

# Shakespeare and the Idea of the Modern\*

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IN AN ESSAY OF ADMIRABLE historicizing rigor, Margreta de Grazia states that “no work in the English literary canon has been so closely identified with the beginnings of the modern age as *Hamlet*.”<sup>1</sup> De Grazia cites Harold Bloom as the most recent example of this identification.<sup>2</sup> She could just as easily have cited William Kerrigan, who is no less convinced of the importance of *Hamlet*’s romantic origins. “Shakespeare’s revenge tragedy,” Kerrigan writes, “was present at the birth of Romantic individualism, at the early tests of the doctrine of organic unity, at the discovery of the oedipus complex, at the center of the mythic shenanigans in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.”<sup>3</sup>

Does this mean that the modern era begins in 1600 when William Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*? Yes and no. Yes, because that is indeed when *Hamlet* first made its way from Shakespeare’s brain to the page and thence to the stage. No, because the play was much too ahead of its time to be appreciated as, well, modern. Instead it had to rely on all the standard gags of Elizabethan revenge tragedy: murder, madness, the obligatory ghost, and plenty of violence. No doubt there were many who resented the upstart playwright’s popularity and therefore preferred to point to this rather “primitive” or “old-fashioned” element in his theater. It would take Shakespeare some time to shake this reputation for Saxon savagery.

Two hundred years, in fact. As both Kerrigan and de Grazia agree, before the romantics Shakespeare wasn’t the child of modernity that he is today. But here their agreement ends. Whereas Kerrigan embraces Shakespeare’s modernity, de Grazia resists it. More precisely, whereas Kerrigan’s *Hamlet* begins positively and definitively with the romantics, de Grazia’s begins well before that, indeed, before *Hamlet* was even written, in the “dark ages” of medieval ritual culture.

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Since Kerrigan's idea of modernity has until relatively recently been the dominant one, I will discuss him first. De Grazia's new-historicist position in fact constitutes a direct critique of the tradition Kerrigan so passionately and, it must be admitted, convincingly defends. It is therefore best understood as a response to him. After summarizing their debate, I will go on to propose, in the second and much longer part of my argument, an anthropological solution to it.

## Romantic Shakespeare

"It all begins with the Romantic Germans," Kerrigan starts his chapter "*Hamlet in History*" by saying, and then goes on to show how Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and, even more so, Friedrich and August Wilhelm von Schlegel, and Friedrich Hegel provided us with the idea of *Hamlet* as the quintessential modern work. But what does Kerrigan mean by "modern"? Kerrigan's use of this term is not, strictly speaking, historical. The modern is not a datable empirical fact, or even a datable period with a well-defined beginning and end (compare "the Elizabethan period"). It is rather a literary-historical category: history *mediated* by literature. For Kerrigan, the site of the modern is thus the literary text itself. But since the text is nothing without interpretation, the modern must also be an interpretation. Modern interpretation begins when the romantics foregrounded the problem of Hamlet's delay, which had for so long remained in the background of previous criticism, including criticism before *Hamlet* was written (Aristotle's, for example). Only after Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, and only after the romantics interpreted it, could we talk of plot in the modern sense, that is, in a sense that updated Aristotle for modern times, for example, by codifying "the aesthetics of a drama based on pure individualism of character" (HP 8).

Kerrigan thus accepts as inaugural or originary the problem of Hamlet's delay. Its very originarity is also what makes it "modern," in that it constitutes a moment in history we are unable to transcend. "When Schlegel proposed that *Hamlet* was the first modern drama," Kerrigan enthusiastically writes, "he set a problem that no amount of historical scholarship can resolve" (HP 29). And it cannot resolve it because there is no historical solution to it, only better or worse *literary* interpretations.<sup>4</sup>

In implicit if not explicit debate with Kerrigan, de Grazia questions the significance of this literary origin. What about the "real" historical origin of *Hamlet* in 1600? And what about the period before the romantics, from 1600 to 1800, that Kerrigan silently passes over? De Grazia worries about this omission, and she takes her main critical task to be to return us to this neglected period. For as Kerrigan's account seems to

exemplify with breathtaking vengeance, “these interstitial two centuries tend to be phased out by Hamlet’s identification with the modern” in 1800 (HBT 356).

Let us attempt to put this debate in broader perspective. The scandal implied in pointing out the “barbaric” or premodern origins of so illustrious and thoroughly romanticized a work as *Hamlet* gives de Grazia’s essay considerable polemical edge. Indeed, her argument recalls T. S. Eliot’s snub of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, when Eliot argued that *Hamlet*’s “intractability” stems not from anything to do with the psychology of the prince, but from the play’s being “superposed upon much cruder material which persists even in the final form.”<sup>5</sup> Though de Grazia does not mention Eliot in her survey of *Hamlet* criticism, her historicist debunking shares much in common with his 1919 essay. Having neatly lined her romantic ducks in a row, she, like Eliot, turns her back on them, announcing instead a new-historicist “turnabout,” a theoretical shift from “the hero of modern consciousness to the ghost from a premodern system of belief” (HBT 374). In medieval religion de Grazia discovers what the romantics had either repressed or ignored, the haunting trace of the other.<sup>6</sup>

Kerrigan, on the other hand, seems to have no interest in being “new” in this historicist sense. Instead he pronounces himself, rather disingenuously, to be so unfashionably old-fashioned as to be idiosyncratic. He is thus new in his very unconcern with newness. While the avant-garde have been immersing themselves in postmodern theory, Kerrigan remains a stubborn “modern,” which is to say, he still believes in the transformative power of what used to be called high culture. And therein lies the deeper target of de Grazia’s historicism, namely, Kerrigan’s unrepentant romantic belief in the aesthetic text as a vehicle of personal transformation or self-discovery.<sup>7</sup> Eschewing generative inwardness of any kind, de Grazia’s aim is to historicize *Hamlet*, not to update the prince for the presentist needs of the modern consumer, whose relentless low-cultural appetite for new models of desire obscures from view the high-cultural recognition of the origin of desire in *Hamlet* itself. In obvious dissonance with Kerrigan’s conviction that *Hamlet* will never cease to transcend the merely ephemeral products of marketplace or consumer culture, de Grazia regards the text with all the ironic disenchantment of the apostate, the one whose belief in the literary text’s transcendence has been rudely and noisily shattered by the profane distractions of the modern world.

We should not be surprised by de Grazia’s “apostasy.” On the contrary, we should be more surprised by Kerrigan’s refusal to follow suit. For it has been apparent for some time that the era of high Western culture is drawing to a close. There are still a few “last stands” being made by defenders of this tradition, of which Kerrigan’s is undoubtedly one of the best and most interesting. But as even he seems to recognize, the days

of the master literary critic are over.<sup>8</sup> The rise of “theory” in literature departments is a response to this decline.<sup>9</sup> But the literary object has not simply disappeared. It has been subsumed by a broader anthropological category. That category is culture. But culture is much older than literature. It is as old as the human itself. Literature has enjoyed enormous cultural centrality for the duration of the modern era (roughly, since Shakespeare’s day). But this centrality is nothing when compared to the historical longevity of its cultural precursor, which is religion.<sup>10</sup>

### Anthropological Aesthetics

In Eric Gans’s “generative anthropology,” the neoclassical aesthetic is the first modern aesthetic.<sup>11</sup> For Gans, the aesthetic manifests itself in a historical “sequence of hypotheses of [human] origin” that together map “the rise and fall of the esthetic as an anthropological discovery procedure” (*OT* 25). I have already alluded to the fall of the aesthetic, that is, to the demise of high literary culture, in my summary of the debate between Kerrigan and de Grazia. What Gans’s aesthetic history allows us to grasp more clearly is that their debate on modernity is really an allegory for the rise and fall of the aesthetic as the West’s principal source of anthropological discovery. Kerrigan sees the rise of the aesthetic, which establishes its ascendancy in the romantic and postromantic eras, whereas de Grazia sees only its fall, in the postmodern turn to theory and the subsequent new-historicist project of digging up historical exotica left in the margins of the old high culture. This is not to say that Kerrigan is totally unaware of this fall, only that he chooses to interpret it as premature, thus making a space for his continued discipleship of the romantics.<sup>12</sup> De Grazia, on the other hand, interprets her “modernity” in terms of her rejection of the romantic aesthetic defended by Kerrigan. But—and this is crucial—she offers no anthropology capable of replacing the aesthetic tradition she rejects.<sup>13</sup>

### Romantic Anthropology

As Kerrigan convincingly shows, the romantic *Hamlet* assumes a generative distinction between ancient and modern. Anthropologically speaking, this difference was presented as a transition from an ethical system based on collective ritual to one based on the interiority of the modern subject.<sup>14</sup> Hegel’s analysis of *Hamlet* is exemplary of the romantic critical enterprise as a whole. Whereas a classical hero like Oedipus is destined to suffer for crimes he is totally ignorant of, the romantic Hamlet suf-

fers because he internalizes as a representation—for example, in the figure of the ghost, the player’s speech, and the *Mousetrap* play—the crimes his uncle has committed. For the classical hero, torment comes from without; at the end of the play, Oedipus is ritually banished for transgressing taboos (parricide and incest) that preexist his capacity to understand or control them. For the modern hero, torment comes from within; haunted by the memory of his father’s death, Hamlet invents fictional scenes by which he attempts to relieve himself of his ethical duty to revenge. For Hegel, as indeed for most moderns, this internalization of the classical scene of collective sacrifice is considered an ethical advance. Hamlet’s celebrated delay is also a symptom of his exemplary modernity. By internalizing the scene of his uncle’s crime rather than blindly reproducing its ethical structure in an act of revenge (like Laertes, like Fortinbras), Hamlet points the way toward a more open ethical system, one in which individual desire is liberated from the constraining forces of ritual interdiction and integrated into the productive forces of the modern exchange system.<sup>15</sup> Hence the currency of A. C. Bradley’s remark in 1904 that “the tragedy of *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out has become the symbol of extreme absurdity.”<sup>16</sup> For the romantics, what the play is above all about is the mind of its ambivalently “liberated” protagonist.

But if the romantics only invented the problem of Hamlet’s delay, what enabled them to come up with the idea of delay in the first place? De Grazia’s reply is that it was the plot of *Hamlet* that provided the ultimate source for the romantic infatuation with the procrastinating prince. By translating a dramatic narrative of suspended action (delayed revenge) into a narrative of psychological hesitation, the romantics reversed the historical priority of dramatic performance over internal reflection. In effect, they argued that the dramatic performance originated in the internal “psychological” scene of the prince’s mind, whose capacious imagination they took as a model for their own.

Historically speaking, de Grazia is certainly right to say that the drama preexists the character. Without the collective context of the dramatic performance, there can be no individual view of this same scene. But it is precisely in this difference between the collective and individual “scenes of representation” that we can begin to discern the anthropology latent in the romantic interpretation of *Hamlet*.

## Classical Anthropology

Drama assumes the difference between the individual spectator and the “scenes” performed on stage before the viewer. Like the frame of a painting, the limits of the stage represent the formal boundary between

the fictional world of the play and the real world of the spectator. The question as to what scenes are appropriate to represent aesthetically was originally answered by the Greeks, who took their subject matter from the myths and legends that preceded them.

But the reception of myth differs from the reception of mythical *content*. The audience of the former is not so much a spectator as a participant. The point of myth is not to tell fictions that may be contemplated whenever it is convenient for the individual to do so, but far more urgently to “incorporate” the individual into the collective life of the community.<sup>17</sup> The power of myth is therefore never exclusively a product of the aesthetic effect it produces during the occasion of its particular performance. The boundary between myth and literature is a condition of the capacity of the text to survive by the power of its performance alone, independently of the historically specific beliefs that are necessary if a community’s myths and rituals are to survive. It is for this reason that we are still able to appreciate Greek tragedy independently of its original ritual context, or why we read “Homer” as literature rather than as an authorless communal myth or folktale.

The Greeks were the first to institute an aesthetic distinct from the ritual scenes that historically preceded them and which still provided the festive occasion for their performance (as in the Dionysian festival in Athens). As Gans notes, the “classical esthetic is the first and simplest” because its sole claim to the significance of its (usually mythical) content is presence on stage (*OT* 132). Oedipus has no need to justify his appearance on stage; he is, as the priest says in his opening speech, “Greatest in all men’s eyes,” because his greatness has existed in the Greek imaginary since time immemorial.<sup>18</sup>

## Neoclassical Anthropology

By Shakespeare’s day, the classical aesthetic was firmly established as the historical source for all future aesthetics. To the question, “What should be represented on stage?” the neoclassicists replied by pointing to the Greeks. Hence the inevitable quarrel between ancient and modern.<sup>19</sup> The neoclassicists were the first historical anthropologists because they were the first to recognize, as a condition of their aesthetic project, their historical distance from their aesthetic precursors. As modernism’s flirtation with the idea of the primitive suggests, the origin of anthropology lies ultimately in this “aesthetic” distinction between ancient and modern.<sup>20</sup> The contemporary idea of distinct aesthetic periods (“classical,” “medieval,” “Renaissance”) is a continuation of a historical development begun by the Greeks, when they liberated the aesthetic from the

“eternal present” of ritual. But these aesthetics are not, despite what the romantics and their modernist heirs believed, the instigators of actual historical change. The formulation of new aesthetics is possible only on the basis of new systems of social organization. Historically speaking, the difference between ancient and modern is less a formal-aesthetic than an ethical difference. What intervenes between the Greeks and Shakespeare is the ethical revolution that is Christianity. In this specifically anthropological sense, the intervening “Middle Ages” are just as “modern” as the Renaissance.<sup>21</sup>

According to Gans, the most obvious consequence of Christianity for the classical aesthetic is that the automatic privilege granted to the protagonist of Greek tragedy becomes suspect. “The unquestioned exemplarity that separates the classical protagonist from the world of the spectator,” Gans writes, “is no longer sufficient. Significance is no longer self-evident; it must be explicitly derived from the locus of the scene” (*OT* 151). In the face of Christianity’s moral doctrine of spiritual election, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify the ethical inequalities of the social order. The Shakespearean protagonist is a representative of this moral sentiment, not in the sense that he is a romantic revolutionary who fights for “liberty, fraternity, and equality,” but in the more fundamental sense that he is a resenter of the social order. None of the kings of Shakespeare’s history plays, despite their obvious centrality on stage and within the social order they represent, are free of resentment toward those around them, whom they imagine as rivals to the very centrality they have themselves usurped. From Richard III to Henry V, Shakespeare’s kings are obsessed with the idea of their status as usurpers because they participate in the same resentment that makes it impossible for them to accept their invulnerability at the center. Shakespeare’s theme of usurpation is thus much more than a political category. It implies the awareness that the throne is in reality an “aesthetic scene” that preexists the individual’s place on it. Centrality becomes a role to be played, defined by the protagonist’s self-consciousness of his distance from it.<sup>22</sup>

Before Shakespeare’s radical staging of the “scene” of resentful inwardness, this distance was most often reflected in the self-conscious belatedness of the neoclassical work, which is forced to borrow from its classical precursors. For example, Marlowe’s *Dido Queen of Carthage* focuses not on Virgil’s hero, but on the death of his African queen. Dido “imitates” Aeneas’s tragic account of the fall of Troy. At Dido’s insistence, Aeneas describes, in a narrative of gratuitous pathos, his own near sacrifice at the hands of Achilles’ avenging son Pyrrhus and his bloody Myrmidons. But Aeneas miraculously escapes from this imagined tragedy when Venus shields him with a magic “invisibility” cloud. With the central sacrificial position left vacant, Dido wastes no time usurping it. Marlowe’s tragedy

concludes with Dido imagining herself the true victim of the classical scene:

Now, Dido, with these relics burn thyself,  
And make Aeneas famous through the world  
For perjury and slaughter of a queen.<sup>23</sup>

In Marlowe, the self-consciousness of the imitation is in danger of destroying the desired tragic effect. When Dido's sister, Anna, and the queen's former suitor, Iarbas, both kill themselves in imitation of the queen, the tragedy risks turning into farce. To a certain extent, this is a danger implicit in all imitation. There is, for example, already a sense of belatedness present in Virgil; the Roman poet's depiction of Dido's death competes with the Homeric account of Hector's death. But in neither the Roman nor the Greek case is this lateness a subject for reflection on the anthropology of the scene of representation itself.

In Shakespeare, this belatedness with respect to classical precursors becomes more than an exercise in self-conscious imitation. It provides the occasion for a sustained reflection on the openness of the center to all humanity. For the Shakespearean protagonist, the center is an object of both intense desire and intense envy. What drives the plot of Shakespeare's more mature work is the protagonist's awareness of the center's openness to the periphery. This is the neoclassical's anthropological modification of the Aristotelian assumption that plot preexists character. Put in René Girard's terms of the mimetic triangle, without the mediation of the center provided by the mimetic other, there would be no center for the subject to desire, and hence no plot to drive the narrative of usurpation.<sup>24</sup>

The royal protagonists of Shakespeare's histories are all too aware that they are performing roles on stage rather than reproducing mythical-historical scenes from the past. Shakespeare's kings know they cannot take history for granted. They can of course be assumed to possess a historical significance that precedes them; the enormous popularity of historical subject matter in Shakespeare's day is at least partially explained by the preexisting ideological significance of Tudor history among the Elizabethans. But unlike the classical figure, the neoclassical hero is aware that his historical significance must be renewed continually by the aesthetic scene itself.<sup>25</sup>

Thus no sacred ancestry can serve to put an end to rival claims on the center. On the contrary, it becomes all the more imperative to cite these ancestries as further instances of narrative legitimation. Henry V's convoluted claim to the throne of France is not just a pretext for the young king's aggressive war-mongering. It is a symptom of his awareness



of his displacement from the center. Nor are the more patriotic elements of the play free of resentment. Harry's great speech on the eve of the battle of Agincourt is usually understood as an example of rousing patriotism. When Harry declares, "For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother," he is in the mode of the revolutionary.<sup>26</sup> By emphasizing his fundamental equality with the common soldier, Harry abandons the ritual hierarchy of sacred kingship and embraces the fraternity and equality of his "band of brothers" (4.3.60). But Harry's "happy few" (4.3.60) constitute a new center more exclusive than the old when his "band of brothers" are explicitly opposed to England itself, to those "one ten thousand . . . gentlemen in England now abed" (4.3.17, 64). Westmoreland, who wishes those "one ten thousand" were present to assist in the fight, sees only the fact that they are vastly outnumbered by the French and quite reasonably desires more favorable odds. Harry, the more advanced student of desire, responds not by attempting to assuage Westmoreland's natural fear of violent death, but by showing him the aesthetic potential of the scene in which they are about to centralize their marginality. The real climax of the speech occurs some seven lines before the speech ends, in the haunting and intensely imagined line, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" (4.3.60). Harry's "patriotism" defines itself not with but against all Englishmen, whom he imagines as competitors to his desire for significance.

### Shakespearean Anthropology

Let us listen to Henry V once more, this time to the lines directly preceding those already quoted:

This day is called the feast of Crispian.  
 He that outlives this day and comes safe home  
 Will stand a-tiptoe when this day is named  
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian.  
 He that shall see this day and live old age  
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,  
 And say "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian."  
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,  
 And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."  
 Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot  
 But he'll remember, with advantages,  
 What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,  
 Familiar in his mouth as household words,  
 Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,  
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,

Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.  
 This story shall the good man teach his son,  
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by  
 From this day to the ending of the world  
 But we in it shall be remembered,  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. (4.3.40–60)

In his discussion of the generative scene of collective memory, Anthony Dawson notes that the paradoxicality of Harry's speech, which embeds in the historical past the scene of its own future retelling, grants this past the status of an "originary event."<sup>27</sup> The scene points forward to its own future significance in the immortalization of Harry's band of brothers through the memories passed down from "the good man" to his son. But this future significance is also being enacted before the audience in the theater, who identify with Harry's onstage audience precisely because they already know the outcome of Harry's prediction. Dawson argues that these metatheatrical moments are more than simply an example of dramatic irony.<sup>28</sup> Shakespeare, he suggests, is here staging in explicitly theatrical form a kind of "social memory" that was formerly devoted to the purely ritual "stage" of sacred commemoration.<sup>29</sup>

Dawson is certainly not alone when he suggests that in the background to such "originary" scenes of remembrance in Shakespeare lies a long-term cultural process of deritualization, in which the old sacred guarantees become increasingly decentered and recycled by a commercial marketplace, including the marketplace of the theater.<sup>30</sup> This change in the balance between the centripetal forces of the sacred and the centrifugal forces of the market is the real crux for discussions of the modern. But what exactly is meant by deritualization in these accounts of Shakespeare's pivotal position between ritual and aesthetic culture, between the premodern and the modern?

To answer this question, we need to begin our history much earlier than the religious controversies immediately preceding Shakespeare's day. Deritualization implies a movement away from the sacred. But the sacred did not begin with the historical controversies of the Reformation. A historical analysis of these controversies can therefore never fully explain the emergence of aesthetic institutions such as the theater from the ritual context, whether these are located in Reformation England or, going back still further, in Periclean Athens.<sup>31</sup>

In Gans's "originary hypothesis" of the minimal categories of human culture, the sacred is that which stands at the center, maximally opposed to the individual desires of the peripheral human community.<sup>32</sup> In ritual sacrifice, only the central sacred figure is able to withstand the multiple, conflicting desires among the members of the human periphery. As Girard suggests, the god functions as an "external mediator," upon whom

all desire is collectively projected and so purged.<sup>33</sup> The god is thus both a victim and a hero. In the first moment, he functions as the repository for frustrated desire (the scapegoat); in the second, he is deified as the restorer of order (the god).

In Girard's formulation of the founding murder, the central figure is not a god but a human who stands in the place of the god. For Girard, the god always was a human; the sacrifice upon which the god depends was originally and foundationally the murder of his human victim. As Gans points out, implicit in Girard's originary scene of sacrifice is the fundamental difference between the peripheral human sign and its central sacred object. We know the victim only by designating it as sacred, which means minimally situating the victim/object at the center of the human scene of representation that we call symbolic culture.<sup>34</sup>

In Gans's revision of the Girardian mimetic crisis, what stands at the center in the originary scene is not another human but the *figure* of humanity as such, which is the god. The usurpation of the role of the central figure by the humans on the periphery is implied by the desiring structure of the scene. Like Hamlet on the margins of Claudius's court, the peripheral subject remains attracted to the scene because his attention is mediated by the attentions of the others on the periphery. The sacred is the originary historical site of all such figurations. Insofar as the theater is a form of dramatic figuration, it necessarily partakes of this same "symbolic" relationship to the sacred object.

But there is a difference. The aesthetic manifests itself historically as an *effect* rather than as the sacred reproduction of history. Ritual is historical only in the "unconscious" sense that it attempts to reproduce as faithfully as possible previous ritual, which is to say, historically significant or collectively memorable events. There is no self-conscious attempt to differentiate between past and present in the ritual act. On the contrary, such attempts are likely to be regarded as a theft of the sacred—a sacrilege—and the perpetrator of difference, like the unfortunate Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, will not go unpunished for his "modernist" act of desecration.

As these remarks suggest, the modern is less a formal or generic category of literature than a term we use to differentiate between different degrees of centralization in the general cultural business of linguistic, aesthetic, sacred, and economic exchange. The universally observed historical movement from compact ritual societies, in which economic exchange remains bound by a centralized ritual "superstructure," toward the modern exchange system, which eschews ritual centralization of any kind, leaves in its wake a vacuum. This vacuum is filled by what we call high culture. Literature is the culture of the market because the market is the locus of cultural desacralization.<sup>35</sup>

But desacralization does not happen overnight. Because the market is centerless, culture responds by recentralizing in imaginary or aesthetic form—that is, on the stage of the theater, or in the pages of the novel, or within the frame of the painting—the old figures of the ritual order. Henry V's great speech on the eve of the battle of Agincourt is an example of this imaginary recentralization. Shakespeare looks back to the old institution of kingship in order to look forward to the new social order in which each individual soul is elected, like Harry himself, to the center of world history. This may not be the radical revolutionary historicism of the romantic, who rejects the existing social order wholesale, but it is a precursor of it.

Reconsider this difference between the romantic and neoclassical ideas of aesthetic centralization. In contrast to the romantic model of subjectivity, Henry V still understands himself as a *rival* for a significance that precedes his own being. Hence his reference to the Christian martyrs Crispin and Crispian. Harry understands his own significance on this Christian model of victimary self-centralization. Obviously this has nothing to do with military strategy. Like the victimized saints themselves, significance or sainthood is inversely proportional to military strength. By increasing the likelihood of their sacrifice at Agincourt, Harry also increases the chance for his “happy few” to achieve aesthetic immortality. By the end of his speech, Harry has successfully communicated the cultural productivity of resentment to the previously queasy Westmoreland, who now wishes that “you and I alone . . . could fight this royal battle!” (4.3.74–75). Westmoreland finally catches on that significance is a role to be played on stage, rather than a real battle that acquires significance from the empiricism of actual history.

In the plays of his middle period, including *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's protagonists become increasingly obsessed with the aesthetics of the scene in which they imagine their destruction. Brutus is a transitional figure between Henry V and Hamlet. Like Henry, he recognizes his own belatedness with respect to the scene of his immortalization. But unlike Henry, who can at least claim to be the legitimate heir of his father's throne, Brutus is forced to imagine Julius Caesar's centrality as a usurpation. With increasing sharpness, Shakespeare will trace the passage of desire from its “comic” fulfillment in the collective appropriation and distribution of the central object (*Henry V* ends with a marriage) to its “tragic” source in the imagination of the peripheral subject. This renewed focus on the periphery is reflected in the secondary or “marginal” status of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Brutus is to Julius Caesar as Hamlet is to Claudius. Both protagonists are driven by resentment of the more central other. Brutus at home dreaming of the scene of his own centralization anticipates Hamlet “hallucinating”

characters (the ghost, Pyrrhus, Lucianus) who can “purge” his resentment toward Claudius.

In the history plays, this more lucid depiction of the structure of resentment tends to be obscured by the fact that the action inevitably centers on the dominant figure of the social order, which is the king. Hence the “stagy” artifice of Harry’s disguise as a common soldier when he delivers his memorable soliloquy on the hollowness of the king’s “thrice-gorgeous ceremony” (*Henry V* 4.1.263), as though donning the cloak of a peripheral subject has demonstrated to the king the emptiness of the center he occupies. In Richard II, whom Walter Pater extolled as the most “exquisite poet” of Shakespeare’s kings,<sup>36</sup> we find another example of this doubling of center and periphery within the protagonist. Richard is more interested in imagining, while he is still king, the scene of his own sacrifice than in actually defending himself against the upstart Bolingbroke. An early prototype of Hamlet, Richard is fascinated by the prospect of his own death, not so much because he suffers from melancholia, as because he resentfully identifies with the omnipotent power of death itself. After learning that he has been abandoned by his Welsh allies and that his court favorites have been executed by Bolingbroke, Richard’s response is to “sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings.”<sup>37</sup> The long speech that ensues appears to be triggered by deep sorrow for what has befallen his friends, but beneath the ostensibly mournful tone is a much darker identification with the destructive power of the resentful protagonist of Richard’s sad story: “the antic” “Death” who, “scoffing” and “grinning” at the king’s “state” and “pomp” allows him “a little scene” before he “Comes at the last and with a little pin / Bores through his castle wall, and farewell, king!” (3.2.162–70).

The scene of Richard’s resentful identification with death as the ultimate leveler of social inequality strikes us as perverse, or, at the very least, extremely ill-advised, because it takes place while Richard is still king. What indeed has this man to envy? But the point of resentment is not that, as Nietzsche believed, it is exclusive to slaves rather than masters, but that it is a universal condition of human subjectivity. Henry V, in disguise as a common soldier bitterly soliloquizing on the “thrice gorgeous ceremony” (*Henry V* 4.1.263) of a king, is as much a resenter of the social order as Richard II denouncing the “pomp” and “state” of the monarch’s “little scene” (*Richard II* 3.2.163–64).

This resentment reaches its most lucid depiction in *Hamlet*. Even before Hamlet sees the ghost, he is presented as a menace to the court. Dressed in black and defiantly ignoring the king’s admonishment that he “throw to earth / This unprevailing woe,”<sup>38</sup> Hamlet’s hostility is motivated not by revenge, for which he has as yet no motive, but resentment. Indeed, the whole point of delaying Hamlet’s interview with the ghost seems

to be to show us that Hamlet's resentment is generative of the scene in which the ghost reveals the secret of Claudius's crime. Hence W. W. Greg's still pertinent remark that Hamlet can reasonably be said to have "hallucinated" the ghost.<sup>39</sup> Despite the torrent of criticism Greg's original argument inspired, the most belligerent of which was undoubtedly J. Dover Wilson's, I do not think that its kernel of truth has ever been adequately explored.<sup>40</sup> Most of the original commentators rely on the standard retort that the ghost can hardly be a figment of Hamlet's imagination because it has also been seen by Marcellus, Barnardo, and Horatio. But the question of Hamlet's motivation cannot be decided by giving a headcount of the other witnesses. The very fact that it appears only to a handful of minor characters before word of its appearance gets to Hamlet is itself extremely significant, because it suggests that only from a position sufficiently removed from the centralizing or homogenizing influence of Claudius's court can the "difference" of the ghost be noticed. This seems to be the point behind Shakespeare's insistence that Gertrude is incapable of seeing the ghost, even when Hamlet is there to point to its presence.

After the nighttime mystery of the opening ghost scene, the action switches to Claudius's brilliant court scene. If we omit the "mythical" content of the ghost for a moment, we arrive at the following official narrative efficiently delivered by Claudius: (1) there has been a recent change in the seat of power in Denmark, the old king having died and his younger brother having taken the queen's hand in marriage and, thereby, the throne; (2) Denmark is preparing to defend itself from an external threat that, pushed underground by the former king's reign, now reemerges to test the new king's leadership. The only figure to challenge this official interpretation is Hamlet, but he does so not by direct refutation but by his menacing stage presence. Dressed in black on an occasion intended to celebrate the new king's marriage and coronation, Hamlet's resentment of Claudius is more pregnantly communicated by his stage presence than any speech could hope to convey.

But the very fact that this first challenge remains unspoken only increases our desire for an explanation. Commentators, from Coleridge to Bradley and Freud, have hastened to defend Hamlet's resentful opening posture and the delay upon which it feeds. Coleridge interpreted the prince's delay as the product of his "vivid imagination," which sends him into "endless reasoning and hesitating."<sup>41</sup> Bradley, accepting the romantic position, suggested that this was the effect, not the cause, of the particular predicament in which Hamlet finds himself; the one-two punch of a father's death and a mother's overhasty remarriage triggers the condition of stultifying resentment and deep melancholy in which the audience first observes the prince.<sup>42</sup> Finally, Freud and Ernest Jones

proposed that, far from being unusual, Hamlet's resentment was all too typical.<sup>43</sup> Hamlet resents Claudius because he sees in him the unfolding of his own "unconscious" desire to unseat his father and marry his mother.

Of the three interpretations, only the Freudian one puts its finger on the key issue, which is that Hamlet uses Claudius as a proxy for indulging his interdicted desires. But contrary to the Freudian view, desire is not first experienced, then repressed. The Freudian notion of the unconscious as a repository of forbidden Oedipal desires is rather the consequence of the mediated status of *all* desire. What prevents the fulfillment of desire is not the repressive law of the father, but the fact that in order to be desired the object must be situated at the center of the scene of representation, where possession is possible only within the fictive space of the individual imagination. This is the source of the romantic intuition that Hamlet is the ultimate poet-figure, a procrastinator who would rather delay his usurpation of the center because he understands that its aesthetic power depends upon this delay. But the flip side to the delayed fulfillment of desire is the buildup of resentment within the prince's diseased imagination. It was G. Wilson Knight who first pointed to the significance of Hamlet's resentment as a structural feature of the play.<sup>44</sup> Calling Hamlet the "ambassador of death" (32), Knight noted the Danish prince's resentful dependency on the scene he affects to despise. This dependency is evident in Hamlet's first stage appearance. Surrounded by Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, and his other courtiers, the king dominates the stage. But this centrality is menacingly undercut by the black-clad prince, whose pregnant silence and snarling asides make clear from the start that this center is under attack, not indeed from Fortinbras, but from within the very same scene occupied by Claudius. The exemplary modern, Hamlet criticizes the scene that provides him with his *raison d'être*. He expresses with unparalleled lucidity the awareness that the scene of representation preexists the individual's right to appear on it.

\* \* \*

When Christianity opened the aesthetic scene to slaves as well as masters, appearance on it became problematic. The neoclassical solution is to represent not just the center, but the paradoxical relationship between center and periphery. The representation of this relationship reaches its fullest expression in *Hamlet*. The prince's ambivalent relationship to the scene usurped by his uncle reflects the paradoxical structure of the neoclassical aesthetic, which represents the center as a locus of usurpation

from the periphery. In the play's violent and bloody conclusion, Hamlet becomes the unofficial "king" of Denmark for the briefest of moments. Between his murder of Claudius and his own (delayed) death by Laertes's poisoned sword, he momentarily occupies the paradoxical position of the kings of Shakespeare's history plays. Like them, he is both the subject and the object of resentment. Hamlet's single "command" during his brief occupation of the center is to persuade Horatio to remove himself, by putting aside the poisoned cup, from the mimetic center's contagious violence. This forward-thinking action by the dying prince/king has one purpose: so Horatio can "tell my story" (5.2.354).

Hamlet is thus a modern "before his time" in a sense similar to the happy few of Harry's speech at Agincourt. Aware that his election to the center of the spectator's desire depends upon Horatio's ability to tell his story, Hamlet usurps the center at exactly the point where his own life is about to end. No longer a resentful spectator of Claudius's centrality, he himself becomes an object of resentment: ours. With impeccable timing, Hamlet transforms himself from a resentful prince competing metatheatrically with the spectator's (delayed) desire for the sacrificial dénouement of traditional revenge tragedy into its glorious and bloody fulfillment. From our mimetic rival, Hamlet transforms himself into our mimetic victim, the object of a spectacle that fulfills our desire not for delay, but closure.

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#### NOTES

1 Margreta de Grazia, "Hamlet before Its Time," *Modern Language Quarterly* 62 (2001), 355 (hereafter cited in text as HBT).

2 According to Harold Bloom, Hamlet is "the Western hero of consciousness" (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* [New York: Riverhead, 1998], 109), quoted in de Grazia, 355.

3 William Kerrigan, *Hamlet's Perfection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), xi–xii (hereafter cited in text as *HP*).

4 "For finally," Kerrigan continues, "it is a literary call. It hardly matters that much of Renaissance dramatic theory was still wedded to Aristotle: Shakespeare might have been an original" (*Hamlet's Perfection*, 29). Kerrigan's wager is, of course, that Shakespeare was "an original."

5 T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and his Problems," *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1950), 122. Like de Grazia's "new" historicism, T. S. Eliot's "old" historicism is intended as a corrective to the excesses of the romantic critic. Eliot has no patience for the latter, whom he describes as "the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead. These minds [Eliot continues] often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization. Such a mind had Goethe, who made Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge, who made Hamlet a Coleridge. . . . We should be thankful Walter Pater did not fix his attention on this play" (121). One notes the irony of a poet criticizing other poets for their insufficiently "objective" criticism. Eliot writes at the dawn of literature as a "scien-



tific" discipline. So, naturally, he is inclined to differentiate himself from his precursors by invoking his alliance with this newly emerging historical "science of literature."

6 "Can it be," de Grazia asks at the end of her essay, "that criticism, after two centuries of pitching Hamlet toward the future, is turning its back on the modern present?" De Grazia's wager is, of course, that it is. For de Grazia, the ghost functions as a figure for a host of premodern religious issues, including "purgatory, patrilineality, real presence, embodied memory, the justice of exact retribution, and the affinity between man and earth (human and humus)" ("*Hamlet* before Its Time," 374–75). De Grazia is thus not unlike Hamlet himself, who in his effort to become the first successful interpreter of the ghost, to make it speak and thus to succeed where Barnardo, Marcellus, and Horatio have failed, must separate himself, rather violently, from his fellow interpreters ("I'll make a ghost of him that lets me").

7 "As I turned from the history of criticism to the play itself," Kerrigan confides in his preface, "my work quickly lost its initial polemical edge. Born of a sorrow that my generation of scholar-critics might have embarrassingly little to contribute to the understanding of Shakespeare's major work, the book rapidly became a love affair with *Hamlet*" (*Hamlet's Perfection*, xi). It is hard to imagine a new historicist writing this way. Compare, for example, Stephen Greenblatt in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988): "If one longs, as I do, to reconstruct these negotiations, one dreams of finding an originary moment, a moment in which the master hand shapes the concentrated social energy into the sublime aesthetic object. But the quest is fruitless, for there is no originary moment, no pure act of untrammelled creation. In place of blazing genesis, one begins to glimpse something that seems at first far less spectacular: a subtle, elusive set of exchanges, a network of trades and trade-offs, a jostling of competing representations, a negotiation between joint-stock companies" (7). In Greenblatt, as in all new historicism, the romantic love affair with the aesthetic text is subconsciously diluted and flattened, via the deconstructionist notion of "textuality," to embrace not just literature but all history. There is a real anthropological point to this "flattening" of literature into history (Jacques Derrida would call it a "dissemination" or "supplementation" or, most originarily, a "*différance*"), but it tends to remain obscured by exaggerated polemics with mythical targets like the new criticism. New historicism's Oedipal relationship to the latter suggests that this polemic is really just an ironic form of literary piety. Hence the ease with which a "traditionalist" like Kerrigan can dismiss "theory" as so much petty rivalry among the brothers who have killed their father. But the solution to the "presentist" rivalries of theory is not to resurrect the dead father, as Hamlet seeks to do, but to minimize from within this mythical-literary scene the fundamental anthropological elements of rivalry itself. For further discussion, see my "The Critic as Ethnographer," *New Literary History* 35 (2004): 621–61.

8 Kerrigan's self-consciousness of his own marginalization comes across when he says "my book might be considered the minority report of a minority ambition" (*Hamlet's Perfection*, xi). But his tendency is to explain this marginality in terms of his relationship to the contemporary critical vanguard ("theory") rather than in broader historical terms, which is the route I shall pursue here.

9 On this point, see Wolfgang Iser, "Changing Functions of Literature," in *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 197–214; Galin Tihanov, "Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?)," *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004): 61–81; and Stein Haugom Olsen, "Progress in Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 341–58.

10 The classic discussion of the sacred remains Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (1912; New York: Free Press, 1995). For an intelligent and uncluttered summary of Durkheim's basic ideas, as well as for a lively analysis that at-

tempts to show their continued relevance for the theory of culture today, see Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2000). I admire the lucidity with which Scruton understands the fundamental anthropological problem of modern culture, but it seems to me that his solution is ultimately only a more rigorous defense of high culture than is available in, for example, Kerrigan. Having said that, Scruton still remains one of the few people to have grasped the magnitude of the problem. He is at his anthropological best when he understands that the strongest defense of culture is not ultimately aesthetic but *religious*, which is very nearly to say, anthropological.

11 See, in particular, Eric Gans, *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993) (hereafter cited in text as *OT*).

12 "Why," Kerrigan asks, "has my generation of literary intellectuals contributed so little to the elucidation of *Hamlet*?" He offers two explanations. Either we are fed up with the romantics, whose "individualism . . . promoted this play to its lofty status in world literature," or we are fed up with literature itself, there being "not much fresh and original to be said about *Hamlet*" or indeed any other great work (*Hamlet's Perfection*, xi). Kerrigan, of course, rejects both answers. "Compared to *Oedipus Rex*," he writes, "*Hamlet* is still in its infancy. Its tradition is young and open, rich in questions, teeming with opportunity" (*Hamlet's Perfection*, xi).

13 This point becomes most clear when one observes that the entire argument of "*Hamlet* before Its Time" is essentially an exercise in debunking exponents of the romantic aesthetic, from Coleridge to Derrida. To the question, "If what you say is true, what follows?" de Grazia ultimately has no answer. Instead, her final paragraph alludes very tentatively (via a footnote) to a list of names of possible critical reformers, including Anthony Low, Ann Rosalind Jones, Peter Stallybrass, and Greenblatt. But because this list is not backed up with a discussion of the fundamental ideas of any of these individuals, the gesture is in fact empty. The effect is, paradoxically enough, not unlike one of Derrida's own texts, a point de Grazia appears to acknowledge obliquely when she refers in the final paragraph to Derrida's remarks on the paradoxical figure of the ghost. Like Derrida's reading of metaphysics, de Grazia's argument is concerned with "deconstructing" the *Hamlet* of the romantics, not with advancing a new *Hamlet*, which is to say, a "new literary history."

14 This transition is also the subject of Katharine Maus's closely argued study *Inwardness and Theater in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Maus explains Hamlet's inwardness as a consequence of widespread ethical changes in the culture, including, notably, the religious changes produced by the Reformation.

15 Compare Kerrigan and Gordon Braden in *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989): "The year after the peace of Westphalia, in an act of far-reaching symbolic import, England beheads its sovereign. If we posit that step as the symbolic climax to a general European Renaissance, it constitutes, despite its violence, a denial of Burckhardt's ultimately tragic scenario for the period, since it affirms a serious faith in the social potential of an individualistic ethos. . . . The period at its end retrieves the seemingly failed enterprise of the Italian communes: the management of personal ambition as a civic resource" (40).

16 A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1905), 90.

17 For an analysis of the importance of the "rites of passage" in traditional religious societies, see Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge, 1960). Originally published as *Les rites de passage* (1908).

18 David Green, ed., *Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12.

19 Exactly how modern was Shakespeare in 1600? Did, for example, his small Latin and less Greek make him less modern than, say, Ben Jonson? But the debate about Shakespeare's

modernity does not hinge on his familiarity with classical texts, but on his sense of himself as a “literary” author competing for an audience (a market) that was also fast becoming a readership. On this last point, see Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the importance of Shakespeare’s rivalry with Jonson and of the “war of the theaters” as constitutive of literary authorship in general, see James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

20 It is for this reason that I find Richard Halpern’s provocative argument in *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) only partially convincing. Halpern’s thesis is that modernism’s fascination for the primitive, notably, in Sir James George Frazer and the Cambridge ritualists, was taken up by literary critics, first by arch-modernists like Wyndham Lewis and Eliot, but also by later academic critics like Northrop Frye and Greenblatt. For these critics Shakespeare represented the transition from primitive to modern. Halpern cites Eliot’s notion of the “dissociation of sensibility” as a symptom of the modernist idealization of the primitive over the “fragmentation” of experience that is the lot of the modernist. But Halpern’s thesis assumes that modern historical self-consciousness only begins with modernism’s contact with the primitive other, a figure whose radical alterity forced the West to reconsider its own past as a source of difference rather than identity. But this is to ignore the historical self-consciousness inherent to the category of the aesthetic itself. The very idea of a “Renaissance,” in which the art forms of a previous era are revived and imitated, is an illustration of the historicity of the aesthetic. No doubt this historical self-consciousness was more apparent to the successors of the Renaissance than to its original practitioners, but the very notion that the classical art forms could themselves be “revived” demonstrates a minimal awareness of the historical difference between ancient and modern.

21 This suggests an alternative interpretation of the “interstitial” period of the “Middle Ages” alluded to by de Grazia as another example of historical forgetting similar to the lost period of *Hamlet* criticism between 1600 and 1800 (“*Hamlet* before Its Time,” 356). Insofar as the Middle Ages provided a new ethical context for the revitalization of the classical aesthetic, it is indeed erroneous to bracket the entire period as in some vague and undefined sense “premodern.” The crucial factor is the integration of the aesthetic scene inaugurated by the Greeks into the ethical context of Christianity. As Gans suggests, in these terms the “medieval period already illustrates the same postclassical problematic as that of the Renaissance” (*Originary Thinking*, 150).

22 Kerrigan and Braden point to Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as the first truly Shakespearean character, and offer this brilliant comment on his gleefully malicious opening soliloquy in *Richard III*: “the bitterness is itself something of an act. It is being cultivated as a resource. Richard’s divorce from love is the detachment of Renaissance individualism, aware of its unlikeness to others as it sizes them up with exploitative intent. Machiavellian role-playing is the relevant art of such a medium; Richard is simply backing off to give it room to work” (*The Idea of the Renaissance*, 65). Richard’s “backing off” to give himself room to work anticipates Hamlet’s delay as he “backs off” from Claudius to put on plays.

23 Christopher Marlowe, *Dido Queen of Carthage, and the Massacre at Paris*, ed. H. J. Oliver, *The Revels Plays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 5.1.292–94.

24 See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

25 For a sensitive reading of how Shakespeare self-consciously reproduces the past in some of the tragedies, see Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

26 William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson, 1995), 4.3.61–62 (text references are to act, scene, and line of this edition).

27 Anthony B. Dawson, “The Arithmetic of Memory: Shakespeare’s Theatre and the National Past,” *Shakespeare Survey* 52 (1999): 54.

28 For the analysis of the hysteron proteron effect as a purely dramatic or literary form of irony, see Marjorie Garber, "What's Past Is Prologue": Temporality and Prophecy in Shakespeare's History Plays," in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 301–31.

29 For the idea of "social memory," see, in particular, James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

30 See, for example, Lars Engle, *Shakespearean Pragmatism: Market of His Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and the debate between Dawson and Paul Yachnin in their co-authored *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

31 On this point I am in complete agreement with Eli Rozik, who in a recent reassessment, *The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and other Theories of Origin* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), criticizes the commonplace view that the theater originates historically in ritual. Rozik argues instead that theater is "sui generis" and that any attempt to trace its origin "historically" to earlier ritual forms is therefore a category error. Rozik's own solution is to see the roots of theater in "the psychological constitution of human beings and sociocultural structures of human societies" (xiv). My view is that the "sui generis" character of institutions like ritual and theater must be addressed "minimally" in terms of an originary hypothesis.

32 See Gans, *Originary Thinking*, 1–28, and *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment and Other Mimetic Structures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1–36.

33 See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

34 Gans's criticism of Girard's originary scene is original and far-reaching. The fundamental point Gans raises is that Girard's notion of an originary scene of victimage implies a theory of symbolic representation. By emphasizing the necessarily mediated status of the central object/victim of the originary scene, Gans removes from the original Girardian scenario the "naturalism" implied by Girard's assertion that it is the empirical presence of the victim as such that motivates the first moment of cultural "non-instinctual attention" (see Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 99). To this assertion Gans responds by saying that the victim can only be a victim in this "non-instinctual," "cultural-symbolic" sense if it is assumed that the violent sparagmos of the "mimetic crisis" is preceded by an awareness that the focus of communal aggression—Girard's founding victim—is *already* a manifestation of the sacred, which is to say, this moment of non-instinctual attention must in fact take place before, rather than after, the first victim is dispatched. This is the basis for Gans's assertion that the sparagmos is preceded by the "aborted gesture of appropriation" (*Signs of Paradox*, 16), a moment in which the central object is designated or represented to the mimetic other. Only this prior "symbolic" awareness can explain the difference of "mimetic" violence among humans from the sort of mimetic violence documented in many other social animals. For instance, chimpanzees appear to engage in group "murders" of conspecifics. But this does not mean that chimpanzees therefore have an understanding of the category of the sacred. The killing of a conspecific—or indeed of any living species, whether plant or animal—does not "naturally" evolve into an act of sacralization. The act of sacrifice is in the first place a *symbolic* act. The difference between humans and all other animals is to be found here. This is the originary ground of all anthropology, including the "cultural" anthropology of anthropology departments and the "literary" anthropology of literature departments. For a clear statement of the central issues, see Gans, "Differences," *Modern Language Notes* 96 (1981): 792–808; and especially *Signs of Paradox*, chap. 2. For a convergent position from a biological anthropologist, see Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: Norton, 1997). For some remarks on this interesting convergence between the sciences and the humanities on the

topic of language origin, see my "Cognitive Science and the Problem of Representation," *Poetics Today* 24 (2003): 237–95. For a brief summary of the basic principles of generative anthropology, see Iser's chapter "Anthropological Theory: Gans," in his *How to Do Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

35 For a fascinating sociological study of this tension between periphery and center in human societies, see Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

36 Walter Pater, "Shakespeare's English Kings," in *Richard II*, ed. Kenneth Muir, Signet Shakespeare, 2nd revised ed. (New York: Penguin, 1999), 151. No doubt this text is what Eliot had in mind when he expressed his relief that Pater had not turned his attention to Hamlet. See note 5 above.

37 Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thompson, 2002), 3.2.155–56 (text references are to act, scene, and line of this edition).

38 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, The Arden Shakespeare (New York: Methuen, 1982), 1.2.106–7 (text references are to act, scene, and line of this edition).

39 See W. W. Greg, "Hamlet's Hallucination," *Modern Language Review* 12 (1917): 393–421.

40 See J. Dover Wilson, *What Happens in "Hamlet,"* 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 138–97, esp. 159–60. For a review of the controversy, see Jenkins's long note in the Arden *Hamlet*, 501–05. Jenkins himself sides with the traditional reading, and remains impatient with what he regards as the sheer "pointlessness" (503) of Greg's original argument. Jenkins's dismissal notwithstanding, Greg's "controversy" has experienced something of a minor revival among theorists, who have been quick to point out the deconstructive, psychoanalytic, and occasionally even Marxian implications of Greg's analysis. For the Marxian reading, see Terrence Hawkes's entertaining, but ultimately misdirected, "Telmah," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 310–32. For the deconstructive and psychoanalytic readings, see Ned Luckacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 178–235; Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179–91; and Christopher Pye, *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the Subject, and Early Modern Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 105–29.

41 Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton*, quoted in *Critical Responses to "Hamlet," 1790–1838*, ed. David Farley-Hills, vol. 2 (New York: AMS Press, 1996), 54.

42 See Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 118–19.

43 See Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1949).

44 See G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy with Three New Essays*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1949) (hereafter cited in text).