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The Father's Witness: Patriarchal Images of Boys

for Harry

Feed me with Your gaze, O Lord.
—Nicholas of Cusa

The Elderly Boy

THE BODY OF A SMALL BOY PERCHES on one corner of a chair much too large (fig. 1). The toy sailboat resting on one leg is balanced, in the symmetry of the composition, against an incongruous, grandfatherly head, gazing blandly from behind its spectacles as if unaware of its predicament. Only the flicker of a smile around the mouth, fainter even than the Mona Lisa's, hints that the head in its wisdom may be amused by its toy boat and toylike body.

Deliberately absurd, this untitled photomontage from around 1915 parodies the impulse to cherish precocious adulthood that has governed literary and artistic representations of children since Virgil first praised Ascanius for being “thoughtful, responsible / Beyond his years.”¹ Ernst Robert Curtius gives this figure a name: he calls it the *puer senex*, or elderly boy.² The elderly boy has an antitype, the *senex puer* (think of Polonius, or Charles Dickens's Harold Skimpole), and each of these has a sister, the *puella senex* and the *senex puella*. The *puer senex*, though, appears far more frequently than the others do. After Virgil it becomes a topic of praise for writers in the rhetorical tradition of late antiquity when they want to grace a youthful subject with a high-toned allusion. As they work their variations on the topic these writers also stylize it, polarizing its synthesis of youth and maturity to create a more striking image—not just a youth mature beyond his years, but a prodigy displaying in a child the wisdom of a graybeard.

The nearly anonymous Boston photographer, surnamed Purdy, who created the image is a modern inheritor of this tradition, which in highly sentimentalized form passed through William Wordsworth and Dickens and into Victorian popular culture. Like the rhetoricians who were his distant antecedents, Purdy takes the components of the figure to opposite extremes. But as parody his image has a disconcerting edge, turning the compliment around to reveal the adult audience for whom it was always, finally, intended. By taking the rhetorical “figure” literally,



FIGURE 1. Purdy, Photomontage of Man's Head on Boy's Body, c. 1915. © Rodger Kingston Collection. By permission of Rodger Kingston.

that is, Purdy uncovers the transaction implicit in it, the address to an adult witness who is posited as both the speaker's audience and the child's model. Purdy's composite image skewers convention by flushing this witness out of hiding and exposing the character of the "space" in which he hides, a reflective surface that is at once the child's countenance and his persona.

In earlier examples from the tradition we can see complex forms of the transaction Purdy has compressed into a single unsettling image. An entry from the *Tatler*, published by Richard Steele in 1709, offers a revealing instance. Thomas Betterton, seventy years of age but still the most celebrated Shakespearean actor of the day, is praised for the remarkable feat of playing young prince Hamlet. In almost the same breath, a little boy named Jerry is commended for responding so ardently to the performance:

I was going on in reading my Letter, when I was interrupted by Mr. *Greenhat*, who has been this Evening at the Play of *Hamlet*. "Mr. *Bickerstaff*," said he, "had you been to Night at the Play-house you had seen the Force of Action in Perfection. Your admir'd Mr. *Betterton* behav'd himself so well that tho' now about Seventy he acted Youth; and by the prevalent Power of proper Manner, Gesture and Voice, appear'd through the whole *Drama* a Youth of great Expectation, Vivacity and Enterprize. The Soliloquy where he began the celebrated sentence of *To be, or not to be*; the Expostulation where he explains with his Mother in her Closet; the noble ardor after seeing his Father's Ghost, and his generous Distress for the Death of *Ophelia*; are each of them Circumstances which dwell strongly upon the Minds of the Audience, and would certainly affect their Behaviour on any parallel occasions in their own Lives. Pray, Mr. *Bickerstaff*, let us have Virtue thus represented on the Stage with its proper Ornaments, or let these Ornaments be added to her in Places more sacred. As for my Part," said he, "I carry'd my Cousin *Jerry*, this little Boy, with me and shall always love the Child for his Partiality in all that concern'd the Fortune of *Hamlet*. This is entering Youth into the Affections and Passions of Manhood before-hand, and as it were antedating the Effects we hope from a long and liberal Education."³

There is an odd symmetry in this passage between little Jerry's introduction to manhood and the rejuvenation of Steele's "admir'd Mr. Betterton." It is as if the mysterious "Force of Action in Perfection" has somehow drawn them together. Taken a step further, the process might lead to just such a fantastic amalgamation as Purdy has visualized. But here the middle term that gathers youth and age into itself is not—apparently—the *puer senex*, it is Hamlet.

Little Jerry is "partial" to Hamlet, meaning he enters the drama of manhood by vicariously taking Hamlet's part. But why should he want to be Hamlet? Because Mr. Greenhat does, and will always love Jerry for doing the same. The child seeks approval by imitating the grown-up "cousin" (his uncle, perhaps?) who "carries" him to the performance in more than one sense. If we ask in turn why Mr. Greenhat wants to be Hamlet, the answer lies in his self-gratifying pronouncements about the moral value of Shakespeare: "Pray, Mr. *Bickerstaff*, let us have Virtue thus represented on the Stage with its proper Ornaments." In Hamlet he can love an idealized image of himself. And by carrying his little cousin to this exemplary performance

of virtue, he can flatter himself for doing what he calls his “Part” to promote “the Effects we hope from a long and liberal Education.”

Mr. Greenhat’s notion of virtue may strike us as odd. The *Tatler* essays, writes Brian Vickers, show Steele’s “personal appropriation of Shakespeare to a new sentimental morality.”⁴ No doubt this appropriation also reflects the ego ideal of the medium. The coffeehouse newspaper aspires to model discriminating taste and behavior for a broadening public sector, and if there is a touch of self-regard in Mr. Greenhat’s estimate of Hamlet, there may likewise be a touch of institutional vanity in the *Spectator*’s praise for the theater. But however we construe them, these circles of self-congratulation exercise remarkable transformative powers, reconceiving Hamlet’s sexual violence toward Gertrude as “explain[ing] with his Mother in her Closet,” and his egotistical rivalry with Laertes as “generous Distress” for the death of Ophelia.

The idealization that assimilates Hamlet’s violence to the morality of a later age shows itself capable of even greater miracles when it assimilates Betterton at age seventy to an image of youthful expectation. It is almost as if the actor were making good on Hamlet’s taunt to Polonius: the truth about old men’s bodies should not be bluntly set down, “for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.”⁵ Later in the same scene Hamlet marvels at the transformative powers of make-believe:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage waned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in’s aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing.

(2.2.551–57)

Together these passages form a kind of Shakespearean matrix for Mr. Greenhat’s account of the admired Betterton: is it not monstrous that this player here can, like a crab, go backward, forcing his soul so to his own conceit that forty years drop away from his visage? He works this miracle by suiting his whole function with forms to his conceit. Or as Steele puts it, “the prevalent power of proper Manner, Gesture and Voice” allows him to simulate the conventional ideal of manhood. This ideal is the “conceit” the age saw in Hamlet, the image of virtue “with its proper Ornaments” that Mr. Greenhat, spokesman for “the Minds of the Audience,” wants to see and wants to be. In itself this ideal may not be monstrous, but there is something disturbing in the way Betterton’s rejuvenation is replayed inversely in little Jerry—as if, like the portrait of Dorian Gray, he were aging on the actor’s behalf.

And yet whether monstrous or miraculous it is all, as Hamlet says, “for nothing.” Betterton turns into “a Youth of great Expectation,” a personification of en-

ergy and life subject to the effects of an imaginary future. However conceived, the “Affections and Passions of Manhood” will be just such a fiction, such a dream of passion. The *Tatler* passage shows how this dream sustains itself; it details the transactions by which culturally sanctioned “manhood” appropriates persons and is appropriated by them as a persona. Mr. Greenhat is especially concise in formulating the temporal paradox that allows the effects of culture to antedate their causes. He is no less explicit about how this paradox organizes the circulation of masculine self-love, forever pursuing its own image through a minuet of substitutions. The dream of manhood passes from dreamer to dreamer, from Betterton to Mr. Greenhat to little Cousin Jerry. Each imitates the object of the others’ desires, but the object itself is purely imaginary.

Moving further back in the tradition we see how this transaction may be embedded in the conventions of portrait painting. In a portrait by Sir Anthony van Dyck, *Filippo Cattaneo, Son of Marchesa Elena Grimaldi* (fig. 2), little Filippo postures manfully. Against the prevailing darkness of the background his left hand comes forward into the light, establishing itself together with the face as highlights of the composition.⁶ The hand’s position marks it as resting on the hilt of an unseen weapon, perhaps a dagger of the sort Shakespeare’s Leontes remembers from his childhood days, “muzzled, / Lest it should bite its master” (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.156–57). The gesture is one of assurance, an impression reinforced by the projecting elbow that, in the postural conventions of the genre, signifies masculine self-assertion.⁷ The bravado of the left hand is complemented by the right hand’s retreat into shadow, grasping the leash of a spaniel that crouches submissively in the background. Gaze averted in contrast to the boy’s forthright stare, this cowed pet testifies to its little master’s authority.⁸ And yet, for all of Filippo’s precocious mastery, we gaze down on this scene of petty triumph from a superior position; a ledge across the bottom of the foreground hints, meanwhile, that Master Filippo has been artificially elevated. Harry Berger shrewdly notes that “the foreshortened perspective produced partly by the tilted-up floor plane” in this painting “signifies a bird’s-eye view” even as it “places the observer’s eyes at the sitter’s eye-level,” so that “the face is not only brighter but bigger and nearer,” and “the resultant fantasy of disproportion contributes to the pathos of infantile bravado.”⁹

In this way the picture solicits patronizing indulgence from an adult viewer, a delegate like Steele’s Mr. Greenhat of the social world that produces the “little man.” As we saw in the *Tatler* passage, the affective economy of this world offers the grown-ups’ love as the child’s reward for simulating manhood, the lure that entices him “before-hand” into a cultural masquerade that is to generational difference what drag is to sex.

Purdy’s photomontage literalizes this masquerade as a mask. Its superimposed head lets us see in retrospect that Van Dyck’s posturing child was already a weirdly composite figure in whom the time is out of joint. The affective exchange at the heart of this transaction involves an awkward mixture of whimsy and seriousness:



FIGURE 2. Sir Anthony van Dyck, *Filippo Cattaneo, Son of Marchesa Elena Grimaldi*, 1623. Oil on canvas. Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. By permission of the National Gallery of Art.

the child is loved at once for impersonating a man and for not being one. His bravado is endearing in its way because it is not threatening, so the response it calls for is a complementary masquerade in which adult amusement, signifying complacency in the face of a mock challenge, pretends admiration, deference, or fear. We cannot literally see this complacency in the portrait of Filippo, but once we acknowledge its implied presence we are prepared to see in the child's assumed bravado a form of submission as abject in its way as the spaniel's humble crouch. For as masquerade, the little boy's lordly attitude subordinates his newfound ability to recognize and assert himself as *me* to the social world's demand for deferential flattery expressed as precocious masculinity. In this way the panache of a little Jerry or Filippo, as he steps (or is carried) forward into an imaginary future, marks his immature *me* as a wanna-be *us*.

A Thing of Nothing

All three of the representations we have considered telescope age and youth. What they represent is not man or boy but the desire of each to cross the gap between them, the boy's desire to be magnified and the man's to be reflected. They do not represent these desires in the same way, however. In Van Dyck the boy is on display, the man only implied as a witness. Steele displays, along with the boy, the adult male showing him off. Purdy, like Steele, exposes not just the adult witness but the fantasy informing his display of the child. All three, though, point to *the invisibility of the father as father* when they make the boy signify his identification with the adult male. None of the relations in question is explicitly filial, yet all three representations turn the boy into a visible symbol of the invisible link between fathers and sons.

With actual fathers and sons the dynamic is the same but the stakes are higher. Father-son identity is so central and powerful in Western culture that it often leads to a bitter struggle for control of the single self these generational rivals seem to share. The mother's role in the rivalry is pivotal, not necessarily because the relations involved are themselves primordially sexual but because she embodies the link between father and son. Yet since the father cannot *see* his fatherhood in her, he looks for it instead in the son. This desire sets in motion the dynamic we see in Purdy, Steele, and Van Dyck, the transformation of the child into a symbolic object whose body signifies paternity.

In the same year that Van Dyck painted *Filippo Cattaneo*, John Heminges and Henry Condell brought out the first folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. In *The Winter's Tale* (written c. 1609–11), we find the familiar topic of the *puer senex* invoked at a pivotal moment between father and son. King Leontes of Sicilia has been playing host for nine months to his boyhood friend Polixenes, the king of Bohemia. In the play's second scene, Polixenes has just announced his intention to depart. By a

fateful coincidence, Leontes' queen, Hermione, is about to give birth to their second child, meaning that the term of her pregnancy has coincided with Polixenes' visit. When Polixenes resists the king's plea to delay his departure but then acquiesces to Hermione, Leontes' suspicions are aroused. Watching his queen entertain his closest friend with a familiarity he finds intolerable, Leontes turns aside, seething with jealousy. In the passage that follows he talks partly to himself and partly to his son, Mamillius. In the process, he lurches awkwardly between dialogue and asides, drawing the asides out into soliloquies and then shifting abruptly back to dialogue. In its own way this uncertainty of address dramatizes the instability of the boundary between father and son. Questions about this boundary are also the explicit content of the passage, for the king's doubts about his queen register immediately as doubts about his son's legitimacy: "Mamillius," he asks, "Art thou my boy?" (1.2.119–20).

This could be any father's question, a routine invitation to confirm the bond of affection. Leontes goes on in just such solicitous tones: "I'fecks, / Why, that's my bawcock. What? Has smutched thy nose?" (1.2.120–22). But his dark underthought surfaces repeatedly: "They say [the nose] is a copy out of mine"; "they say we are / Almost as alike as eggs. Women say so, / That will say anything" (1.2.122, 129–31). Leontes generates a whole series of jocose nicknames that magnify the child beyond his years ("bawcock," "captain," "mine honest friend") or reduce him to the status of a morsel ("you wanton calf," "Most dear'st, my collop" [bit of flesh], "this kernel"). Sometimes he condenses both impulses into the same phrase ("sir page," "sweet villain," "This squash, this gentleman"). The king's friend Polixenes, speaking of his own young prince, echoes the faintly belligerent undertone of this patronizing address:

If at home, sir,
 He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter,
 Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy;
 My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all.
 He makes a July's day short as December,
 And with his varying childness cures in me
 Thoughts that would thicken my blood.
 (1.2.165–71)

Shakespeare unsettles the overfamiliar rhetoric of such fatherly affection by embedding it within several related transactions. The mock rivalry between father and son plays against the latent one between the two kings, and both relationships turn on the question of proximity to the queen: paddling palms, pinching fingers, whispering. Once Hermione comes under suspicion both relationships break down, and they do so because the dimension of proximity has turned sinister: when the friend who is so close he might be oneself turns into a deadly rival, the son who seems his father's copy must be snatched from his mother's presence. The "varying childness"

that makes the little boy “now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy” may seem to offer only a token challenge, flattering the indulgent father. Yet by invoking this language just as the system of relations that contains it is turning murderous, Shakespeare suggests how volatile the underlying tensions can be. All the elements so innocently present in Polixenes’ speech—the hint of darkness in “thoughts that would thicken my blood,” the alternations from friend to enemy, July to December, child to statesman—have specific counterparts in Leontes’ distracted inspection of Mamillius; the thoughts that thicken Leontes’ blood keep breaking in on the discourse of indulgent fatherhood like a subtext that will not stay hidden.

The result is a vivid rendering of the implied relations within which an image like Van Dyck’s *Filippo* is suspended. It is as if the points of view from which the portrait is painted and to which it is addressed were not only shown along with the boy, but also thrown into crisis. In Shakespeare’s play Queen Hermione’s pregnant body—symbolically charged, visually imposing, tense with the imminence of birth—silently dominates the stage, conditioning all that is said. In representations like the *Tatler* passage or the portrait of Filippo, the maternal body is twice removed, serving only as the unacknowledged ground of a perspective that is tacitly paternal. Shakespeare, by contrast, first pulls the father into the scene and then stages the father’s demand to be copied against the background of the mother’s enlarged abdomen.

In doing so the playwright lets us see yet another rivalry, that between himself and Hermione. Only the mother, whose art is nature and whose body is a competing “globe,” can answer in the flesh the father’s desire to be copied. But the playwright also lets us see how the mother’s very superiority can devastate the fatherhood it makes possible. All the while as Leontes gazes on his son, Hermione’s body mutely displays the connection to children that a father can never have. His connection is always nominal, legal, testimonial, and therefore speculative. Words like *chastity* and *adultery* can *formulate* the difference on which fatherhood depends but cannot point to it. Even when the evidence includes physical resemblance it remains a matter of conjecture and perception, constituted not by manifest facts of the body, as pregnancy and birth are, but by a symbolic system.

In this system the queen’s virtue, the prince’s legitimacy, and the king’s fatherhood are all one thing or they are all nothing. What would this “thing” look like if we could see it? Is it possible even to imagine the *body of paternity*? Within the culture of patrilineal patriarchy the answer must be no: fatherhood, to adapt a line from Iago, “is an essence that’s not seen” (*Othello* 4.1.15). In a deeply ironic twist, this makes fatherhood equivalent to the female genitals, at least in the reductive terms that define sexual difference by the presence or absence of the penis. And there is ample evidence that in Elizabethan England, the female genitals were regarded (to echo Hamlet now) as “no thing.” This logic supposedly reinforces the privilege of the phallus in male-dominant cultures, but it also returns to haunt this

privilege in the contrast between the visible tumescence of motherhood and the irremediably verbal or symbolic status of fatherhood. As Hamlet also memorably remarks, “The king is a thing . . . Of nothing’” (4.3.26–28).

In *The Winter’s Tale* Shakespeare demonstrates the reality of this “nothing,” which takes on traumatic force as the “absent cause” of Leontes’ inexplicable madness precisely *because* it can neither exist nor be represented. That is what drives Leontes crazy. Shakespeare’s dramaturgical coup, which baffles most readers and has never quite been understood, is to have staged the paternal body’s absence so precisely while lending it such devastating power. Like God, and according to a similarly inscrutable logic, Leontes seems to require his own son’s death in order to substantiate his fatherhood, both in the sense of proving it beyond doubt and in the sense of providing it with a body.

The Winter’s Tale seeks to recuperate its losses in ways too intricate to unfold here, but we should at least notice that, as recent criticism has stressed, the maternal body is absent from the closing scene in which Hermione’s statue comes to life. In this miracle, pregnancy is sublimated into the male artist’s immaculate power of conception, leaving the female body split between a mother past childbearing and a prenuptial daughter. This transformation recovers fatherhood as symbolic *form* in the political body of the dynastic marriage and as symbolic *function* in the regenerative potency of the theatrical illusion that resurrects a dead queen. But this reassertion of the paternal body as dynastic and aesthetic symbol masks, even as it reenacts, its loss *as body*. Corporeally the father remains a thing of nothing.

In keeping with the logic of filial sacrifice, the play names this loss “Mamillius.” “At the end of *The Winter’s Tale*,” writes Stanley Cavell, “a dead five- or six-year-old boy remains unaccounted for.”¹⁰ I cannot imagine accounting for such a thing, but it seems important to recognize that the death of the royal heir is required not only by the king’s madness but by the dynastic plot, which merges the kingdoms instead of the kings. The plot opens a path to this merger by substituting Perdita, and through her Florizel, for the lost child who will *not* be found. Mamillius, as the bodily form of Leontes’ fatherhood, dies so that the body masculine can be reconstituted in dynastic form. The play’s romance ending thus depends on a sacrificial economy, although this dependency is disguised by the masterful sleight of dramaturgy through which Shakespeare replaces the masculine body’s loss with the restoration of Hermione, purged of natural fertility and reborn through the triumph of theatrical illusion.

A Digression upon Blasphemy

The examples we began with share an economy of representation organized with implicit reference to an adult, masculine gaze (and to the desires of

fatherhood). In Shakespeare we begin to see this modern and secular system of the fatherly gaze in a different context, suspended against the background of an archaic sacrificial economy that seems forever to be rupturing in the wake of some great, unspecified historical trauma. I want to suggest that one of the familiar names by which we know this trauma is “the Reformation.” The most familiar definition of the Reformation takes doctrinal disputes over the Communion ritual to be its central feature. In citing this historical landmark I would add that the Mass is the preeminent instance in medieval and early modern culture of a symbolic transaction in which the body of a boy is presented to a third party to substantiate the reality of fatherhood. For like paternity in general, the transcendent Father of the New Testament has no body of his own. He achieves immanence only in and as the Son.

By the twelfth century in Europe the consecration of the host during Mass was beginning to emerge as a “second sacrament” distinct from Communion; the elevation of the host dates from this period. “By the thirteenth century,” Carolyn Walker Bynum reports, “we find stories of people attending Mass only for the moment of elevation, racing from church to church to see as many consecrations as possible, and shouting at the priest to hold the host up higher.”¹¹ Theologians describe the Son’s descent into the wafer as reenacting the Incarnation; “insistently,” writes Bynum, “the host forced itself onto the senses of believers as flesh with firm boundaries” (62, 63). However firm, of course, these boundaries were also subject to extraordinary metamorphoses, and in many of these Jesus takes female form. Bynum and other historians have explored the range of symbolic identifications his body sustains in the writings of female mystics, who used the cultural association of women with flesh to envision the suffering Jesus as female, and often maternal. Bynum goes so far as to speak of “the startling reversal at the heart of the Mass” in which God and priest, as food and food-preparer, become symbolically female (278–79). Such reversal of attributes is typical of religious symbolism and may lend itself to the critique of dominant practices. Yet as Bynum also observes, “Women’s images [are] informed and made possible by the symbolic oppositions of the dominant theological tradition” (292–93). Such imagery does not always sustain the tradition from which it arises, but it does pad out the disembodied father with the values and capacities of women’s bodies. True, if the priest can be seen as symbolically female in the pivotal moments of the Mass, then women may also represent themselves as symbolically priestlike—and they did, as Bynum has shown. But this asymmetrical reversal makes it easier as well to accept women’s literal exclusion from the priesthood. In this respect such imagery may be compared to the *Vierges ouvrantes*, those “late medieval devotional objects in which the statue of Mary nursing her baby opens to show God inside.”¹² Their message might be paraphrased “Our Bodies, Himself.”

The most forthright way to develop an argument about the filial symbolism of

the Mass would be through a discussion of the Eucharist. But it is not the only way, and I offer instead a digression upon blasphemy. References to the Eucharistic body and its members are the most common profanities in early modern English, and the polemic against them offers an explicit parallel to disputes over the nature of the communion.

Blasphemers routinely swear by God's blood, wounds, nails, and bones. These oaths belong to a class formed by adding nouns (with or without adjectives) to some form of the possessive "God's."¹³ Many are simple, yeomanly expletives that pay their respects to the deity by taking the work of transgression seriously; such are earnest references to God's blood, death, dignity, heart, mercy, mother, passion, or wounds. Others find slightly offbeat ways to compound the offense of profanely invoking God. The *OED* lists eleven "minced forms" of the divine possessive, some of which dice it as a slang term for the penis ("Cods," "Cocks"). Among the fifty-six nouns and adjectives the *OED* finds in such oaths are a number that seem similarly impertinent. Such would include references to God's foot, his eyelids, his guts, his hat, his lady, his malt, and perhaps (depending on how it is construed) his nails. There is even a group of "corrupt or fabricated" nouns that occur in no other contexts—words like "bodykin," "pittikins," and "sonties." A quaint oath like "Odd's Bodykin" first minces God's name into the common term for peculiarity and then yokes it incongruously to his "little body."¹⁴ Such expressions have something in common with the rhetoric of fatherly affection: there too we encounter a jocular mingling of the impulses to magnify, to diminish, and to take calculated liberties with the subject's dignity. Perhaps oaths might be thought of as a displaced counterblast, a rhetoric of filial impertinence.

In a sacrificial economy such oaths are not just overly familiar; they are violent and genuinely obscene. Geoffrey Chaucer's Pardoner, describing the profanity of the rioters in his tale, echoes one of the popular commonplaces of fourteenth-century sermons:

Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable
That it is grisly for to heere hem swere,
Oure blissed Lordes body they totere —
Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough—
And ech of hem at otheres synne lough.¹⁵

Before the Reformation this theology of oaths was by no means employed for mere vividness. The body they tore was not just mystical. This point is illustrated by a tale from Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (1303). A rich man given to swearing great oaths is lying alone in his sickbed when a woman comes before him weeping and carrying a bloody child:

Of þe chyld þat she bare yn here armys
Al to drawe were þe þarmys^{guttys}
Of handys, of fete, þe flesh of drawyn,

Mouþ, eȝyn, & nose were al tognawyn,
Bak and sydys were al bloody.¹⁶
(lines 701–5)

Rising up in pity and alarm, the rich man asks who she is and who has mauled her child:

“þou,” she seyð, “has hym so shent,
And wyþ þyn oþys al to rent.
þus hast þou drawyn my dere chyld
Wyþ þyn oþys, wykkyd & wyld.
And þou makst me sore to grete^{wepe}
þat þou þyn oþys wylt nat lete.
Hys manhede þat he toke for þe,
þou pynyst hyt, as þou mayst se.
þyn oþys down hym more greuusnesse
þan al þe Iewys wykkydnesse.
þey pynye hym onys & passyd away,
But þou pynyst hym euery day. . . .”
(lines 711–22)

Superficially Mannyng’s strategy in these passages resembles that of the Purdy photomontage, which mocks the rhetoric of fatherly affection by embodying its trope with disconcerting literalness. Yet Mannyng fleshes his trope to different effect. He does so because he conceives of the strategy not as literalizing a figure of speech but as portraying realistically the effects of a language whose potency is sacramental. His blasphemer’s vision bears a stronger resemblance to the “proliferating eucharistic miracles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—in which the host . . . turned visibly into Christ” (*Holy Feast*, 51).

In *The Anatomy of Swearing* Ashley Montagu cites instances of this corporealizing motif as late as the 1540s in England. A verse pamphlet by Stephen Hawes entitled *The Conversion of Swearers*, prefaced by an illustration of the bleeding Christ, revives the tale of the bloody child: “With awful realism,” says Montagu, “Hawes . . . describes how the hands and feet of Christ were being literally pierced anew and every member and portion of his body torn and lacerated by the imprecations of unheeding Christians.”¹⁷ A related and equally durable trope represents the material effects of swearing as butchery. The *Ayenbite of Inwit* (1340) says that swearers “break” the Lord’s body “smaller than one doth swine in butchery”; nearly two centuries later Sir Thomas Elyot in *A Boke Named the Governour* (1531) disparages oaths that call on God’s “glorious heart, as it were numbles chopped in pieces” (*Anatomy*, 123, 128). “Numbles” is a butcher’s term of art for innards chopped in preparation to be eaten.

This polemic sees oaths as a travesty of the Eucharist, a diabolical counterpart to the sacred reenactment of Christ’s crucifixion. Such a polemic would have to change once the shock value of confounding mystical and material bodies had been

co-opted by Reformation apologists and turned back against the Eucharist itself. And so it did. By 1560, Roger Hutchinson's *Image of God* would offer a very different description of oaths as speech-acts:

You swearers and blasphemers which use to swear by God's heart, arms, nails, bowels, legs and hands, learn what these things signify, and leave your abominable oaths. For when thou swearest by God's heart, thou swearest by God's wisdom; when thou swearest by God's arms, thou swearest by Christ; when thou swearest by his hands or legs, thou swearest by his humanity; when thou swearest by his tongue and finger, thou swearest by the Holy Ghost; and swearing by his head thou swearest by his divine and blessed nature; and swearing by his hairs, thou abusest his creatures, by which thou art forbidden to swear. (*Anatomy*, 135)

Theological conceptions of blasphemy thus mirror the central dispute over the Eucharist: a theory insisting on the real presence of Christ's body in oaths yields to a theory of "what these things signify."

As I suggested earlier, the transcendence of God the Father in the Gospels means that he has no material form other than the "little body" of his son. This body is little—not just a body, but a bodykin—in part no doubt because Jesus is imagined as a child but also because his body, even in its fully grown and crucified form, stands in for the Father's "big" body, a mystical entity whose reality is otherwise unimaginable. This line of reasoning leads me to suggest that the medieval theology of blasphemy may contain its own ironic double, a symmetrical reversal that is distinct from the Reformation polemic. This double is made explicit in the ordinary denunciation of blasphemy from Chaucer's Pardoner ("Hem thought that Jewes rente hum nought ynough") to Thomas Becon's 1543 *Invective Against Swearing*: "The Jews crucified Him but once, and then their fury ceased; but these wicked caitiffs crucify him daily with their unlawful oaths" (*Anatomy*, 129). In this view the real function of blasphemy would be the same as that of the Eucharist: to transform the crucifixion from a unique into an endlessly repeated event.

Such a transformation is necessary because the historical duration of Christianity depends on the repeatability of its founding sacrifice, whose cultural work is never finished. This is the work, as Elaine Scarry has argued, of lending substance to a God who cannot persist historically as an object of worship if he doesn't assume material form.¹⁸ The crucifixion not only provides Him a body, it does so over and over again, for the Pardoner's drunkards are right: once was not enough. From this perspective, "The Tale of the Bloody Child" only appears to rebuke the blaspheming rich man. In fact it satisfies his implicit demand, which is the same as that of the crowds at Mass "shouting at the priest to hold the host up higher," and might be paraphrased, "Show me the body!" In other words, the chastisement provoked by the rich man's oaths is an extraritual occasion for the showing forth of God's little body. This showing performs a cultural function that seems, in Shakespeare's plays, to be in crisis—the function Leontes *wants* his inspection of Mamillius to perform. It uses the son's body to display the reality of a fatherhood that remains unknowable.

Dismembering the Ritual Economy

It may seem a stretch to link patriarchal anxieties about legitimacy to Reformation disputes about the Eucharist, but I believe there is a cultural link between the two. Sacrifice serves, in Scarry's phrase, to "confer the force and power of the material world on the noumenal and unselfsubstantiating" (205). Is it a coincidence that the God who cannot be seen is one who also deifies paternity? In an obvious way, fatherhood too is invisible and "unselfsubstantiating"; presumably this is why its historical fortunes have been tied to technologies of representation. Nancy Jay's anthropological work on rituals of blood sacrifice makes precisely this connection, for Jay demonstrates, across a historically and geographically diverse range of social systems, that *the function of blood sacrifice is to reinforce patrilineal descent by substantiating fatherhood*. Offering the flesh and blood of the victim as a spectacular counterpart to the flesh and blood of pregnancy and birth, sacrifice compensates for the invisibility that godhead and fatherhood share. In the words of Karen Fields, since ritual "provides an event that is as available to the senses as childbirth, but more flexible," it serves as the way "patrilineal kin know they are kin."¹⁹

The link between the real presence of Christ in the wafer and the real presence of fathers in their children lies, then, in ritual's gift of substance to entities that otherwise would remain inapprehensible. But sacrifice can accomplish this only in the right circumstances; the ritual *works* only for a social group capable of drawing itself together into a community of witness. Dismembering an animal and burning its flesh does not supply the kind of information we get from DNA samples—nor will scientific testing establish fatherhood as an object of belief. It may establish fatherhood as a scientific fact, but only by reaffirming science itself as the ultimate object of belief, one that depends on an experimental economy of witnessing.²⁰ A sacrificial community already in some sense "knows" patrification to be what the ritual "means." Such knowledge is not cognitive but intuitive; it condenses a system of cultural relations into a highly charged perception. Unless such a synthetic perception is already laid up in the community's store of shared intuitions, ritual actions will be powerless to transform the still-warm flesh of a sacrificial victim into visible proof of the kinship system and the gods who authorize it.²¹

Since the Reformation was an epochal disturbance in the Christian version of this economy of witnessing, it confirms the model I have sketched by demonstrating the consequences of its failure. The culture wars that shaped the Protestant State in Tudor England splintered the community of witness that gave the Eucharist its meaning.²² Not only did these culture wars place interpretation of the ritual at the center of doctrinal dispute, they also displaced the scene of this ritual's symbolic enactment from the altar to the public square, associating the Eucharist in a violent and compelling way with horrors of public immolation. Religious controversy cast extermination in the image of martyrdom even as it drew on the new technology of print. Such published accounts displace the scene of symbolic reenactment once

again, from the public square to the dispersed and partly imaginary scene of reading. In this way religious polemic widens the scope of debate and raises the stakes as it transforms and extends the notion of witnessing through the medium of print.

John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* gathers a whole archive of stories modeled on the Passion and set forth in a rhetoric of pious horror. In describing the Marian martyrdoms Foxe depicts a community of scandalized witnesses, but at the same time he is also seeking to replicate the scandal on a much larger scale—to carry the “rueful sight” of the martyrdoms (as he puts it) “not only to the eyes of all that there stood, but also to the ears of all true-hearted Christians that shall read this history.”²³ As a written account his book trades not in ritual but in *rhetorical* sacrifice, and in the process it forcefully transvalues the events it depicts. Like the crucifixion of Jesus, the immolation of heretics under Mary was *meant* as a ritual of humiliation (a point I owe to Stephen Mullaney). Foxe, like Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, boldly reverses the terms: “It is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she who burns in't” (2.3.115–16). Inevitably, too, the *Book of Martyrs* (as Foxe's collection came to be known) reached Catholic polemicists who challenged its version of events, competing with Foxe for ideological mastery of the pathos stirred by his tales. Their accounts seek to defend or restore the perception of these events as lawful execution rather than sacrifice.

Polemics of this kind depend on and reinforce a horrified response to the sacrificial spectacle, confirming Debora Shuger's view of the modern subject's emergence “in terms of alienation from sacrifice.”²⁴ At the same time, however, such polemics also suggest the *intimacy* of this alienation for subjects in a culture that continues both to stage ritual killings and to rehearse sacrificial imagery in a wide range of texts and events. Under such historical conditions sacrifice becomes a profoundly disturbing and volatile fantasy lodged at the heart of the social imaginary.

Theater as Witness of the Subject

I am proposing to view the Reformation as a crisis in the history of *witnessing* as both social practice and a symbolic economy. In this crisis the late medieval economy of witnessing breaks down while witnessing as a social practice is dispersed by new technologies into different imaginary and material settings. Within this broad view I propose to correlate two familiar developments, the crisis in patriarchal masculinity and the advent of commercial theater. I take Shakespeare, specifically *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, not only as an exemplary instance of these developments but more crucially as an extraordinary reflection upon them. In these plays he looks with fear and loathing (and some very dark laughter) at the historical destruction visited upon the ritual basis of fatherhood, and he subjects this destruction to what we might call theatrical analysis. Not just in the content of his plays but in their dramaturgy, Shakespeare grasps the central importance of representational

technologies for the production of selves and social roles. At the same time he recognizes the commercial theater as a novel scene of witness, made possible by the dismantling of ritually based social technologies. In the drama that embodies these recognitions, he discovers how profoundly fatherhood depends on the modes his drama comes to displace, and he seeks a theatrical practice that will find new ways of bearing witness to that ancient but newly vulnerable cultural reality.

The early modern crisis of patriarchal fatherhood finds no more striking embodiment than Leontes, the murderous patriarch of *The Winter's Tale*. Leontes goes spectacularly mad in ways that short-circuit the canons of dramatic realism, but he comes into focus quickly as a character in whom the logic of ritual sacrifice reappears as a psychology. "Apollo's angry," says Leontes on learning of his son's death, "and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (3.2.146–47). But Apollo strikes at the father's injustice in the person of the son, and the father's remorse, as Stanley Cavell has shown, carries overtones of relief—as if what Leontes really meant were, "The heavens themselves do strike at my injustice—at last!" For it is only when the heavens finally strike that he can *see*, in the dead bodies of his wife and child, divine assurance that he really was a father after all. To pursue this knowledge in so relentlessly negative a form seems unthinkable, much as the historical reality of child sacrifice has seemed unthinkable to archaeologists faced with its evidence. But what are the foundational stories of Isaac and Christ about, if not the terrible necessity of this knowledge for the system of patrilineal patriarchy?

In Shakespeare this unspeakable logic begins to appear not as ritual or sacrificial narrative but as the subjective basis of masculine identity. Shuger has argued that the very Calvinist polemic by which the early modern economy of sacrificial witnessing was wrenched asunder also worked hard to install this ruptured economy as the internal dynamic of reformed selfhood. Such a conflicted process should yield just what we find in Leontes—an inherently traumatized subject whose fantasies recreate the logic of ritual in the form of pathology. When Janet Adelman, for example, explains Leontes' madness as a defensive fantasy that negates birth, we should recognize that she is attributing to his madness the same function, in the economy of the psyche, that Nancy Jay attributes to sacrifice in the economy of kinship relations. Both stand in formal opposition to childbirth.²⁵

This analogy between sacrifice and psychosis is, however, still purely formal, whereas the relationship for which I am arguing is genealogical. To understand how a social practice like ritual can be *transformed into* a subjective structure, we must grasp a different kind of link between them. This link lies once again in the notion of an economy of witnessing, and it appears in the self's reliance upon an internalized version of this economy. The Reformation subject is one whose innermost thoughts and feelings are conceived as objects of God's witness. As Katharine Maus observes, for Shakespeare and his contemporaries "the structure of internal experience is thought necessarily to imply observation by a deity."²⁶

I want to suggest that *Hamlet* represents commercial theater as both supple-

menting and displacing this internal theater of divine witness. The play is almost entirely taken up with mortal schemes to approximate, through some combination of spying, eavesdropping, and guesswork, the divine privilege of witnessing human motives. Meanwhile, not only Hamlet but also the play itself worries covertly, insistently, whether God is watching. The question is never asked (in so many words) about the murders of Claudius, Polonius, or King Hamlet, but the Player's speech in Act 2 asks it about their mirror image, the murder of Priam:

But if the Gods themselves did see her then,
 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
 In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
 The instant burst of clamor that she made,
 Unless things mortal move them not at all,
 Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
 And passion in the Gods.

(2.2.512–18)

The Player emphatically hedges his affirmation: Hecuba's grief would have impassioned the gods if they saw her then, and if mortal things can move them at all. These conditional clauses give voice to a question already there in the scene from Virgil, where Pyrrhus carries his brutal revenge for Achilles all the way to the ancestral altars in the central palace courtyard. How *do* the gods receive such terrible offerings? Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe add to this scene a statue of Jove that frowns "As loathing Pyrrhus for this wicked act."²⁸ Thomas Sackville by contrast ascribes to Jove both human fury and the implacable law of fate: the destruction of Troy "by the *wrathful will* of Gods was come: / And Jove's *unmoved sentence* and foredoom / On Priam king. . . ."²⁹

Instead of answering this question, Shakespeare transforms it. The special horror of the scene in the *Aeneid* is concentrated as much on the death of the king's son Polites as on Priam's own death. Or rather, it is concentrated on the father's *witnessing* of his son's destruction. Pyrrhus enters chasing the boy and kills him "before his father's eyes" (*ante ora parentum*).³⁰ Priam denounces Pyrrhus for this in particular: "You forced me to look on / At the destruction of my son: defiled / A father's eyes with death." Later Aeneas, as if echoing a ceremonial formula, will warn his own father that Pyrrhus "kills the son before his father's eyes, / The father at the altars."³¹ Clearly the sacrilege for Virgil lies in defiling not just the altars but the father's gaze—almost as if the two could be equated. In adapting the scene, however, Shakespeare suppresses the son's death altogether. Unlike Marlowe and Sackville he simply *omits* Polites, instead bringing forward Hecuba (whose response is never mentioned in Virgil) as the figure on whom pathos and sympathy fasten.³²

Harry Levin's classic analysis of the Player's speech emphasizes the displacement of "passion" from Priam into a chain of empathy, concentrated metonymically in Hecuba, that reaches from the gods at one extreme to the theater audience at the other.³³ In Virgil the scene of Priam's death is witnessed by Aeneas, whose

response may be Hamlet's "cue for passion": "I stood unmanned, / And my dear father's image came to mind / As our king, just his age, mortally wounded, / Gasp'd his life away before my eyes."³⁴ But if Priam is the slain father and Hecuba a grieving Gertrude, then Hamlet's point of entry into the scene, according to his father's dread command, is to identify not with the passive Aeneas but with the hypersanguinary Pyrrhus. As commentators have often noticed, this transforms the analogy, which now anticipates Gertrude's horrified response to the murder of Claudius. In other words, as soon as Hamlet projects himself into the scene, the pathos concentrated on Priam attaches itself to the wrong king. Here indeed is a mousetrap for the conscience.

The Virgilian scenario is generally understood as crystallizing the terms of Hamlet's impasse, but Shakespeare is also clearly holding the mirror up to theater. As the represented scene divides between Denmark and Troy, the scene of representation is split between English and Danish theatrical spaces, in which an English player plays the Danish Player playing Aeneas. At the center of this reduplicative structure Shakespeare locates a spectacle of harrowing moral and emotional ambiguity—one in which filial revenge turns sacrilegious, even hideous, but also one that the horrified Aeneas will reenact *from the other side* when he avenges the death of Pallas in the epic's closing lines. Shakespeare, recognizing the affinity between these matched and weighted moments in the *Aeneid*, carries the image of Aeneas's fateful pause, sword stroke suspended, from the later passage back to the earlier, as if tracing Virgil's path in reverse.

In this way Shakespeare brings together at the scene's focal point a double exploration—unfolding the ambiguous pathos of sacrificial spectacle on the one hand and the ambiguous dynamics of theatrical empathy on the other. Out of pagan sources, this strategy synthesizes, in the scene of Priam's death, a theatrical analogy to the traumatic breakup of Christian sacrificial witness. In doing so it suggests the *emergence* of the theatrical analogy *from* the shattering of ritual. Shakespeare's staging of the Player's speech models in its dramaturgy a dynamic in which the shattering of the ritual economy yields two new cultural forms—*theater* and "modern" subjectivity—bound together in an economy of spectatorship.

If the purpose of this essay were to finish off readings of *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, the next step would be to trace *their* matched and weighted explorations of theatricality as a form of social energy released by the splitting of ritual witness. Instead I propose to conclude the discussion by suggesting a measure of our cultural and historical distance from the crisis reflected in Shakespeare's theater. One implication of the shift from witnessing to spectatorship is a change in the way internalized versions of these economies work to sustain self-apprehension. The ritual subject takes the interior witness of God as its ground, but in Shakespeare we begin to see this function displaced onto a different Other, equally imaginary: not God but the Audience.

In this economy it is not a transcendent but a social Other whose gaze supports

the phenomenality of the self. I have tried to suggest how deeply father-centered this economy remains even in its modern, secular forms, inviting witnesses to become the delegates of a patriarchal order. Whether we look at the conventions of portraiture in Van Dyck, the dynamics of “polite” conversation in Steele, or the structure of a photographer’s joke, we find social actors playing out scenarios organized at once by the encompassing presence of the father’s gaze and by the pervasive absence of his body.

Our own historical moment may turn out in retrospect to have witnessed the undoing of this system. What happens when the conventions that sustain a symbolic economy lose their force? Is such a thing happening now, in the cultural movements associated with postmodernism? I do not expect to settle such questions, but I do want to close with the possibility that the father’s gaze may be deconstructed. To witness this hypothetical event, I invite you on an excursion to the University of California at San Diego. There we will encounter an architectural conceit that functions, I suggest, as a postmodern mousetrap for the ego of the spectatorial subject. But this mousetrap, unlike Hamlet’s, seems designed less to indict the viewer’s conscience (or vanity) than to dispel it, and it does this by unraveling the phantasmatic Other whose gaze bears witness to the self. Whereas Shakespeare captures the historical moment of Elizabethan theater by staging the emergence of spectatorship from the destruction of witnessing, the Mandell Weiss Forum at UCSD demystifies spectatorship by splitting apart the “mirror stage” of theatrical convention. Its architectural mousetrap demonstrates vividly that the bodily ego is (as Jacques Lacan would have it) little more than an especially convincing optical illusion.

Through the Looking Glass

On the hills north of La Jolla, the campus of the University of California at San Diego overlooks the ocean to the west and a freeway running through the canyons to the east. There are some impressive buildings—on one hilltop, the University’s Geisel Library, with its stepped and cantilevered upper layers stacked on a concrete pedestal, looks as if it might just have touched down after a long interstellar voyage (fig. 3). The Mandell Weiss Forum, by contrast, is unimposing. Approaching at street level you can just see the top of the building over a long wall of glass panels the size of billboards (fig. 4). Even by daylight these panels form a reflective surface, giving back to the gaze a tree-lined expanse of gravel dotted with footlights, holding the mirror up to nature quite literally (and quite theatrically).

To enter the Forum you take a right turn and follow the walkway down the wall of glass. The effect is to make you a furtive and self-conscious spectator before you even get inside. Do you ignore the spectacle to your immediate left, implausibly

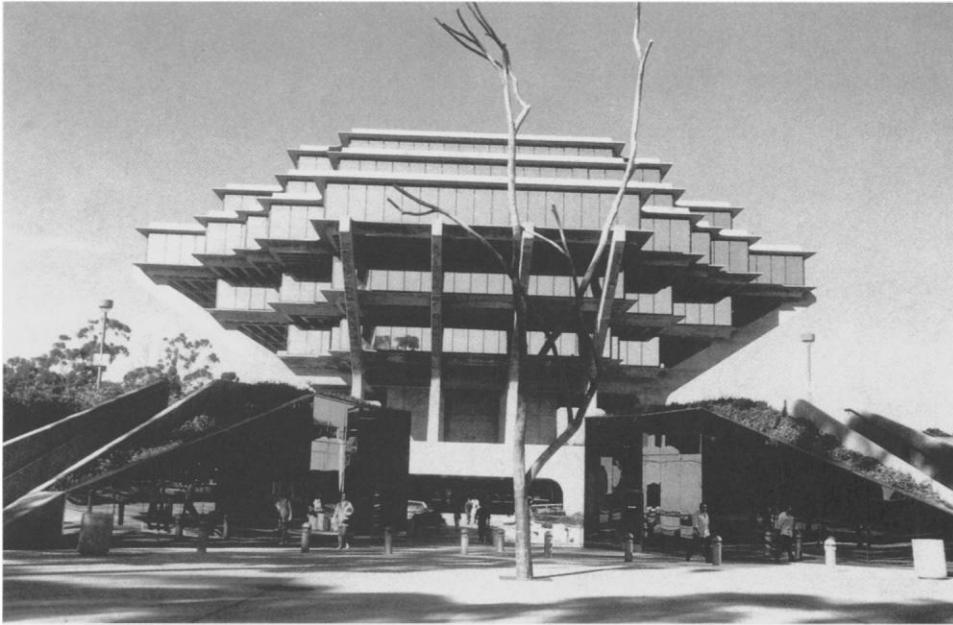


FIGURE 3. Theodore Geisel Library, University of California, San Diego.
By permission of the University of California, San Diego.

pretending not to notice? If you do look, where do you aim your gaze? At yourself, or at others as they file past before and behind you? And where do they look? Do you catch them stealing a glance at you or at themselves? Do they catch you watching? The impulse to look, combined with the unnerving prospect of being caught in the act, prevents you from settling down at one “end” or the other of a Lacanian Gaze, secure in your role as either the subject or the object of vision. This is a little like the trick Purdy’s photomontage, with its nod to conventional representations of children, plays on the adult witness, opening his hiding place to view by revealing that the child is a mirror. Our laughter at Purdy’s image comes with a faint shock in which recognition and estrangement are combined.

The moment of surprise, when you find yourself watched from an angle you failed to anticipate, is *not* a moment that pegs you haplessly to your bodily image. It is just the reverse, a Humpty Dumpty moment that reveals the bodily image to have been propped up on a fantasy of seeing yourself from the outside. Mirrors collaborate with this fantasy, reassuring us that the carefully tended image they give back is the one we present for the world’s admiration. But no mirror can totalize the field of vision—there is always another position from which to be seen. When such a viewpoint takes you by surprise it ruptures the protective fantasy in which you say to yourself, *I know how I look*, and so it knocks the prop out from under your



FIGURE 4. Mandell Weiss Forum, University of California, San Diego.
By permission of the University of California, San Diego.

self-possession. The result is a moment, trivial or devastating, in which the cocoon of seeing and being seen falls away. The loss of self you abruptly rediscover at such moments is one version of the phantasmatic event psychoanalysis calls the trauma.

The path that leads to the Mandell Weiss Forum conducts the theatergoer into an artificially traumatic moment. At first it teases your vanity with anxiety as you try to settle down in the crossfire of real and imagined gazes set into play by the collective reflection. At this point the shock of dispossession still lurks as one possibility within an intersubjective intrigue. The mousetrap springs shut only after you turn through the entryway in the wall. Crossing an open patio toward the box office, you see all at once that what had been a mirror is now a window. Looking back through it you see you were unwittingly on stage the whole time, faked out by a two-way mirror that recreates the proverbial “fourth wall” of the proscenium arch, behind which the theater audience hides to watch a performance. Your hide-and-seek game with the mirror was exposed all along to an audience of those who came before you in line.

To realize this is a bit like discovering that you’re Malvolio. But the special quality of the revelation is not just that it makes you an object of the gaze all over again. It is rather that it places you—almost, but not quite, simultaneously—on opposite ends of the *same look*, a hidden perspective before which the ego in its fur-

tive vanity is laid bare. Literally of course it is someone else, not you, whose uncomfortable negotiations with the mirror are now on display, and this is a crucial part of the experience. Only by identifying with that other person can you retroactively glimpse yourself an instant ago. This splicing of an *other* into the repeating loop of narcissism makes a considerable difference—enough to deconstruct the whole fantastic dynamic of the Gaze, based on the illusion of a subject who sees everything but is never seen. This subject, whether imagined collectively as “the world” or transcendently as God, is the panoptical witness tacitly assumed by a rhetoric of laying bare the ego or hoping (however whimsically) for its redemption. Such phrases allude to an imaginary subject greater than the abject personal ego, a watching presence in whose eyes the ego falters and might seek redemption.

The Forum entryway demystifies this Other by demonstrating that the superior awareness it enjoys is purely structural *and cannot be the attribute of a subject*. If the person on the other side of the mirror is imaginatively equivalent to yourself a moment ago, then who is the subject before whom you were exposed if not the imaginative equivalent of yourself now? The entryway’s revelation splits you between these two positions, demonstrating in the most intimate way that the same subject cannot occupy both at once. Turning the corner you assume the voyeur’s privilege, but the first thing you recognize in doing so is your own instantaneous, retroactive displacement from the imaginary space in which you had situated yourself. You are in this manner divested of yourself by the very act of assuming a privileged point of view. The subject before whom you were exposed was similarly dispossessed by the act of perceiving *you*—and since your exposure retroactively dispossessed him, or her, just as someone else’s is now doing to you, it was never merely *your* exposure. If the first recognition is disconcerting (“A moment ago, I was exposed to the point of view I have just stepped into”), the second one should come as a relief (“The person who saw me then was seeing *in* me his or her own retroactive exposure, just as I am now seeing mine in someone else”). If the first recognition dispossesses you of your imaginary self, the second should dispossess you of your imaginary Other—for if your ego doesn’t entirely belong to you, neither does its abjection.

To be dispossessed of the Other. What kind of relation between subject and spectacle do we glimpse in such a possibility? I suspect it is one in which, to paraphrase Cusanus, we no longer exist by means of the Other’s seeing. The filial images in this essay belong to an economy in which the self feeds on the gaze of a metaphysical Father. This phantasmatic scene survives many crises in its long *durée*, among them a traumatic fragmenting of the social witness (the Audience as Other), split off from its divine counterpart. Yet even in modern and secular forms, the implicitly patriarchal character of this social fantasy appears in representations of boys, who continue to signify fatherhood as the imaginary witness of identity. Our own historical moment is widely perceived as one in which the social and cultural functions of traditional fatherhood lie in ruins, waiting only to be swept into the dustbin of

history (or recycled in the theme park of postmodern nostalgia). But whatever the modalities of contemporary selfhood may turn out to have been, once we round the next corner to look back upon them, it is already clear they no longer rely on the father's witness to guarantee their existence.

Notes

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1. *Ante annos animumque gerens curamque virilem*; P. Vergili Maronis, *Aeneidos* 9.311, in *Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); in English: Virgil *Aeneid* 9.436-37, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York, 1990); subsequent quotations in English and Latin are from these editions, and appear parenthetically in the text, though I have modernized the orthography of *u* and *v* in citing the Latin.
2. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, 1953), 98-105.
3. *Tatler* 71, 20 September 1709, in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Brian Vickers (London, 1974), 2:207-8.
4. Brian Vickers, headnote, in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, 2:203.
5. *Hamlet* 2.2.202-4. Shakespeare citations throughout are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2d ed. (Boston, 1997). Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.
6. Christopher Brown notes in *Van Dyck* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983) that during his stay in Italy the painter experimented repeatedly with effects of light and shadow. Most of his portraits in this period were painted "from dark to light . . . that is, Van Dyck adopted the Italian procedure of priming the canvas with a dark ground and laying the light pigments over it. The usual Flemish practice was the reverse" (82).
7. See Joneath Spicer, "The Renaissance Elbow," in *A Cultural History of Gesture from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (1991; reprint, Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), 84-128, on the masculine and implicitly military connotations of "the brandished male elbow" (101). Spicer notes that "in Anthony van Dyck's companion portraits of the small son and daughter of the Marchesa Cattaneo of 1623 four and a half year old Filippo is shown in the same protective pose as the adult males with their wives or families" (112).
8. Christopher Brown thinks the puppy's crouch means it "has just seen a cat or a mouse and is about to pounce"; Brown, *Van Dyck*, 94. I don't find the "invisible mouse" theory persuasive, but the portrait is dark enough that a halftone reproduction can scarcely convey the details on which these impressions depend.

9. Harry Berger Jr., personal communication. Berger also notes that the portrait of Filippo and that of his little sister Clelia are pendants. A more extended reading than I have space for here would pursue the implicitly conjugal themes of the pairing, noting the thinly veiled anatomical symbolism of the baby girl's portrait: the hands meeting at the waist hold an apple upside-down over the belly, its broken stem superimposed over the infant pudendum. On pair portraits as a marriage topos, see David R. Smith, *Masks of Wedlock: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Marriage Portraiture* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982).
10. Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (New York, 1987), 193. My argument is indebted to Cavell's insightful analysis of the filial dynamic in this play.
11. Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987), 55. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.
12. Carolyn Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991), 101.
13. For an extended catalogue of examples, see A. E. H. Swain, "Figures of Imprecation," *Englische Studien*, Band 24 (1898): 6–71. On the rhetorical motives of blasphemy, see Emil Benveniste, "La blasphémie et l'euphémie," in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, (Paris, 1974), 2:254–57.
14. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "God." The etymology of *bodkin* and *bodykins* (or *bodikins*) is uncertain. OED, s.v. "God," cites Hamlet's oath "God's bodykins, man" (2.2.529), but does not define the word. Swain, "Figures of Imprecation," glosses it as a diminutive of "body" (33, 41), as do most modern editors of Shakespeare. In the Riverside edition (which I cite), G. Blakemore Evans follows typical practice by modernizing the spelling to "bodkin." OED, s.v. "bodkin," does not record this usage.
15. Geoffrey Chaucer "The Pardoner's Tale" 472–76, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John H. Fisher (New York, 1977), 224.
16. Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton, N.Y., 1983), 20.
17. Ashley Montagu, *The Anatomy of Swearing* (New York, 1967), 128. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.
18. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), 181–243.
19. Karen E. Fields, foreword to Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago, 1992), xiv, xiii. Jay traces the formal opposition of blood sacrifice to childbirth in otherwise unrelated traditions whose "common feature," she demonstrates, is that "only adult males—fathers, real and metaphorical—may perform sacrifice" (xxiii).
20. I owe this point to Virginia Blum.
21. For an analysis of this dichotomy as the discursive crux of ethnography in Bronislaw Malinowski and his followers, see Clifford Geertz, "I-Witnessing," in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, 1988), 73–101.
22. The effort to hold this community together in the Elizabethan Settlement shows what a stress-point the Eucharist was. The "Articles of Religion" (1563, 1571) explicitly reject the doctrine of transubstantiation (XXVIII, "Of the Lordes Supper") but also seek to exclude Anabaptist and Zwinglian views of the ritual as merely festive or memorial.

- They speak ambiguously therefore of “a parttakyng of the body of Christe” (*communicatio corporis Christi*) while repudiating the elevation and adoration of the consecrated host; see Charles Hardwick, *A History of the Articles of Religion*, 3d ed., ed. F. Procter (London, 1895), 328–31; and E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, 3d ed., rev., ed. H. J. Carpenter (London, 1955), 382–83. The 1559 liturgy is equivocal in a similar way: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life: and take and eat *this* [body? wafer?] in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and *feed on him in thine heart by faith*, with thanksgiving”; *Liturgical Services: Liturgies and Occasional Forms of Prayer set forth in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. William Keatinge Clay (Cambridge, 1847), 195, emphasis added.
23. *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Josiah Pratt (London, 1877), 8.229–30 (quotations follow the 1576 edition). Stephen Mullaney notes the synesthesia in this clause, which marks the shift in economies of witnessing, in “Reforming Resistance: Class, Gender, and Legitimacy in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*,” in *Print and the Other Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur Marotti and Michael Bristol (Amherst, Mass., 2000), 235–51.
 24. Debora Kuller Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley, 1994), 73.
 25. Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York, 1992), 220–38.
 26. Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, 1995), 10–11 n. 33. While Protestantism arguably intensifies this sense, it can also be traced as far back as Augustine. Nicholas of Cusa, for example, in *De visione Dei* (1453) elaborates an Augustinian meditation upon the invisibility of a God whose creatures exist only insofar as He beholds them. Beginning with the image of a painting whose eyes follow the viewer around the room, Cusanus meditates on the idea that all creatures “exist by means of Your [God’s] seeing”; quoted from Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*, (Minneapolis, 1985), 165.
 27. Addressing Jesus, Cusanus asserts, “from merely a few signs You comprehended that which lay hidden in a man’s mind”; Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 239.
 28. Christopher Marlowe, *Dido, Queene of Carthage*, 2.1.258, quoted from *Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. E. D. Pendry and J. C. Maxwell (London, 1976).
 29. Thomas Sackville “Induction” 438–40, in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (1938; reprint, New York, 1960), emphasis added. I have silently modernized spellings.
 30. The recurrence of this phrase as a “leitmotif” is discussed by M. Owen Lee, *Fathers and Sons in Virgil’s Aeneid: Tum Genitor Natum* (Albany, N.Y., 1979).
 31. *Aeneid* 2.699–701 (in Mynors, 2.538–9: *qui nati coram me cernere letum / fecisti et patrios foedasti funere vultus*) and 2.865–66 (in Mynors, 2.663: *natum ante ora patris, patrem qui obruncat ad aras*).
 32. Most commentators stress how problematic it would be for Hamlet to identify with Pyrrhus; the disappearance of Polites is less often noted. But even if Shakespeare did not consult or remember Virgil’s text, he would have found Polites mentioned prominently not only in sixteenth-century English translations but also in the looser “imitations” already quoted: Sackville’s “Induction” to *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1563) 466–

69, or Marlowe's *Dido, Queene of Carthage* (published 1594), where Pyrrhus appears for the first time bearing "on his spear / The mangled head of Priam's youngest son" (2.1.214–15).

33. Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (New York, 1959), 159–61, and 168, fig. 3.

34. *Aeneid* 2.731–34 (in Mynors, 2.560–62: *subiit cari genitoris imago, / ut regem aequaeuum crudeli vulnere vidi / vitam exhalantem*).