London, 1586) p. 180. For more on magnanimity in early modern (and earlier forms of) heroism see Eugene Waith's work, both on Herculean heroism and the broader notions of "greatness" that bound together heroism in the early modern period in Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) and Waith, *Ideas of Greatness* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971).

(*MW* 231). This particular vision of the heroic is summed up nicely when Musidorus—at this point narrating the Princes' exploits—summarizes their heroic self-perception:

> And therefore having well established those kingdoms under good governors, and rid them by their valour of such giants and monsters as before-time armies were not able to subdue, they determined in unknown order to see more of the world, and to employ those gifts, esteemed rare in them, to the good of mankind; and therefore would themselves … go privately to seek exercises of their virtue, thinking it not so worthy to be brought to heroical effects by fortune or necessity, like Ulysses and Aeneas, as by one's own choice and working. (274-5)

But while these lines reveal a vision of heroism as a limitless process of personal becoming, they also—ironically—articulate an ideal that will *never actually occur* in the *New Arcadia*. The Princes' tyrant-slaying is, after all, a result of the forces of "fortune and necessity." And the adventures they engage in subsequently show the increasing inability of virtue to master the political world it encounters.[54] This is

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[54] We see this, for instance, in book 2's next episode, which portrays their inconclusive attempt to intervene in a rebellion against the king of Patagonia by his bastard son Plexiturus (an episode from which Shakespeare derived some of the rudiments of the plot of *King Lear*). But the fact that in book 2 the "efficacy of heroic activism is clearly declining," as Richard McCoy puts it (*ibid*, p. 144) becomes even clearer the Princes' next exploit, an attempt to aid Erona the Queen of Lycia.

crystallized when they eventually encounter the Arcadian Princesses and are amorously waylaid from their heroic preoccupations. In the *Old Arcadia*, Sidney summarizes this distraction from "the exercise of virtue" (10) by having Cleophila (the disguised Pyrocles) recite the following lines:

> Transformed in show, but more transformed in mind,
>
> I cease to strive, with double conquest foiled;
>
> For (woe is me) my powers all I find
>
> With outward force and inward treason spoiled.

Erona's story begins when she (at this point still the Princess of Lycia) falls in love with a man "of mean parentage" named, significantly, Antiphilus, and refuses to marry the royal husband to whom she is betrothed, Tiridates, the King of Armenia (302). Her obstinacy "so brake[s] the tender father's heart" that he dies, and so Erona inherits Lycia's throne, advancing her "affection" for Antiphilus to the "holy title of matrimony" (302). But Armenia's king is still angered by the breach of the earlier marital contract, attacks Lycia, and is almost at the point of overcoming Erona's forces when Pyrocles and Musidorus arrive on the scene. After various twists and turns of the plot, the Princes save the Queen and rescue her fiancé (who has been captured by the Armenians). But despite Pyrocles and Musidorus' rather considerable exercise of heroic military virtue, Sidney suggests in this episode that a rift is developing between their heroic activities and the broader political venues in which they operate. In this particular episode, all this centers on Antiphilus. Due to the Princes' actions he is "redeemed and (though against the consent of all her nobility) married to Erona; in which case the two Greek princes, being called away by another adventure, left her" (306). In the earlier episodes of the *New Arcadia's* second book the Princes are on the side of aristocratic right and custom: in removing the tyrants of both Phrygia and Pontus, they rely on the assistance of the local nobility, and ultimately they make sure to keep the aristocracy firmly in charge of the post-tyrant political situations in both of these kingdoms. When they intervene in Lycia, however, their heroic military valor serves only to *perpetuate* a tyranny. And this tyranny, furthermore, only becomes more intense when the *New Arcadia's* narration returns to Lycia some time later and we learn that Antiphilus, soon after marrying Erona and becoming Lycia's king, grows easily into the etymological meaning of his name, imagining that the "true property of sovereignty" is "to do what he listed and to list whatsoever pleased his fancy" and making his "kingdom a tennis-court where his subjects should be the balls" (398).

The Erona episode, I would argue, anticipates the fate of Pyrocles and Musidorus' active aristocratic heroism in the later portions of the *New Arcadia*. In portraying the failure of their praxis to master and transform a complex political reality that, as a result, lapses into tyranny, it suggests a major shift that will occur later in the *New Arcadia*: a shift, in Sidney's understanding of the political, from seeing the collective world as a kind of primal matter on which individual heroic potential can impose its forms, and toward instead seeing it instead as characterized by inexorability and inevitability that are beyond any individual agent's power to control. This increasingly bleak experience of the political world as the site of a kind of confrontation with inert and untouchable totality is, as the *New Arcadia* progresses, signaled repeatedly in Sidney's increasing emphasis on tyranny.

(*OA* 10)

And indeed this neutralization of heroic "powers" is only further foregrounded in the *New Arcadia*, juxtaposed, as it is, with a concrete version of the Princes' previous feats in active heroism.

In the *New Arcadia*'s later books, however, Sidney's concern with the failure of an active heroism in the face of both internal and external obstacles is not mainly elaborated through Pyrocles and Musidorus. Instead, and somewhat surprisingly, he switches his emphasis to another heroic figure: Amphialus. In the later portions of the *New Arcadia*, while the Princes are disguised and pursuing Pamela and Philoclea, it is Amphialus who violently and theatrically comes to embody the destructive failure of an active heroism. It is Amphialus who becomes the vessel for Sidney's increasing skepticism toward an active heroism, and who also sets in action a course of events that will allow Sidney to articulate an *alternative* form of heroism in the Princess Pamela.

IV

Amphialus is the son of Cecropia, probably the only unqualified villain in Sidney's entire oeuvre.[55] Before Basilius' late-life marriage to Gynecia, Cecropia, we

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[55] Cecropia has often been read by critics as an allegorical embodiment of Mary Queen of Scots. For a version of this argument – as well as a summary of previous redactions – see Barbara Brunbaugh, "Cecropia and the Church of the Antichrist in Sir Philip Sidney's *New Arcadia*," *SEL* 38 (1998) pp. 19-43.

learn, was the wife of the king's brother, meaning that Amphialus stood to inherit Basilius' crown upon his death—a necessity for Cecropia, who, being originally the daughter of a foreign monarch, violently refuses to see her and Amphialus' "royal blood" degraded by a loss of royal status and the startling possibility that they might ever be seen as having been "born of the mud of the people" (446). With Basilius' marriage, however, and with the birth of his eldest daughter and "inheritrix" Pamela, Cecropia's dynastic hope is displaced. Cecropia's solution to this problem is to force a marriage between her son and Basilius' daughter. And her plan to do this involves manipulating her son, who lacks her amoral tendencies. Amphialus, in Sidney's account, is educated not by his mother but rather by his aristocratic and significantly-named relative Timoetheus (from the Greek *tîme*, "honor"). He is schooled in all the same noble and military virtues that Pyrocles and Musidorus are. But, as with the Princes, Amphialus' heroic education is incapable of protecting him from the distractive power of *eros*, and he eventually falls in love with Philoclea and quickly ceases to be "courteous, noble, liberal"—a collection of "all heroical parts" (*NA* 122). Amphialus becomes, instead, a creature of his passions—passions his mother is able to play on as she pursues her dynastic ambitions and her desire for revenge against Basilius. She plots to play on Amphialus' own desire for Philoclea and eventually succeeds in convincing him to rebel and kidnap the Arcadian royal family, along with the disguised Princes.

Amphialus, then, is a hero lead astray by love, just as the Princes are. But while, for them, love becomes its own triumphant tyrannical force—neutralizing their drive to enact virtuously their dynamic potentiality—Amphialus demonstrates a different relationship with tyranny, allowing desire to drive him to become a tyrant *himself.* Amphialus is first linked with tyranny in an early episode of the *New Arcadia*'s third book. At this point, he has just kidnapped Arcadia's royals, retreated to his castle, and called a caucus of his allies to plot their course of action. Although the reader is well aware of Amphialus' real motivations for having undertaken this course of action, Sidney nevertheless has him extensively justify himself through a long political speech. Here, he masks his impure motives in the language of the anti-tyrannical Protestant resistance theory already mentioned. One of the major postulates of this school of political thought was that nobles and magistrates subordinate to a monarch, so-called "subaltern" magistrates, had the right to rebel if a ruler transgressed religious morality and foundational political rights.[56] And Amphialus—accusing Basilius of tyranny for his rural rustication and handing off of his kingly duties to subordinates—claims that he has, in rebelling, acted on the basis of this fundamental right, the fundamental right of "being subaltern magistrates and officers of the crown" (*NA* 453).[57]

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[56] See Walzer for background on this.

[57] See Ratiere, pp. 19-38.

However, Sidney ironically represents Amphialus as being *himself a tyrant*, in two ways. He is first of all (like the Princes) ruled by desire, by what the narrator at one point refers to as love's "tyranny" (565). But he also acts tyrannically to his subjects and allies by plunging Arcadia into civil war, rather than protecting the common good—leading to a mode of political behavior that is repeatedly described as "tyrannical" (481). In this way, Amphialus emerges not just as parallel to the Princes but also as parallel to Basilius, and the isomorphism between the two characters is emphasized throughout much of book 3. This is not to say that Sidney does not go to great lengths to draw *contrasts* rather than comparisons between the two characters. While Amphialus epitomizes a (misdirected) aristocratic prudence and ability, Basilius is a humiliating parody of this ideal—"desirous," as Sidney writes at one particular damning moment, "that everybody should do valiantly but himself" (446). But they are united in their utter self-interest and lack of concern for the common good: each is "a notable example of how great dissipations monarchal governments are subject unto" (766).

Such "dissipation" was—of course—the major political focus of the *Old Arcadia* as well. But while in this text monarchical normativity is embodied and ultimately restored by Euarchus, in the later books of the *New Arcadia* this political grounding is nowhere in sight. Euarchus becomes a minor and insignificant character, who cannot tame the ongoing war between the "Amphialans" and the "Basileans" that unfolds as Basilius and his allies lay siege to Amphialus' castle. This

conflict is a war between factions captained by figures who have failed to uphold the basic virtues of good governance, and it degrades into a political and military quagmire in which Basilieus and Amphialus quickly find themselves inextricably caught. The siege of Amphialus' castle, Sidney's account suggests, will not be broken, and the portrayal of the war as it unfolds suggests a deep disenchantment with the *vita activa* so uncritically extolled in the *Old Arcadia*, and in the *Defense.*

This disenchantment with an active, dynamic heroism becomes particularly clear in the third book's portrayal of military violence. A number of critics have observed that Sidney's stance on violence shifts in the *New Arcadia*'s last book, becoming an *aestheticized* spectacle stripped of the ethical depth of Sidney's earlier efforts in this area.[58]   But, as with the resistance theory mentioned a moment ago, this heroic violence is also *ironized* in a way that is unprecedented in Sidney's earlier work. In the *Old Arcadia*'s portrayal of the Princes' crushing of a peasant rebellion, the Princes at one point turn their swords on a painter who has come to the battle looking to see real wounds to paint them, and Sidney writes, with perfect poise and symmetry, "And so the painter returned well skilled in wounds, but with never a hand to perform his skill" (381). Sidney's language, here, betrays no sense of moral anxiety over this sort of violence. He comfortably submits this fictional occurrence to the subtle wit and courtly poise for which his prose is known. But the differences

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[58] See McCoy's account in *Rebellion in Arcadia* as well as Clare Kinney, "Chivalry Unmasked: Courtly Spectacle and the Abuses of Romance in Sidney's *New Arcadia*," *SEL* (1995) pp. 35-52.

between *Old* and *New Arcadia* become clear if we compare this episode with another scene of military bloodshed in the latter text's third book. Here, Sidney dexterously and decorously describes Amphialus' double butchering of an aging squire named Aeschylus and the son who tries to defend him in terms of a transformation of "father and son" into "twins in their never-again-dying birth" (*NA* 470). On the surface, this seems similar to the just-mentioned moment from the *Old Arcadia*. But in context, they could not be more different. Immediately before his description of Amphialus' brutal slaying of Aeschylus and his son, Sidney's narrator notes that in his actions on the battlefield Amphialus is propelled by his desire to hold onto Philoclea more than anything else. His fighting—including the father/son slaying—is described as a laboring "to make valour, strength, choler and hatred to answer the proportion of his love which was infinite" (*NA* 469). In other words, violence—which previously in the *New Arcadia* served a privileged heroic medium for the actualization of virtue—has now been transformed into a perverse attempt to force the world to come into line with erotically-determined delusion. Earlier, violence contributed to an exemplary fantasmatic version of a dynamic experience of the political. But now violence is merely symptomatic of a degradation in political life, a conflict in which, as David Norbrook perceptively writes, "[b]attle is confined to a series of single combats, which can be described in terms borrowed from courtly tilts rather than in the language of sixteenth-century military science. The knights dress up in fantastic and colorful costumes; the field of battle becomes a 'bloody

Teniscourt' in which 'the game of death' is played; blood becomes a caparison 'decking' Philautus' armor. Violent action is blocked and displaced into spectacle."[59] Sidney's skeptical portrayal of heroic military violence suggests a broader breakdown of faith in heroic action's ability to meaningful impact the political world. We are no longer in the stable and traditional realm of the *Old Arcadia,* where duty entails action, a heroic action that—despite love's distractions—is still very much possible. The *New Arcadia*'s final book has more combat, more action, more of the military *vita activa* that Sidney earlier extolled than *any* of his other writings. But it is, at the same time, presented as a hollow charade.

The *New Arcadia*'s third book suggests a sudden and significant shift in Sidney's attitude toward the dynamic, action-oriented model of heroism that is dominant across most of his other writings. His earlier works show a deep-seated faith in the political potentiality of aristocratic virtue. But these last books, as one critic writes, suggest a full-fledged "crisis in the political" insofar as they depict "the limits of the various modes of political action—counsel and warfare—open to men of Sidney's ilk."[60] But this crisis, I would suggest, is not just a crisis in the postulates of political theory. It is also a crisis in political experience, in which Sidney's narrative works through a fundamental alienation of virtue, of political activity, from political life. In the *New Arcadia*'s final book, virtue degrades from an

[59] Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics,* p. 105.

[60] Tracy Sedinger, "Sidney's *New Arcadia* and the Decay of Protestant Republicanism," *SEL* 47, no. 1 (2007) p. 60.

organizing principle of noble "well-doing" into an excuse for self-interested and ultimately tyrannical behavior. The portrayal of military and political activity here seems to point forward to the political pessimism that would eventually be expressed in the later writings of Sidney's friend and biographer, Fulke Greville. In his early seventeenth-century *Inquisition upon Fame and Honour*, Greville describes human beings as "fraile," prone to forget their own limitations, and inclined to chaotic and violent behavior that is only capable of being tamed by sovereign authority.[61] It is out of the "womb of this frailty," Greville writes, that the "Giant Creature in excess of Might," the sovereign, emerges as the only preservation of "Religion, Honour, Natures Laws and Nations"—phenomena that are all "derived from that gift transcendent."[62]

But while Sidney seems to share Greville's political pessimism in the final book of the *New Arcadia*, his solution is not a proto-Hobbesian embrace of absolute authority. Instead, the *New Arcadia*'s concluding pessimism puts forward a complex reconsideration of heroic action and political experience. It is impossible to deny that Sidney's account of the siege of Amphialus' castle suggest a kind of *negation* of an active, military heroism. But if Sidney negates this earlier heroic paradigm he also (in Hegelian terms) *negates this negation:* his cancelling out of active heroism also involves the simultaneous attempt to "keep" and "preserve" heroism in a

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[61] Fulke Greville, *Inquisition upon Fame and Honour,* in *Certaine Learned and Elegant Works*, p. 64.

[62] Fulke Greville, *Treatise of Monarchy*, in *The Works in Verse and Prose of the Right Honourable Fulke Grevile*, ed. Alexander Grosart (London, 1870) p. 25.

dialectically transfigured form.[63] More concretely, the *New Arcadia*'s third and final book shows a progressive deracination of the sort of heroism represented by Pyrocles and Musidorus and (later on) Amphialus. But at the same time, out of this negative movement, comes the positive presentation of the new, and very different, heroism represented by the Princess Pamela, a heroism that is not immanent to the political *vita activa* but rather constitutively located outside of it. To understand what Pamela does in the *New Arcadia's* third and final book, however, we need to first turn back to Sidney's initial presentation of the character in the *Old Arcadia*.

V

The politics of the *Old Arcadia*, as we have already seen, are focused on monarchical governance. The text's plot hinges on a ruler, Basilius, whose failure to live up to these ideals sets into motion both the *Old Arcadia*'s initial comedy and its later tragic tumults. Amidst these tumults it is Euarchus, the King of Macedon, who ultimately emerges as a paradigmatic example of proper kingship, of the proper discharge of monarchical office. But in the *Old Arcadia*'s later books, Sidney also presents Basilius' elder daughter Pamela as an exemplary embodiment of this political paradigm. While Euarchus exemplifies the arts of kingly rule, Pamela figures a principle of monarchical inheritance in her obstinate refusal to budge from

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[63] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel: Translated from the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904) p. 142.

her position as the rightful "inheritrix" to the Arcadian throne. This refusal is represented in the *Old Arcadia* as a particular form of constant heroism, a heroism not of active "well-doing" but, instead, of an aristocratic magnanimity refusing to yield to uncontrollable circumstance.

The nature of Pamela's heroism in the *Old Arcadia* becomes clear from Sidney's juxtaposition of her with her young sister Philoclea. The "tender Philoclea," Sidney's narrator claims, is unable to cope with the unfolding events of the *Old Arcadia*'s later books. Having "never lifted up her mind to any opinion of sovereignty" she is "apter to yield her misfortune, having no stronger debates in her mind than a man may say a most witty childhood is wont to nourish, as to imagine with herself why Philanax and the other noblemen should deal so cruelly by her that had never deserved evil of any of them" (*OA* 319). Pamela, by contrast, keeps her eyes trained on the sovereignty that—as the oldest child of Basilius—is rightfully hers. Although she is

> endued with a virtuous mildness, yet the knowledge of herself and
> what was due unto her, made her heart full of a stronger disdain
> against her adversity; so that she joined the vexation for her friend
> with the spite to see herself, as she thought, rebelliously detained, and
> mixed desirous thoughts to help with revengeful thoughts if she could
> not help. (*OA* 319)

The initial emphasis in this description is on Pamela's "virtuous mildness," a phrase whose adjectival subordination of virtue to the weak abstraction of mildness seems to imply a kind of gentle passivity, a feminized acquiescence to circumstance. But the start of Sidney's description is deliberately deceptive. For this sentence quickly reveals that Pamela's "virtuous mildness" goes hand-in-hand with a quiet un-mild and non-acquiescent "knowledge of herself."

Grasping the full significance of this phrase requires us to remember that self-knowledge had a radically different sense in Sidney's time than it has acquired in subsequent centuries, and carries in our own culture.[64] For most of us, self-knowledge is bound up, in one way or another, with the idea of *authenticity*—with notions of individual identity, reflexivity, and essence that are often traced back to the Cartesian *cogito* but are more than anything else the product of the gradual incorporation of nineteenth-century notions of the self into the narcissistic mass culture of the twentieth century. But from classical antiquity well into the Renaissance, self-knowledge had a radically different sense. Shakespeare's Polonius famously sums this sense up in his injunction "To thine own self be true"—an injunction that, in context, commands not a commitment to one's own personal identity but rather to social expectations, particularly those attending to Laertes as

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[64] For the standard account of the complex development of modern modes of selfhood see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1992).

the son of a prominent Danish courtier.[65] And Pamela's self-knowledge falls into a similar category. It is not a knowledge of uniqueness or personality but rather of "what was due unto her." It is a self-knowledge grounded in the concrete social materiality of inheritance and rule and in a sense of the unrelenting claim of kinship within this social and political realm.

Specifically, Pamela asserts the claims of a woman within this political realm. The "great lady of Tudor times," as E.M.W. Tillyard notes in his account of the *Arcadia*, "was in her way as much a governor as her husband."[66] It is important, in reading how Pamela is presented in the *Old Arcadia*, to realize that Sidney was writing with this assumption. Contemporary complaints about Elizabeth's gender notwithstanding, the late sixteenth century was a period that preceded the political and social transformations that would banish women from the political realm, domesticating them to the realm of the household and the private as opposed to the male public sphere.[67] In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel described this shift in terms of the emergence of the two polarities of state and civil society. Before this political arrangement, however, he also suggests there was another mode of political and

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[65] For recent, helpful accounts of this rule/office-based model of selfhood see Timothy J. Reiss, *Mirages of the Selfe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) and Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England*.

[66] E.M.W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Backrgound* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966) p. 310.

[67] On the problematic place of gender in Elizabethan political culture see A.N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth, 1558-1585* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). On the emergent discourses of domesticity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Lena Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

ethical life, one in which the "immediate substantiality of spirit … has as its determination the spirit's *feeling* of its own unity, which is" the "love" of kinship. Love, here, is not sentimental attachment but rather kinship-based belonging, in which one is a "member" of a broader, blood-based communal whole whose interest trumps his or her own interests.[68] A number of feminist critics have emphasized the degree to which this kinship was a powerful and important mode of political enfranchisement.[69] And we see such enfranchisement ascend honed into its own form of heroism in Pamela's actions in the *Old Arcadia.* In constantly clinging to the prerogatives of family, Pamela projects a sort of semi-stoic political heroism. Like Antigone clinging to the laws of kinship in the face of Creon's commands, she makes "her heart full of a stronger disdain against her adversity," which she manages to restraint from developing into "revengeful thoughts." Pamela is presented by Sidney as embodying a heroism of constantly clinging to one's sense of entitlement, to aristocratic/monarchical *officium*, and aristocratic greatness.

However, *this* version of heroism only makes sense if the stability of a monarchical, kinship-based political order is a solid assumption. And while this assumption persists throughout the *Old Arcadia*, despite the state of emergency into which the Arcadian kingdom falls after Basilius' apparent death, it has, by the third

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[68] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allan Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 199.

[69] See, for instance, Maureen Quilligan, *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) and Julie Crawford, "The Case of Lady Anne Clifford; or, Did Women Have a Mixed Monarchy?" *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006) pp. 1682-9.

book of the *New Arcadia,* been radically undercut. As we have just seen, Sidney's presentation here of an unending civil war presents a kind of attrition of earlier models of aristocratic virtue, monarchical office, and political stability. And a profound sense that the bottom has fallen out from earlier assumptions about politics, virtue and political experience hovers over the other major narrative component of the *New Arcadia*'s final book: the so-called "captivity narrative" that encompasses the torture of Pamela and her sister by Cecropia. However, it is also here that Pamela comes to figure *new* models of heroism, virtue, and political experience—models that figure a distant dialectical engagement with the alienation of political life that the *New Arcadia*'s last book portrays.

In the *New Arcadia* Pamela—to be sure—is still aristocratic; she still demonstrates the magnanimity appropriate to "a Prince's daughter" and "princely disdain" still "sparkles" toward Cecropia out of her "princely eyes" (*NA*, 552, 546). But her heroic position is articulated and elaborated in relation to a different political situation: not the disruption of an ultimately stable monarchical system of governance, but, instead, a state of *absolute subjection*, imprisonment, isolation, and corporeal vulnerability. Like Giorgio Agamben's archetype of the *homo sacer*, Pamela occupies a position of "bare life": she is separated from any communal norms and protections, completely subjected to the sovereign fiats of Cecropia's "tyrannical

authority" (*NA* 473).[70] In the *New Arcadia*'s captivity narrative, however, such exposure is not simply negative. Like Boethius' nameless narrator in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Pamela sublates her own bare life, her own exposure to the violence of sovereignty, into a paradoxical but powerful source of *strength*. As in Boethius, this transformation entails the redefinition of virtue. It entails the metamorphosis of virtue from an active and outwardly-oriented principle of political becoming into a fundamentally passive conservation of individual potential in the face of an inexorable political reality. Virtue, says Boethius' *Philosophia*, is "so called because relying on its own powers (*suis viribus nitens*) it is not overcome by adversity."[71] And we see a similar reconceptualization of virtue at the core of Pamela's heroism in the *New Arcadia*.

Consider, for instance, the first major statement Pamela makes during the captivity narrative: the prayer she speaks shortly after she has been imprisoned by Cecropia:

O all-seeing light and eternal life of all things, to whom nothing is either so great that it may resist, or so small that it is contemned; look upon my misery with Thine eye of mercy, and let Thine infinite power vouchsafe to limit out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to

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[70] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereignty, Power, and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[71] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, pp. 358-9.

Thee shall seem most convenient. Let not injury, O Lord, triumph over me, and let my faults by Thy hand be corrected, and make not mine unjust enemy the minister of Thy justice. But yet, my God, if in Thy wisdom, this be the aptest chastisement for my unexcusable folly; if this low bondage be fittest for my over-high desires; if the pride of my not-enough humble heart be thus broken, O Lord, I yield unto Thy will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow Thou wilt have me suffer. Only thus much let me crave of Thee … that Thou wilt suffer some beam of Thy majesty so to shine into my mind, that it may still depend confidently upon Thee. *Let calamity be the exercise but not the overthrow, of my virtue.* (*NA* 463-4; my emphasis).

At first, Pamela's prayer seems innocuous enough—an affirmation of the transcendent power of God. But read in the context of Pamela's captivity, it takes on a particularly powerful sense. Pamela is—at this point and throughout the captivity narrative—totally subordinated to Cecropia's power. While Pyrocles and Musidorus earlier overcame tyranny, Pamela is completely vulnerable to the "absolute tyrannies" to which Cecropia's "abominable rage" carries her and Cecropia tries again and again to break Pamela and force her into marrying Amphialus. In the face of this total subjection, however, Pamela posits a different, a higher horizon of power. She posits an "all-seeing light" that trumps any particular worldly force, no

matter how "great." She posits a divine, transcendent force, an "infinite power" that overrides any worldly instantiation of power. And this transcendent plane Pamela posits is also—significantly—a site of "justice."

In her later arguments with and interrogations of Pamela, Cecropia will go to great lengths to deny the validity of this viewpoint. Throughout the *New Arcadia*, Cecropia espouses a kind of disenchanted, skeptical, and amoral "Machiavellian" philosophy that rejects all moral norms and divine groundings. "[T]here is no wisdom," she claims at one point, "but in including both heaven and earth in oneself; and that love, courtesy, gratefulness, friendship, and all other virtues are rather to be taken on than taken in oneself" (*NA* 154). And in her discussions with Pamela, Cecropia asserts again and again that Pamela's faith in a transcendent divine power is bogus; that "those powers (if there be any such) above" are moved neither by "eloquence" or by "prayers" (*NA* 488). Pamela, however, obstinately clings to this sense of a divine power that is higher than the chaotic, aleatory political world in which she has to exist.

The consequence of this transcendent attitude, however, is not a simple renunciation of the world. It is not a simple instance of the called "unhappy consciousness" into which men and women often slip— according to Hegel—in moments of unfreedom, fleeing the world into the "pure universality of thought" (and, we might add, faith).[72] Rather, Pamela reasserts her own personal, dynamic

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[72] Hegel, *Logic*, p. 115.

power in the face of her bodily abjection vis-à-vis her upward, transcendent orientation. Here we might look back, for a moment, to the just-quoted text of Pamela's prayer—specifically the sentence that begins "Only thus let me crave." Here Pamela passes from admiring and subordinating herself to the divine order into putting forward a kind of a Platonic metaphysic, where divine strength can pass into the world.

Throughout the rest of the captivity narrative, this gesture becomes the basis of Pamela's new model of virtue. Rather than an active principle of well-doing, virtue is now defined as a dynamic sense of self internalized into an inner ethical space. While earlier the Princes were compelled to dynamically actualize the "sparks of virtue" implanted in them divinely through well doing (*NA* 222), Pamela's virtue, derived from God, now moves into an inward position of simultaneous *constancy* and *transcendence*. Like the animals in "Ister Bank" the prayer shows Pamela learning to "know" her "strength."

Earlier, I noted that this "inward" ethical turn is in a certain sense familiar. In England and across Europe the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw elites turning to political and ethical philosophies of withdrawal, constancy, and transcendence—traditions that had long been associated with passive, constancy-based heroism. [73] And this broad turn in elite culture was also linked to a

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[73] For the classic statement of this historiography of early-modern Neo-Stoicism see Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); for a more

redefinition of virtue, to an increasing tendency to view virtue not as an outwardly-directed principle of worldly activity but, rather, as a turning of "Reason "to God and the Original of its Self" and being "Firm and immoveable in what is good"—to quote Justus Lipsius' highly-influential late sixteenth-century stoic handbook *De Constantia*.[74]   But while Sidney was no doubt influenced by this broad shift in intellectual culture—he corresponded with Lipsius, who dedicated a book on Latin pronunciation to him—I want to argue that his transformation of Pamela's heroism in the *New Arcadia* has a significance that goes beyond the late-Renaissance tendency to see fortitude as "more heroical" than action-oriented virtue.[75] Pamela, I want to suggest, should be understood as signaling not just not just an ethical re-orientation but a *fundamental shift* in how Sidney's work views the relationship between poetry and political experience. In his portrait of Pamela, Sidney shifts heroism from the realm of practical *exemplarity* into the realm of what we might call *aesthetic autonomy*.

The adjective "aesthetic" is, as the introduction has already noted, anachronistic anathema to the late sixteenth century—a product of ideological and cultural mutations that postdate the *New Arcadia* by more than a century. Particularly, as Terry Eagleton argues, the idea of aesthetics emerges when the legal, political, and economic transformations of the late seventeenth and eighteenth

recent redaction of the argument see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[74] Justus Lipsius, *Of Constancy*, trans. John Stradling (London, 1595) p. 26.

[75] Francis Bacon, "Of Adversity," in *Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 74.

centuries, where increasingly consolidated economic and political power was "translated into new kinds of spontaneous social practice" in which structures "of power must become structures of feeling and the name for this mediation from property to propriety is the aesthetic."[76] This transformation followed, by some time, Sidney's portrayal of Pamela, and it would seem additionally risky to apply this particular set of concepts to Sidney's portrayal of the Arcadian princess, since aesthetics, historically, went hand-in-hand with the banishing of women from public life and the simultaneous portrayal of women (in various forms of literary discourse) in terms of a moralized, passive sentimentality. Indeed Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740), one of the most influential examples of this in the English eighteenth century, takes the name of its heroine from Sidney's character. But while Richardson's Pamela models a kind of feminine heroism of chastity, silence, and obedience, Sidney's Pamela is quite different. What she embodies *ethically* is an aristocratic magnanimity that turns inward in response to political alienation. And what she embodies *aesthetically* is the power of Poesy not just to engage with the particulars of political reality, but to rise above the contingencies, frustrations, and difficulties of the actual world into an increasingly autonomous sphere of poetic and political imagination.

Coming back to the *New Arcadia*, we can see this dual agenda at another key moment later on in Pamela's captivity. At this point, Cecropia has resorted to

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[76] Terry Eagleton, "Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Poetics Today* 9, no. 2 (1988) pp. 229-30.

torturing the captive princesses. First, she scourges Philoclea, who begs for mercy. But when she turns to "using the like cruelty upon Pamela" (553) there is a different result:

> But if ever the beams of perfection shined through the clouds of affliction, if ever virtue took a body to show his else-unconceivable beauty, it was in Pamela. For when reason taught her there was no resistance—for to just resistance first her heart was inclined— then with so heavenly a quietness and so graceful a calmness did she suffer the divers kinds of torments they used to her, that while they vexed her fair body, it seemed that she rather directed than obeyed the vexation. And when Cecropia ended and asked whether her heart would yield, she a little smiled, but such a smiling as showed no love and yet could not but be lovely. (553)

Pamela is presented, here, not just as an exemplary fictional persona but as an aestheticized embodiment of virtue. Unlike her sister, Pamela is able to see that there is no "resistance" to the position of abjection in which she has been placed. Her heart is inclined to such resistance. But she realizes the only path, here, is a "heavenly" quietness and calmness. But this is not a surrender, a pure passivity. Rather, Pamela suffers her torments, but although they "vex" her body this apparent negation of her

autonomy and integrity once again leads to its own negation, its own dialectical reversal—one made particularly clear in her response to Cecropia:

> 'Beastly woman,' said she, 'follow on, do what thou wilt and canst upon me, for I know thy power is not unlimited. Thou mayest well wreck this silly body, but me thou canst never overthrow. For my part I will not do thee the pleasure to desire death of thee: but assure thyself, both my life and death shall triumph with honour, laying shame upon thy detestable tyranny. (553-4)

Pamela is here is able to "negate the negation" of her own corporeal abjection. Her body may be wrecked, but her inner potentiality—her inner virtue—*cannot be overthrown*. What seems like oppression actually becomes a venue for her to demonstrate a heroic "conquering" of outward "doing" with her own "suffering" (554). In her engagement with Cecropia, Pamela manages—paradoxically—to "have authority over tyranny" even though physically Cecropia's tyranny has authority over her. And the way she is capable of doing that is by *conquering* with the " fair … majesty" of her "unconquered virtue" (492).

VI

In Pamela, then, we see a transformed vision of virtue, heroism, and, I would argue, political experience. Political experience is no longer oriented toward an absolute enmeshment in the world of aristocratic well-doing: rather, it is marked by a fundamental sense of alienation from the *vita activa*, and a subsequent retreat into the resources of one's own inner, dynamic potentiality. Similarly, heroism is no longer a simple incitement to worldly well-doing. It becomes a more complex species of what the *Defense* (borrowing from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*) calls "architectonike": "the knowledge of a man's self, in the Ethike and Politique consideration, with the end of well doing, and not of well knowing only" (*MW* 219).[77] It is in fostering such self-knowledge that heroical poesy—in the last book of the *New Arcadia*—finds both its purpose and its preeminence as an instance of how the imaginative potential, the "erected wit" of the poet,

> disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour
>
> of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making
>
> things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms
>
> such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops,
>
> Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with

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[77] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a.

nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely

ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. (*MW* 216)

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the most famous episode of Pamela's literary

afterlife is not Richardson's novel but, rather, the scene that unfolded on the scaffold

in front of Whitehall immediately before Charles I's 1649 execution. According to a

widely-circulated rumor Charles—immediately before his execution—recited

Pamela's prayer. John Milton famously picked up on this fact in his 1649

Eikonoklastes, where he mocks the dead king's choice of a profane text for his final

prayer. Though he praises Sidney's *Arcadia* as being a book "among the best of its

kind"—one that is "full of worth and witt"—it is, he claims, "among religious

thoughts, and duties not worthy to be nam'd."[78] But while Milton chooses to

interpret Charles' unusual devotional choice in terms of his own impiety and

religious hypocrisy, it is possible to see his pre-mortem identification with Pamela in

another light. For Sidney's figure models a powerful fantasy of heroism that emerges

out of the same fundamental situation that claimed Charles' life: a contradiction

between a dying mode of kingly and aristocratic life and the inevitable imperatives

of an emerging political modernity.

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[78] Milton, *Collected Prose Works*, vol. 3, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) p. 362.

Chapter 2

Marlowe's Wit

I

It would be hard to exaggerate the impact that Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* made when it was first performed in 1587. Like most of English Renaissance literature, *Tamburlaine* was not "original" in the modern, post-romantic sense of the term. The play's stunning spectacles of heroic violence self-consciously drew on a tradition of chivalric-heroic romances representing "actiue deeds … honour, laud and praise"[1] that had thronged London's stages since the commercial theater was established, and it was additionally indebted to a long dramatic backlog of theatrical tyrants, from Seneca's tragedies and the ranting Herods of the medieval cycle plays.[2] But even if Marlowe's play was not *original*, it was still *remarkable*. *Tamburlaine* set a new standard for theatrical audacity. Part of this had to do with the play's ambitious and aggressive titular protagonist, who eschewed moral norms with a boldness that was strikingly unapologetic. But even more important was the

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[1] George Peele, *The historie of the tvvo valiant knights, Syr Clyomon Knight of the Golden Sheeld* (London, 1599) A4^r.

[2] See David Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe: Growth and Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) for a classic account of Marlowe's formal debts to his theatrical forebears. For an overview of Marlowe's more thematic links to earlier dramatic texts in *Tamburlaine* see also Brian Gibbons, "Romance and the Heroic Play," in *Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, eds. Michael Hattaway and A.R. Braunmuller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp. 197-227 and Ruth Linney's recent *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). G.K. Hunter's "Seneca and the Elizabethans: A Case Study in 'Influence,'" *Shakespeare Survey* 20 (1967) pp. 89-100 surveys Seneca's influence on Marlowe and his theatrical milieu more broadly.

sheer firepower of Marlowe's poetic language. No character on the English stage had ever *sounded* like Tamburlaine before. Take the titular lead character of Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (1570). At the height of his tyrannical grandeur and *gravitas* Cambyses can only manage the clunkily mannered menace of lines like:

> The *Egiptians* against us repugne, as verlets slave and vile.
>
> Therefore I meane with *Marsis* hart, with warres them to frequent.[3]

In *Tamburlaine*, by contrast, Marlowe dropped the thumping fourteeners and rhetorical filigree of this earlier poetic mode. He adopted a frenetically fast-paced blank verse characterized by simple syntax and vivid imagery. Ben Jonson would later call this Marlowe's "mighty line," and for good reason.[4] It produced a forward-moving sense of power, of self-actualization, of sheer conquest. Compared with Cambyses, Tamburlaine's threats to his own set of recalcitrant Egyptians—

> When holy Fates
>
> Shall 'stablish me in strong Egyptia,
>
> We mean to travel to th'Antarctic Pole,

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[3] Thomas Preston, *A Critical Edition of Thomas Preston's Cambises*, ed. Robert Carl Johnson (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1977) 1.15-17.

[4] Ben Jonson, "To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare," in *Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (London: Penguin, 1988) p. 30.

Conquering the people underneath our feet,

And be renowned as never emperors were.[5]

—must have seemed something like that post-tornadic moment in the *Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy walks out of her house and everything turns technicolor.[6]

Marlowe took the basics of *Tamburlaine*'s story from the real life of Tīmūr-e-Lang, a Mongol magnate and warlord who conquered a sizeable part of central and south Asia during the fourteenth century. Tīmūr was a well-known figure in the period, and his life had been chronicled by a number of Latin and vernacular writings. [7] In Marlowe's hands, however, this complicated moral and political story these writings told is largely dropped: the life of Tīmūr is shorn of almost all its geopolitical complexity and transformed into a single-minded account of one man's desire to dominate everything he encounters.[8] *Tamburlaine*, as well as the play's quickly-penned follow-up, which came out the following year, present complex

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[5] *Tamburlaine* Part 1, 4.4.139-45. All citations to Marlowe's texts in what follows refer to *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) by act, scene, and line number.

[6] For a recent and excellent overview of Marlowe's stylistic distinctions and innovations see Russ McDonald, "Marlowe and Style," in *Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe,* ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 55-69.

[7] On Tīmūr's Renaissance reputation see Eric Voegelin, "The Humanists' Image of Tīmūr," in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002) pp. 175-223. For a collection of Marlowe's sources see *Christopher Marlowe*: *The Plays and Their Sources*, ed. Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman (London: Routledge, 1993).

[8] Compare Marlowe's account of Tamburlaine with the complex picture of Tīmūr that emerges in the early chapters of John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

realities. They portray dozens of conquests stretching from Persia to Egypt and Africa. But the plays' enormous mimetic scope, the sweeping global-geographical glitz of their imagery, and the abundant *dramatis personae* that swell their scenes are all almost totally subordinated to Tamburlaine and his *libido dominandi*.[9] They are put into the service of a will to power that Marlowe gives an almost cosmic capaciousness:

> Nature that fram'd us of foure Elements,
>
> Warring within our breasts for regiment,
>
> Doth teach us to have aspyring minds:
>
> Our soules, whose faculties can comprehend
>
> The wondrous Architecture of the world:
>
> And measure every wandring planets course:
>
> Still climing after knowledge infinite,
>
> And always moving as the restles Spheares,
>
> Wils us to weare our selves and never rest
>
> Untill we reach the ripest fruit of all,
>
> That perfect blisse and sole felicitie,
>
> The sweet fruition of an earthly crowne.

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[9] Harry Levin applies this term to Marlowe in his influential study *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952). It originally derives from the work of Augustine.

(2.7.18-29)

This well-known passage captures a concern at the heart of *Tamburlaine's* version of heroism—an experience of *becoming*, of over-reaching ambition trumping any moral norms or natural hierarchies; of the "fiery" pursuit of "sovereignty" overcoming any other force or factor (2.1.20). But these lines also capture another, and equally important, fact about Marlowe's play. In *Tamburlaine* the experience of heroic experience is not exclusively a matter of action. It is also always a matter of *language*. It is a literary-critical commonplace that signifier and signified, form and content, are always inextricably tangled up in one another. But *Tamburlaine* takes this to the extreme. It is a text where "magniloquence"—as Harry Levin writes in his classic study of Marlowe—"does duty for magnificence." It is a play where language serves not simply as a "means of communication" but also as "a substitute for representation."[10] *Tamburlaine*'s spectacle of *heroic* becoming—in other words—is indissociable from an experience of *poetic* becoming. In Marlowe's play heroism goes hand-in-hand with the "affluent spirit yielding inuention to praise or dispraise, or anie ways to discourse" that Renaissance writers referred to as *wit*.[11]

The spectacularly heroic surface of the play's poetic language has been the major focus of scholarly commentary on *Tamburlaine*—from Hazlitt to the New

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[10] Levin, *ibid*., p. 44.

[11] Gabriel Harvey, *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (London, 1597) p. D2[r].

Historicists.[12] But this chapter takes a different tack on the play's heroism. Behind its

spectacular suture of heroic action and poetic projection, I argue, *Tamburlaine* is

engaged with an experience of *political impossibility*. This experience of impossibility,

however, is different from what we saw in the last chapter. There, I argued that

Sidney's *New Arcadia* grapples with the impossibility of an active heroism by

embracing the exemplary ethical and aesthetic force of the heroism of passive-active

power embodied by Pamela. But while Sidney's work both encounters heroism's

political impossibility and dialectically subsumes this practical impossibility into the

imaginative potentiality of poetic imagination, Marlowe is different. His work is

suspicious of heroism's translation from action into imagination. His work—I will

argue—is haunted by a sense of heroism's *virtuality*; by the unbridgeable chiasmus

that separates heroism's verbal subcomponents, the imaginative split separating the

"hero" from the "ism."

Such a stance toward heroism is subtly evidenced in *Tamburlaine's*

presentation of its titular lead character. But it emerges even more fully in his later

play *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592). Critics commonly read these plays as not only distinct

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[12] William Hazlitt speaks of Marlowe's work as combining a lust for sovereignty and a "glow of imagination": see *Lectures on Literature in the Age of Elizabeth* (London, 1884) p. 202. This description anticipates many later critical approaches to Marlowe. See, for example, the account of *Tamburlaine* in Levin's *Overreacher*; Eugene Waith's discussion of *Tamburlaine's* Herculean heroism in *The Herculean Hero* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) pp. 60-88; and, more recently, Alan Shepherd's *Marlowe's Soldiers: Rhetorics of Masculinity in the Age of the Armada* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002). Stephen Greenblatt's influential reading of Marlowe's work in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) also focuses on the outward flourish of Marlowe's overreaching. But while it is similar to my own account in that Greenblatt sees, beneath this bluster, a complex and ambivalent reaction to the external pressures of the Elizabethan state apparatus, we differ in our understanding of how these pressures worked. Just how will become clear below.

but diametrically opposed, the violent and aggressive military conquests of the one negatively mirrored by the intellectual aspiration of the other.[13] But read together, *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus* show a common concern with the troubled dialectic relationship of linguistic wit and heroic sovereignty. But to understand this relationship, however, I first need to turn both to Marlowe's own historical situation and to the key term through which this situation is experientially presented and grappled with in his two plays: wit.

II

The biographical baseline of Marlowe's life is well- and widely-known. He was born the son of a shoemaker in Canterbury in late February 1564; studied on scholarship at the local grammar school and later at Cambridge; had oblique connections to Francis Walsingham's intelligence services; and, later on, in the midst of sudden and remarkable theatrical success, was mysteriously murdered in May of 1593.[14] But although Marlowe's life was unique in many ways, this short summary highlights how much it was also deeply characteristic of a much broader social

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[13] See C.L. Barber, "The Form of Faustus' Fortunes Good or Bad," *Tulane Drama Review* 8, no. 4 (1964) pp. 92-119. See also Hilary Gatti's account of the play's putatively Bruno-esque intellectual heroism in *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge: Giordano Bruno in England* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

[14] For two recent treatments see David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Harper and Row, 2005) and Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe, Poet and Spy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). My account of Marlowe's historical surround is especially indebted to Riggs.

formation in late sixteenth-century England.[15] This social formation encompassed

the young and "middle-class"[16] men who came out of the Elizabethan education

system. This system, as historian M.H. Curtis writes, was "geared to the

extraordinary demands for trained men which the Elizabethan Church and State

made upon them." But in trying to fill these needs, it also ended up producing

"more educated talent than that society … could put to work"; preparing "too many

men for too few places."[17]

Such a human surplus of overeducated and underemployed university

graduates is a familiar phenomenon to students and scholars of the sixteenth and

early seventeenth centuries. But the objective and institutional account of their

situation by historians like Curtis does not capture the *experiential* and *subjective* side

of their situation. Reducing the latter to the former would be to fall into a historicist

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[15] Since the rise of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism—along with the broader influence during the 80s and 90s of the energies of cultural studies, feminism, and identity politics into Renaissance studies— Marlowe has been treated by most politically-inclined critics as a profoundly *marginal* figure. He has been seen as a writer whose work reflects various sorts of liminal experiences—sexual, ideological, and cultural. Scholars drawing on the "Baines Note"—a posthumously publicized report where Marlowe espouses various sorts of skeptical, aesthetical, and sexually renegade beliefs—have, for example, mapped Marlowe's resistance to the gendered social norms of the period. See, for instance, Jonathan Goldberg, "Sodomy and Society: The Case of Christopher Marlowe," in Peter Stallybrass and David Scott Kastan, eds., *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1991) pp. 75-82. Other scholars have argued that Marlowe also portrayed experiences of cultural alienation that were more and more common in the globalizing world of the Renaissance. See Emily Bartels' *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

[16] There was, of course, no "middle-class" in Renaissance England: I use the term here as shorthand for the complex constellation of social strata that often goes by the title of "middling sort." On the middling sort see the essays assembled in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin's, 1994).

[17] M.H. Curtis, "The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England," *Past and Present* 32 (1962) pp. 27-28.

version of what William James called the psychologist's fallacy: the "confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact about which he is making his report."[18] And to understand the "mental facts," the political experience of Marlowe and other men in his social, economic, and political position—to understand difficulties not on not only an *ontic* but also an *ontological* level—requires that we understand something important about the Elizabethan educational system.

Modern education is almost always presented through a rhetorical frame of universality. It is seen as being committed to capacious and malleable ideas like excellence, self-exploration, and success. [19] But Elizabethan education was resoundingly *particular* and (especially after the Henrician Reformation) *civic*. It was intended to train those strata of society who were, to quote Smith's *De Republica Anglorum*, "participant of the common wealth" and who would "beare office." [20] Elizabethan education, in other words, was intended to school gentlemen. But throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the Tudor-Stuart state apparatus grew and its need for literate low-level bureaucrats increased, educational

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[18] William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York, 1890) p. 196. While James developed this argument in his critique of the psychology of his day it fits nicely into my own critique of the erasure of experience in contemporary scholarship on Renaissance literature and culture. For a later, but equally germane, discussion of the unavoidable nature of the category of experience see William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York, 1912).

[19] See Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). In the 200+ pages of this compelling polemic Ravitch never once considers that education should train children for particular, pre-determined social slots.

[20] Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum: A Discourse on the Commonwealth of England*, ed. L. Alston (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1906) p. 32.

opportunity became more accessible to young men who were not born into the ruling elite but came, instead, from England's mechanical and middling classes.[21] The aim behind educating such low-born subjects was not providing mobility or opportunity. These concepts, in fact, were almost totally alien to Marlowe's period. The aim, rather, was to provide personnel to fill humble offices in the church and the lower levels of the state bureaucracy.[22] But scholarship boys like Marlowe were still schooled in a combination of rhetoric, poetics, and civic humanism that had originally been designed to educate England's enfranchised elite. They were trained for a participation in public life. And before long, the social incongruity of such schooling became hard to avoid—especially during the late sixteenth-century's constriction of offices and political opportunities, which made the positions for which men like Marlowe thought themselves destined increasingly scarce.

Curtis calls such young men the "alienated intellectuals" of late-Elizabethan and early-Stuart England. Modern scholars might dismiss this appellation—balking at its whiff of anachronism, its shades of Sartre's Roquentin or Heidegger's *das Man*, and preferring to analyze this segment of the population in more institutional or ideological terms. But I would argue that alienation is an apposite descriptor if we

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[21] See Curtis, *ibid.*, as well as Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996) pp. 17-38; David Cressy, "Educational Opportunity in Tudor England," *History of Education Quarterly* 16 (1976) pp. 301-20; Cressy, *Literacy and the Socail Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[22] As one historian observes, Elizabethan education went in the service of a fundamentally conservative and hierarchical Elizabethan politics whose primary purpose was "to restrict men to the callings of their fathers, to consolidate the social order by maintaining due differences between estates" (Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966] p. 6).

take the term in a political-ontological (rather than an existential or an economic) sense; if we understand these "alienated intellectuals" as being caught in a contradiction between an assumption and an experience of political *possibility* and the increasing thwarting of this possibility in the period's concrete historical-material life. [23] But understanding this alienation also requires comprehending something specific about the *experience* of Marlowe and men like him. As David Riggs argues in his recent biography, the upward path toward political participation for poor scholarship boys like Marlowe would have involved an ideal not just of political action (as with the more aristocratic Sidney) but also rhetorical and poetic skill.[24] Such skills formed the basis of the Tudor curriculum. From grammar schools all the way to the Oxbridge Colleges rhetoric, poetics, and politics would have merged into a common, broadly Ciceronian concept of *vita activa*, of a life lead appropriately "in actione."[25] They would have combined into an ideal experience of moving—as Gabriel Harvey put it—"a meditatione, ad praxim," from meditation to practice, from contemplation to action. [26] Within the "monarchical republic" of

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[23] See Richard Halpern's discussion of Tudor style and the educational system's "primitive accumulation of men" in *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[24] On the distinction between aristocratic and middling modes of humanism in the period, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[25] Riggs, *World*, p. 55; the description of political life as being lived "in actione" comes from John Case, *Speculum Moralium* (Oxford, 1585) A3^v.

[26] *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia*, ed. G.C. Moore Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913) p. 145. On the period's rhetorical culture and its integral links to politics see also Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Elizabethan England, "acting and speaking" went hand-in-hand as the essential

foundations of dynamic political experience.[27] But as I have already shown, such an

experience was becoming increasingly impossible in the late sixteenth and early

seventeenth centuries. Harvey, for instance, who shared Marlowe's middling

background, harps obsessively on action, on *praxis*. Throughout his marginalia and

commonplace books, he extolls the ideal of the "right pragmaticall" who "karrieth

euermore liuely and quyck spirites, and takith continually the nymbliest and

speediest way."[28] But he does so only out of a deep-seated and long-lasting political

frustration that resulted from his repeated failure to actually attain the kind of

political participation for which he had been trained. Nor was Harvey's hard

realization that "[c]ommon Learning and the name of a good scholar was never so

much contemned and abjected of princes, pragmaticals, and common gallants as

nowadays" unique.[29] Indeed Marlowe himself—in an odd moment in *Hero and*

Leander—sums it up precisely in the form of an etiological fable about the origins of

the political marginalization of poets and scholars:

    … *Midas* brood shall sit in Honors chaire,

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[27] For more on the republican elements of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English political culture, see the introduction. "Monarchical republic" is, as I a note there, a phrase coined and made popular by Patrick Collinson.

[28] Harvey, *ibid*., p. 151

[29] Harvey, *ibid*. For more on Harvey, see Virginia F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey: His Life, Library, and Marginalia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

To which the *Muses* sonnes are only heire:

And fruitfull wits that in aspiring are,

Shall discontent, run into regions farre;

And few great lords in vertuous deeds shall joy

But be surpris'd with every garish toy.

And still inrich the loftie servile clowne,

Who with incroching guile, keeps learning down.

(475-82)

These lines limn the objective, material circumstances of men like Marlowe and Harvey. They show how "poverty" and political disenfranchisement have become "the Muses' patrimony" (as Robert Burton would later call it in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* [1621], where he quotes from Marlowe's poem during his famous digression on the "miseries of scholars").[30] But Marlowe's fable also captures the subjective, experiential side of political alienation. It captures the experience of exclusion from the active life of "Honors chaire" and "vertuous deeds." And, significantly, it identifies the young, learned men who have been the victims of this exclusion as *wits*. In the fable's fictional temporality, these "fruitful wits" ostensibly precede their exclusion from "Honors chaire": in Marlowe's myth, that is, there was

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[30] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001) vol. 1, p. 309.

presumably a time before "*Midas* broode" came to monopolize honor and political

participation. But within the poem itself, these men only emerge as a unit of

aspiring but alienated "wits" *insofar as they are excluded from the active life*. The

experience of *wit*, in other words, is inseparable from the experience of exclusion.

Actuality—to adapt Hegel's formulation—precedes potentiality. The possible is

parasitic on the actual, a retroactive reconstruction, from the perspective of a

frustrated present.[31]

Wit emerges, in these lines, as fundamentally ambivalent. In psychoanalytic

terms, a kind of *objet petit a*, simultaneously signifying the possibility but the always-

already lost nature of a primal, political-poetic *jouissance*.[32]   Such ambivalence will

run throughout the relationship between heroism and its imaginative vehicles in

Tamburlaine and *Doctor Faustus*. But to understand the significance of wit's place in

these plays, one first needs to get a sense of the term's broader meanings in

Marlowe's period.

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[31] For Hegel's dense discussion of the priority of the actual over the potential see *Shorter Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904) pp. 257 ff. For a more accessible exposition of potentiality's parasitism on the actual, however, we can turn to Brecht—particularly to one of his *Stories of Mr. Keuner*: "Mr. K saw an actress walking by and said: 'She's beautiful.' His companion said: 'She's recently become successful because she's beautiful.' Mr. K was annoyed and said: 'She's beautiful because she's become successful'" (Bertolt Brecht, *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, trans. Martin Chalmers [San Francisco: City Lights, 2001] p. 29). The first moment of Brecht's fable stages the fixation on a particular object: the fame/beauty of an actress. The second moment tries to explain the desirability of this object vis-à-vis some anterior state (she is famous because she is beautiful, i.e. was beautiful before she was famous). But in the fable's final moment we witness the dialectical demonstration that the opposite is actually the case: that what seemed like the consequence (fame) is actually the cause—a cause projected, retroactively, into the past.

[32] For Lacan on the *objet petit a* see, for instance, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) p. 179.

Wit has one of the more complicated philological pedigrees of any word in

the English language. "What is I then, which like the *Power* divine / We only can by

negatives define," Abraham Cowley complains near the close of his own "Ode to

Wit," and such exasperation is understandable after even a quick glance at the

diversity of definitions that wit has accrued over the centuries.[33] But in the

Renaissance it generally signified the idea of imaginative and intellectual potential

passing into actuality.[34] Take, for instance, the use of wit in Philip Sidney's *Defense of*

Poesy (c. 1583). Here Sidney famously argues that it is "only the poet" who,

"disdaining to be tied to any such subjection" and "lifted up with the vigour of his

own invention," is capable of creating "another nature" over and above the fallen

world.[35] The poet's use of language to transcend actuality, Sidney goes on to claim,

puts him on the same plane as God. It is also indicative of the divine element—the

prelapsarian potentiality—that inheres in fallen human beings.   And Sidney

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[33] Abraham Cowley, "Ode: Of Wit," in *English Seventeenth-Century Verse*, v. 2, ed. Richard Sylvester (New York: Norton, 1969) pp. 55-6. For a helpful survey of the history of the term, see C.S. Lewis' overview of wit in his *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) pp. 87-110. For a famous study in wit's semantic multiplicity see William Empson's analysis of the various senses the term has in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* in "Wit in the *Essay on Criticism*," *Hudson Review* 2, no. 4 (1950) pp. 559-577, later reprinted as the third chapter of *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951).

[34] For an overview of understandings of wit in the English Renaissance generally see William Crane, *Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: The Formal Basis of Elizabethan Prose Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937); Janelle M. Mueller, *The Native Tongue and the Word: Developments in English Prose Style, 1380-1580* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) pp. 322-423; Angus Fletcher, "The Distractions of Wit in the English Renaissance," in *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp. 52-67; and Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[35] Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, in *Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 216.

identifies this potentiality with what he calls "erected wit" that "maketh us know what perfection is," however much "our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.[36] Wit carries a similar sense in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593), where Hooker repeatedly invokes the "naturall perfection of wit" as a way of marking the innate striving after the good inherent in human beings generally.[37] In general, the idea of wit (both in its English avatar and its Latin doppelganger *ingenium*) was linked in the period to concepts of linguistic and imaginative capacity passing into actuality. It was associated with poetic "production" in the etymological sense of *pro-ducere*: a "leading out" of inner capacity, of *in-genium*, into the actuality of *poiesis*.[38]

In the late sixteenth century, however, wit also came to signify the troubling status of imaginative and intellectual potential disjoined from any appropriate avenues of actualization. We see this sense of the term especially in the milieu of "alienated intellectuals" who, like Marlowe, lacked legitimate political office and were forced to ply their educations in the proto-public sphere of vernacular print, in

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[36] *Ibid.*, 217.

[37] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. A.S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 82.

[38] The conception of wit developed above is in partially indebted to several philosophical interrogations of the concept. See particularly Jean-Luc Nancy's description of wit as a "structure of production" in "Menstruum Universale," in *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993) p. 251. For a semi-recent elaboration of the Heideggerian notion of production invoked above see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) p. 27, as well as Giorgio Agamben's older *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) 59-60. On wit as an internalized potentiality see also Agamben's more recent reflections on the concept of *genius* in Giorgio Agamben, "Genius," in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2007) 9-10.

an emergent literary culture where (as George Chapman would write) wit became a "free trade for all sorts to liue by."[39] In this context, wit often evoked anxieties about poetry and learning's relationship to political exclusion and alienation. Such anxiety, for instance, runs through the extensive literature of prodigality that was inaugurated by John Lyly's bestselling *Euphues* (1578), which was significantly subtitled *The Anatomy of Wit*, and which chronicled the misadventures of its titular character, a "young gallant"

> of wit more than wealth, and yet of more wealth than wisdom, [who] seeing himself inferior to none in pleasant conceits thought himself superior to all in honest conditions, in so much that he thought himself so apt to all things that he gave himself almost to nothing but practicing those things commonly which are incident to these sharp wits: fine phrases, smooth quips, merry taunts, jesting without mean and abusing mirth without measure.[40]

In his influential study *Elizabethan Prodigals*, the late Richard Helgerson argued that Lyly introduced a narrative pattern and paradigm into much vernacular literature

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[39] Chapman, *Monsieur D'Olive* (London, 1606) B2[r]. See also Eckhard Auberlen, *The Commonwealth of Wit: The Writer's Image and his Strategies of Self-Representation in Elizabethan Literature* (Tübingen: Verlag, 1984).

[40] John Lyly, *Euphues,* in *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction,* ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 89.

where the theme of wit squandered and lost was mapped and described with reference to the Biblical parable of the prodigal son (a story that reached its dramatic culmination in the repeated writings of the life of the period's prodigal-in-chief, Robert Greene).[41] But Marlowe decisively broke from this paradigm of prodigality, this understanding of wit as a distraction from the proper course of political life. For Marlowe wit is not—as Thomas Nashe wrote—a "worthless" distraction produced by "deceitful arts" from political existence.[42] It is not

> but a phantasme and Idea, a quarreling shadowe, that will seldom dwell in the same roome with a full pursue, but commonly is the idle follower of a forlorne creature … a deuill that will neuer leaue a man till it hath brought him to beggerie, a malicious spirit that delightes in a close libel or an open Satyre … an vnfortunate thinge….[43]

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[41] See Richard Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978). On Greene see *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit*, ed. Daniel Allen Carroll (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1994). While it is an open topic whether Greene actually authored this pamphlet, it still provides a good overview of his prodigal reputation.

[42] Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the diuell* (London, 1592) p. A2^r

[43] *First Part of the Return from Parnassus,* from *The Three Parnassus Plays,* ed. J.B. Leishman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949) p. 144.

Wit, rather, is the unactualized tropism of learning and linguistic and poetic ability toward *action*, a tendency thwarted in a social situation where, as Francis Bacon would later comment, "more are bred scholars, than preferments can take off."[44]

Probably the best gloss on this understanding of wit in the period is provided in Richard Mulcaster's *Positions* (1581). Here Mulcaster, probably the most perceptive educational commentator of the period, writes that "many very toward wittes, of reasonable good reading and of excellent good utterance" are led—on account of the extreme expectation and subsequent disappointment produced by their educations—to "overshoot themselves by overruling the circumstance and overstraining authority."[45] Elsewhere in the same text, he goes on to talk about:

> … wittes misplaced most vnquiet and seditious: as any thinge else strayned against nature: light thinges prease vpward, and will ye force Fire downe? Heauie thinges beare downeward: and will ye haue Leade to leape vp? An imperiall witte for want of education and abilitie, being placed in a meane calling will trouble the whole companie, if he haue not his will, as winde in the stomacke: and if he haue his will, then shall ye see what his naturall did shoote at.[46]

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[44] Francis Bacon, "Of Seditions and Troubles," in *Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 104.

[45] Richard Mulcaster, *Positions Concerning the Training up of Children*, ed. William Barker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) p. 22.

[46] *Ibid.*, 142.

For Mulcaster wit is a force of potentiality that strives and struggles for actualization. But, when deprived of the opportunity, those who have wit reflexively recoil on its lost potential, becoming "unquiet," "seditious," a source of "trouble." In *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe's "wit" shows the same ambivalent oscillation between potentiality and loss, between learning and language and political alienation. And this oscillation both structures and ultimately undercuts the heroic fantasy articulated in both plays.

III

Throughout *Tamburlaine* Marlowe foregrounds the relationship between wit and sovereignty. Take the play's presentation of the very first character it introduces: Mycetes, the incompetent king of Persia. The *topos* of the maladroit monarch was common currency on the Renaissance stage: it was used to great dramatic effect in Shakespeare's first tetralogy and by Marlowe himself in *Edward II*. But Marlowe presents kingly incompetence at the start of *Tamburlaine* with a particular twist. Mycetes is not just a bad king *in general*. He is inept specifically on account of his resounding lack of imaginative and verbal capacity. He is a bad king, in other words, because he lacks wit.

Brother *Cosroe*, I find my selfe agreev'd,

Yet insufficient to expresse the same:

For it requires a great and thundering speech:

Good brother tell the cause unto my Lords,

I know you have a better wit than I.

(1.1.1-5; my emphasis)

In reading this hap- and helpless dithering it is important to remember an important

historical fact. Mycetes is the king of *Persia*, and for Elizabethan audiences—at least

educated Elizabethan audiences—Persia would have had a specific set of

associations. Such audiences would have associated Persia, in part, with threatening

oriental otherness. But they would have also associated Persia with something more

positive: with ideas of ideal kingship, the kind of kingship —combining "quickness

of learning" with a "courageous doing of every thing," combining sovereignty with

wit—that was portrayed in the Athenian writer Xenophon's fourth-century

Cyropaideia.[47] Although nowadays largely forgotten, the *Cyropaideia* was a major

component of the classical curricula of the sixteenth century: Spenser was not going

off the grid of mainstream opinion when he wrote, in the "Letter to Raleigh," that it

surpassed Plato's *Republic*.[48] But even for an uneducated auditor, the rift between wit

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[47] Xenophon, *The Bookes of Xenophon Containing the Discipline, Schole, and Education of Cyrus, Noble King of Persia*, trans. William Barkar (London, 1550) p. Biii^r.

[48] Spenser writes that although both Xenophon's and Plato's texts are concerned with the "Commune welth," Plato fashioned a "gouernment such as it might be," Xenophon fashioned one in the story of Cyrus "such as it might best be" ("Letter to Raleigh," in *The Faerie Queene,* ed. A.C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. [London:

and sovereignty in Mycetes would have contrasted sharply with *Tamburlaine*'s

prologue, spoken only a few moments earlier in the theater. Here Marlowe—with a

formal aplomb that was unprecedented on the Elizabethan stage—dismisses the

"jygging vaines of riming mother wits," the demotic humor of stage clowns and

other popular performers, and promises, instead, to show his audience a *new*

combination of wit with sovereignty, of poetry with power; to "leade" the audience

to Tamburlaine's "stately tent of War," where they

> shall heare the Scythian Tamburlaine,
>
> Threatning the world with high astounding tearms
>
> And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

(Prol 4-6)

One critic calls this mini-manifesto the "most forceful articulation of the early

Elizabethan dramatist's sense of his own authority and entitlement to transform the

common stage to create a self-contained verbal picture of an imaginary world." [49]

And indeed *Tamburlaine*'s prologue would have lingered over the play's opening

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Longman, 2001] p. 719). On Xenophon's reception in the period, see Knox Wilson, *Xenophon in the English Renaissance from Elyot to Holland* (New York: NYU Press, 1948) and, more recently, Jane Grogan, "'Barbarous Utopias': Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in the English Renaissance," *Hermathena* 183 (2007; pub. 2009) pp. 163–74. On sixteenth-century readings of Xenophon and how the *Cyropaideia* was seen to inculcate practical knowledge see also Lorna Hutson, "Fortunate Travelers: Reading for the Plot in Sixteenth-Century England," *Representations* 41 (1993) pp. 90-3.

[49] Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 56.

scene like a burst of ozone. It would have made Mycetes' failures to translate wit into kingship—which eventually leads to his brother Cosroe overthrowing him and taking the Persian crown from "his wearie *witlesse* head" (2.1.46; my emphasis)— bend anticipatorily toward Tamburlaine's apparition. Indeed, when he is introduced, Tamburlaine fully delivers on the prologue's promise.

We first encounter Tamburlaine in the play's second scene as he is in the process of abducting a traveling Egyptian princess named Zenocrate. Zenocrate, taken aback by the boldness of a low-born shepherd, objects that she is traveling under her father's orders to see the Chinese "Cham." Her attempt to pull rank, however, does not impress Tamburlaine, and he quickly asserts that her "letters and commands" have been

> … countermanded by a greater man.
>
> And through my provinces you must expect
>
> Letters of conduct from my mightiness
>
> If you intend to keep your treasure safe.

(1.2.21-24)

Although Zenocrate is understandably nonplussed and puzzled by this obscure shepherd's wild and whirling words, Tamburlaine resolutely asserts himself in a

single compact but significant sentence after she responds to his not so subtle question about her marital status:

Zenocrate. I am (my Lord), for so you do import.

Tamburlaine. I am a Lord, for so my deeds shall prove.

(1.2.33-34)

These ten words micrologically anticipate much of Marlowe's play. The rider that Zenocrate adds to her answer in the first line suggests her skepticism about Tamburlaine and implies a split between the shepherd's pretensions and the reality of his situation. But Tamburlaine wastes no time in trying to suture this split. In what almost seems like a linguistic-rhetorical analogue to the abduction he is attempting, Tamburlaine hijacks the syntax of Zenocrate's skeptical response to his question—"I am (my Lord)"—and transforms it into a declarative statement—"I am a Lord"—whose strong and definitive copula almost has the ring of the proclamation of the Old Testament deity. This monotheistic rhetorical *auctoritas* carries over into the next clause as Tamburlaine translates the subjunctive skepticism of the Zenocrate's "for so you do import" into the firm futurity of "for so my deeds shall prove." *Shall* is the key word here. Tamburlaine deliberately overlaps ontology and grammar. By the force of linguistic fiat, future potentiality subsumes the actualities of the present. This move is repeated as the scene goes on and

Tamburlaine dramatically doffs his pastoral outfit to reveal that underneath he is actually (and emblematically) clad in the full military regalia of a conqueror:

> This compleat armor, and this curtle-axe
>
> Are adjuncts more beseeming Tamburlaine.
>
> And Maddam, whatsoever you esteeme
>
> Of this success, and losse unvalued,
>
> Both may invest you Empresse of the East.

> (1.2.42-6)

Seemingly-straightforward, these lines are actually crisscrossed by a number of oppositions: between appearance and essence, being and seeming, "beseeming" and "esteeming." The result is phenomenological confusion as the reader or auditor is forced to flip back and forth between Tamburlaine and Zenocrate's perspectives. But once again, Tamburlaine decisively and authoritatively resolves this confusion. And once again, he does so with reference to the future, particularly by positing a future image of Zenocrate as "Empresse of the East." Of course the local point of this gesture is to justify the sexual violation politely referred to in Tamburlaine's mention of Zenocrate's upcoming "losse unvalued" (that is, of her virginity). But more is going on here than a simple rhetorical *apologia* for rape. In these lines (and the others I just discussed) Marlowe introduces a rhetorical strategy that will run throughout

both *Tamburlaine* plays, a rhetorical gesture in which the heroic sovereignty of the present is established vis-à-vis the future projections of imagination. He introduces a strategy in which *sovereignty is established through the prolepsis of wit.*

The term prolepsis comes out of classical Greek rhetoric and filtered into the Renaissance as a grammatical term of art for the dramatic delay of details in a given sentence (something hard to pull off in English but which is quite easy in highly inflected languages like Latin and Greek). Marlovian prolepsis, however, is of a different sort. I apply the term to *Tamburlaine* to signify the core move on which its presentation of heroism is grounded: the dismissal of the actual in favor of a potentiality that is projected—by the sheer power of poetic language, by the sheer fiatic force of wit—into the future. Like some hyper-kinetic version of Heidegger's *Dasein*, Tamburlaine's being is always a *Sich-vorweg-sein*, a "being-ahead-of-itself," a being constantly thrown into the future.[50] But unlike the death-limned finitude of Heidegger's archetypal protagonist, Marlowe's proleptic hero knows no limits or negativities. No matter how much he conquers, the future is wide open. Take, for instance, the following statement, spoken by Tamburlaine to his followers in the same scene:

These Lords (perhaps) do scorne our estimates,

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[50] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) p. 236.

And thinke we prattle with distempered spirits:

But since they measure our deserts so meane,

That in conceit bear Empires on our speares,

Affecting thoughts coequall with the cloudes,

They shall be kept our forced followers,

Till with their eies they view us Emperours.

(1.2.52-58; my emphasis)

Once again, these show wit's proleptic push into the future. They demonstrate Tamburlaine's use of images of future conquest and superabundance as a kind of solvent on the actual. But interestingly, this moment also shows an odd—and otherwise uncharacteristic—self-awareness and even defensiveness about such proleptic gesturing. This defensiveness is introduced with the parenthetical "perhaps" of the opening line, and runs through the passage—culminating in Tamburlaine's sideways recognition that some might believe that he and his followers are little more than "distempered" dreamers who touch the "clouds" in their thoughts rather than their actions. What is being broached here is the possibility that Tamburlaine's pending *imperium* is more a matter of conceit than coming actuality. But this possibility is quickly passed over, sidelined in the final proleptic image of these vaguely defined "lords" being one-day kept as the "forced followers" of Tamburlaine and his troops. Wit wins out, in other words, over the

stresses of things as they are. And futurity becomes the existential horizon of the rest of Marlowe's play. As he says, later on, to his lieutenant Theridamas:

> … Wil and Shall best fitteth *Tamburlain*,
>
> Whose smiling stars gives him assured hope
>
> Of martiall triumph, ere he meete his foes:
>
> I that am tearm'd the Scourge and Wrath of God,
>
> The onnely feare and terror of the world,
>
> Wil first subdue the Turke, and then inlarge
>
> Those Christian Captives, which you keep as slaves
>
> Burdening their bodies with your heavie chaines,
>
> And feeding them with thin and slender fare,
>
> That naked rowe about the Terrene sea.
>
> (3.3.41-50)

As much as *Tamburlaine*'s prologue, this passage provides a kind of mini-manifesto for the imaginative method of both plays, reiterating not just the Antichrist-like terror their protagonist is meant to inspire but also the "high astounding terms" through which he inspires it. But they also show an odd and underappreciated feature of Tamburlaine's proleptic sublation of wit into sovereignty. Grammar is foregrounded at the start of Tamburlaine's declaration, with his claim that the future

mood best captures his heroic aspirations. But grammar also tells another story here. Although Tamburlaine himself is the grammatical subject of the ten-line sentence that constitutes this passage, he notably fades away by its conclusion. The sentence starts out with Tamburlaine, but in the rapid movement to subdued Turks and Christian captives and heavy chains and the Terrene Sea, Tamburlaine gets lost. He is subsumed into the images he proleptically posits. So while this passage is a perfect demonstration of the play's proleptic sublation of wit into sovereignty by way of future, imaginative projection, it also shows how prolepsis goes hand-in-hand with *aphanisis*: with the disappearance and fading out of the subject under the strain of the signifier.[51]

This odd coexistence of self-negation and self-assertion, of prolepsis and aphanisis, recurs throughout the rest of *Tamburlaine*'s first and second parts. It is, for instance, particularly apparent in what is probably *Tamburlaine*'s most famous scene, one evoked and parodied from Shakespeare's Pistol to George Eliot's Will Ladislaw: the "Jades of Asia" speech in the play's second part. Here, Tamburlaine enters on a chariot pulled by the Asian kings he has conquered, proclaiming:

> … forward then ye Jades:
>
> Now crowch ye kings of greatest *Asia*,
>
> And tremble when ye heare this Scourge wil come,

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[51] For more on this term see Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, pp. 216-29.

That whips downe cities, and controweleth crownes,

Adding their wealth and treasure to my store.

The Euxine sea North to *Natolia*

The Terrene west, the Caspian north north-east,

And on the south to *Senus Arabicus*,

Shal al be loaden with the martiall spoiles…

……………………….

Then in my coach like *Saturnes* royal son,

Mounted his shining chariot, gilt with fire,

And drawn with princely Eagles through the path,

Pav'd with bright Christall, and enchac'd with stares,

When all the Gods stand gazing at his pomp:

So will I ride through *Samarcanda* streets,

Until my soule dissevered from the flesh,

Shall mount the milk-white way and meet him there.

To Babylon, my lords, to Babylon!

(4.3.97-105; 125-34)

"No scene in all ten acts of this play," Eugene Waith writes, "depicts more clearly

Tamburlaine's lust for power," his Herculean drive to dominate, conquer, and

actualize his heroic potentiality on an uncomprehending and inferior world.[52]   But as Tamburlaine proclaims his conquering, heroic becoming he also fades into the future conquests he summons to support this ambition and agenda. The Euxine sea, Natolia, the Terrene Sea … all of them loom larger than Tamburlaine himself. And this subjective fade-out seems only further reinforced by his eventual fantasy of cosmic ascent, of his "shining chariot" moving toward heaven in a Herculean rise toward deification.

Such aphanisis is the flipside of *Tamburlaine*'s proleptic version of heroism. It is the flipside of the play's attempt to sublate wit into sovereignty. When Hegel, in the *Shorter Logic*, defines sublation (*Aufheben* in German) he makes note of its "double meaning": sublation can mean both "to clear away, or annul" but also "to keep, preserve."[53]   *Tamburlaine* draws on both features. In Marlowe's play the proleptic establishment of heroism goes hand-in-hand with the annulment of the hero. *Tamburlaine* centers, to a remarkable degree, on Tamburlaine himself. But in the end, what Marlowe's play provides is not so much a hero as a hero*ism*. What it provides is not so much a singular figure of action as a fantasmatic structure in which action is infinitely imagined by being projected into the future. *Tamburlaine*, that is to say, provides its audience, with an experience of potentiality—of the potentiality, the imaginative power of *language* and of *fantasy*. This was, no doubt,

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[52] Eugene Waith, "Marlowe and the Jades of Asia," *SEL* 5, no. 2 (1965) p. 231.

[53] Hegel, *Shorter Logic*, p. 142.

precisely the *appeal* of *Tamburlaine*, what made it so stunning and striking when it was first performed. But it was also what made *Tamburlaine* so easy to parody for writers like Shakespeare and Jonson, who in moments like Pistol's

>   Shall packhorses
>
> And hollow pampered jades of Asia,
>
> Which cannot go but thirty mile a day,
>
> Compare with Caesars, and with Cannibals,
>
> And Trojan Greeks? [54]

pilloried precisely the *unreality* of its heroism, the gap between the heroic imagination of what Mulcaster called "imperial wits" and the humbleness of their actual circumstances.[55]   No hint of this gap appears in Marlowe's actual play; its spectacular presentation of heroism refuses the very possibility of such a split in subsuming the hero so completely into his own language.   But when Marlowe moved on from *Tamburlaine* he was not through with the question of the relationship between alienation and heroism, the relationship between wit and sovereignty. A few years later he returned to the issue, from a wholly different point of view, in *Doctor Faustus*.

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[54] Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*, ed. Rene Weis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 2.4.161-5.

[55] For more on the parodic interrelationships between Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson see James Shapiro, *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

IV

As with *Tamburlaine,* Marlowe built *Doctor Faustus* out of semi-real events—specifically the life of John Faustus, a scholar supposedly-turned-sorcerer who lived in early sixteenth-century Germany and, by the end of that century, had become a legendary figure across Europe with a reputation that was reinforced by a vernacular pamphlet presenting an embellished version of his life that scholars have come to call the *Faustbook* and which was Marlowe's main source in putting his play together.[56] In the *Faustbook,* Doctor John is presented as a poor and malcontented academic who conjures and colludes with the devil to gain the powers necessary to fulfill his rather extensive and Epicurean lusts for money as well as to satisfy an ego—in the words of the prologue to Marlowe's play—"swool'n with cunning of a self-conceit" (Prol 20). But while Marlowe's prologue toes this particular narrative line, the play changes the figure of Faustus significantly. In Marlowe's play, the Doctor's motivations shift from greed and lust into an intense heroic aspiration. I have already mentioned that critics tend to read Faustus as a speculative and intellectual version of Tamburlaine's more earthly aggression. But when the differences of the two figures' circumstances are set aside it becomes quite clear that their fundamental motivations are almost identical. Both are driven by the desire for

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[56] See the preliminary discussion of Marlowe's sources for the play in Thomas and Tydeman eds., *Christopher Marlowe*: *The Plays and their Sources*.

"omnipotence," the capacity to have "[a]ll things that move betweene the quiet poles" at his "command" are as characteristic of Doctor Faustus as they are of Marlowe's earlier hero (1.54, 56-57).

Doctor Faustus and *Tamburlaine*, in other words, both approach heroism in terms of its combination of wit and sovereignty. Indeed, like its predecessor *Faustus* foregrounds wit from early on. In the play's famous opening scene, Faustus fixates on wit as he catalogues his disenchantment with the academic studies he has undertaken:

> Settle thy studies, *Faustus*, and beginne
>
> To sound the deapth of that thou wilt professe:
>
> Having commenced, be a Divine in shew,
>
> Yet level at the end of every Art,
>
> And live and die in *Aristotles* workes:
>
> Sweete *Analutikes* tis thou hast ravisht me,
>
> *Bene disserere est finis logicis*,
>
> Is, to dispute well, Logickes chiefest end
>
> Affoords this Art no greater miracle:
>
> Then reade no more, thou hast attaind that end:
>
> A greater subject fitteth *Faustus* wit…

(1.1-11)

The gnarled enjambment of these lines is distinctly different from the flowing and forceful hypotaxis of Tamburlaine's rhetoric. But both of Marlowe's protagonists are propelled by the same drive to dominate. Both are driven toward the same experience of violent *entelecheia*, of potentiality bursting into actuality vis-à-vis conquest, domination, pure worldly power. But while *Tamburlaine* begins with— and, as we just saw, never leaves behind—a fantasmatic experience of such *entelecheia*, its bombastic imagery acidizing the actual and compressing the future into an instant of pure possibility, *Doctor Faustus* begins with the *failure* of this gesture. It begins with an experience not of actualization but of wit's vexing separation and exile from political action and actualization. It begins, in other words, with the problem of *alienation* that Marlowe sketched in *Hero and Leander*, where the learning and eloquence of wit are primally banished from the realm of rule and wit lingers as a lost reminder and remainder, an *objet petit a* alluding to the impossible plenitude of a pure political praxis.

The anxieties and attention deficits that come from such alienation, from such a sense of primal loss, pulse through this scene and infuse the seemingly dry and desultory rhetoric of Faustus's *seriatim* dissection of each of the things he has studied. Faustus combs through these past studies in detail but his focus is always on wit. He dismisses disciplines like "Law and Phyisicke" that seem to be appropriate only "for pettie wits" (1.107). He is—despite his best efforts—unable to

decide on a "subject" that fits his own "wit." What wit marks here is, of course, intellectual capacity. But it also indicates an ontologically thicker sense of potentiality, a potentiality whose final aim is not the pure knowledge of Platonic *noiesis* but rather very worldly *rule*:

> O what a world of profit and delight,
>
> Of power, of honor, of omnipotence
>
> Is promised to the studious Artizan?
>
> All things that move betweene the quiet poles
>
> Shalbe at my command, Emperours and Kings,
>
> Are but obeyd in their severall provinces:
>
> Nor can they raise the winde, or rend the cloudes:
>
> But his dominion that exceeds in this,
>
> Stretcheth as farre as doth the minde of man.
>
> A sound Magician is a mighty god:
>
> Heere *Faustus* trie thy braines to gaine a deitie.

> (1.53-63)

In *Tamburlaine*'s already-quoted *apologia* for the "aspiring" mind's pursuit of worldly power we saw Marlowe materialistically subvert the well-known Neo-Platonic trope of intellectual aspiration, transforming a transcendent quest for the absolute into an

immanent grab for power. Marlowe repeats such conceptual catachresis here as he has Faustus invoke, but simultaneously subvert, the old hendiadys of *dulce et utile*— Horace's formula for the ideal agenda of poetry. From this point of view, learning and poetry foster conventional moral norms. But Faustus's viewpoint could not be further from this conventional commonplace. For him, wit marks a potentiality that can only be actualized when he has secured worldly power and transformed himself, as he says a little later, into being the "great Emprour of the world" (3.104). As this scene goes on, with the encouragement of his two fellow scholars Cornelius and Valdes, Marlowe's Doctor finally decides that the *only* way to accomplish this goal is through the black arts. As his friend Valdes says, it is only by putting Faustus's "wit" toward magic that they "Shall make all nations to canonize us, / As *Indian* Moores obey their *Spanish* Lords" (1.119-21); that they will be presented with "huge Argoces" from Venice and take from "*America* the golden fleece, / That yearely stuffes olde *Philips* treasury" (1.29-31).

In such early moments of aspiration, *Doctor Faustus* almost seems as though it will follow the path of *Tamburlaine*, sharing in the earlier play's use of global imagining as a mode of proleptic conquest.[57] Things do not fall out this way in *Doctor Faustus*, however. In the play, Marlowe swaps the centrifugal open-

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[57] For more on Marlowe's global-geographical imagining see Crystal Bartolovich, "Putting Tamburlaine on a (Cognitive) Map," *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997) pp. 29-72; John Gilles, "Marlowe, The Timur Myth, and the Motives of Geography," in *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh-Dickinson University Press, 1998) pp. 203-209; and Emrys Jones, "A World of Ground: Terrestial Space in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* Plays," *Yearbook of English Studies* 38, no. 1-2 (208) pp. 168-82.

endedness of the romance genre he adapted in *Tamburlaine* for the closed eschatological economy of a morality play. Whatever Faustus gains through his deal with Mephistopheles and his master, his powers have an expiration date. But Marlowe also, and more interestingly, portrays Faustus as somebody who seems again and again incapable of using the powers he acquires through his deal with the devil to follow through on what motivated him in the first place. He portrays Faustus, in other words, as somebody who starts off wanting Tamburlaine-level worldly dominance but ends up mired in a miasma of mimesis and representation. Consider the following lines, spoken as Faustus's final hour draws near:

> Have not I made blinde *Homer* sing to me,
>
> Of *Alexanders* love, and *Enons* death,
>
> And hath not he that built the walles of *Thebes*,
>
> With ravishing sound of his melodious harp
>
> Made musicke with my *Mephastophilis*,
>
> Why should I dye then, or basely dispaire?
>
> (6.208-213)

We just saw that Faustus starts off wanting to sublate wit into sovereignty, to change the scholar's gown for the imperial regalia of a monarch like Philip. But by midway through the play all he has done with the almost-infinite power he has obtained is to

stay *within the realm of representation*, imagination, fantasy—within the realm of *wit*.

Turning, in the passage just quoted, to canvass what wonderful things he has accomplished with his powers, Faustus can think only of making Homer *sing* to him, of seeing classical scenes unfold before him. Completely missing are any of the worldly, material, and imperial feats he initially imagined. Even Amphion— legendary founder of Thebes who used music to "move" stones (and in Sidney's *Defense* is exemplary of the capacity of poets to civilize and form polities)—appears only as Mephastophilis's partner in some sort of serio-ludically hellish hoedown.

Faustus starts off wanting the omnipotent power that Tamburlaine projects. But he ends up not with "power in general" but—as Peter Womack writes—"the power to create illusions."[58] *Faustus*' framework of Christian morality, in which the overreaching ambition of "toward wits" is punished with damnation, seems to enforce a lesson that is less religious than metaliterary.[59] The play emerges, in the words of one recent critic, as a "didactic work teaching that to place one's trust in the

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[58] Peter Womack, *English Renaissance Drama* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006) p. 143.

[59] Richard Halpern has recently analyzed *Doctor Faustus* in similar terms, emphasizing this negativity and entrapment in representation in terms of what it reveals about the commodification of theater in Marlowe's time. See Richard Halpern, "Marlowe's Theater of Night: *Doctor Faustus* and Capital," *ELH* 72, no. 2 (2004) pp. 455-95. The essay claims, more specifically, that Marlowe identifies theatricality with a form of negativity, of lack, with deep theological roots (that run all the way back to Augustinian associations of evil with privation) but which can only fully be grasped in terms of the particular forms of socio-economic alienation endemic to the commercial theater, a commercial theater that was based on the "structural subordination of petty production"—of the playwright—to the "merchant's capital" embodied in the English theater companies (p. 461).

performative sign is to subjugate oneself to Satan."[60] The attempt to convert wit into sovereignty leads only to entrapment and a situation in which wit's fantasmatic prism becomes a mental prison and locus of alienation. As in Mulcaster's account of the contradictions of Tudor education, Faustus' own "Imperiall Wit" marks both a positive desire to *become* and a negative symptom of *social exclusion.* It marks a desire to control and to conquer that is itself a compensatory attempt to overcome an absence, a lack, that is inscribed in this desire's very origins.

This realization hangs over the long *dénouement* of Marlowe's play, but its most poignant articulation comes in the late scene where Faustus is summoned before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Charles, we learn, has heard reports of the Doctor's deep "knowledge in the black Arte" (9.2). He thinks this will help him banish the malaise that he has been suffering from:

> As I was sometime solitary set, within my Closet sundry thoughts
>
> arose, about the honour of mine auncestors, howe they had wonne by
>
> prowess such exploits, gote such riches, subdued so many kingdoms,
>
> as we that do suceede, or they that shal hereafter possesse our throne,
>
> shal (I feare me) never attaine to that degree of high renowne and

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[60] David Hawkes, *The Faust Myth: Religion and the Rise of Representation* (New York: Palgrave, 2007) p. 53. See also Graham Hammill, "Faustus's Fortunes: Commodification, Exchange, and the Form of Literary Subjectivity," *ELH* 63, no. 2 (1996) pp. 309-36.

great authoritie, amongst which kings is *Alexander* the great, chiefe

spectacle of the worlds preheminence. (9.18-25)

The Emperor hopes Faustus can cure his ill temper by bringing back to life the exemplary figure of Alexander the Great. But all he is capable of providing is pure (and professed) illusion: demons and minions of Mephastophilis dressed in the borrowed robes of heroic greatness, but which both he and the Emperor desperately want to accept as postmortem embodiments of heroic action, an experience of political meaning and plenitude that is, in reality, irrevocably lost. In this scene, Marlowe presents a summation of *Doctor Faustus*'s interrogation of the relationship between wit and sovereignty, between heroism and its own basis in fantasy. Wit is no longer a free-floating potentiality that needs to be actualized by way of a passage into heroic praxis. *Doctor Faustus* stages the realization that all of heroism's "art and power" are—in the words of a knight at Charles' court who refuses to take Faustus' conjuring seriously—"just nothing at all" (9.40-1).

V

Nothing at all. These three words capture the final position of Marlowe's interrogation of the wit. While *Tamburlaine* is a fantasy organized and oriented around an experience of political *entelecheia* vis-à-vis the linguistic praxis to which it was linked for Marlowe, the play's very success brushed up against the negativity

signaled in the fading out of the hero under the pressure of linguistic power itself. But in *Doctor Faustus* the relationship between sovereignty and wit is presented in an even bleaker light. The play suggests that wit is not an imaginative potential that is unbreakably tied to political life but—rather—a capacity for unreality tied to *nothing*, validated by nothing, adrift in a politically disenchanted world. *This* experience of wit is, in the final analysis, what Marlowe's engagement with heroism reveals. Marlowe's two heroes are remainders and reminders of a primal split between the potentiality of language and the potentiality to participate in the political world—a split from which heroism emerges, but which it is also constitutively unable to mend.

In subsequent centuries, wit would find a new place on the shifting maps of English and European culture. It would come to signal the free-floating imaginative and creative potentiality whose valorization was central in the rising discourses of neo-classical criticism and aesthetic ideology. In these, wit would signify the combinatory capacities of the human mind harnessed by the creative writer capable of "'discordia concors'; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."[61] Wit's migration into this new cultural and textual territory, however, was itself part of the process of political

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[61] Samuel Johnson, *Life of Cowley*, in *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*, ed. Donald Johnson Greene (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) *p.* 678. For a good overview of later seventeenth-century understandings of wit in critical and philosophical discourse, one that covers the degree to which later critical and aesthetic definitions were impacted by the philosophical formulations of Hobbes and Locke, see William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Knopf, 1957) 221-51.

transformation, of political *alienation*, that Marlowe's texts witness. The emergence of "the political as abstract" and "universal"—as Christopher Pye recently writes— went hand-in-hand with the emergence of the literary and the aesthetic as formally autonomous categories.[62] But while Marlowe's work struggles with the challenges of this political change, his work looks backward rather than forward; it understands wit not as the origin of an independent or autonomous form of literary practice but rather as a marker of a lost plenitude of politico-poetic unity.

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[62] Christopher Pye, "'To Throw Out our Eyes for Brave Othello': Shakespeare and Aesthetic Ideology," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2009) p. 429.

Chapter 3

Chapman's Policy

I

So far, I have argued that in the plays, prose, and poems of Philip Sidney and Christopher Marlowe heroism functions as a powerful mode of political-poetic fantasy, one that mediates a major shift in elite political culture that was ongoing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This shift involved the collision between a traditional English political paradigm—one that combined monarchy with local autonomy, office-holding, and a republican ethos that understood politics in terms of dynamic individual action and potentiality—and an inchoate and fundamentally alienated form of political life, one that centered on the consolidated political power of the state. Historians have charted this shift variously. But as I noted earlier, they have tended to see the story of state-formation as a series of objective processes and institutional changes. Like any historical process, however, the emergence of the early modern English state was just as much *subjective* as it was *objective*. It occurred not only within the *ontic* sphere of material and institutional history, but also within the *ontological* sphere of political experience.

Both Sidney and Marlowe, as we have seen, use heroism as a way of imaginatively coming to grips with the increasing impossibility of a dynamic ideal of political action. In each writer's work, this heroic ideal exits the realm of practical

possibility and becomes, instead, a marker of poetic creativity's separation from actuality. But while Marlowe and Sidney's works only *gradually* reconcile themselves to a newly alienated political reality, this chapter turns to a writer for whom the fundamental disenchantment, the fundamental alienation, of political life is not a hard realization but a basic point of departure: George Chapman (c. 1559-1634). Though little read today, Chapman was a remarkable writer. His immense body of work runs the gamut from arcane philosophical coterie poetry to deluxe translations of classical authors, from demotic humoral comedy to some of the most highly-wrought tragedies that ever graced the Renaissance stage. And he has a strong claim to being one of the most powerful, intensive, and extensive engagements with heroism that early modern England produced.[1]

Heroism is at the center of the two literary projects that dominated Chapman's career. The first of these projects was the Homer translation for which Chapman (largely due to Keats' famous sonnet) is best known today. Chapman first hit on the idea of Englishing Homer in the mid-1590s and announced it with *Achilles Shield* (1598), a pamphletic teaser that provided a bit of the initial translation and

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[1] My discussion of the particulars of Chapman's life—here and throughout the following—derives largely from Mark Thornton Burnett, "Chapman, George (1559/60–1634)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5118, accessed 20 Oct 2010]. For overviews of Chapman's life and writings see also Ennis Rees, *The Tragedies of George Chapman: Renaissance Ethics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); Millar Maclure, *George Chapman: A Critical Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and Charlotte Spivack, *George Chapman* (New York: Twayne, 1967).

advertised the further work to come.[2]   This was followed up, in the same year, by the more substantial *Seven Books of the Iliads of Homer*, and the project continued in a number of subsequent editions that came out well into the first two decades of the seventeenth century and culminated with *The Whole Works of Homer* (1616).[3] Chapman's Homer translation is a high-water mark for the prestige and centrality of heroism to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English culture. Throughout the extensive notes, prefaces, and other paratextual materials he appended to its various editions and redactions, Chapman emerges as a powerful and eloquent apologist for heroism as a paradigmatic model of human excellence and potential. Homer's heroes, he writes, are models of "unmatched virtues" and "dignities" of the soul.[4] They signal the greatness of which human beings are intrinsically capable.

This strong ethical and political investment in heroism is also at the center of Chapman's other major project and his most lasting accomplishment as a playwright: the series of tragedies he composed in the early years of the seventeenth century and which include *Bussy D'Ambois* (1603), the *Conspiracy* and *Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608), the follow-up to the first *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (first published in 1603), and the harder to date *Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France* (c. 1611-22). These plays—which modern critics call the "French Tragedies," since

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[2] See George Chapman, *Achilles Shield* (London, 1598).

[3] See George Chapman, *Seauen Bookes of the Iliades of Homere* (London, 1598); George Chapman, *The Whole Works of Homer* (London, 1616).

[4] Chapman, *Seauen Bookes,* A4$^{\mathrm{r}}$.

they focus on the French court—present heroism as an ethical and political exemplum of human potentiality. In them, such potential can take various forms. It can, for instance, appear in the near-Herculean magnanimity of a figure like Charles, Duke of Byron, who proclaims that it is "[i]mmortallitie to die aspiring" and that

> No true power doth admit privation
>
> Adverse to him, or suffers any fellow
>
> Joined in his subject; you superiors,
>
> It is the nature of things absolute
>
> One to destroy another… [5]

as well as in the heroized stoic *apatheia* of a "Senecal man" like Claremont D'Ambois:

> In his most gentle and unwearied mind
>
> Rightly to virtue framed; in very nature;
>
> In his most firm inexorable spirit
>
> To be removed from anything he chooseth
>
> For worthiness, or bear the least persuasion
>
> To what is base, or fitteth not his object.[6]

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[5] George Chapman, *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron,* in *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron,* ed. John Margeson (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988) 1.2.99-103.

But whether engaging heroism in terms of the "[b]odies … outward Fortitude" or the mind's "inward, constant, and vnconquerd Empire," Chapman's French tragedies present heroism as an avatar of the "excellence of royal humanity."[7]

It is thus not surprising that scholars have seen Chapman as uniquely invested in the heroic. No "dramatist of the period before 1642," as Eugene Waith writes, "was more explicitly concerned with the heroic tradition than George Chapman."[8] In what follows, however, I want to argue that Chapman was also deeply ambivalent about heroism.[9] For Chapman, heroism was an ethical, a political, and an intellectual ideal. In the French Tragedies, however, he is concerned equally with how heroism's ideality collides with contemporary political conditions that are inimical to it. In Chapman's drama, heroism emerges not as a singular ethical or political absolute. It functions as a flexible but powerful political fantasy, one capable of encompassing a broad range of political experiences, but which exists in a state of tension with political reality. This political tension, rather than negating

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[6] George Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, in *Four Revenge Tragedies,* ed. Katherine Eisaman Maus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 4.4.14-19.

[7] Chapman, *Whole Works,* A4ʳ; Chapman, *Seauen Bookes*, A3ʳ.

[8] Eugene Waith, *Ideas of Greatness* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971) p. 124.

[9] The scholarly debate about Chapman's attitude toward the heroic tends to occur alongside another debate, concerning whether Chapman's writing articulates a coherent set of philosophical positions or whether it is a more unstable mixture of different—and often contradictory—philosophical, ethical, and political positions. For a persuasive argument that Chapman's work, and his presentation of his heroes in the French tragedies, does *not* adhere to a single, standard doctrinal line see Maclure, *George Chapman*. For a less persuasive argument that Chapman is actually a relatively doctrinaire proponent of a Christian humanist philosophy see Rees, *Tragedies*, and Roy W. Battenhouse, "Chapman and the Nature of Man," *ELH* 12, no. 2 (1945) pp. 87-107.

heroism, provides the fundamental source of its political appeal—a paradox that is worked through most intensively and most extensively in what critics generally agree is the greatest of the French plays: *Bussy D'Ambois*.

Bussy D'Ambois is based on the real life of Louis de Clermont, seigneur de Bussy d'Ambois (1549-1579), a courtier and scion of a wealthy and influential family who was known as a particularly prickly and trouble-prone young man in Henry III's already trouble-prone court. In 1574 Bussy, previously loyal to Henry, transferred his allegiance to his (Henry's) brother the Duc d'Alençon (Chapman refers to him as "Monsieur," the standard moniker for the heir apparent). In a series of twists and turns largely ignored in Chapman's play, he was eventually assassinated in a factional conflict between the King and the Duke. Bussy was somewhat well-known in his own day, and he seems to have had a significant reputation "for personal courage, violent temper, sexual intrigue and dueling"; but no commentator on contemporary French affairs—as one of the play's modern editors writes—seems to have ever considered giving him "heroic status." [10] Chapman, however, transforms Bussy almost completely. Rather than a privileged courtier, he makes Bussy "poor," the bastard son of a cardinal and disaffected soldier and a scholar who—as the play opens—has retreated from the active life into stoic *apatheia* but is subsequently lured by Monsieur to serve as one of his hangers-

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[10] I draw here on Nicholas Brooke's introduction to this edition of *Bussy D'Ambois* (London: Methuen, 1964). All subsequent citations to *Bussy* refer to this edition by act, scene, and line number.

on. Once Bussy arrives at court, in Chapman's version, he develops a "great" spirit that "will not down" in the face of any of the prerogatives of privilege or position. He defies his superiors, takes up with Tamyra, the wife of a high-ranking nobleman, and establishes himself as a vocal malcontent who, with the protection of the king, carries himself as an embodiment of natural nobility and the prelapsarian *virtus* of a lost heroic age.

This eventually (and predictably) leads to Bussy's downfall when he is gunned down by the henchmen of his spurned patron and the jealous husband of his mistress. But the most gripping and dramatic dynamic of Chapman's play is not the predictably fatal twist of its tragic plot. It is, rather, the central characterological ambiguity of Bussy himself, the way in which he becomes the focal point for a widely divergent set of political perspectives and experiences. In his presentation of Bussy's meteoric ascent and descent in the French *curia*, Chapman constantly calls attention to the triangular tension between how Bussy sees himself, how others see him, and the bare facts of what he does. The most striking of these three dramatic levels is the third, for what Bussy actually does is precisely *nothing*. We see no great feats of heroism from Bussy. His heroism rather emerges in Chapman's play as largely *virtual*, existing in the articulated experience and perception of the characters that surround him. For Tamyra, for the King, and for Bussy himself, Bussy is an instance of a kind of primal, almost prelapsarian "naturalness." In one scene, for instance, he proclaims:

Sin is a coward Madam, and insults

But on our weakness, in his truest valour:

And so our ignorance tames us, that we let

His shadows fright us: and like empty clouds

In which our faulty apprehensions forge

The forms of dragons, lions, elephants

When they hold no proportion, the sly charms

Of the witch Policy make him like a monster

Kept only to shew men for Goddess Money.

(3.1.18-26)

This passage combines two well-known classical notions. First, Bussy invokes the common classical concept of the "natural man." [11] He sets himself up as a paradigmatic instance of a prelapsarian purity that is opposed to the ideological forces of "sin" and "ignorance"—concepts, he claims, that function to "tame" individuals. This initial self-presentation, however, develops into another position and another unique riff on classical precedent. Bussy identifies the force behind such

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[11] On Chapman's use of this concept and its Senecan background, see Richard S. Ide, *Possessed with Greatness: The Heroic Tragedies of Shakespeare and Chapman* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) p. 84.

attempted "taming" as the "witch Policy."[12] Hovering in the background of this identification is the classical concept of *Fortuna* as a femininely-personified allegory of the worldly contingency that individual *virtus* has to strive and struggle to overcome.[13] In replacing fortune with *policy*, however, Bussy opposes himself not only to the mutability of the sublunary world. He opposes himself to something more specific: the social and a political totality that is opposed to heroic identity and integrity. That totality, which the French court represents, is marked off by and identified with the term policy.

This chapter reads *Bussy*'s complex and multiple portrayal of its protagonist—from his own viewpoint, and in the viewpoints of those around him—through the lens of the idea of policy. For Chapman, I will argue, this term marks an experience of the political as fundamentally alienated. It captures a vision of the political world as a space of impossibility, suffused by the forces of corrupt constituted power. But while in his more strictly philosophical poetic writing Chapman willingly dismisses policy as intrinsically corrupt, a more complex position emerges in *Bussy D'Ambois*. In *Bussy* we see both a profound skepticism about the active life as well as a demonstration of its unavoidable appeal. Bussy's

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[12] For an analysis of Chapman's play—and Jacobean drama more generally—as practicing a kind of inchoate form of ideology critique see Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2004) pp. 182-88.

[13] On the classical concept of fortune, see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*: *Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975) and Hanna Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccòlo Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

species of heroism is—for Chapman—impossible within the political realities he inhabits. But this impossibility is also the source of Bussy's power and appeal as a poetic and philosophical ideal. [14]

In what follows, I suggest that by tracing the term policy through Chapman's play we can see *Bussy D'Ambois* articulating a complex dialectic of poetic-political (im)possibility. But before turning to Chapman's play, I want to first canvass his career more broadly and talk more generally about his presentation of the concept of policy. For throughout Chapman's writing this term marks a profoundly alienated experience of the political—one to which Chapman's literary work is a particular, powerful, and complex response.

II

George Chapman lived and worked in a milieu that should be familiar from the last chapter's discussion of Marlowe's life and historical moment. Much like

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[14] Critics have gone back and forth about the perspectival multiplicity of how Chapman presents Bussy. Rees, *Tragedies*, argues that Bussy is a kind of ironic variation on the concept of the Marlowe-style superman, and many others have argued that Chapman's presentation of his protagonist is—in one way or another—ironic (see, e.g., Peter Ure, "Chapman's Tragedies," in *Jacobean Theater* [London: Edward Arnold, 1960] p. 236). Probably the best account of the presentational multiplicity of Chapman's play is A. R. Braunmuller's subtle and supple account of Chapman's major tragedies in his study *Natural Fictions: George Chapman's Major Tragedies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983). "The play's courtly speakers," Braunmuller writes, "lack a language to describe Bussy, or at least to describe one aspect of the hero. They struggle to find terms—demon or prelapsarian man or blustering bully—for what they have never experienced. This difficulty extends to Bussy himself. He, too, flounders when he tries to define himself as the outsider he feels he is. Linguistic difficulties echo the social and psychological ones. If definition could be found, Bussy could be 'placed' in the court world, and, of course, the politicians could then control and manipulate him as they control and manipulate more orthodox individuals" (p. 40). My own reading departs from these earlier readings, however, insofar as I claim that Chapman is not only aware of this ambiguity, but that it is *itself* a statement—an implicit statement, but a statement nonetheless—about the contradictions of the period's political experience.

Marlowe, Chapman was one of the over-educated but under-employed *lumpenliterati*

who provided plays for the popular stage as well as a wide variety of other texts for

the vernacular print culture that was booming in late sixteenth- and early

seventeenth-century London.[15] And like Marlowe (and Greene, and Nashe, and

many other young writers) Chapman's career was a long and uneven attempt to

carve out an authorial position in this new social situation—a situation where

poetry's longtime link to networks of patronage was waning; where (as Chapman

wrote) the "sonnes of the Muses" no longer had the "priuiledge to liue onlie by their

wits" but, instead, had to find their way in the "free trade" of the literary

marketplace.[16]

Historians and critics have failed to unearth much information about

Chapman's early life. He was apparently born into a middling family at sometime

around 1560 and spent some of his early years serving as a foot soldier during the ill-

fated Netherlands expedition in which Sidney was killed (a grunt's-eye experience

of combat that perhaps accounts for some of the skepticism toward glorified military

violence that we see in his work). Where Chapman acquired his extensive learning is

a mystery. An extensive Oxbridge education is unlikely, so he seems to have been a

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[15] See the general discussion in the last chapter as well as M.H. Curtis, "The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England," *Past and Present* 32 (1962) pp. 27-28 and G.K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[16] Chapman, *Monsieur D'Olive* (London, 1606) B2[r].

Jonson-style autodidact.[17] By the early 1590s, in any case, Chapman was in London,

trying to start a writing career. He cut his theatrical teeth writing for the popular

theater—first for Henslowe's Admiral's Men (who produced his first play *The Blind*

Beggar of Alexandria in 1596) and later for the Children of the Chapel (who performed

the French Tragedies). At the same time, however, Chapman also started moving in

a different and more unusual literary direction. In the mid-90s, he began publishing

a series of long, learned, and seriously arcane philosophical poems. The first was the

Shadow of Night (1594), a pair of hyper-learned hymns to Night and the classical

goddess Cynthia that try to develop a style of poetry that eschews the "monstrous

affections" of sensuality and amorousness for a more "beautifull" intellectual

"iudgement." [18] The second was *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, which came out the

following year and which tries to pull off what Adorno and Benjamin might have

called an "immanent critique" of the erotic epyllia popular in the 1590s.[19] (Around

the same time, Chapman also provided a continuation of Marlowe's fragmentary

contribution to this genre, *Hero and Leander*—a continuation that carried on in

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[17] See Burnett, "George Chapman."

[18] George Chapman, *The Shadow of Night*, in *The Poems of George Chapman*, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (London: Oxford University Press, 1941) p. 19. All subsequent citations to Chapman's poetry will be to this addition, hereafter abbreviated as *Poems*. The philosophical confidence and intensity of this particular poem led an earlier generation of critics to speculate that Chapman belonged to some sort of secret cabal of magicians, scholars, and poets called the "School of Night." See M.C. Bradbrook, *The School of Night* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936). The idea of this school—also thought to have involved Marlowe, Raleigh, and Thomas Harriot—has since fallen out of fashion.

[19] George Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, in *Poems*. On the epyllion and its popularity in this period see Elizabeth Story Donno, "The Epyllion," in *English Poetry and Prose, 1540-1674*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Sphere, 1986) pp. 82-100. For more on the poem's negotiation of its situation and its traditions see Frank Kermode, "The Banquet of Sense," in *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne: Renaissance Essays* (London: Routledge, 1971) pp. 84-115.

Marlowe's spirit but also downplayed the erotic sensuousness of the original fragment).[20]

Chapman's early poems are unique—even by the standards of the innovative literary culture of the English 1590s. They show an unparalleled level of metaphysical intensity and a tendency toward syntactic and imagistic torsion that is both impressive and irritating. To take but one of thousands of possible examples, consider the following stanza from *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*:

Here *Ovid* sold his freedom for a looke,

And with that looke was ten tymes more enthralled,

He blusht, lookt pale, and like a fervor shooke,

And as a burning vapor being exhaled

    Promist by *Phoebus* eye to be a star

Heavens walles denying to be further scalde

    The force dissolves that drewe it up so far:

And then it lightens against his death and fals

So Ovid's powre, this powerful sight appals.[21]

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[20] See *Hero and Leander*, in *Poems*. On Marlowe's poem and Chapman's continuation see C.S. Lewis, "Hero and Leander," in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp. 58-73.

[21] George Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, in *Poems*, p. 65.

Commentators on Chapman's poetic style have often tried to account for its difficulty by emphasizing the complexities of Chapman's imagery. Rosemond Tuve is typical here in describing Chapman's fondness for "introducing an unexpected logical complication into an image."[22] We see this quality in the stanza just quoted, particularly in the confusing image of vapor that Chapman puts forward in its later lines. But the difficulty and peculiarity of Chapman's poetic writing go way beyond its opaque images. Chapman's poetic obscurity is part of an overall poetic and rhetorical strategy, one characterized linguistically by a tendency toward asyndeton—toward what George Puttenham calls a "Loose Language" which "wants good band or coupling."[23] Trying to account for Chapman's peculiarity T.S. Eliot argued in the early twentieth century that Chapman stood alongside Donne, both exemplifying a metaphysical merger of meaning and sense that was possible in poetry before the later seventeenth-century "dissociation of sensibility."[24] But with all due respect to Eliot, the Donne/Chapman analogy is misleading. True, both poets share a tendency toward imagistic abstraction and syntactic contortion. But the rococo virtuosity of Donne's lyric is integrally linked to its limited intended audiences, coteries *au courant* in the same arcane learning that Donne himself was

[22] Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 267.

[23] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007) p. 259.

[24] See Eliot's famous essay/introduction "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1961) p. 296, where he crisply claims that in "Chapman especially there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what we find in Donne."

and who could thus be counted on to appreciate the ways in which he parlayed this learning into complex feats of poetic brilliance.[25] But Chapman is different. His poetry is written with a much different conception of authorship and audience in mind. Raymond Waddington (drawing on the work of Michael Murrin) calls this conception "allegorical": a model of authorship where the poet eschews the rhetorical back-and-forth of audience assumption and authorial articulation and instead "begins with an absolute truth, which creates a presentational dilemma; while he must protect his truth from the unworthy multitude by concealing it, he must conceal it in such a way as to reveal it to the few prepared to understand and accept."[26] And indeed Chapman's poetry, which hinges on a model of learning defined as

> …skill to throwe
>
> Reignes on your bodies powers, that nothing knowe;
>
> And fill the soules powers, so with act, and art,
>
> That she can curbe the bodies angrie part;
>
> All perturbations; all affects that stray

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[25] See Arthur Marotti, *John Donne*, *Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

[26] The critic is Raymond B. Waddington, and much of the above draws on his helpful account of Chapman's *nachleben* in the first chapter of his *The Mind's Empire: Myth and Form in Chapman's Narrative Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Waddington bases his distinction between allegorical and oratorical poetry on Michael Murrin's *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

> From their one obiect; which is to obay
>
> Her Soueraigne Empire… [27]

—a skill, he claims, that can be channeled by a "diuine discipline of Poesie" capable

of providing to a select few the "exceeding rapture of delight in the deepe search of

knowledge"—repeatedly demonstrates this understanding of authorship.[28] Anybody

familiar with Chapman's body of work—a body of work dotted with declarations

like

> Away, vngodly Vulgars, far away
>
> Flie ye prophane, that dare not view the day.[29]

and

> The Prophane multitude I hate, & onelie consecrate my strange Poems
>
> to these searching spirits, whom learning hath made noble…[30]

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[27] Chapman, *Euthymiae Raptus*, *or The Teares of Peace*, in *Poems*, p. 184.

[28] I am quoting here from the prefatory epistle to Matthew Royden, attached to Chapman's first volume of published poetry, *The Shadow of Night* (1594), printed in *Poems*, p. 19.

[29] George Chapman, *Andromeda Liberata*, in *Poems*, p. 305.

[30] George Chapman, Preface, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, in *Poems*, p. 49.

and whose individual texts are often are stuffed with a superabundance of scholarly self-assertion that makes Ben Jonson look like a paragon of lightly-worn learning—will have no trouble recognizing this allegorical idea of authorship at play throughout, from his early arcane poetry of the late 1590s all the way down through the mature poetry, translations, and tragedies.

Chapman's unique vision of poetic authorship, however, did not emerge in an historical vacuum. The relative decline of critical interest in Chapman's work over the last few decades is indicative of the fact that critics reading literature in terms of its social and political complexity find it difficult to historicize a writer whose work is obsessed with transcendent truths and whose writing almost always leads back to the same strikingly syncretic but ultimately unoriginal mélange of Platonism, Stoicism, and the other bits of hermetic lore popular among the educated classes of Renaissance Europe. But Chapman's attempts to fashion himself as a kind of oracular poet/sage are no less historically and socially situated than those of the period's other and more-examined "self-crowned laureates" (Spenser's Virgilian *rota*, Jonson's attempts to revive Horatian ethical perspective and sociability…).[31] Particularly, I would argue that Chapman's oracular poetic self-conception speaks to the specific political position he occupied and from which he wrote. It was a response to the social, economic, and political alienation that—like Marlowe and

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[31] See Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983); Patrick Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight*: *A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

other writers in similar social positions—Chapman's career embodied. For Marlowe

poetry's opposition to the political realm is fundamentally unjust. It is—to quote

these helpful lines again—the result of a primal disenfranchisement he imagined in

Hero and Leander's description of how

> … *Midas* brood shall sit in Honors chaire,
>
> To which the *Muses* sonnes are only heire:
>
> And fruitfull wits that in aspiring are,
>
> Shall discontent, run into regions farre;
>
> And few great lords in vertuous deeds shall joy
>
> But be surpris'd with every garish toy.
>
> And still inrich the loftie servile clowne,
>
> Who with incroching guile, keeps learning down.

> (475-82)

Chapman, by contrast, not only accepts the split between poetry and philosophy and

politics but uses it as a way of positing the superiority of poetry and learning to the

politically active world. For Chapman, poetry and learning are fundamentally

opposed to the world of policy. Take, for instance, these lines from an early stanza in

Ovid's Banquet of Sense:

'Tis for mere looke-like Ladies, and for men

To boast of birth that still be children,

Running to Father straight to helpe theyr needs;

True dignities and rites of reuerence,

Are sowne in minds and reapt in liuely deedes,

And onely pollicie makes difference

Twixt States, since virtue wants due intemperance…[32]

This skepticism toward the active life—an active life characterized, here, by unnatural division and the repression of virtue—continues and increases in intensity as Chapman's career goes on. Repeatedly in his later poetry Chapman uses policy to mark an experience of political alienation: a sense that no good can come of participation in collective life; that it is a degraded and inherently corrupt space where, as he writes in *The Tears of Peace* (1609),

… Actiue men, consume their whole lifes fire,

In thirst of State-height, higher still and higher,

(Like seeled Pigeons) mounting, to make sport,

To lower lookers on; in seeing how short

They come of that they seeke, and with what trouble;

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[32] Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet*, in *Poems*, pp. 75-76.

Lamely, and farre from Nature, they redouble

Their paines in flying, more then humbler witts,

To reach death, more direct. [33]

For Chapman, policy serves not just as a marker of political corruption. As these lines suggest, the term also functions as a kind of symbolic condensation of the political alienation and *ressentiment* that affected the entire social stratum he inhabited. Here, policy comes to mark a fundamentally negative political experience: a view of the collective realm as alienated, distant, a degraded sphere from which any value—poetic or philosophical—must be rigorously separated. But to understand the significance of this vision of politics and policy for Chapman's work—and, ultimately, to understand the uniqueness of how he treats the term in *Bussy D'Ambois*—we first need to establish what the term meant in the context in which Chapman wrote.

Contemporary senses of the term policy—"a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions … a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body," according to a recent redaction of *Webster's*—provide an almost perfect summary of

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[33] Chapman, *Tears of Peace*, in *Poems*, p. 182. Indeed, in a later patronage letter, when Chapman is forced by the rhetorical occasion to speak of a "true policy" that can make "men great and good" he *still* speaks of policy in the rather ambivalent image of a "serpent" who "windes" through "all Empery" (*Andromeda Liberata*, in *Poems*, p. 311).

a modern experience and understanding of the political. They point to the way in which modern political life is mediated by either representation or the institutional totality of the state, whose "formally unified" bureaucratic "guidance" (to quote Max Weber) the contemporary term policy marks.[34] However, from its initial appearance in English during the fourteenth century, policy marked a very different understanding and experience of the political: one that was profoundly *personalized* and lacking the mundane metaphysics of market, state, and representation that mediate and alienate modern political life. Policy was the art of governance. It was the area of human endeavor where members of the enfranchised elite—whether the monarch and the ruling aristocracy or the educated proto-middle class who advised and educated them—could realize "the potentialities of his inborn nature" by taking on the "responsibility appropriate to his status in the life of his community or country."[35] This positive sense of policy runs through much later-medieval and early-Tudor writing, from John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* to Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (to cite just a few examples).[36] And it continued into

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[34] For a foundational articulation of this modern political viewpoint, see Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. C. Wright Mills and Hans Heinrich Gerth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948) p. 89.

[35] Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1965) p. 166.

[36] See, e.g., John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* (London: Early English Text Society, 1901) 7.1680-87. On the language of policy and public participation in Middle English poetry generally, see Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum*, 53 (1978) p. 93. On policy in early Tudor humanism see, for instance, Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, where policy goes hand-in-hand with "prudence"—two technical abilities, on the part of governors, necessary to "bring the whole country to quietness and civility, that every man and so the whole, may at the last attain to such perfection as by nature is to the dignity of man due, which as it seemeth resteth in the communing of all

the later sixteenth century, where policy was still seen as the proper pursuit of an active life and defined as "the regiment of a cittie, or Common-wealth; and that which the Grecians call politicall gouernment."[37]

But in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, policy's significance also began to shift. Specifically, it started to signify the increasing sense of *separation* between a republican ethos of public participation and the constituted power of the state. The last two chapters have described this shift from the perspective of both Sidney's aristocratic milieu and Marlowe's world of "alienated intellectuals." What I want to emphasize here, however, is that policy came to mark a political vision—a political fantasy—that both these perspectives shared: an emergent experience and understanding of politics in terms of political ideologies of *arcana imperii* and *raison d'état* and their ethical emphases on constancy, prudence, and a politically charged inwardness of "reserving into a man's self a fair retreat" captured so memorably in Bacon's *Essays*.[38] This alienated view of the political often attached itself to the semi-fictional version of Machiavelli that circulated in the popular imaginary. Modern

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such virtues as to the dignity of man are convenient, to the profit of other, living togidder in civil life and politic; yea, and, as were, in the forming of other to their natural perfection" (Thomas Starkey, *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, ed. K. Burton [London: Chatto & Windus, 1948] p. 26).

[37] Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie* (London, 1586) p. 577.

[38] Francis Bacon, "Of Simulation and Dissimulation," in *Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 76. For more on the political-ideological shifts of the later Renaissance see Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and J.H. Salmon, "Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England," in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court,* ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

scholars have decisively dispelled this understanding of Machiavelli, and demonstrated how his bracing realpolitikal analyses were in fact made as part of an attempt to preserve this republican order.[39] But nevertheless the "distortions" Machiavelli's thought "was subjected to after his death" were part and parcel of the negative connotations the term "'policy' and its derivatives acquired in the course of the sixteenth century."[40] This negative version of policy had a long life. In the late seventeenth century, Philip Sidney's great nephew Algernon Sidney would complain that "not any word [is] more abused than that of policy"—abuse, he claims, that is grounded in the forgetting of the etymological fact that the *polis* from which it derives, in the Aristotelian formation, should be organized around the pursuit of a "happy human life" that follows from virtue; but the term also came to indicate political practice unmoored from any ethical norms.[41] And this fundamentally negative view of policy would be even more powerful during Chapman's historical moment, a moment where "'policy' and 'politic' came to be generally used as denoting cunning, and altogether amoral conduct based on expediency, deceitfulness,"[42] and where policy was often seen as being coequal with

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[39] See, e.g., Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, and Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1998).

[40] See Nicolai Rubinstein, "The History of the Word 'Politicus' in Early-Modern Europe," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 53.

[41] Algernon Sidney, *Court Maxims*, ed. H.W. Blom *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 24.

[42] Rubinstein, *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

what *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) described as a "pestilent Machiuilian policy."[43]

Such negative visions of policy, however, assume that the political amorality and alienation that it signifies are aberrations from the norms of civic virtue and a stable monarchical-republican political community. For Chapman, on the other hand, policy's state of exception becomes the norm. The term marks no longer the breakdown of proper political life but its dark, degraded essence. Chapman's espousal of this viewpoint is in a sense not surprising, given the moment when he began his literary career. Sidney and Marlowe began (and, in Sidney's case, ended) their literary careers in the 1570s and 80s, when the sense of political alienation and disenfranchisement we have already discussed was only starting to surface. But Chapman started off in the midst of the 1590s, a period when the increasing penury of the Elizabethan state and the authoritarianism of the crown and the Cecil faction as well as an increasing sense of social disequilibrium generated a profound and ubiquitous sense of pessimism.[44] The most notable symptom of such tensions was the Essex Revolt of 1601, which brought together a coalition of alienated aristocrats and alienated intellectuals.[45] But the very fact that Essex and his followers chose to

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[43] *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit*, ed. Daniel Allan Carroll (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1994) p. 80

[44] John Guy, "Introduction," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade,* ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 1 and Paul E.J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[45] See my discussion of Essex and his milieu in the introduction and previous chapters.

revolt in the first place is indicative of their continuing faith in the power of political action. Chapman, on the other hand, had a much darker vision of politics. Indeed, the singularity of this vision comes through in his own attempt to court Essex's patronage in the dedicatory epistle to the 1598 *Seauen bookes of the Iliades of Homere*. In this letter, Chapman starts off by predictably associating Essex with Homer's paradigmatic hero, Achilles. His way of making this comparison, however, is peculiar.

> Most true *Achilles* (whom by sacred prophecie *Homere* did but prefigure in his admirable object) and in whole unmatched vertues shyne the dignities of the soule, and the whole excellence of royall humanitie. Let not the Peasant-common polities of the world, that count all things servile and simple: that pamper not their own private sensualities, buying quick in their filthy sepulchers of earth, the whole bodies and soules of honor, virtue, and pietie: stirre your diuine temper from perseuerance in godlike pursute of Eternitie.[46]

The gap between the viewpoints of Essex and Chapman is revealing. Although Essex himself viewed politics from the perspective of the same activity-emphasizing honor culture we saw in Sidney's work, Chapman—even as he seeks the Earl's

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[46] Chapman, *Seauen,* A4[r].

patronage—cannot help revealing his own, fundamentally opposite belief in the fundamental *futility* of any and all attempts at immanently devoting oneself to the "peasant common" politics of the *vita activa*. Some of Chapman's critics have claimed that the political pessimism evident in his writing—particularly in the French tragedies—was an oblique response to the fall of Essex. [47] But here we see it even before this fall occurred. Even in the late 1590s, Chapman was already profoundly skeptical of any concrete, active politics. The ideal of heroism that Chapman tries to sell to Essex, here, looks less like the immanent "well-doing" we see in Sidney and more like the transcendent model of intellectual heroism evident in the work of Ficino, Pico, Bruno, and other Platonists and mystics.[48]

This passage also demonstrates a more complex relationship between immanent and transcendent models of the heroic than the Neo-Platonist thinkers put forward. For Chapman, transcendent heroism does not occur in isolation: its aesthetic power and intellectual ideality emerge only as part of a dialectical negation of the political world. Chapman's transcendent heroism, in other words, can only exist on the negated ruins of the immanent and degraded world of policy that he rejects. The passage just quoted stages this complicated relationship between

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[47] See Ide, *Ideas of Greatness*.

[48] On Chapman and Platonism see Jean Jacquot's *George Chapman (1559-1634), Sa Vie, Sa Poesie, Son Theatre, Sa Pensee* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951). For Bruno's version of intellectual heroism—published in late sixteenth-century England during his exile there—see *The Heroic Frenzies*, ed. and trans. Paul Eugene Memmo (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

immanence and transcendence, between policy and heroism, in miniature. In *Bussy D'Ambois*, however, Chapman elaborates it extensively and in dramatic form.

III

We can start our path toward Bussy by considering its setting. *Bussy D'Ambois* is set at the French court, and this fact is extremely significant for the play's perspective on heroism. As we saw a moment ago, when policy started to develop a sense of the corrupt practices of the political world it was often associated with Italy. Roger Ascham's *Schoolmaster* (1570), for instance, cautions against the young "liuing and traueling in Italie" because they might "bringeth home into England out of Italie, the Religion, the learning" and the "policie."[49] But by the end of the sixteenth century, and especially in the wake of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, France started to absorb many of Italy's negative associations. It was increasingly French rather than Italian settings that provided the fantasmatic screen on which English writers projected their bleak visions of political alienation.[50] Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* (c. 1593) is exemplary here. In the play, France provides a state of exception *par excellence*: it models the suspension of the traditional norms

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[49] Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967) p. 67.

[50] See J.H.M. Salmon, *The French Wars of Religion in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). An important agent in this imaginative move from Italy to France was, of course, Catherine de' Medici.

of political virtue.[51] And a similar attitude toward France and the French court hovers over *Bussy*'s first scene.

In our first encounter with Bussy Chapman very quickly associates him with an experience of political alienation. But Chapman's presentation of this experience is complex, contradictory, and mingles disaffection and *ressentiment* with a growing heroic impulse. This scene starts off the flat-out rejection of political life we have seen elsewhere in Chapman's work. Bussy's initial statements could come straight out of Chapman's anti-worldly poetry. But our first encounter with Bussy also reveals that the renunciation that Chapman stages in his poetry is, in practice, part and parcel of a more complex political experience—one caught between alienation and the impulse to act and participate in political life. *Bussy*'s first scene does not actually contain the word "policy," but it is nevertheless suffused by what the political ambivalences the term will, in the rest of the play, come to signify. As the first scene begins Bussy enters "poor." And indeed poverty and privation—in both political and economic senses—are the central leitmotifs of his first lines:

> Fortune, not Reason, rules the state of things,
>
> Reward goes backward, Honour on his head;
>
> Who is not poor, is monstrous; only Need

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[51] See the Guise's over-reaching description of his own "policye" in the opening scene of *The Massacre at Paris* in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). On Marlowe's play as staging a sort of state of sovereign exception see Graham Hammill, "Time for Marlowe," *ELH* 75, no. 2 (2008) pp. 291-314.

Gives form and worth to every human seed.

(1.1.1-4)

Chapman begins with a striking combination of the conventional and the subversive. His opening line parrots a classical commonplace—*vitam regit fortuna, non sapientia*—that can be traced back to Cicero and Plutarch and other ancient writers.[52]   But this cliché is quickly coupled with another, edgier argument. The contingency of the cosmos means anyone who manages to come out on top—anyone who is "not poor"—is *a priori* "monstrous."   In a world ruled by fortune, success is not just random; it implies corruption.   And this quick metaphysical conclusion leads Bussy to a startling political argument. "Honour," he claims is "on his head."

This line deserves some consideration. In the personalized political culture of the Renaissance honor was an immensely important concept. But its precise structure and significance in the period are also difficult to grasp from the vantage point of the contemporary west.[53] Thomas Hobbes provides some assistance here. In his *Elements of Law* (1640) Hobbes defines honor as a key symbolic place-holder within inter-subjective economies of respect and social cohesion. To "honour a man

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[52] See the notes in Brooke's edition, p. 155.

[53] On honor in the aristocratic culture of Renaissance England see Mervyn James, *Politics, Society and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness, and Honor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On honor culture more generally—and its modern decline—see James Bowman, *Honor: A History* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006).

(inwardly in the mind)" he writes, "is to conceive or acknowledge, that that man hath the odds or excess of power above him that contendeth or compareth himself."[54] In Bussy's speech, however, honor is defined as being *impossible* in a contemporary political environment of axiological inversion. Anything good, Bussy claims, can only be good insofar as it is thwarted; only insofar as it exists in opposition to the realm of the realm of the actual or—as Chapman calls it in a significant synecdoche—"reward."

Chapman's play, then, starts off with a statement of profound political alienation. But as Bussy's opening monologue goes on, the articulation of this alienation moves from the jumpy plain-style juxtaposition of *sententiae* to a more epic timbre and tone:

> As cedars beaten with incessant storms,
>
> So great men flourish; and do imitate
>
> Unskillful statuaries, who suppose
>
> (In forging a Colossus) if they make him
>
> Straddle enough, strut, and look big, and gape,
>
> Their work is goodly: so our tympanous statists
>
> (In their affected gravity of voice,

Sourness of countenance, manners' cruelty,

Authority, wealth, and all the spawn of Fortune)

Think they bear all the kingdom's worth before them;

Yet differ not from those colossic statues,

Which with heroic forms without o'erspread,

Within are ought but mortar, flint and lead.

(1.1.5-17)

Those who profit—those who are not poor, who reap the benefits of contingency—are inclined to forget the contingency of their own situations. In this way, they are like *colossi* of antiquity: their outward forms are "heroic," but such sparkling surfaces conceal a metaphysical insolvency. This insolvency is sharply suggested by Chapman's addition in *Bussy*'s second edition of the term "tympanous statists," an adjectival riff on the term tympany, which marked a swelling on the body, often as a result of pregnancy.[55] While monumentality is clearly the major metaphoric register in which this passage unfolds, this turn of phrase introduces another element: one of a clearly distasteful feminine fecundity that chimes with the long and already-noted mythographic tradition of associating fortune's contingency with feminine fickleness.[56] Here, however, the political coordinates of this association are quite

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[55] See Brooke's gloss.

[56] See Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*.

specific. Fortune's tympany is tied to the state insofar as it is attributed to those ("statists") who rise through manipulating it, to those who dwell in the political realm and profit from policy.[57]

Bussy strongly opposes himself to such people in his subsequent claim that

… when we wander furthest through the waves

Of glassy Glory and the gulfs of State,

Topp'd with all titles, spreading all our reaches,

As if each private arm would sphere the world;

We must to Virtue for her guide resort,

Or we shall shipwrack in our safest Port.

(1.1.28-33)

In our earlier discussion of Sidney we saw in his writing an aristocratic honor culture where virtue marked not only moral good behavior but "the possession of divinely endowed gifts and powers," "properties" that, "if cultivated by education" could "carry the authority of example and … change the world."[58] Here, however, virtue marks a *renunciation* of a dynamic link between individual human capacity and the surrounding world: a stoic withdrawal into *apatheia* and self-governance. It

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[57] See OED, s.v. "statist," 1a.

[58] Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia' and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 22.

is the interiority necessary to navigate the alienated "gulfs of state" Bussy invokes. Oceanic imagery (which recurs with surprising frequency in Chapman's play, and to which I will return below) is associated with the implied femininity of the political realm, the mutability of policy; with a vision of collective life as the zone of an almost Boethian *fortuna.* The solution, however, is not to tame it. It is to withdraw.

At the start of Chapman's play, then, Bussy positions himself in a direct, alienated opposition to the political realm. Much like Chapman's philosophical poetry, Bussy expresses the kind of absolute political alienation that Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, called "unhappy consciousness" (*unglückliche Bewusstsein*). This stage of experience (*Erfahrung*) encompasses the bondage of individuals to collective forces beyond them and produces a flight into the "pure universality of thought."[59] For Hegel, such a withdrawal from the world, such an alienation is evidenced in the various schools of ethical and metaphysical thinking that dominated later antiquity: cynicism, skepticism, and, above all, the stoicism that Bussy implicitly invokes in these lines. In Chapman, however, we see not only this particular state of alienated political experience in terms of abstract ethical doctrine. We also see its link to centralized and alienated state-form insofar as Bussy opposes himself to "statists."

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[59] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. N. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 115.

But as Hegel realized, political experience is never stable: it is always riddled with complexities and contradictions that push it dialectically forward into new forms.[60] Chapman's play proves this true. As the first scene continues, Bussy moves from a political experience of absolute alienation into an increasingly active orientation toward collective life. This starts when we meet Monsieur, the King's malcontented brother who has sought out Bussy and wants to recruit him into his retinue at court. Monsieur wants to set himself up to take the throne when the time comes. As a result, wants "resolved spirits" to be in his service (1.1.44). Thus he has

> ... follow'd D'Ambois to this green retreat;
>
> A man of spirit beyond the reach of fear,
>
> Who (discontent with his neglected worth)
>
> Neglects the light, and loves obscure abodes;
>
> But he is young and haughty, apt to take
>
> Fire at advancement, to bear state and flourish…

(1.1.45-50)

Monsieur's quick take on Bussy's character acknowledges the alienation we have earlier seen him exhibit earlier. But it also puts this alienation in a different—and

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[60] For Hegel's account of experience see Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

more contradictory—light. According to Monsieur, Bussy's disaffection is a result of his experience of a split between his own sense of inner potentiality, of inner "worth," and how it has been outwardly recognized. Bussy seems like he is giving up *any* notion of worldly worth in his opening lines: though a "man of spirit" he "neglects the light and loves obscure abodes." "But," Monsieur says, some part of Bussy is still compelled to an active life of "virtuous deeds, by which we live" (1.1.81). The adversative ("but") is important here: it points to something that is not yet put forward in Bussy's initial speech—a contradictory element of his political experience of alienation.

Monsieur subtly shifts the meaning of virtue, and this subtle shift in the sense of the term "virtue" predicts the way in which he will turn out to be right about Bussy. Bussy, at first, justifies his decision to enter into Monsieur's service and go to court in terms of reform. He wants to "bring up a new fashion / And rise in Court with virtue" (1.1.125-6). He is, he also claims, "for honest actions, not for great" (1.1.124), a "smooth plain ground" that will "never nourish any politic seed" (1.1.123). But this sense of alienated virtue is quickly replaced by an attraction to the "light" of active life, which, as Monsieur puts it,

> Not only serves to shew, but render us
>
> Mutually profitable: so our lives
>
> In acts exemplary not only win

Ourselves good Names, but doth to others give

Matter for virtuous Deeds, by which we live.

(1.1.77-82)

Monsieur's statement here is a fairly standard assertion of the priority of the life of action to the life of contemplation, the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa*.[61] Considered in the broader context of Chapman's writing, however, his use of the imagery of light makes these lines a highly ambiguous and ambivalent moment. Chapman's first published poem—the "Hymnus in Noctem" included in the 1594 *Shadow of Night* volume—hinges on the idea that night is metaphysically superior to the day. Daytime's "whoredome of … painted light," Chapman argues, signals the false worldly enmeshment of sensuality and political participation. Night, on the other hand, is a "tender fortresse of our woes"—it is coequal with a contemplative, speculative retreat from the contingencies and inequities of the material world.[62] The passage into light is not into illumination. Rather, it entails taking on the contradictions, distortions, and perversions of the material world.

Such an attitude toward the active life is foregrounded at the tail end of *Bussy*'s first scene. After Bussy agrees to serve Monsieur and is promised money for

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[61] On the history of this opposition in classical and early modern thought see Nikolaus Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967). For a sixteenth-century English example of the elevation of the active over the contemplative life see Starkey, *Dialogue*, pp. 62-3.

[62] Chapman, "Hymnus in Noctem," in *Shadow of Night,* in *Poems*, p. 23.

his service, we encounter an initial outburst of aggressive dyspepsia when he attacks Maffé, the servant Monsieur sends to deliver the payment. Maffé is, understandably, skeptical of his master's elevation of this seemingly marginal figure to a prominent place in his service, opining about the fickle "Humour of Princes" (1.1.140). But when he expresses the slightest hint of skepticism and sarcasm in his dialogue with Bussy, Bussy immediately takes an almost Achillean offense, proclaiming himself to be a "scholar" and a "soldier" (1.1.182). In this initial scene—in other words—a rift starts to surface between a vision of Bussy in terms of political ideals of action and reform and his actual behavior. And this gap between Bussy's self-perceptions (and the perceptions of others) and his petty and violent behavior becomes only more striking in the subsequent scene, when Bussy arrives at court with his new master. Initially, Bussy is presented to King Henry as a "Gentleman t'attend you" (1.2.57). Their first exchange, however, is significant:

Henry.　　　I have expected th'offer of your service;

　　　　　　For we (in fear to make mild Virtue proud)

　　　　　　Use not to seek her out in any man.

Buss.　　　Nor doth she use to seek out any man:

　　　　　　He that will win, must woo her; she's not shameless.

(1.2.62-67)

Here Bussy moves from a passive to an active model of virtue. He earlier adhered to a passive, stoic model of virtue to navigate the "Gulfs of State." But now, face to face with the monarch himself, he drops this model of virtue, embracing, instead, a more *active* model of virtue, which is presented here vis-à-vis the (Machiavellian) trope of gendered conquest.

IV

In the early scenes of *Bussy D'Ambois*, then, we see two threads that will become increasingly prominent as the play goes on. On the one hand, Chapman reiterates the anti-worldly, anti-political, and profoundly *alienated* perspective of his poetry, introducing a strain of political skepticism that will persist in the play's background noise and eventually return in full force at its conclusion. But on the other hand he also presents heroism as existing in a relationship to political life that is far more complex than simple renunciation. Heroism is a fantasy of political selfhood and political being opposing itself to the political *vita activa*: we see this in the heroism of stoic *apatheia* that Bussy espouses in the play's very first lines. Heroism, however, is also drawn irresistibly to political activity and enmeshment— toward what we have been referring to as a dynamic ideal of political experience, in which collective life is a venue for individual virtue and becoming.

Heroism's ambiguous capacity to capture both alienation and the desire to overcome it runs through the rest of *Bussy D'Ambois*, as the play moves beyond Bussy himself to catalogue the multiple perspectives various court figures take on him, to catalogue the various fantasies and scattered sorts of political experience whose screen he becomes. This is evident, for instance, in the subsequent action of the second scene. Here, after Bussy's dialogue with the king (and some rather aggressive flirtation with the wife of the the Guise) one of the courtiers on stage notes sarcastically: "Here's a sudden transmigration with D'Ambois, out of the Knights' ward, into the Duchess' bed" (1.2.116). Knights' wards were parts of contemporary prisons where higher-ranking inmates received preferred treatment while being held (often for private debts), and this imputation of poverty is made even sharper by the fact that it comes from a low-level courtier who (unlike the royals with whom he has just parlayed) is Bussy's equal. "See what a metamorphosis a brave suit can work" another comments (1.1.117). For his social equals, then, from their perspective, Bussy is little more than an upstart. In their view of the events they have just seen—his presentation to the king, the patronage he has received from a high-ranking nobleman—he falls into that class of aspiring courtiers Chapman had helped to parody in *Eastward, Ho!* (1605).[63]

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[63] See George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston, *Eastward Ho*, in *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies*, ed. James Knowles et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Chapman, however, is less concerned in this scene with undercutting Bussy's own view of himself than with staging the sheer multiplicity of possible perspectives on the protagonist. And such multiplicity is once again made clear by way of violence as Bussy realizes he is being mocked by his fellow courtiers and subsequently slays several of them in a brawl. Chapman presents this conflict in 1.2., as a petty fight between the hired hangers-on and thugs of the French court's aristocratic grandees. But it appears in a different—a much different—light at the start of the second act when a character identified only as a "nuncius" comes to King Henry and informs him of the brawl that has just occurred. The use of the term "nuncius" to designate this particular figure is significant: it plunges a reader of the playtext into the dramatic realm of Senecan closet tragedy. And a sense of both linguistic grandeur and Seneca's own herculean model of heroism is everywhere in the nuncius' subsequent description of the fight that has just occurred. Consider the following examples:

> What Atlas, or Olympus lifts his head
>
> So far past covert, that with air enough
>
> My words may be inform'd? And from his height
>
> I may be seen, and heard through all the world?
>
> A tale so worthy, and so fraught with wonder,
>
> Sticks in my jaws, and labors with event.

(2.1.25-30)

> When face to face the three defendants met them,
>
> Alike prepar'd, and resolute alike,
>
> Like bonfires of contributory wood…

(42-44)

> But D'Ambois' sword (that light'ned as it flew)
>
> Shot like a pointed Comet at the face
>
> Of manly Barrisor; and there it stuck:
>
> Thrice pluck'd he at it, and thrice drew on thrusts …

(81-4)

This speech is one of the odder moments in Chapman's play: it is uncharacteristically ornate, and goes on for nearly a hundred lines. But the overall effect is clear enough: the messenger's description is deliberately dissonant and seems designed to remind the reader/auditor that the play is presenting two distinct perspectives on Bussy, two distinct fictional and dramatic domains. It is an impressive rhetorical accomplishment. But anyone who has just seen the back-and-forth between Bussy and the other courtiers cannot help remain aware of the gap between heroic vehicle and humble tenor.

Chapman's striking dramatic double-take on Bussy's brawl with his fellow courtiers thus expands upon an emphasis introduced in the play's first act. It reiterates the way that, for Bussy, heroism models and captures a political experience caught ambivalently between stoic withdrawal and an active, almost Herculean engagement in worldly action. But it also introduces another key concern throughout the rest of the play: the way in which Bussy himself becomes a figurant for various sorts of political experience and indeed political desire on the part of various other characters in Chapman's play. *Bussy D'Ambois* presents heroism as a multiplicity of experiences, a multiple fantasmatic structure that can accommodate a whole range of political positions within the corrupted and bleak world of the French court.

This attitude toward heroism becomes even clearer in the subsequent scene where Bussy has to own up to the murders he has committed in his brawl with his fellow courtiers. These murders are, of course, illegal. But as his patron the Monsieur intercedes with the King and manages to secure a pardon. This pardon, presented as a voluntary royal beneficence, is, however, not good enough for Bussy. He manages to convince the King that his own heroic valor positions himself fundamentally *outside* the law; that Henry should not just *pardon* him, but

> Let me be King myself (as man was made)
>
> And do justice that exceeds the law:

> If my wrong pass the power of single valour
>
> To right and expiate; then be you my King,
>
> And do a Right, exceeding Law and Nature:
>
> Who to himself is law, no law doth need,
>
> Offends no King, and is a King indeed.

> (2.1.198-204)

It would be possible to read Bussy's declaration of his own heroic autarky as simple hyperbolic flourish. What is being evoked here, however, is a more significant set of political and ethical and heroic ideas that will haunt Chapman's play. The notion that monarchy emerged, historically, out of the surrender of some sort of primal sovereignty is often associated with the bleak and brutal fantasy of Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes*.[64] But although it became famous through Hobbes' elaboration, it was a notion of very long standing, reflected in the work of various earlier writers. Fulke Greville, for instance, wrote in his *Inquisition upon Fame and Honour* about how "[f]rom which Cras'd womb of frailty was brought forth, / A Giant Creature in excess of Might, / To work in all with every pow'r but worth."[65] However, while Greville's notorious pessimism anticipates Hobbes, this notion of primal, pre- or extra-governmental autarky was often spun in more *positive* terms. It is often

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[64] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 89.

[65] Fulke Greville, *Inquisition upon Fame and Honour*, in *Certaine Learned and Elegant Workes of the Right Honorable Fulke Lord Brooke* (London, 1633) p. 64.

associated with the idea of a natural, prelapsarian purity that connected easily with

the classical concept of the "heroic age." In the introduction, we saw this sense of

heroism running through Aristotle's treatment of both Hector's "heroic virtue" and

the troubling figure of the "great-souled man" whose greatness excludes him from

the life of the *polis*. For Aristotle, both these instances are politically threatening—but

they are also aesthetically, poetically, and imaginatively appealing.[66] For Aristotle,

in other words, a primal heroic virtue is poetically powerful precisely because it is

politically impossible: it is a fantasy whose appeal derives precisely from its

opposition to the drabber and more institutional norms of political life. And, *mutatis*

mutandis, a similar attitude is attributed by Chapman to the French King. He grants

Bussy his request, and later defends Bussy to the Guise, in the following terms:

>   … I wonder
>
> Your equal disposition brooks so ill
>
> A man so good, that only would uphold
>
> Man in his native noblesse, from whose fall
>
> All our dissensions rise; that in himself
>
> (Without the outward patches of our frailty,
>
> Riches and honour) knows he comprehends

---

[66] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) 1145a and Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 1253a; 1284a 3-16. See also the discussion of classical heroic concepts in the introduction.

Worth with the greatest: Kings had never borne

Such boundless eminence over other men,

Had all maintain'd the spirit and state of D'Ambois…

(3.2.88-97)

The key term here is "worth." For the King, Bussy presents a fantasmatic vision of value, of greatness. The passage begins by situating such worth on an outward, sensorily-available level: the King wonders why the Guise does not admire a "man so good." Worth, however, quickly moves inward: according to the King, Bussy's greatness is based not just on his appearance to others; it is based on his own ability to recognize, reflexively, worth "in himself." It is *this* (inner) sense of *dynamic* potentiality that grounds his heroism, that makes Bussy superior to the King and Guise and the other members of the aristocracy. Their honors and positions are actually "*outward* patches of our frailty," a frailty based precisely on their outwardness. Bussy, by contrast, by looking inward, and recognizing his own dynamic potentiality, "comprehends / Worth with the greatest."

V

In the opening acts of Chapman's play, then, Bussy moves from embodying a heroism of stoic withdrawal to embodying a heroism of dynamic worldly participation, valor, and value. But while his is the dominant attitude toward

heroism and its attendant political experience for both Bussy and King Henry early in the play, Chapman subsequently goes on to profoundly problematize this heroic vision. In the later acts, Bussy's own actions, attitude, and expressed political experience, become more and more contradictory and ambiguous. As we have already seen, Bussy starts off wanting to enforce virtue. When the Monsieur first makes his offer in the play's first scene, Bussy describes himself as:

> … a smooth plain ground
>
> Will never nourish any politic seed;
>
> I am for honest actions, not for great:
>
> If I may bring up a new fashion,
>
> And rise in Court with virtue, speed his plough…
>
> (1.1.122-26)

But by the start of the play's third act this adherence to virtue has significantly shifted. Bussy initially extols this active model of virtue by way of the metaphorical, Machiavellian conquest of fortune by virtue. However, he subsequently transforms and literalizes this dynamic drive this into the active pursuit of inappropriate sexual behavior toward Guise's wife. He goes further as the play continues, beginning an affair with Tamyra, the wife of a prominent aristocrat named Montsurry. When Tamyra expresses some guilt over her infidelity, he dismisses such concerns in terms

that suggest a significant alteration in the consequences of Bussy's own dynamic sense of his own "worth." We have already quoted this dismissal, but it is worth examining again:

> Sin is a coward Madam, and insults
>
> But on our weakness, in his truest valour:
>
> And so our ignorance tames us, that we let
>
> His shadows fright us: and like empty clouds
>
> In which our faulty apprehensions forge
>
> The forms of dragons, lions, elephants
>
> When they hold no proportion, the sly charms
>
> Of the witch Policy make him like a monster
>
> Kept only to shew men for Goddess Money.

(3.1.18-26)

This statement suggests not just a departure from Bussy's ostensible heroic moral purity at the start of the play. It also represents an important rupture with an earlier element of Chapman's presentation of his protagonist: Bussy's firm critical sense of the inequities and inequalities of French society, and his various critiques of how "great men" use their "greatness" to "bombast[…]" their "private roofs, with public riches" (3.2.27). In his moments of social critique, Bussy is particularly focused on

excoriating the "Protean law" that can be manipulated by "great men" who, along with their lawyers, turn "sacred Law / … Into a Harpy, that eats all but 's own" (3.2.49-54). In making such statements, Bussy decisively positions himself in opposition to policy, juxtaposing his own sense of valor, honor, and heroic worth with the degradations of actual political life. For Chapman, as one critic writes, policy marks the "the triumph of lawless appetite over traditional norms of social and ethical behavior."[67] But while Bussy's own experience of his valor, potentiality and worth is *opposed* to such a version of policy, his increasing fall into an amoral dismissal of *any* constraint on his desires shows that he himself is sliding into policy's purview.

This is not lost on the play's other characters. Although the King himself is blind—wanting to make Bussy something like the specter of Alexander the Great that Faustus summons up for the Holy Roman Emperor in Marlowe's play—Monsieur sees through Bussy's front. In a key moment, he verbally attacks Bussy, sarcastically undercutting Bussy's pretensions of heroic autarky and casting him as a brutal animal who is both beneath human norms but also inextricably bound up with the policy that he outwardly excoriates:

I think thee then a man

---

[67] Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961) p. 51.

That dares as much as a wild horse or tiger;

As headstrong and as bloody; and to feed

The ravenous wolf of thy most Cannibal valour

(Rather than not employ it), thou would'st turn

Hackster to any whore, slave to a Jew

Or English usurer, to force possessions

(And cut men's throats) of mortgaged estates;

Or thou wouldst tire thee like a tinker's wife

And murder market folks; quarrel with sheep,

And run as mad as Ajax…

(3.2.336-46)

Bussy's supposed heroic virtue is reduced here to an almost bestial "daring." His supposedly sacred heroic valor and virtue—which, earlier, he implicitly opposes to the rapacity of noblemen and lawyers who would eat all but their "own" (3.2.54)—is revealed as its own form of cannibalism, equally enmeshed with the compromised corruptions of self-interested political existence. Monsieur's final reference to Ajax, here, is also significant. For Ajax, of course, is the major classical exemplar of heroic valor become animal savagery. Monsieur, however, in these lines, is not just criticizing Bussy's animal attitude toward his fellow men, however. He is also

suggesting that Bussy's whole experience of his own heroic singularity is contradictory:

> … in thy valour th' art like other naturals,
>
> That have strange gifts in nature, but no soul
>
> Diffus'd quite through to make them of a piece,
>
> But stop at humours that are more absurd,
>
> Childish and villainous than a huckster, whore,
>
> Slave, cut'throat, tinker's bitch, compar'd before.
>
> (3.2.347-53)

As the awkward internal reference in this passage's last line suggests, Monsieur comes back around to his initial point, and drives home the claim that Bussy is utterly lacking in the (dynamic) autarky he pretends to possess. Bussy, Monsieur emphasizes, is hardly an embodiment of autarkous heroic virtue: protected by the king as his favorite, he is no more elevated than any of the other "mountebanks" and "painted bawd[s]" that populate the French court (3.2.361).

Chapman's play, then, manages to maintain two perspectives on Bussy. For Bussy himself, and for others (the King, Tamyra) he is the apogee of a heroic fantasy hinging on a dynamic mode of political experience. However, what the play *seems* to promise at its outset, a "moral theater of disguise and discovery" in which "Bussy

will play the role of the courtier in order to search out vice and, by purging it, to reform the enchanted glass of the court," conspicuously fails to materialize: as Robert Ornstein writes, "[h]aving made the initial compromise to enter the fallen world, Bussy has not only been entangled by it but increasingly has become a representative citizen of it. He has been corrupted by society, but the defective nature of his heroic spirit, inspiring a blind heroic idealism, has itself been an accomplice in that corruption."[68]

The rest of Chapman's play demonstrates this. Bussy's affair with Montsurry's wife is discovered, and Tamyra is (brutally) tortured until she sets up Bussy for assassination by the newly-minted alliance of her husband, Guise, and Monsieur. Meanwhile, Bussy—as he discovers, and prepares to confront this plot—becomes more and more explicit about his acceptance of the policy he had initially scorned and still seems to hold himself above:

> I'll soothe his plots: and strew my hate with smiles
>
> Till all at once the close mines of my heart
>
> Rise at full date, and rush into his blood:
>
> I'll bind his arm in silk, and rub his flesh
>
> To make the vein swell, that his soul may gush
>
> Into some kennel, where it longs to lie,

---

[68] Ide, *Ideas of Greatness*, p. 89.

And policy shall be flank'd with policy.

<div align="right">(4.2.155-61; my emphasis)</div>

In what reads like a brutal version of anti-court satire so frequent in the early seventeenth century, Bussy claims he will "sooth" (i.e. flatter, go along with) the Monsieur's plots, hiding his hate under "smiles." He then moves into a military metaphor, of the mines that sappers dig under a wall, during a siege, which will eventually explode, that is, "rise at full date." The scene of projected torture that follows is a sharp contrast with his earlier condemnation of great men. He is, now, fully enmeshed in policy.

<div align="center">

VI

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Chapman's play presents us with an experience of the heroic that is multiple, based in both Bussy's fantasies about himself and the fantasies that other characters project onto him. In doing this, *Bussy D'Ambois* suggests that heroism is both contradictory as a direct mode of experience and self-conceptualization and is deeply problematic in a contemporary world. Heroism—as a way of understanding oneself and a way of seeing the world—fails throughout the play to work. Bussy can declaim his separation from policy but, ultimately, he cannot escape it. From the moment he passes out of the play's preliminary darkness into the unflattering light of the *vita activa*, the impossibility of Bussy's heroic aspirations is again and again

made clear. Throughout the play, we see a growing gap between how Bussy sees the events unfolding around him and how they actually ("objectively") appear within the play. The final scene provides a kind of culminating elaboration of this growing gap and of its bleak implications for the virtuality and impossibility of heroism.

This scene falls into two parts. In the first, Monsieur and Guise pause to consider Bussy's character, shortly before their assassination of him is set to be carried out. Earlier, we saw Monsieur taking a rather hard line on Bussy—dressing-down his "cannibal valour." But now his attitude is markedly different:

> Now shall we see, that Nature hath no end
>
> In her great works, responsive to their worths,
>
> That she who makes so many eyes, and souls,
>
> To see and foresee, is stark blind herself:
>
> And as illiterate men say Latin prayers
>
> By rote of heart, and daily iteration;
>
> In whose hot zeal, a man would think they knew
>
> What they ran so away with, and were sure
>
> To have rewards proportion'd to their labours;
>
> Yet may implore their own confusions
>
> For anything they know, which oftentimes
>
> It falls out they incur: so Nature lays

A mass of stuff together, and by use,

Or by the mere necessity of matter,

Ends such a work, fills it, or leaves it empty

Of strength, or virtue, error or clean truth;

Not knowing what she does;

(5.3.1-17)

Monsieur's initial reflections frame Nature as a site of contingency. It lacks an "end"—an organic organization in which the inner potentialities of things progressively and rationally unfold into the realm of the actual. Instead, Nature is aleatory and encompasses a profound disjuncture between essential virtue and entelecheia. The very philosophical—largely Aristotelian—metaphysical bases of a dynamic model of political experience are being demolished in this passage. The spirit of Montaigne (with his dismissal of an enchanted, ordered nature, and of the essential unfolding of human virtue) seems to hover over Monsieur's words as he elaborates both a general, alternate metaphysic and moves in to focus more specifically on how this is relevant to Bussy. Nature, he goes on to claim,

… usually

Gives that which we call merit to a man

(And believe should arrive him on huge riches,

Honour and happiness), that effects his ruin;

Right as in ships of war, whole lasts of powder

Are laid (men think) to make them last, and guard them:

When a disorder'd spark that powder taking,

Blows up with sudden violence and horror

Ships that kept empty, had sail'd long with terror.

(5.3.18-25)

The idea that merit, worth, virtue, potentiality must and will be actualized is once again rejected here. Indeed, when read in the broader context of Chapman's play, these lines see Monsieur coming implicitly back to the initial, alienated political perspective articulated by Bussy in the first scene. In this early scene Monsieur reflected that

There is no second place in numerous State

That holds more than a cipher: in a King

All places are contain'd. His words and looks

Are like the flashes and the bolts of Jove,

His deeds inimitable, like the sea

That shuts still as it opes, and leaves no tracts,

Nor prints of precedent for poor men's facts.

(1.1.34-41)

But now, as the play nears its end, he comes back to this perspective and sees in Bussy's fate evidence of the lack of purposiveness of nature. Monsieur clearly admires Bussy as a fantasmatic object. But he also sees that the flipside of the fantasy of heroism he embodies (for himself and others) is impossibility:

> Young, learned, valiant, virtuous, and full mann'd;
>
> One on whom Nature spent so rich a hand,
>
> That, with an ominous eye, she wept to see
>
> So much consum'd her virtuous treasury;
>
> Yet, as the winds sing through a hollow tree,
>
> And (since it lets them pass through) let it stand;
>
> But a tree solid, since it gives no way
>
> To their wild rages, they rend up by th'root:
>
> So this full creature now shall reel and fall,
>
> Before the frantic puffs of purblind Chance.

(5.3.37-47)

The puffing of chance, he says, "pipes through empty men, and makes them dance" (5.3.48). But now Bussy has become "full" in this very sense. He has come to be one of the *colossi* he earlier critiqued, one of those men who

> … differ not from those colossic statues,
>
> Which with heroic forms without o'erspread
>
> Within are bought but mortar, flint, and lead.

Monsieur's realizations and philosophical statements in the *first* part of the final scene of *Bussy D'Ambois* set up an important dramaturgical move that Chapman makes in the scene's second segment, where we see Bussy's death and final words. Here Chapman provides a culminating vision of the heroic as simultaneously a poetically powerful fantasy—an ideal embodiment of human capacity—and a profoundly problematic concept vis-à-vis the harsh realities of political existence. He does this by creating another parallelism between the play's first and last scenes—this one not only thematic but dramaturgical.

Many scholars have noted that early modern drama was not only narrative but also "spatial and emblematic" in method.[69] Such an emblematic mode of theatrical practice is evident at the start of Chapman's play, in his implicit reference to the long tradition, emblematic and textual, of Herculean heroism. The opening

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[69] Emyrs Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 32.

scene—with Bussy oscillating between darkness and light, between contemplative and active—invokes the famous emblematic scene of the "choice of Hercules" where Hercules, in a verdant retreat like the one that Bussy inhabits, is portrayed as choosing between the active, contemplative, and sensual lives—represented, respectively, by light and dark.[70] Hercules, of course, decides to move into the light of activity—as does Bussy. But while Hercules' own decision leads to his foundational heroic labors, Bussy's turns out to lead him not into the glorious luminosity of the heroic *vita activa* but rather into the darkness and degradation that Chapman, throughout his poetry, saw as typical of engaged political existence. As he says, realizing this, soon after he is shot by Monsieur's assassins:

> … is my body then
>
> But penetrable flesh? And must my mind
>
> Follow my blood? Can my divine part add
>
> No aid to th' earthly in extremity?
>
> Then these divines are but for form, not fact:
>
> Man is of two sweet courtly friends compact;
>
> A mistress and a servant: let my death
>
> Define life nothing but a Courtier's breath.
>
> Nothing is made of nought, of all things made;

---

[70] Braunmuller, p. 41.

Their abstract being a dream but of a shade.

I'll not complain to earth yet, but to heaven,

And (like a man) look upwards even in death.

(5.3.125-36)

Bussy decisively returns to his bleak, semi-stoic withdrawal from the world; to his initial acknowledgment of the vacuity of worldly existence. But while earlier this had led to been embodied by the stage direction of laying down ("he lies down"), here Bussy insists on *standing*, citing the classical precedent of Emperor Vespasian.

And if Vespasian thought in majesty

An Emperor might die standing, why not I?

She offers to help him

Nay without help, in which I will exceed him;

For he died splinted with his chamber grooms.

Prop me, true sword, as thou hast ever done:

The equal thought I bear of life and death,

Shall make me faint on no side; I am up

Here like a Roman statue; I will stand

Till death hath made me marble: O my fame

Live in despite of murder: take thy wings

And haste thee where the gray-ey'd Morn perfines

Her rosy chariot with Sabaean spices;

(137-48)

As in the first scene, Bussy calls here on a stoic ethos, describing himself as being "equal thought … of life and death." But he significantly differs from his initial presentation insofar as he *embraces* his status as a powerful but ultimately empty heroic colossus, a "heroic figure," while at the same time acknowledging the human weakness and frailty that undercuts the heroic ideal.

O frail condition of strength, valour, virtue,

In me like warning fire upon the top

Of some steep beacon, on a steeper hill;

Made to express it like a falling star

Silently glanc'd—that like a thunderbolt

Look'd to have stuck, and shook the firmament.

(188-93)

Bussy has become (and recognizes himself to have become) an exemplum of a heroism that is no longer possible, a bleak anagnorisis that is further reiterated in the concluding choral remark provided by the ghost of the Friar who earlier provided a

go-between for Bussy and his mistress Tamyra but here serves a kind of choral function:

> Farewell brave relicts of a complete man:
>
> Look up and see thy spirit made a star,
>
> Join flames with Hercules: and when thou set'st
>
> Thy radiant forehead in the firmament,
>
> Make the vast continent, crak'd with thy receipt
>
> Spread to a world of fire: and th' aged sky,
>
> Cheer with new sparks of old humanity.
>
> (5.3.268-74)

The friar's final description of Bussy provides a kind of parting précis of the whole play. Bussy, he claims, is an embodiment of human possibility and perfection. A "complete man," he warrants comparison to the classical super-antecedent of Hercules. But Bussy's Herculean impressiveness—his "join"-ing together with Hercules—occurs only in his post-death elevation into a constellation. Post-mortem monumentality, in other words, is indissociable from Bussy's elevation into being a heroic ideal, from his embodiment of what is best about "old humanity." Chapman's choice of language here is significant. Throughout his plays and poems Chapman uses the notion of an "old humanity" to signify the primeval, prelapsarian purity

that human beings innately possess, before they are compromised and corrupted by the soiled policy of the current world.[71] In an early sonnet printed along with *Ovid's Banquet*, for example, he writes of a kind of a pure philosophical love that can teach "by passion"

> … what perfection is,
>
> In whose fixt beauties shine the sacred scroules
>
> And long-lost records of your *humane* blisse[72]

In the much-later *The Tears of Peace* (1609) the allegorical personification of Peace evokes this ideal again, rhetorically asking

> … who is it can denie,
>
> That the rich crowne of ould Humanitie,
>
> Is still your birth-right?[73]

In both these examples, and in countless others, Chapman uses the notion of humanity to signify the deepest potentialities of human being. But in the real world

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[71] See Battenhouse, "Chapman and the Nature of Man," pp. 87-88.

[72] George Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet, Coronet,* in *Poems*, p. 83; my emphasis.

[73] George Chapman, *Euthymiae Raptus, or, The Tears of Peace*, in *Poems*, p. 185.

that the plays (rather than the poems) represent, a world crisscrossed by corruption and policy, this humanity can only exist as an extra-worldly ideal. The play begins with Bussy striking a Herculean posture of withdrawal from the active life. It ends with the transposition of the active heroic ideal into a paradoxical place where it is both aesthetically exemplary and practically impossible.

Chapman, in short, ends his play by hinting at the poetico-political (im)possibility of heroism. He concludes by gesturing at heroism's simultaneous status as an aesthetic ideal and an impossible political task. But while Chapman would continue to grapple with the complexities of this impossible heroism in his subsequent plays and poems and translations I want, in the final chapter of this dissertation, to turn elsewhere. I want to turn, instead, to another writer—a writer for whom the simultaneous appeal and impossibility of heroism is not a paradox but a point of departure. This writer is Shakespeare, and the play I want to examine is *Macbeth*.

Chapter 4

Shakespeare's Ecstasy

I

Reading *Macbeth* as a heroic play might seem, at first glance, like an odd critical gesture. When one thinks of Shakespeare and heroism the Scottish play does not usually spring to mind—and with good reason. *Macbeth* lacks overt heroic themes and posturing, an absence that stands in sharp contrast to most of the other tragic plays Shakespeare penned around the same time. *Hamlet*, for instance, is haunted by heroism: the prince negatively compares both himself and his uncle to Herculean strength and decisiveness.[1] Othello is quite explicitly set up as a heroic figure who woos his future bride Desdemona with stories of "battles, sieges, fortunes / That I have passed."[2] And Antony and Coriolanus, of course, both exhibit heroic energies and ambitions—even if they ultimately lapse into moral decrepitude and violent psychosis.[3] But such heroic ideas and ideals are lacking in *Macbeth*. Classical heroism seems weirdly absent from the play's imaginary.

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[1] See Hamlet's description of Claudius in 1.2: "My father's brother (but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules)." William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Thomson, 2006) 1.2.152-3. All further citations to *Hamlet* (to which we will return in a few pages) will be to this edition by act, scene, and line number.

[2] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann (London: Thomson, 1997) 1.3.131-2. See Reuben Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Greco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) pp. 1-28 for a more extended reading of heroism's place in *Othello*.

[3] I refer to the version of Antony from *Antony and Cleopatra*, rather than the less fleshed out avatar we find in *Julius Caesar*.

Macbeth's relationship to the heroic, however, is not as simple as this summary might suggest. True, the play lacks explicitly heroic *themes*. But a lack of self-conscious heroic *thematization* does not necessarily mean a lack of heroism. All the other Shakespeare plays just listed gesture at heroism, explicitly and deliberately.[4] But all of them also dwell in dramatic worlds where heroism is circumstantially impossible; where heroic ideals are deeply mismatched with social and political and cultural realities. The grim surveillance-state of *Hamlet*'s Elsinore, the decadence and corruption of *Othello*'s Venice, the late-Republican entropy of *Antony and Cleopatra*—all these are out of sync with the protagonists' heroic greatness.[5] Each play's surface-level obsession with heroism seems almost like a symptom of the circumstantial impossibility of heroic behavior.

Macbeth, however, is different. *Macbeth* may not *thematize* heroism, but the play's titular protagonist *embodies* heroism—and he does so more fully and thoroughly than almost any of Shakespeare's other tragic leads. *Macbeth*, as Mary Beth Rose perceptively writes, "is set apart from other Shakespearean warriors of noble stature by the way in which his heroic idealism grows almost to perfection, increasing in severity and intensity throughout the play." He "illuminates *with*

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[4] See Brower, *Hero and Saint*, for careful accounts of each of their debts to the Greco-Roman heroic tradition. For a more specific study of Herculean heroism in Shakespeare see Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, and Dryden* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962). For more on Shakespeare and heroism see also the introduction.

[5] See, for example, Cleopatra's ironic description of Antony as a "Herculean Roman" in William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders (London: Thomson, 1995) 1.3.85.

perfect and rigorous clarity the shared values and beliefs that the culture uses to construct heroism."[6]

But while *Macbeth* embodies heroic action more fully and thoroughly than Shakespeare's other tragedies the play also submits it to a searing skepticism unequaled almost anywhere else in the Shakespearean canon. [7] *Macbeth* is preoccupied with what we have called a *dynamic* ideal of action: it fixates time and again on the ability of "deeds" to "trammel" up their own consequences; of praxis to exist as its own plenitudinous "be-all" and "end-all."[8] But *Macbeth*'s dramatic arch hinges on this ideal's failure. In chronicling the darkly ironic consequences of Macbeth's murder of Duncan and usurpation of the Scottish throne, Shakespeare's play ultimately presents a portrait of action as partial, problematic, and subject to unfathomable and inscrutable forces beyond any individual agent's ken or control. *Macbeth* ultimately presents individual praxis as deeply and *essentially* (rather than circumstantially) inadequate.

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[6] Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) pp. 21-22; my emphasis on the second quotation.

[7] *Macbeth*'s only rival in this regard is *Coriolanus*. But the impossibility of heroism in *Coriolanus* has more to do with the shifting political circumstances of early republican Rome than it has to do with action as such.

[8] All further references to Shakespeare's play refer to *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1962) by act, line, and scene number. This passage appears at 1.7.3, 5. Various critics have commented on the place of action in Macbeth. For a book-length investigation of the topic, and interesting comparison of action's respective roles in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, see James L. Calderwood, *If It Were Done: Macbeth and Tragic Action* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986). See also Timothy Fuller, "The Relation of Thought and Action in Macbeth," in *Shakespeare's Political Pageant*, ed. Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1996) pp. 209-18 and Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2001) pp. 201-16.

The clearest statement of this attitude comes in *Macbeth*'s famous "sound and fury" soliloquy. Spoken shortly before his downfall, Macbeth's eleventh-hour anagnorisis casts a backward look at his bold and bloody faith in the power of human deeds and the deep disillusion it has caused:

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
>
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
>
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
>
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
>
> The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle.
>
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
>
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
>
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
>
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
>
> Signifying nothing.

> (5.5.17-26)

In these lines, we see what might be called a *traversal* of heroic action. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, "traversal" is the subject's passage through the fantasmatic structures of her own subjectivity and the resulting "acceptance of the fact that *there*

is no secret treasure in me, that the support of me (the subject) is purely phantasmic."[9]

Shakespeare's lines stage a similar event. They show a traversal of heroic action.

They reveal that the ideal of masculine-military *praxis* is little more than fantasmatic

"sound and fury," covering up the fundamental fact that human action and human

life are always displaced from the present; that human beings live always beyond

themselves, in a constant disruptive anticipation that amounts to little more than

quotidian creeping toward the telos of "dusty death."

In the rest of this chapter I want to explore the thought these lines stage. I

want to read *Macbeth* as grappling with the relationship of an ideal of heroic action

and the self-displacement that this passage portrays—a self-displacement that the

play repeatedly refers to as *ecstasy*. Ecstasy, of course, is a complex idea, with long

historical links to medicine, philosophy, as well as a whole slew of Jewish, Platonic,

Christian, and New Age mysticisms.[10] In *Macbeth*, however, the term has a narrow

(though intense) meaning. In Shakespeare's play, ecstasy signals the movement from

presence to absence, the passage from immersion in the world at hand to

displacement from it.[11] In *Macbeth*, ecstasy comes to mark the jarring leap from the

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[9] Slavoj Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997) pp. 9-10.

[10] On the history of ecstasy see Margharita Laski, *Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).

[11] See Robert Burton's description of ecstasy as being "a taste of future happiness, by which we are united unto God" but also a cause of "madness, dotage, and melancholy" (Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson [New York: New York Review of Books, 2001] p. 140).

immanence of the heroic *vita activa* to the ultimate realization that human deeds are subject to *transcendent* forces beyond anyone's control.

By reading *Macbeth* in this way, I want to chart a new methodological approach to the play. Particularly, I want to suggest the value of paying attention to the play's philosophical and speculative commitments. In the last few decades, these commitments have been downplayed in *Macbeth* scholarship. Suspicious of lapsing into A. C. Bradley-style modes of ahistorical metaphysical analysis, historicist critics have tended to ignore Macbeth's philosophical concerns to focus, instead, on its more marginal historical intrications (the culture of witchcraft in the Renaissance, the recent Jacobean accession, related issues of Anglo-Scottish unity and archipelagic identity and so forth).[12] But while interesting work has resulted from this turn, I would argue that *Macbeth*'s political and historical content cannot be separated from

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[12] For A.C. Bradley on *Macbeth* see *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1991) pp. 305-65. On *Macbeth* and witchcraft see Peter Stallybrass, "Macbeth and Witchcraft," in *Focus on 'Macbeth*,' ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 1982) pp. 189-209; Terry Eagleton's offbeat reading of the Weird Sisters' role in the play in William *Shakespeare* (London: Blackwell, 1986) pp. 1-17; Stephen Orgel's "Macbeth and the Antic Round," *Shakespeare Survey* 39 (1987) pp. 143-53; Deborah Willis, "The Monarch and the Sacred: Shakespeare and the Ceremony for Healing the King's Evil," in *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and his Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) pp. 147-68; and Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996) pp. 199-230. On *Macbeth* and the Stuart accession to the throne see Henry N. Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (New York: Macmillan, 1950); Alvin Kernan's later discussion in *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) pp. 71-78; Michael Hawkins, "History, Politics, and *Macbeth*," in *Focus on 'Macbeth'*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 1982) pp. 155-88; David Norbrook, "Macbeth and the Politics of Historiography," in *The Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) pp. 78-116; and Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson, "*Macbeth*, the Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union," *SEL* 47 (2007) pp. 379-401. On *Macbeth* and archipelagic identity see John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics, 1603-1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 91-114.

its metaphysical concerns.[13] The play's obsessive wrangling with the problems of action and fate cuts to the core of the major shift in political organization, culture, and experience that the previous chapters have traced. *Macbeth*'s concern with action, I will claim, is a direct (if complex) response to the alienation of political experience that went hand-in-hand with the early stirrings of the modern state.

In dealing with these concerns, *Macbeth* is not alone among Shakespeare's works. In fact, the play is the culmination of a series of Shakespearean tragedies that are centrally concerned with the problem of action and its relationship to political totality; which witness a "declining belief in the correlation between individual action and the larger movements of social and political transformation." [14] A thorough consideration of the politics of Shakespearean tragedy is, of course, far beyond the scope of this chapter. But to frame *Macbeth* in a broader Shakespearean context I would like to focus selectively on two other tragic texts. One of them is obvious and it is *Hamlet*—a play also concerned with heroic action and with its ecstatic failure. The other play, however, is less obvious, and it is here that I want to begin.

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[13] I have made this methodological point more extensively in Bryan Lowrance, "'Modern Ecstasy': *Macbeth* and the Meaning of the Political," *ELH* (forthcoming, 2013).

[14] Walter Cohen, *Drama of a Nation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 306.

II

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar (c. 1599) is a play of considerable political sophistication and formal beauty, but it has often stood on the sidelines of Shakespeare scholarship, attracting far less commentary than a number of arguably lesser works. This is, in part, a result of the play's generic indeterminacy: it hovers ambiguously between the history plays of the 1590s and the mature tragedies of the first decade of the seventeenth century, fully inhabiting neither generic niche. It also might have something to do with *Caesar*'s central place in the curricula of American high schools, where it is the first experience many students have with Shakespeare.[15] But whatever the reason, the play has been underserved by its critics. This has started to change recently: with a surge of interest in Renaissance republicanism, today's critics are slowly turning back to *Caesar* and the ways in which it both reflects and refracts the republican political cultures of the late sixteenth century.[16] But while such attention is salutary, its republican emphasis threatens to occlude the fact that *Caesar* is a play whose political agenda goes beyond the representation of late republican/early imperial Rome. It is a play that cuts to the core of a broader

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[15] Richard Halpern notes *Julius Caesar*'s "perennial use as a high school text" in his analysis of the play in *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) p. 67. Halpern reads Shakespeare's play in terms of the complex ways in which it has mediated notions of mass culture and the public sphere. But the play's familiarity has also—I would speculate—bred a certain complacency and assumption of its simplicity.

[16] For one example of a republican reading of *Julius Caesar* see Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 167-83. See also Oliver Arnold, *The Third Citizen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) pp. 140-78. For more on the republican turn in Renaissance scholarship generally see my discussion in the introduction below.

crisis of action in the later English Renaissance and begins Shakespeare's preoccupation with a politics of failed heroic action—a politics whose culminating moment is *Macbeth*.[17]

We can get a sense of *Caesar*'s political preoccupations by turning to the play's second scene. Here the audience is first introduced to the main protagonists: Brutus and Cassius. Both are deeply troubled by Caesar's pending elevation to permanent dictatorship. Both worry for Rome, as well as their own honor as members of the republic's patrician aristocracy. Cassius, however, is especially agitated. "I was born as free as Caesar, so were you," he complains to Brutus. "We both have fed as well, and we can both / Endure the winter's cold as well as he" (1.2.99-101). He then drives the point home with a story:

> … once upon a raw and gusty day,
>
> The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
>
> Said Caesar to me 'Dar'st thou, Cassius, now

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[17] But this is, perhaps, a false distinction. In the statement above I am assuming a basic separation of politics and political ideology from perceptions of individual action and praxis. I am assuming that politics is something separate from ethics. This assumption shared by most scholars, who thus tend to view republicanism as a species of political ideology—structurally similar democracy, communism, etc. But this fudges an important historical point. Before the conceptual horizon of the total nation state had emerged a political ideology like republicanism operated less as a kind of reified representation of the nature of the political world and more as a set of political sentiments, and assumptions, and *experiences* that were capable of circulating within various sorts of structural situation. Rather than a totalization of the political world, republicanism was something more complex—hence its capacity to coexist with monarchy. This idea—that the very categories that shape the political are themselves subject to historical/dialectical flux and flow—goes back to Hegel. But for the most compelling modern statement see Claude Lefort, "Outline of the Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies," in *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) p. 187.

> Leap in with me into this angry flood,
>
> And swim to yonder point?'[18]

They do so. But Caesar falters, calling

>   'Help me, Cassius, or I sink!'
>
> Ay, as Aeneas our great ancestor
>
> Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
>
> The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
>
> Did I the tired Caesar. And this man
>
> Is now become a god, and Cassius is
>
> A wretched creature, and must bend his body
>
> If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.

>   (1.2.113-20)

This passage percolates with a sense of frustration and thwarted honor. Cassius's resentment is so strong that it poisons one of the exemplary moments from Rome's history: Aeneas carrying his elderly father Anchises from the flames of Troy. This story was canonized in Virgil's *Aeneid* and made a substantial impact on centuries of

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[18] All further references to *Julius Caesar* refer to *Julius Caesar*, ed. Arthur Humphreys (New York: Oxford, 2008) by act, scene, and line number.

educated readers: in the *Defense of Poesy*, for instance, Sidney cites the Virgilian image of "Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back" as irrefutable proof of poesy's ability to inculcate moral virtue.[19] For Cassius, however, this heroic tableau becomes little more than food for the green-eyed monster—a source of bafflement that somehow *this* very mortal man is now "become a God" and reduced his former peers to pitiful "creatures." Cassius' word choice here is significant. In a remarkable reading of *The Tempest*, Julia Reinhard Lupton argues the term "creature" had a different and more complex meaning in Shakespeare's time than it does today. Creaturality, she claims, drawing on patristic and other sources, marked the *suspension* of life between divine creation and worldly fragility. It carried a sense similar to Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life": like the *homo sacer* and *Musselman*, the creature embodied a "pure vitality denuded of its symbolic significance and political capacity and then sequestered within the domain of civilization as its disavowed core."[20] And while Lupton develops this argument while reading Caliban from *The Tempest*, I would argue that a similar sense of the term is mobilized at this moment in *Julius Caesar*. For what Cassius imagines, here, is a total subjection to power. It is a simultaneous alienation of the patricians from

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[19] Philip Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, p. 227.

[20] Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Creature Caliban," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2000) p. 2. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) for Agamben's most influential elaboration of this notion.

power, and inscription of them under the absolute sway of Caesar's budding *auctoritas*.

Cassius, in short, confronts political alienation that we have been tracing throughout the previous chapters. It is hardly surprising, then, that the febrile, feckless stoicism he exhibits is voiced with an almost Marlovian end-stopped grandiosity (combined with some of Bussy's stoic hauteur):

> Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius.
>
> Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong.
>
> Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat.
>
> Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
>
> Nor airless dungeoun, nor strong links of iron,
>
> Can be retentive to the strength of spirit;
>
> But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
>
> Never lacks a power to dismiss itself.

(1.3.89-96)

For Shakespeare, however, the key response to Caesar's rise to power is not Cassius. It is Brutus. And Brutus puts forward a different response to Caesar's assent, one that looks forward to *Macbeth* and starts toward a new view of heroic agency, one that moves beyond military action and stoicism into a more complex and ambivalent

sense of the ultimate inadequacy of action in the face of complex and recalcitrant political reality.

This attitude does not emerge in isolation. Shakespeare portrays Brutus's response to Caesar's rise as being mixed and mingled with a range of other emotions and thoughts on Brutus' part. At moments early on in *Julius Caesar* Brutus seems to flirt with Cassius's angry drive toward responsive action. He is also very much aware of the anti-tyrannical precedent set by his ancestor Junius Brutus, who was instrumental in overthrowing Rome's Tarquin kings (an event Shakespeare portrayed in his earlier long poem *The Rape of Lucrece* [1594]). Take, for instance, the following declaration:

> Brutus had rather be a villager
>
> Than to repute himself a son of Rome
>
> Under these hard conditions as this time
>
> Is like to lay upon us.
>
> (1.2.173-6)

Brutus also gestures toward a sense of stoic constancy early in the play. Part of this constancy is linked to stoic notions of self-sufficient philosophical honor. Brutus demands, for instance, that the conspirators demonstrate "untired spirits and formal constancy" (2.1.227) after they have assassinated Caesar.

But at the core of Shakespeare's portrayal of Brutus is something else: a sense of the essential alienation, the essential inefficacy, of individual action. Brutus is haunted from the play's first scenes by a growing of the deep, essential, *ontological* inadequacy of the deeds he is about to undertake. While he is firm in his faith that Caesar's death is necessary "for the general" good, even if he personally has no "cause to spurn at him" (2.1.10-13), he also shows a deeper malaise about the *very possibility* that striking Caesar will remedy the situation. This emerges less in conscious reflection and more in a sense of stallage and inner disarray. Take his solitary reflections from the start of Act 2, one of the play's most poignant moments:

> Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar
>
> I have not slept.
>
> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
>
> And the first motion, all the interim is
>
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
>
> The genius and the mortal instruments
>
> Are then in counsel, and the state of man
>
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
>
> The nature of an insurrection.

(2.1.61-9)

In an essay on the history of the idea of freedom in western politics, Hannah Arendt cites this moment of Shakespeare's play as exemplifying the classical conception of politics. This conception, for Arendt, is oriented around action: it is *dynamic* in the sense I have been using the term previously—focused on the passage of the potential into the actual, hinged on the ability to by acting "call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given."[21] But, with all due respect to Arendt, this is a misreading. What we are actually seeing here is not a manifestation of a pure theory of action. What we see is the beginning of its breakdown. What we see in *Julius Caesar*—and indeed in Shakespeare's work in general—is the power of action being swallowed up in the gap between intention and impact, between consciousness and its transmission into praxis. For Brutus earlier on, for Cassius, and for the conspirators subsequently, a decisive action can restore the political world for freedom, virtue, and republican values. But for Brutus, here, it is lost in a "phantasma," an ecstatic displacement of the self's relationship to reality.

With Brutus's brief meditation, then, we see the first hints in Shakespeare's work of interaction between action and ecstasy. The inadequacy of action is first suggested—not directly, but through a kind of penumbral sense of insufficiency, stallage, and anxiety. Both here and throughout *Julius Caesar* the limit of action is marked off by Caesar himself. Critics have often puzzled over the title of

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[21] Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1961) p. 151.

Shakespeare's play: Caesar is only briefly a major part of the play, which seems to be more appropriately the tragedy of Brutus and Cassius. But in the play Caesar comes to mark the senescence of what Brutus is a latter day embodiment of: a classical, action-oriented, and dynamic model of the political. Caesar comes to mark the political alienation with which the play is centrally concerned. As Brutus comments at one point, toward the play's conclusion:

> O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet.
>
> Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns out swords
>
> In our own proper entrails.

> (5.3.93-5)

By the time he speaks these lines, Brutus's initial sense of the futility—of the self-displacement—of political action has come to fruition. Rather than restoring a plural patrician order, Caesar's assassination has by the end of the play unleashed a civil war that consumes the conspirators. But while Shakespeare's play seems to gesture toward a sense of action's inadequacy as being behind this political breakdown early in *Julius Caesar*, it is left for another play from around the same period to more fully think through the ontological inadequacy of action in the political realm. This play, of course, is *Hamlet*.

We do not know precisely when *Hamlet* was written and performed: the play's composition, production, and publication are notoriously uncertain and controversial. But whatever the exact specifics there is little doubt that *Hamlet* comes out of roughly the same moment as *Julius Caesar*, and that it combines the earlier play's skepticism toward political action with a more protracted and more self-conscious treatment of heroism. Heroism is not absent from *Caesar*, but it is also never explicitly evoked, and seems almost eclipsed by the play's portrayal of Roman *virtus*.[22] In *Hamlet*, by contrast, heroic tropes and types are front-and-center from the first scene onward. The heroism *Hamlet* presents, however, is also complex, anxious, and ambivalent. Heroic themes run through the play, but the ideal around which they orbit is awkwardly out of place in the fictional Denmark that both Hamlet and *Hamlet* inhabit.[23] This Denmark is a place of uncertainty and duality. In its cold climate the drive to decisive heroic action leads only to an experience of self-displacement, to an experience of ecstasy.

Consider *Hamlet*'s opening scene. Here, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Horatio and a number of other guards on the ramparts of Elsinore. Horatio's description quickly makes it clear that the ghost appears in the full military regalia

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[22] See Coppelia Kahn, "'Passions of Some Difference': Friendship and Emulation in *Julius Caesar*," in *Julius Caesar*: *New Critical Essays*, ed. Horst Zander (New York: Routledge, 2005) pp. 271-83.

[23] See G. K. Hunter, "The Heroism of Hamlet," in *Hamlet*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: Schocken, 1963) pp. 90-109 for a more comprehensive summary of the play's heroic themes. See also Reuben Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Greco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) pp. 271-322.

of the earlier king: Horatio notes the ghost's "warlike form" and his "majesty" (1.1.46-7). The ghost, in other words, is heroic; and indeed throughout the play there's an emphasis on the heroic accomplishment of Hamlet's dead father. We are told about his forays against the Poles and the Norwegians, as well as their consequences, which are driven home by the Fortinbras subplot. Indeed, it is in Fortinbras that we have an odd echo of Hamlet Senior. But until the end of the play, this heroic avatar remains distant. The Denmark in the play is a resolutely post-heroic polity. Hamlet Senior may have been a heroic king, but the same cannot be said of his successor, who is like the epitome of a post-heroic king, presiding over a degraded Renaissance court and skilled in the arts of managing surveillance and intrigue rather than in masculine-military action.

The result is a portrait of the Danish court as being something like the corrupt French curia familiar from Chapman's tragedies. But while Bussy D'Ambois' response to his degraded surroundings was an intense resiliency and hauteur, in Hamlet we see something different. We see a kind of self-lacerating, self-undercutting inwardness. Generation of scholars have puzzled over *Hamlet*'s famed "subjectivity effects," its ability to somehow appear timelessly modern and individualistic. [24] I would suggest, though, that perhaps Hamlet's apparently proleptic interiority is really a function of the failure of traditional ethical distinctions—the traditional normative orientation of the aristocratic political leader

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[24] See Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet before 'Hamlet'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for an extensive discussion of this issue.

toward heroic action. This failure haunts the play, abetting Hamlet's repeated failures to act and his sense of alienation from his surroundings and from the traditional office he feels he ought to occupy. We see this in his negative comparison of himself to Hercules quoted above. And we see it, more subtly, throughout his extended bouts of self-reflection, in which the immediate imperative to undertake revenge for his father's death is again and again thwarted by a sense of the ecstatic nature of human being and the inadequacy of heroic action. Indeed, the theme of ecstasy runs throughout *Hamlet*. Horatio initially thinks that the guards have seen the ghost as a result of their own mental defect, their own ecstatic detachment from reality. It is, he claims, but their "fantasy" (1.1.23). But when he is himself confronted with the ghost he realizes it is not just the individual self-displacement of some misguided mind. The ghost "bodes some strange eruption to our state" (1.1.68), a strange self-displacement that the play will later confirm. Brutus already spoke to the disarray of an individual mind being linked to the disarray of the state, and we see something similar here. And the theme continues as the play goes on. Hamlet's ambiguous madness—possibly a guise, possibly real—is characterized, repeatedly, as a mode of ecstasy. The category is evoked by Gertrude during the closet scene, where she says when Hamlet sees his father's specter that this "bodiless creation" is a result of "ecstasy" (3.4.136). Ophelia is even more explicit:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,

Th'expectation and rose of the fair state,

The glass of fashion and the mould of form,

Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite down.

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,

That sucked the honey of his musicked vows,

Now see what noble and most sovereign reason

Like sweet bells jangled out of time and harsh—

That unmatched stature and form of blown youth

Blasted with ecstasy.

<div align="right">(3.1.149-59)</div>

The ideal that Ophelia charts here is not just something Hamlet fails to live up to. It is impossible in the political world he inhabits, a world in which the ethical nexus of perfect aristocratic identity has run up against an inexorable political sense of alienation. Heroism continues to haunt the play, all the way up to Fortinbras' final instructions about the care of Hamlet's fallen body:

Let four captains

Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,

For he was likely, had he been put on,

To have prov'd most royal…

<div style="text-align:center">(5.2.400-403)</div>

But Fortinbras' comments are, of course, conditional and conjectural and point to a military-monarchical ideal that only he himself seems capable of embodying in *Hamlet*'s dramatic world. When we turn to Macbeth, however, this monarchical-military ideal of heroic action moves out of the margins and into the center of Shakespeare's tragedy. Its full force and power, however, also sow the seeds of Shakespeare's most profound interrogation of the integrity of the heroic idea itself.

<div style="text-align:center">

III

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Heroism's powerful, if somewhat occluded, place in *Macbeth* can be first approached by turning to the play's initial section. At the outset of *Macbeth* we are thrown into the midst of a battle between an army loyal to the sitting Scottish sovereign, Duncan, and a rebelling aristocrat named Macdonwald. Near the battlefield, Duncan and his entourage encounter a "bleeding Captain" who tells the king how his most formidable warrior-nobleman, Macbeth, has just performed in the fight against the rebel.

The merciless Macdonwald

(Worthy to be a rebel, for to that

The multiplying villainies of nature

Do warm upon him) from the western isles

Of Kernes and Gallowglasses is supplied;

And Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,

Show'd like a rebel's whore: but all's too weak

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),

Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,

Which smok'd with bloody execution,

Like Valour's minion, carv'd out his passage,

Till he fac'd the slave;

Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,

Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,

And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

(1.2.9-23)

The dramatic point of this passage is, of course, to introduce Macbeth for the first time—specifically by way of a comparison with his enemy and opposite Macdonwald. But in introducing these two characters, Shakespeare also sketches the two, opposite models of political experience that will run through the rest of the play. One of them based in action, a heroic action of the sort we have already seen.

The other based in the individual agent's alienation from both the efficacy of deeds and the totalities that encompass and negate them.

An ideal of heroic action is hardwired into the imagistic and poetic circuitry of the Captain's description. Shakespeare structures this account around the common classical concept of *Fortuna*, an allegorical figure ubiquitous across the mythological consciousness of classical, medieval, and early modern European culture, and which was often opposed to the *virtus* and fortitude of heroic political action. Fortune embodied non-autonomy, the fragility and possible failure of action, a passivity at odds with ingrained cultural norms of male political activity.[25] And throughout the Captain's initial description, Macdonwald's fundamental feature is precisely this variety of feminized heteronomy. He embodies a lack of the autonomous self-reliance that should properly characterize aristocratic *virtus*. Shakespeare emphasizes this in the initial description of Macdonwald as being swarmed with the "multiplying villainies of nature." This semi-surreal image could mean two possible things. It might suggest either some sort of abstract, allegorical envelopment by personified bad deeds. Or it might suggest more concrete mode of assistance (the Third and Forth Folios read "villaines" rather than "villainies," suggesting the latter).[26] But, in either case, the overall impression remains the same.

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[25] See Hanna Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolo Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[26] I owe this point to Harry Berger's discussion of the passage in "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation," *ELH* 47, no. 1 (1980) p. 7.

This impression is of a feminized lack of autonomy and autarky, a failure of individual action. The passage emphasizes that the action Macdonwald engages is fundamentally, ontologically, not his own. It is anti-heroic; at odds with traditional, dynamic heroism's emphasis on individual singularity and the "luster" of "conspicuous power" that is what allows individuals to stand apart from and influence and awe other men, as Thomas Hobbes would later write.[27]

This contrasts with Macbeth. Shakespeare's Captain turns to Macbeth after leaving *Fortuna* fawning over Macdonwald like a "rebel's whore." This segue is abrupt: the Captain proclaims "But all's too weak" with a jarring caesural shifting of gears, transforming Macdonwald's multivalent villainy into the homogenous antecedent of one, crisp substantivized adjective ("all"), and immediately describing it as paling in comparison to Macbeth's military strength. Against the literal and figurative multiplicity Macdonwald figures stands "brave" Macbeth, an embodiment of a unified, integrated model of heroic political action. Macdonwald acts with an effeminate faith in Fortune's favor, but Macbeth disdains her. Macdonwald fights with kerns and gallowglasses by his side, while Macbeth's sole support is his "brandish'd Steel" which smokes "with bloody execution."[28] At this point in the passage, we should note, a number of critics have argued that

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[27] Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's 'Preface to *Gondibert*," in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. Joel Spingarn (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1904) v. 2, p. 55.

[28] "[K]erns and gallowglasses" are foreign mercenaries—a minor detail both drives home the rebelling thane's lack of aristocratic self-reliance and subtly associates this lack of personal integrity with an exclusion—or a difference —from full belonging to the Scottish polity and people.

Shakespeare subtly *undermines* Macbeth's initial presentation as a masculine aristocratic warrior *par excellence* by describing him as "Valor's minion." Indeed, at first glance, this description does seem effeminizing: in the Renaissance the term "minion" ranged in its meanings from hanger-on to sexual subordinate in its meanings.[29] But I would argue that the antecedent of the simile "like Valor's minion" is not Macbeth himself but rather his "Brandish'd steel." Macbeth's sword, in other words, is a "minion" of his own "valor"—a simile made especially apt by the fact that a secondary and less-common meaning of "minion" in the period was "small cannon."[30]

This reading gains plausibility in light of a later moment in the same scene when another Scottish nobleman, the Thane of Ross, arrives and describes to Duncan and his entourage another engagement in the same battle—this one between Macbeth and the Macdonwald's foreign ally, the King of Norway:

… that Bellona's bridegroom, lapp'd in proof,

Confronted him with self-comparisons,

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[29] See OED, s.v. "minion," *passim*. On the understanding of valor at play in this early description and throughout *Macbeth* see Eugene Waith's "Manhood and Valor in Two Shakespearean Tragedies," *ELH* 17, no. 4 (1950) pp. 262-73. For a comprehensive treatment of how gender figures into the initial descriptions of Macbeth and Macdonwald see Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp. 141-43.

[30] OED, s.v. "minion," II.4. I owe this insight about the secondary, military meaning of "minion" to Berger's discussion in *ibid.*, p. 11, although Berger still assumes that Macbeth is the antecedent of "valour's minion" and thus confirms the traditional, effeminizing reading of this passage. For more on the semantics of the term minion during Shakespeare's period see Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) pp. 188 ff.

> Point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm,
>
> Curbing his lavish spirit….

> (1.2.55-58)

In the description of his duel with Macdonwald, Macbeth metaphorically minionizes his sword in an act of implicit sexual subordination. Here, he is presented in terms of another sexual-symbolic conquest: the domination of Bellona, goddess of war. The "bloody proof" that "laps" Macbeth here seems to subtly suggest not just the gore in which he is splattered from his battlefield exploits but also the hymeneal blood that results from this other sort of sexual conquest. And this particular moment—like the initial comparison with Macdonwald—enforces a broader political-ontological point that Shakespeare drives home throughout his opening presentation of Macbeth, a point that is, in a sense, summed up in one word from this passage: "lavish." Derived from the Old French term for downpour, lavish metaphorically migrated in early modern English to mark a sense of abundance, wealth, and political power associated with aristocratic largesse and magnanimity.[31] In this passage, the term is initially applied to the Norwegian king's princely greatness. But lavishness seems to migrate to Macbeth himself as he matches the foreign ruler with "self-comparisons" and eventually "curbs" his monarchical magnanimity. Macbeth, then, becomes an

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[31] See OED, s.v. "lavish." For more on magnanimity and heroism see the discussion of Aristotelian heroism in the introduction below.

embodiment of individual becoming vis-à-vis dynamic action. He models a paradigm of political experience organized and oriented around the becoming of personal potentiality in a collective life defined by action and heroic *virtus*.

The Captain's initial introduction of Macbeth—with its themes of militarism, masculinity, and feudal loyalty—is a familiar and oft-glossed passage. But I have lingered over it for so long for a particular and important reason. In the imagistic and linguistic density of the Captain's description of Macbeth, Shakespeare provides a compact conspectus of a dynamic model of heroic political experience. This goes beyond a simple representation *and thematization* of the heroic. This is not to say that the play's initial presentation of Macbeth is unrelated to the elite aristocratic culture of Shakespeare's day. As many historians have noted, the political culture of the Elizabethan and Jacobean aristocracy was both *pluralistic* (having "little room" for concepts of sovereignty-qua-absolute obedience) and *personal* (organized around the ideal of individual activity as constituting and sustained community of honor binding together sovereign and noble subject)—ideas that show through clearly in the Captain's battlefield account.[32] But Shakespeare presents this aristocratic cultural paradigm not as a *normative* political framework. Instead, he presents a political-ontological *ideal*—one that is illuminated, I would suggest, by looking beyond

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[32] Mervyn James, "English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485-1642," in *Politics, Society and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 308-415.

Macbeth's immediate historical surround and to Hegel's discussion, in the *Aesthetics* lectures, of what he calls the *Heroenzustande*, the "Heroic Age."

For Hegel, the "heroic age" is not a particular historical moment. It is, rather, a particular ideal representational determination of political life—one where the subject (*das Subjekt*) exists in the unmediated context (*im unmittelbaren Zusammenhange*) of "his entire willing, acting, and achieving, [and] so he also takes undivided responsibility for whatever consequences arise from his actions."[33] Hegel developed this formulation primarily in reference to Greek epic and tragedy. But the concept nonetheless cuts to the core of Shakespeare's initial introduction of Macbeth—both in his combat with Macdonwald and in the subsequent post-battle scene where Macbeth meets back up with Duncan and his entourage. Here, the King fulsomely praises Macbeth, claiming that his "due" is far more than "all can pay" (1.4.21). And while Macbeth's response is, at first glance, a simple self-deflating declaration of humbleness, beneath its banal surface-structure it provides a compact précis of another key facet of the "heroic" model of political experience. "The service and the loyalty I owe," says Macbeth,

> In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part
>
> Is to receive our duties; and our duties

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[33] Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 187. The German text is quoted from Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in *Werke*, v. 13 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) p. 246.

Are to your throne and state children and servants,

Which do but what they should, by doing every thing

Safe toward your love and honour.

(1.4.22-27)

In these lines, rhetorical form and political-ontological content are woven together to the point of inseparability. The rhetorical form in question here is chiasmus: a stylized structural reversal that we can see structuring Macbeth's assertion of the fundamentally reciprocal organization of the feudal-aristocratic polity to which both he and Duncan belong. On the one hand, Macbeth acknowledges the importance of aristocratic "doing," of the action he has just distinguished himself by undertaking. But on the other, he also claims that such action is inseparable from the imperatives of loyalty to his feudal suzerain.[34]

IV

Macbeth opens, then, with a particular version and vision of political life. It opens with a particular model of heroic political experience that is personalized and dynamic, and embedded in feudal norms of reciprocal rule. At the same time, however, Shakespeare's play subtly but significantly presents this political model *as*

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[34] On neo-feudalism in the political culture of early modern England—and, more particularly, an account of the way in which feudal concepts and tropes helped to reconcile the increasing marginalization of the English aristocracy—see Richard McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood: The Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

an exclusively aesthetic ideal. It is one fundamentally at odds with the political reality the play will actually go on to stage. For between the third-person account of Macbeth's military exploits (1.2) and his profession of loyalty to Duncan (1.4) Shakespeare inserts the key scene where Macbeth encounters Weird Sisters and their decisive declaration of his pending accession to the Scottish throne.

It is a critical commonplace that this scene is linguistically thematically suffused with duality—from their own riddling speech to Macbeth's description of the day they meet as both "foul and fair" (1.3.38). This obvious emphasis on the dual and the double, however, takes on a new and profoundly political significance when we read it against the themes of unity, immanence, and heroic-autarkic singularity that are emphasized in the Captain's account of Macbeth's battlefield exploits. In *this* description, Macbeth is a figure of heroic singularity and unity. But after he hears the Sisters' prophecy, the duality they represent rapidly starts to infuse and inflect his own consciousness—a consciousness increasingly caught up in the agential paradoxes that their prophecy poses.

> [*Aside*] Two truths are told,
>
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
>
> Of the imperial theme. – I thank you, gentlemen. –
>
> [*Aside.*] This supernatural soliciting
>
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good: -

If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,

Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs

Against the use of nature? Present fears

Are less than horrible imaginings.

My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,

Shakes so my single state of man,

That function is smother'd in surmise,

And nothing is, but what is not.

(1.3.127-42)

Macbeth's monologue begins by reiterating the idea of magnanimous becoming that is at the core of the Captain's description. Macbeth morphs the prophecies he has just heard into the "swelling act / Of the imperial theme" (a subtle but distinct echo the "lavishness" we saw in the previous scene). But the *immanent* ideal of action at the heart of this earlier, third-person description—the Captain's Hegelian suture of the heroic subject with the "unmediated context of his "willing, acting, and achieving"—is, subsequently, scrambled. This happens in Macbeth's soliloquy by way of the transcendent paradoxes that the Sisters' "supernatural soliciting" seems

to press upon him. Action, here, is no longer a point of unity of becoming. It is dispersed into a projected futurity—into a "fantastical" prolepsis that makes Macbeth's "single state of man" shake.

Indeed, this particular line—"[s]o shakes my single state of man"—is highly significant. Its sibilant sounds, and its subtle emphasis on the "stat" phoneme, point to a key term that will, throughout much of the rest of Shakespeare's play, signal precisely the experiences of displacement, of doubleness, and agential confusion that characterize Macbeth. This term is ecstasy. *Macbeth* first shows a concern with ecstasy in this scene—both in Macbeth's actual monologue, and in the response of his companion Banquo to it: "Look how our partner's rapt" (1.3.143)—and this preoccupation will run through the rest of the play. [35] Throughout *Macbeth*, ecstasy— both as a surface-level signifier and a more complex political-experiential structure—repeatedly marks the *failure* of the initial ideal of action that the Captain's speech so precisely and poetically sums up. In his analysis of the "heroic age," Hegel writes that such a political-aesthetic configuration ends when the "individual is … no longer the vehicle and the sole actualization of [his] powers."[36] And it is such a breakdown of the relationship between agency and ability, of individual and

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[35] For a characteristically sharp analysis of the theme of rapture in Shakespeare's play—although one much differently directed than my own—see Christopher Pye's reading of the play in *The Regal Phantasm: Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 1990) pp. 154-55.

[36] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 194.

power.[37] As in the earlier plays, though, Shakespeare gives it a unique and uniquely political inflection. He makes it mark an experience of political alienation, of the failure of political action that—as we will see—is at the fissile core of Macbeth's tragic dynamic.

But if we want to understand Shakespeare's unique political-experiential inflection of ecstasy we first have to work our way through another—and less overtly interesting—thread in *Macbeth*'s weft: ambition.

As far back as Greek tragedies and the concept of *hubris*, ambition has been linked to heroism. And if *Macbeth* starts off by associating its titular protagonist with the social and political immanence and unity of a "heroic" model of action, the play's real momentum derives from working through another tendril of the classical conception of heroism—the "ambition" which, as Thomas Hobbes suggested, is a fault but also an often unavoidable ancillary of the "Heroick."[38] Ambition has its own long and complex history, from Greek concepts of *hubris* through widespread Elizabethan vilifications of the tendency.[39] But Shakespeare's presentation of it in

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[37] It is worth noting, here, that in his so-called *Early Theological Writings*, Hegel suggests that *Macbeth* is exemplary of the impossibility of a wholly singular form of human action that opposes itself to the communal enmeshment that he (Hegel) would later call *Sittlichkeit* but which his early work refers to in the language of "life." For an excerpt from this analysis see *Philosophers on Shakespeare*, ed. Paul Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009) p. 51. Hegel would later use *Macbeth* as an example in various other aesthetic and philosophical arguments. For a collection of the relevant arguments see *Hegel on Tragedy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

[38] Hobbes, "Answer," p. 61.

[39] For a good example of the Elizabethan/Jacobean period's profound allergy to ambition or any sort of disruption of the social *status quo* see the "Exhortation Concerning Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates" (1547), excerpted and reprinted in *Renaissance Literature: An Anthology*, eds. Michael Payne and John Hunter (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) p. 161. On ambition in the period generally and in

Macbeth gives the old concept a new twist. *Macbeth*'s treatment doesn't just repeat the period's boilerplate ethical injunctions. It uses ambition to think through the experience of political action was being profoundly disjoined from ethico-politcal norms.

Here we can begin with the early scene in the play, where Lady Macbeth analyzes her husband's character (1.5). At this point, Macbeth has already received the Weird Sisters' startling prophecy and conveyed their message to his wife by letter. In the same missive, he has informed her that Duncan, grateful for his battlefield service, will soon visit their estate—information that leads Lady Macbeth to the conclusion that killing Duncan will speed along Macbeth's pending royal ascent. With this scheme already at full boil, Lady Macbeth pauses to ponder the prospects of her husband actually being able to do the necessary deed:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
>
> What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature.
>
> It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness
>
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
>
> Art not without ambition, but without
>
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,

Shakespeare's texts specifically see Robert N. Watson, *Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,

And yet wouldst wrongly win.

(1.5.13-20)

Like Macbeth's chiastic retort to Duncan, these lines demonstrate the degree to which *Macbeth* constantly interweaves rhetoric and ontology—the ways in which its poetic patterns and conceptual dynamics form a complex filigree. But while Macbeth's earlier riposte to Duncan hinged on the rhetorical trope of chiasmus, here we see a decisive shift away from chiasmus to *contradiction*: from the plenitude of political order to the paradoxes that will prove this order's undoing.

Throughout her speech, Lady Macbeth violently probes for paradoxes and inconsistencies in her husband's character. She begins by portraying his personality as a kind of *concordia discors* of apparently opposed desires—to be high and holy, to be great and ambitious, but also lacking in illness or moral compromise—all of which exist in a fragile chiastic balance. But it quickly becomes clear that her goal is a full-on assault on this balance—a balance she disdainfully describes in terms of "kindness." According to the Lady, Macbeth's "nature" is "overly full" with such kindness—a mammary metaphor whose low-level assonance (in the long vowels in "full" and "milk") suggests both sonically and semantically that Macbeth is

complacent to an almost maternal power.[40] What earlier passed as fealty has now

become a bovinity—a bovinity that is made to seem viscerally disgusting.[41] In this

passage, we can see Lady Macbeth both mapping and planning to poke holes in this

consistency and complacency. She is at pains to establish how she can make sure

that Macbeth's "ambition" must, in the end, paradoxically clash with his loyalty and

obedience.

It is significant that *illness* becomes the metaphorical marker, here, for what

Lady Macbeth sees as necessary to break the boundaries of her husband's

complacency—to get him to seize the opportunity the Sisters have presented.

Ambition and illness go hand-in hand; and to gauge the significance of what the

Lady does here with ambition it is worth turning, for a moment, to the beginning of

Francis Bacon's roughly-contemporary consideration of the topic, the 1612 essay

"On Ambition":

> Ambition is like choler; which is an humor that maketh men active,
>
> earnest, full of alacrity, and stirring, if it be not stopped. But if it be
>
> stopped, and cannot have his way, it becometh adust, and thereby
>
> malign and venomous. So ambitious men, if they find the way open
>
> for their rising, and still get forward, they are rather busy than

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[40] For a more comprehensive consideration of Lady Macbeth's use of maternal imagery see Adelman, *ibid*.,
135.

[41] See her later request to be "unsex[ed]" (1.5.43).

dangerous; but if they be checked in their desires, they become

secretly discontent, and look upon men and matters with an evil eye,

and are best pleased, when things go backward; which is the worst

property in a servant of a prince, or state.[42]

Bacon begins by associating ambition with choler, the Galenic humor traditionally

tied to anger and other sorts of violent perturbation. This is, in itself hardly startling:

the early seventeenth century was an era in which the metaphorics of the humors

could be stretched far enough to provide all-encompassing explanations of literally

everything in the universe.[43] But there is more going on, here, than a simple humoral

comparison. For Bacon, ambition is not just a character flaw or ethical deviation. It is

a breakdown of the homoeostatic order of the body politic; a breakdown of a

particular model of what the political means and how it should work. For Bacon

ambition is an autarkic force of becoming: a power unmoored from the organic

political reciprocities that *should* contain it. While ambition, Bacon admits, is often a

boon for the state, it is also a kind of free radical that constantly threatens its

integrity.

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[42] Bacon, *Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985) p. 173.

[43] See Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* for an instance of the sheer descriptive scope of humoral theory. See also Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*: *Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

This idea emerges, in similar terms, in Lady Macbeth's analysis of her husband. The Lady's rhetorical goal in the lines just quoted, however, is to render this destabilizing function in *positive* terms: she wants to yoke it to the very "heroic" model of the political that it threatens to subvert by casting ambition as a variety of self-actualization; a way in which (as she says to Macbeth later on) one "be the same in thine own act and valour / As thou art in desire" (1.7.40-1). But still, for Lady Macbeth as much as Bacon, ambition is a principle of absolute autarkic self-actualization. It is the heroic ideal spiraling off into moral anarchy, a kind of misplaced ideal of immanence along solipsistic and anti-communal lines. But while Macbeth's ambition appears this way from the *outside*—and we should remember that like the Captain's, the Lady's speech is *external* to Macbeth's own perspective, presenting a third rather than a first person viewpoint—ambition's relationship to action is considerably more complex from the "inside." Ambition, that is to say, is considerably more complex as a mode of first-person political experience.[44]

Macbeth registers this complexity throughout the play: from his initial encounter with the Weird Sisters he sees the threatening and problematic possibilities of ambition's particular model of action. Take the following lines, which Macbeth delivers shortly before killing Duncan. Again, this is a long and familiar speech. But it takes on a new and unfamiliar sense if we view it not as an expression

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[44] For a helpful discussion of the distinction between first- and third-person experience—one that has informed this brief analysis—see Akeel Bilgrami, "Interpreting a Distinction," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2005) pp. 389-98.

of proleptic subjectivity effects, or a rhetorical exercise, but as a profoundly *political* meditation—one that came out of a culture in which politics and individual action were indissociable:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well

It were done quickly: if the assassination

Could trammel up the consequence, and catch

With his surcease success; that but this blow

Might be the be-all and the end-all here,

But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,

We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases

We still have judgment here; that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return

To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice

Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice

To our own lips. He's here in double trust;

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,

Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,

Who should against his murderer shut the door,

Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been

So clear in his great office, that his virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against

The deep damnation of his taking-off;

And pity, like a naked new-born babe,

Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,

Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,

That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur

To prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself

And falls on the other.

(1.7.1-28)

At the start of this speech we are confronted, again, with the ideal of action that *Macbeth* stages in its early scenes. It is presented here in Macbeth's deployment of the rhetorical figure the Greeks called *polyptoton* and Puttenham dubbed the "tranlacer": **"**when ye turne and tranlace a word into many sundry shapes as the Tailor doth his garment."[45] And in Macbeth's speech we see a three-time tranlacing of "done," a rhetorical move that—coupled with the opening sentence's subtle but

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[45] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007) p. 288.

perceptible patterning of "d" and "w" sounds—produces a sense, both sonic and syntactic, of a strong but deferred desire for closure, for a strong and decisive *doing* that could, as Macbeth puts it in the next line, "trammel up the consequences" (the verb literally means to bind up or to ensnare in a net).[46] The striking scholastic swerve of the phrase "be-all and the end-all" draws out what is at stake here, the ideal of a perfectly unified action and self-consistency.

But while Macbeth's monologue begins with the action-oriented model of the political that echoes the opening of the play, the rest of this speech stages this notion's radical undermining. The agents of this undercutting are, at first glance, externalized forms of ethical normativity: a pagan/Christian hybrid of the "life to come" and the "even-handed justice" (1.7.10) that threatens retribution for what Macbeth is about to do. But by the end of the speech these initially-external forces are *internalized*, migrating from outward justice and eschatology to a kind of *psychomachia* internal to Macbeth himself and which is increasingly dominated by the arguments of ambition, a force that is strikingly materialized in the speech's closing lines as a spur to Macbeth's action that also threatens to unhorse him in his upward ascent to greatness. Indeed, the chaos implicit in this odd, jarring metaphor predicts the ultimate consequences of Macbeth's ambition—consequences that are manifested, in the play, on two levels. The first level is that of the Scottish polity as a

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[46] *OED*, s.v. "trammel."

whole, and the ultimate impact of Macbeth's ambition and usurpation on Scotland is summed up well by the Thane of Ross in the play's fourth act:

> Alas, poor country!
>
> Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
>
> Be call'd our mother, but our grave; where nothing,
>
> But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile;
>
> Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rend the air
>
> Are made, not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems
>
> A modern ecstasy …
>
> (4.3.164-70)

Macbeth's ambition, this description suggests, leads to a form of collective "modern ecstasy." But this striking phrase speaks to the *outward* effect of Macbeth's usurpation and subsequent reign on Scotland as a whole—the "sighs and groans and shrieks" that go hand-in-hand with his reduction of the Scottish nobility to *homines sacri* quaking in front of Macbeth's sovereign decisions—it also sums up the play's primary focus: which is the effect of the murder of Duncan on *Macbeth himself*.[47] As numerous critics have noted, *Macbeth* is a tragedy of tyranny, based on Macbeth's

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[47] On the figure of the *homo sacer* see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereignty, Power, and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

increasingly brutal actions on Scotland in terms of the enacting of one long "state of

exception," a sovereign emergency in which the laws of god and man are suspended

while Macbeth seeks obsessively after the "safety" that the second half of the Sisters

prophecy (that Banquo's heirs will ascend in Macbeth's wake) denies him.[48] But *pace*

Carl Schmitt's influential description of the sovereign decision as a positive and

productive institution of a juridical-political order, Macbeth's bloody sovereign

actions decisions precisely *fail* to attain positivity. [49] For they are, ultimately,

motivated by an experience of radical inadequacy, of a radical lack at the core of

Macbeth's attempts at action—attempts that try to make his "deeds" into a "be-all"

and an "end-all" but which are constantly shadowed by the ambiguity of the Weird

Sisters' vision of the future. When, earlier in the play, Lady Macbeth first hears this

prophecy she posits a positive form of political ecstasy:

> Thy letters have transported me beyond
>
> This ignorant present, and I feel now

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[48] For a recent, influential and contemporarily-oriented account of the idea of a sovereign state of exception see Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For an analysis of *Macbeth*'s portrayal of tyranny in light of this concept's broader life on the early modern English stage see also Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) pp. 116-53. For a more recent account of the historical significance of *Macbeth*'s combination of the two, seemingly opposed categories of tyrant and traitor see Rebecca Lemon, "Sovereignty and Treason in *Macbeth*," in *Macbeth: New Critical Essays*, ed. Nicholas Moschovakis (New York: Routledge, 2008) pp. 73-87. And for a recent reading of *Macbeth*'s staging of monarchical surveillance see Arthur F. Kinney, "Macbeth's Knowledge," *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004) pp. 11-26.

[49] See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2005).

The future in the instant.

<div style="text-align: right;">(1.5.54-5)</div>

But for Macbeth himself ecstasy comes to mark a darker self-displacement, a darker and more problematic alienation from action. In the play's own peculiarly subjective version of tragic irony, this self-actualization is negated by the self-displacement from which it originally sprung, both in Macbeth's own anxious cogitations and in his monarchical behavior, his willingness to let

> … the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
>
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
>
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams,
>
> That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead,
>
> Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
>
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
>
> *In restless ecstasy*.

<div style="text-align: right;">(3.2.15-22; my emphasis)</div>

Ecstasy emerges, here, in opposition to the themes of eating and sleeping—what G. Wilson Knight famously called the play's "life themes"—which appear repeatedly at the margins of Shakespeare's play as hints of a world beyond the bleak reality of

Macbeth's own existence.[50] Indeed, Macbeth speaks these lines shortly before he

orders the assassination of Banquo, a move that he makes in order to close off the

possibility of the self-displacement that haunts him in these lines. But while his

assassins succeed in dispatching Banquo, his son and heir Fleance escapes, and this

causes Macbeth, when he hears the news, to return once again to his ecstatic *idée*

fixe—this time appears in the form of a "fit" that contrasts with the material solidity

and airy freedom for which he increasingly pines:

    Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect,

    Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,

    As broad and general as the casing air:

    But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in

    To saucy doubts and fears. But Banquo's safe?

                              (3.4.21-5)

These lines are spoken near the start of the *Macbeth*'s famous banquet scene,

where Banquo's recently-minted ghost haunts Macbeth as he attempts to conduct a

court dinner. Critics have long focused on this scene, seeing it as a kind of set-piece

moment where the disarray Macbeth is bringing to Scotland in his attempts to shore

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[50] See G. Wilson Knights, *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 160-80. See also his *The Imperial Theme* (London: Methuen, 1968) pp. 125-53.

up his own kingship is made brutally clear.[51] But the scene's emphasis on the split between Macbeth's perceptions and those of his guests also foregrounds the degree to which the play, as it proceeds, puts more and more emphasis on the subjective space of *Macbeth's own* experience. This experience hinges on Macbeth's increasing realization that the moral perfidy he has committed in the pursuit of his own ambition has left him ontologically displaced from *both* the social life of the Scottish aristocracy and from his own sense of stability, groundedness *and* (most decisively) his ability to act. We see this clearly in a monologue Macbeth speaks slightly earlier in the play, shortly before he has Banquo killed:

> To be thus is nothing;
>
> But to be safely thus. – Our fears in Banquo
>
> Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature
>
> Reigns that which would be fear'd: 'tis much he dares;
>
> And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
>
> He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
>
> To act in safety. There is none but he

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[51] For a recent account of the banquet scene along these lines, see Paul A. Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) pp. 92-93. Although Kottman's engagement with *Macbeth* is limited to this particular moment in the play, his study in general is concerned with Shakespeare's staging of action and how it relates to the emergence of modern conceptions of the political in a way parallel to my own. His approach, however, is resolutely non-historicist and allied with Hannah Arendt in focusing on the trans-historical theatricality of political experience. For a more extended account of Kottman's very important study see my review in *Textual Practice* 23, no. 4 (2009) pp. 693-96.

Whose being I do fear:

(3.1.47-53)

These lines capture the ecstasy that Macbeth undergoes throughout the play's long *dénouement*, and which will become so theatrically apparent after the attack on Banquo and his son fails. The disorienting deixis of the first two lines quickly cuts to a forceful thesis about the political being of the sovereign: that monarchical being is tantamount to non-being unless it is *safe* being. But significantly, this focus on sovereign safety quickly fades. Macbeth's attention lingers only briefly on issues of sovereignty and rule, but he expends minimal space on Banquo's apparent "royalty of nature." Instead, his attention seems irresistibly drawn from the ideal of *rule* and toward the ideal of *action*—the very ideal, of course, that he himself embodied at the play's opening. The first of these lines limn Banquo as an exemplary embodiment of a long-standing classical ideal of heroism— that is, the perfect conjunction of virtue and wisdom, *virtus* and *sapientia*, in which "virtue" leads to an action "governed with the scepter of knowledge," as Sidney writes in the *New Arcadia*.[52] And it is precisely this ethical and political state to from which Macbeth, by this point in the play, is alienated.

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[52] Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (London: Penguin, 1977) p. 520. On this tradition of ethical thinking see also Merritt Hughes, "The Christ of *Paradise Regained* and the Renaissance Heroic Tradition," *Studies in Philology* 35 (1938) pp. 254-77 and Eugene Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

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Macbeth's condition after Duncan is dispatched, then, is characterized by a permanent experience of political ecstasy—a permanent ontological disorientation and displacement from both social belonging as well as the decisive "heroic" action under whose aegis he leaves that belonging. In Shakespeare's portrayal of Macbeth, we see a state of exception where—rather than shoring up sovereign power— Macbeth is forced to confront, in striving for sovereignty, the fragility, the weakness, the *lack* that is, he ultimately concludes, part of any and all human action.

In a remarkable reading of *Macbeth*—one of the few recent accounts that operates outside the historicist mainstream of commentary on Shakespeare's play— Ewan Fernie argues that *Macbeth* is a play haunted by what Lacan called "the Real": the negativity that persists in every action, every attempt to assign cut and dry meanings and cohesion to human existence. "It's as if," Fernie writes, "by means of Duncan's death Macbeth has scratched away the flimsy surface of the world to reveal the Lacanian void raging beneath."[53] But while Fernie uses *Macbeth* to develop a theory of tragedy's confrontation with this negativity in trans-historical terms, I would argue that we might also read this dynamic in *Macbeth* as a product of something more specific. Here it is helpful to put *Macbeth* alongside not Lacan but

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[53] Ewan Fernie, "Hardcore Tragedy," in *Tragedy in Transition*, ed. Sarah Annes Brown (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008) p. 73.

rather the work of perhaps the greatest thinker of ecstasy in the Renaissance: Michel de Montaigne.

Montaigne's *Essays* dwell repeatedly on ecstasy and ecstatic experiences in their repeated exploration of the inescapable internalized alienation of human beings, of the ways in which "[w]e are never 'at home': we are always outside ourselves. Fear, desire, hope, impel us toward the future; they rob us of feelings and concern for what now is, in order to spend time over what will be —even when we ourselves shall be no more."[54] This preoccupation runs throughout Montaigne's writing, from early considerations of topics like sadness and intoxication all the way to the final pages of the last of the essays, "Of Experience." [55] Montaigne's preoccupation with ecstatic experiences has often been read in terms of his revival of classical stoic and skeptical thinkers and or his putative discovery of a kind of a kind of proto-Cartesian modernity. But it is worth emphasizing, here, that Montaigne's entire project—and the sense of self-displacement that is at the heart of his development of the essay form—has its origins in particular political trauma, specifically in the trauma of the French Wars of Religion. Montaigne's sense of human fragility, in other words, is the flipside of the political chaos he experienced in his own life—a chaos he reacted to by retreating into the aristocratic *otium* the

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[54] Michel de Montaigne, "Our Emotions Get Carried Away Beyond Us," in *Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987) p. 11.

[55] See M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the* Essays (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000).

Essays stage but which, for other thinkers like Jean Bodin, provided legitimacy for a centralized and consolidated sovereign state power.[56] This trauma appears only obliquely in the essays, but it is everywhere beneath the pessimism, the skepticism, the sense of human fragility that is their greatest feature and fixation:

> Man is the most slighted and frail of all creatures and, moreover, the most given to pride. This creature knows and sees that he is lodged down here, among the mire and shit of the world, bound and nailed to the deadest, most stagnant part of the universe, in the lowest storey of the building, and the farthest from the vault of heaven; his characteristics place him in the third and lowest category of animate creatures, yet, in thought, he sets himself above the circle of the moon, bringing the very heavens under his feet. [57]

Macbeth parallels Montaigne's writing insofar as it stages such a politically-derived experience of human impotence, of the failure of action as a totalizing political practice. But while Montaigne retreats into the conciliatory literary praxis of his *Essays*, *Macbeth* derives a different conclusion from the late-Renaissance political

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[56] See, generally, Biancamaria Fontana, *Montaigne's Politics: Authority and Governance in the* Essais (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) and Timothy J. Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[57] Montaigne, "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," in *Essays*, p. 505.

pessimism that *Macbeth* and the *Essays* share.[58] And this conclusion is articulated in what is, without a doubt, *Macbeth*'s most famous speech:

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
>
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
>
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
>
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
>
> The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle.
>
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
>
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
>
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
>
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
>
> Signifying nothing.
>
> (5.5.17-27)

These lines and their dramatic situation are both familiar. Following the sudden death of his wife, and with the violent and chaotic consequences of his usurpation of the Scottish crown barreling toward him, Macbeth steps back and considers the meaning of human existence. It is, he avers, not a site of plenitude or wholeness but

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[58] For more on the pessimistic political culture of the later Renaissance see the introduction. There is a significant critical literature on Montaigne's relationship to Shakespeare. For my purposes, the most relevant recent study is Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 109-25.

rather of *lack*; human existence is actually an *ex-istence*—a being always already outside itself. Such deep ontological displacement is, Macbeth goes on to claim, always caught up in time. Human life is always displaced from its present; we live in constant anticipation of a fragmented futurity. Hence the passage's famous theatrical turn as Shakespeare summons up the ancient and ubiquitous image of the *theatrum mundi*, of the "world as stage," but gives it a striking anti-theatrical twist, denuding this global theatricality of any positive content and making the "poor player" a figure for the emphemerality and emptiness of a human finitude as such.[59]

It would be easy to read this in simply existential terms, or as a standard statement of Renaissance *contemptus mundi*.[60] But I want to argue that the play's concluding negative turn suggests not a simple philosophical epiphany, existential mood-swing, or exemplum of the moral-metaphysical destructiveness of evil, as older critics argued.[61] It is rather the culmination of an interrogation of action that runs throughout the play. It is a final claim that, in transgressing social bounds, reveals its own ecstatic core: it confronts the human impotence, the weakness of human praxis, at the core of political life. This becomes clear if we turn, for a moment, back to the passage's theatrical trope. Earlier in the play, as we have seen,

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[59] For a classic consideration of the derivation and deployment of this *topos* see Ernst Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1954) pp. 138-44. For an equally-influential account of early modern anti-theatricalism see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

[60] See Herschel Baker, *The Wars of Truth: Studies in the Decay of Christian Humanism in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953).

[61] Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 305-66 and Knights, *ibid*.

theatricality is associated with action, with the "swelling" of the "Imperial theme."

But now it figures disillusionment with action *itself*. Macbeth's concluding

consideration of human being collapses *both* sorts of action into one, ultimately

empty category. It makes action a mask for a bleak human ex-istence which is

always ecstatically outside itself and exposed to the contingency and insecurities of

an inscrutable world that ultimately *means* nothing at all.

    Macbeth's actual ending, of course, comes not with the bleak realization that

human action "signifies nothing" but rather in a scene of harmonic social

reconciliation typical of Shakespeare's tragedies. After Macduff has slain Macbeth

and delivered his severed head to Scotland's new monarch, Malcolm declares:

> We shall not spend a large expense of time
>
> Before we reckon with your several loves,
>
> And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,
>
> Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
>
> In such an honour named.

<div align="right">(5.8.60-5)</div>

In Malcolm's concluding thank-you to the aristocracy that has helped him defeat his

father's usurper we see, once again, a reciprocal political ideal where action and

loyalty exist in a cohesive and coherent balance. But even for the usually-ambivalent

conclusions of Shakespeare's tragedies, the ending of *Macbeth* seems particularly *pro forma*, sharply undercut by the realization that Macbeth has voiced, on stage, just a few minutes earlier. It is in *this* realization, I would argue, that *Macbeth* finds its true conclusion: while the play ends with an outward show of social harmony, it leaves us with a sense of the fragility, insufficiency, and ecstatic alienation of individual action in an increasingly abstract and aleatory political modernity.

Conclusion

It might seem odd to end a dissertation about early modern heroism with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Written in the first decade of the seventeenth century, Shakespeare's play predates a good portion of the heroic literature of the English Renaissance. Heroism would continue to occupy an important place on the English stage up to the closing of the theaters shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. And beyond this, when the theaters reopened, the heroic would be at the center of the late seventeenth-century theatrical boom represented by writers like William Davenant and John Dryden. Dryden's heroic tragedies, particularly, represent a re-inflation of the heroic ideal, where heroic and chivalric ideas and ideals are used to bolster an emergent sense of English identity and the imperial destiny of the late seventeenth century's military-fiscal state.[1] And the same is true, in complex ways, of the work of various other writers from the period, who agreed with Thomas Hobbes' statement that "there is in Princes and men of conspicuous power, anciently called *Heroes*, a luster and influence upon the rest of men resembling that of the Heavens."[2]

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[1] On the late seventeenth-century emergence of England's military-fiscal state see John Brewer, *The Sinews of War: War, Money, and the English State 1688-1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). Brewer's study coined the term "fiscal-military state." See also Michael Braddick's more recent *State Formation in Early Modern England, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[2] Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's 'Preface to *Gondibert*," in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. Joel Spingarn (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1904) v. 2, p. 55. For overviews of later seventeenth-century heroic literature, particularly in the theater, see Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (New York: Columbia

But whatever their relation to these later events, the writers I have analyzed in the foregoing pages represent a distinct phenomenon. They present a distinct perspective on collective life—a vision of political experience where a personalized, action-oriented concept of politics is increasingly running up against its own historical limits. These limits take various imaginative forms in the texts I have examined: the aristocratic civil war of Sidney's *Arcadia*, the meta-theatrical paralysis of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the baroque language and intellectual askesis of Chapman's French tragedies, and the haunting existential malaise that concludes Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. But all of these texts share a deeply similar vision of individual action failing amidst the emergence of an abstract, alienated, and fundamentally state-based paradigm of political life.

For each of the authors we have examined, however, heroism doesn't just represent political failure and frustration. It also hints at the transformation of this negative experience through the very process of poetic representation itself. In Sidney and Marlowe and Chapman and Shakespeare heroism represents not just a resistance to reality but the *embrace* of negativity that Sigmund Freud, writing centuries later, saw at the center of art in general:

University Press, 1962) and Eugene Waith, *Ideas of Greatness* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971); Reuben Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Greco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). See also John Douglas Canfield, *Heroes and States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mold his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality. Thus in a certain fashion he actually becomes the hero, the king, the creator, or the favourite he desired to be, without following the long roundabout path of making real alterations in the external world. But he can only achieve this because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he does with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because that dissatisfaction, which results from the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality.[3]

For Freud, art begins by a turning away from the actual; but this initial negation of things as they are is *itself* negated as the artist finds his way back to a new level of actuality: the shared "dissatisfaction" of human beings with their circumstances; a dissatisfaction that is, Freud claims, "itself a part of reality." Such an understanding of art—where the creative imagination begins as a fugitive from reality but is

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[3] Sigmund Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989) 305.

ultimately welcomed home into the "second nature" of inter-subjectivity—would later be reified in the modern ideology of aesthetics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[4] But this dynamic also runs through the heroic writing of Sidney and Marlowe and Chapman and Shakespeare. In their own way, these writers proleptically map the contours of our own modernity—where subjectivity is confined to the realm of art and culture, and where the political sphere is a zone of de-personalized abstraction; of man-made constructs like the state, society, and the market run amok.[5]

This point seems particularly important today. This dissertation was written in a moment when justifying and defending literature and its professional study has never seemed more pressing.[6] Many today argue that literature and the humanities more broadly are useless, out of place in a tough globalized world where our universities ought to be heeding Thomas Friedman-style injunctions toward

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[4] See Immanuel Kant's claim that the "imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952] 176). On the rise of the aesthetic see also Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991); and Paul de Man *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[5] For this proto-aesthetic dynamic in early modern notions of the literary see Timothy J. Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[6] See Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: Norton, 2010) and Mark C. Taylor, *Crisis on Campus: A Bold Plan for Reforming our Colleges and Universities* (New York: Knopf, 2010). Although Menand's is no doubt the smarter and more measured of these two books, Taylor's captures something of the rhetoric of crisis amidst which I am writing these pages.

economic competitiveness.[7] But before this point is conceded—or weakly defended

with clichés about moral self-cultivation the humanities inspire[8]—it is important to

remember that literature as we know it emerged in the early modern period out of

some of the same experiences that confront us today. For Sidney and Marlowe and

Chapman and Shakespeare, the world was no less frightening, alien, and aleatory

than it seems to many of us in the early twenty-first century. The rise of the

centralized monarchical state was no less bewildering than the chaos of the

contemporary market or the grim eventualities of our species' ecological situation.

Sidney, Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare, of course, wrote from within a matrix

of political and ethical ideas that are alien to us. But in its broad gestures, their work

points to literature's vocation as a site for affective resistance to things as they are—

even in a moment when the pressure of what Friedrich Nietzsche once called the

"tyranny of the actual" seems almost impossible to resist.[9]

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[7] See—most recently—Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, *That Used to be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How it Can Come Back* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011).

[8] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 106.

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