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Jesting at scars: Shakespeare’s skeptics and the problem of belief

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JESTING AT SCARS:
SHAKESPEARE'S SKEPTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF BELIEF

by

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ABSTRACT

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by
Allyson Newton

Certain characters in Shakespeare share lineages grounded in thematic concerns. Tracing such lineages can create inroads into key Shakespearean issues that elude more straightforward approaches. Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet, Falstaff in I Henry IV, Part One, the Fool in King Lear, Enobarbus in Antony and Cleopatra: whether we call them skeptics, cynics, "nay-sayers," demystifiers, or pragmatic realists, they share such a lineage. Even though these figures are among Shakespeare's most charismatic and psychologically complex creations, they involve us not just in characterological subtleties but in issues which have to do with the impingement of skepticism on the "illusion" of theatrical embodiment. Exploration of the "resistances" these characters maintain with such tenacity discovers what could be called a Shakespearean meditation on the nature of belief--in the other, in oneself, in imagination, in theater--and on the forces that compel belief into crisis--skepticism, disavowal of desire, distrust of theatrical display, fear of vulnerability and otherness. From play to
play, the elements of male friendship and rivalry, sacrifice and scapegoating mechanisms, and the plain-speaking ironist almost painfully overinvested in the protagonists are reconfigured into a powerful exploration of the creation of belief in the very space made empty by doubt, distrust, grief, and loss.
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CONTENTS

1 Introduction.................................................. 1

2 'Is he gone, and hath nothing?':
Mercurio and the Language of Dreams............... 17

3 Falstaff's 'Sweating Labor' and
the Limits of Irony.......................................... 65

4 Lear's Shadow: The Fool and
the Sum of Nothing........................................ 113

5 At the Very Heart of Loss: Enobarbus
and the Rhetoric of Remembering...................... 156

6 Life in the Level of Dreams: Paulina
and the Work of Restoration........................... 210

Bibliography.................................................. 247
INTRODUCTION

Certain characters in Shakespeare share lineages grounded in thematic concerns. Tracing such lineages can create inroads into key Shakespearean issues that tend to elude more straightforward approaches. Mercutio, Falstaff, the Fool, and Enobarbus, whether we call them skeptics, cynics, "nay-sayers," demystifiers, or pragmatic realists, share such a lineage. Beyond their characterological subtleties, they involve us in issues that have to do with the impingement of skepticism on the "illusion" of theatrical embodiment. Exploration of the resistances these characters maintain with such tenacity discovers what could be called a Shakespearean meditation on belief—in the other, in oneself, in imagination, in theater—and on the forces that compel belief into crisis—skepticism, disavowal of desire, distrust of theatrical display, fear of vulnerability, investment in otherness.

One reason these characters loom so large, despite their auxiliarity, is the uncanny sense of authorial investment in them. While theorists of Shakespearean metadrama have long posited authorial investment in the great protagonists such as Hamlet and Prospero, the more vexed and disavowed overinvestment in these "secondary" characters has largely gone unnoticed. Indeed, the double-binded relationship between creative self and skeptical
other being negotiated through and in these characters complicates any sense of them as merely carefree comic relievers. The attempt to describe the "threat" posed by (and to) the Shakespearean nay-sayer thus becomes inextricably entangled with the attempt to define the Shakespearean project of engendering belief, and cannot be understood without it. What gets played out through Shakespeare's vexed investedness in his nay-sayers is a transvaluation whereby the threatening skepticism of the disbelieving other becomes intrinsic to the creative process; but this involves displacing the tragic onto the marginal other, as his sacrifice becomes the means for "crossing over" into whatever kind of transcendence the plays ultimately work.

As my hesitancy to settle on a single term for Shakespeare's "antisentimentalists" implies, these figures do not merely recapitulate the same themes, but become implicated in a process of questioning and meditation that shifts from play to play. Indeed, one reason that disentangling the thematic strands in which these characters are caught proves so difficult is that their modes of skepticism seem always to involve incredibly complex thematic oppositions--truth and falsehood, knowing and not knowing, belief and its suspension--that are themselves inflected in almost every possible way.
Things are further complicated by the tendency of these characters' extravagant language to release the very energies that their words attempt to block. In fact, it is often through their most vehement disavowals that we are placed most powerfully in the presence of what they seek to deny. Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech generates the very belief in dreams (or in the telling of them) that it ostensibly ridicules, and Enobarbus's artfully constructed "Cydnus" speech, even as it tries to "frame" Cleopatra, clears the space for a spontaneous memory of her in which all of Enobarbus's unarticulated feeling for her is invested.

It seems paradoxical that characters woven of such unexcerptable complexities should be best known for their set pieces: Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech, Falstaff's "catechism" on honor, the Fool's songs and asides, Enobarbus's "Cydnus" speech. But a case can be made that these speeches act within the plays' psychologies as "blinds" which effectively transfer attention from the speaker to the speech, and from the performer to the performance, in a process that epitomizes the deflection of attention so often manipulated by the characters themselves.

Stanley Cavell, the preeminent theorizer of skepticism in Shakespeare, has posited that the underlying issue here is "acknowledgment": "The problem of the other [is] the problem of acknowledging one's relation to the other... the
history of the failures of these relations is a history of skepticism and of attempts to overcome skepticism." But if Cavell refers to a refusal to acknowledge, then the naysayers experience in turn an inability to be acknowledged. While it is true that these characters experience profound failures or refusals of acknowledgment—the uncomprehending "Courage man, the hurt cannot be much" accorded to Mercutio's mortal wound, the Fool's unexplained and unremarked disappearance from King Lear—what especially interests me is the way these failures of acknowledgment become hopelessly entangled in the defenses adopted by these skeptics to ward off whatever claims such acknowledgment might make on them. One cannot discuss the lack of knowledge that wounds these characters without attending to their strategies for deflecting acknowledgment; cannot discuss their skepticism without remarking upon the desire (especially the desire to believe) this skepticism relentlessly disavows; cannot register their preference for theatricalized display without noticing their vague dissatisfaction with the limits of theatrical relationship.

The psychological complexities into which these characters lead us—their overinvestedness in the male protagonist, their uneasy mix of sociality and solitariness, their extravagant use of language, their constant need to deflect both desire and pain into jest—wind up implicating the theater itself. The proclivity of Renaissance drama for
a self-reflexive anti-theatricality has been well chronicled by Jonas Barish and more recently by Harry Berger, whose work posits a fundamental Shakespearean despair at the inevitable reductiveness and "ritual coerciveness" of theatrical performance. While it is true that these characters embody a skepticism (theirs and their author’s) that broods on both the truth of character and the reality of theater, that very skepticism makes them some of Shakespeare’s most compelling dramatic creations, possessing and possessed by the charismatic excessiveness of the consummate actor. It is as if the suspicion of theatrical embodiment imbricated in the nay-sayer’s skepticism is a necessary vehicle for the overcoming of skepticism and distrust. It is as if his role becomes a necessary sacrifice (in itself tragic) for the crossing over into imaginative becomings and belief.

In tracing the rather marginal, peripheral lineage of these uneasy ironists, I look not only at the skeptic’s overinvestment in his relation to the play’s male protagonist but also at his connection with the triangulated female other. This less obvious relationship grows over the succession of plays I treat from the subtextual linkage of Mercutio and Juliet (who never encounter each other in the actual course of the play) to the almost conspiratorial intimacy shared by Enobarbus and Cleopatra. These strange and strangely moving intimacies (including verbal echoes
that resonate in the language of the nay-sayers and the female protagonists) complicate the skeptics' ostensible and much-remarked misogyny, especially insofar as it acts as a defense against the admission of desire and belief that these skeptics so arduously deflect and defer. This triangulation of nay-sayer, male protagonist, and female protagonist may involve a mediation of male homosexual desire through the female beloved, but it is not quite as central to the Shakespearean complex as theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have claimed. One could even argue that the male protagonist mediates an intimacy between the skeptic and the female protagonist as much as she mediates any homoerotic desire between the two men. Certainly in Antony and Cleopatra, Antony seems to draw Enobarbus and Cleopatra close even as Cleopatra serves as a "topic" between the two men. One might say that over the course of the plays, the growing closeness between the nay-sayer and the female protagonist indexes the movement of the nay-sayer's potentially dangerous skepticism from marginal spaces of auxiliarity toward the centers of power and desire that reside in the Shakespearean female "other." Put another way, the complex theatrical need to maintain an absolute distance between Mercutio's bitter ironies and the unrestrained erotic which seems Juliet's element becomes tempered over the course of the plays as the nay-sayer's skepticism itself becomes more multivalent and vexed. The
almost unrelenting bitterness and distrust that finally
 crushes Mercutio modulates to the barely-maintained cynicism
 of Enobarbus, whose grief and longing become too much for
 his determined pragmatism to bear.

 Indeed, if in the purer forms of tragedy, the
 protagonist serves as a scapegoat through whose death the
 community is purged, then in Shakespeare's plays—which seek
 some realm "beyond" tragedy, "beyond" community—these
 marginal nay-sayers become scapegoats of a different sort.
 Their deaths/banishments/departures/disappearances become
 not only tragic in themselves but vectors toward whatever
 kind of transcendence the plays ultimately seek. Mercutio's
 bitter death "under Romeo's arm" literally serves as a
 bridge into the unrestrained desiring of Juliet's "Gallop
 apace, you fiery-footed steeds" soliloquy, even as
 Enobarbus's death of a broken heart, followed by Antony's
 own passing, releases the hold of the tragic on Cleopatra's
 own radical creation of an "Emperor Anthony... past the size
 of dreaming," into a realm where "t' imagine/ An Anthony were
 Nature's peece, 'gainst Fancie,/ Condemning shadowes
 quite."8

 But if the nay-sayer's death enables crossing over into
 imaginative becoming, it also inscribes into the play
 woundedness and lasting scars, grief and irreparable loss.
 If, as I claim, the nay-sayer is drawn closer to the centers
 of power and desire that reside in Shakespearean women such
as Cordelia and Cleopatra, that intimacy is not without its cost. While we may feel that by some kind of impossible mechanism the Fool does indeed return to the play as Cordelia ("and my poor Fool is hanged"), there remains the sense that her presence has become unavoidably contingent on his absence. More than crossing over into Cordelia's return, the Fool's death is also a necessary bridge into the area that Lear's own nay-saying tries to raze in the play's last scene. Enobarbus's wrenching and agonized death even more poignantly pulls the play itself open to that place of woundedness that remains when the last vestiges of Shakespearean irony fall away.

If Enobarbus's skepticism finally gives itself over to romantic impulses of longing and desire, then Mercutio's bitter ironies ultimately smother the tentative stirrings of any latent romanticism. From Mercutio's first resisting "Nay," he initiates the complex of issues that overdetermines these "secondary" characters—the vexed need for sociality in these solitary skeptics, the sense of vicarious investment that energizes their insistent language of "we," the strange combination of possessiveness and selflessness, the tendency of their nihilistic refusals to make manifest the very energies they would deny. As Mercutio's voluble Queen Mab speech embarks on a massive and violent disavowal of any "reality" in dreams, it paradoxically clears the space for belief, even as it
elicits the anticipated response from Romeo: "Peace, peace, Mercutio peace,/ Thou talk'st of nothing." (emphasis mine). Mercutio’s deflationary skepticism vents itself not only against belief but also against the feminine, as if to disavow his overflowingness with the desire his language (again like Shakespeare’s own) figures as feminine. Although much has been made of Mercutio’s rough misogyny, less attention has been paid to the vexedness that inhabits that misogyny, with its tendency toward an intrapsychic process of violent repression that must continually "beat love down," as it defends against rising feelings of tenderness and affection. It is as if Mercutio’s death is a necessary prerequisite for the play’s crossing-over into the powerful committedness of Juliet’s own erotic language.

The relationship between Falstaff and the Prince is marked by a similar sense of vicarious investment on the part of the nay-sayer, along with a thinly-veiled rivalry charged with desire and eroticism, and the deflection of desire into jest. If Mercutio "jests at scars," then Falstaff jests at his own flesh; the process of being made the "butt" of jokes becomes a strategy to forestall acknowledgments that are both avoided and desired. As Shakespeare relocates and reconfigures the problematics of belief and acknowledgment from tragedy to the history plays, the theatricalization of the problem of the other--the Prince’s self-styled masquerade in the taverns of Eastcheap,
the "play extempore" that negotiates the tangle of identities, hostilities, and affections shared by Falstaff and the Prince, Falstaff’s disingenuous posturings and counterfeit "death"--tends to blur the already thin lines between truth and falsehood, authenticity and artificiality. Although the inclusion of Falstaff within a study of peripheral characters at first might seem incongruous, Falstaff’s powerful verbal skepticism forces the issues of knowing and belief into a crisis that it will take King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra to work through. Indeed, one must extend one’s sense of the "ending" of Henry IV, Part One into Part Two and Falstaff’s banishment (as does most criticism of Falstaff) in order to smooth over the very problematical ending of this play. Falstaff’s audacious stabbing of the dead Hotspur, and his subsequent claim that "nobody sees me," betrays our own intimate complicity with Falstaff as audience even as it presses unmercifully the limits of how much alienation and identification the theater (and empathy) can bear.

The sense of overinvestment and ingratiating that characterizes the relationship between Falstaff and the Prince becomes even more vexed in King Lear. The Fool, like Mercutio and Enobarbus, is an ironist who shares with them a poignant language of littleness and smallness with which he attempts to counteract Lear’s magnitude and "moreness." And the Fool’s constant, cynical needling of Lear seems designed
as much to protect the Fool from absorption into Lear’s enormous presence as to "out-jest... [Lear’s] heart-stroke injuries." The subtextual linkages between Mercutio and Juliet become explicit in the Fool’s "pining" for Cordelia, and displaced even more powerfully into the very construction of the play. Paradoxically, the distance enforced between the Fool and Cordelia (who never share the stage) becomes a space of intimacy in which they are, as it were, collapsed—so much so that an all-but-canonical tradition of the same actor "doubling" the roles has evolved. When the Fool, like Mercutio, is "disappeared" from the play without comment after the third act, it is as if the Fool’s skepticism—which keeps Lear at a distance, and which keeps Lear sane—is what Lear ironically absorbs into his own dark nay-saying. The Fool’s death not only allows for Cordelia’s return, but also provides the material of negation for all of Lear’s furious last-scene nay-saying.

If King Lear is the most powerful of Shakespeare’s plays that involve the phenomenon of nay-saying, then Antony and Cleopatra may well be Shakespeare’s most sustained meditation on the problematics of knowing and the difficulties of belief. If one way of thinking about the play is in terms of the oppositions it constructs and then problematizes—Egyptian and Roman, masculine and feminine, public and private, true and false, real and imaginary, stoic and epicurean, belief and doubt—then Enobarbus acts
as a conduit between opposing forces, energized and yet ultimately exploded by them. The desire to "finish all foul thoughts" voiced by Enobarbus in his most despairing moments marks the culmination of a preoccupation with "thinking" and "knowing" that consumes him ("What shall we do, Enobarbus?" "Think, and die"; "A swifter mean shall outstrike thought, but though will do’t, I feel") until self-consciousness becomes unbearable and literally breaks his heart. More than the other nay-sayers, Enobarbus seems full of desire that clashes with his skeptical distrust of otherness. His passionate denials seem particularly overdetermined vis-a-vis Cleopatra’s "theatrical displays," for it is his language that paradoxically creates their legendary greatness. Enobarbus, like the other nay-sayers, becomes a vehicle for overcoming, his death a bridge over which the play crosses into the radical transcendence worked by Cleopatra’s own imaginings.

In one sense, Shakespeare finally puts the specter of Mercutio and his violent skepticism to rest in Antony and Cleopatra. This is not to say, however, that the romances, with their epilogic reconfiguration of the issues of belief raised in the earlier plays, do not continue to engage the phenomenon of Shakespearean skepticism. Certainly The Winter’s Tale radically poses issues of belief and skepticism to the audience through a play that flaunts almost every rule of dramatic structure¹² and yet still asks
us to believe that a grief prolonged long enough (seventeen years!) can recover the longed-for lost object—that a statue can come to life. Central to this process of resuscitation and restoration undertaken by the play is the character of Paulina,¹ who in many ways plays the Fool to Leontes's Lear. She, too, thus takes her place in the lineage of Shakespearean nay-sayers, and shows that the role need not necessarily be construed as male. My aim in concluding with a discussion of this play is not to interpret The Winter's Tale as a resolution to the crisis of belief staged in the preceding plays. Rather, the play reconfigures the elements of male friendship and rivalry, sacrifice and scapegoating mechanisms, and the plain-speaking ironist almost painfully overinvested in the plays' protagonists into a powerful exploration of the creation of belief—belief in the other, in imagination, in theater, in what the eyes behold—in the very space made empty by doubt, distrust, grief, and loss.

¹See James Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), and also Anne Barton, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (London: Chatto &

An important exception is William Empson's reading of the relationship between Falstaff and the Prince as analogous to that between Shakespeare and the young man of the sonnets; see Chapter Three, "They That Have Power," in Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950): 89-115.


Antony and Cleopatra 5.2.97-100. Citations to the plays are from The First Folio of Shakespeare edited by Charlton Hinman (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968). For the reader's convenience, I have provided references to the Riverside edition of the plays as well. My decision to work from the Folio text has been preceded by the essays of J. Leeds Barroll, who argues that "Since silent editorial emendation is itself also a mode of structural analysis, criticism becomes redundant unless supporting quotations are from the original work so that the scholarly reader can judge for himself when matters of vocabulary, logical structure, or nuances of rhetoric are at issue"
("Shakespeare and the Art of Character: A Study of Anthony" in Shakespeare Studies 5 [1969]: 159-235). Michael J. Warren, in "Repunctuation as Interpretation in Editions of Shakespeare," further refines Barroll's argument by tracing out the ways in which modern editions tend to enforce certain interpretations (and restrict others) by inserting modern punctuation, with its own set of rhetorical implications, into the text:

Whatever may be the suspicions about its origins, however inconsistent it may appear, the punctuation is there in the original texts, organizing and grouping the words and phrases, indicating pauses and sometimes questions, and often conspicuously lacking in exclamation points...just as emendation is an act of interpretation derived from the editor's perception of the whole work, so the alteration of punctuation is an act of interpretation itself, however major or minor the instance, however conscious or unconscious the act (English Literary Renaissance 7 [1978]: 155-169).

Warren's comments may also be brought to bear on the performative aspects of the play, especially since modernized punctuation tends to restrict the range of dramatic possibilities offered by the old-spelling text. In particular, modernized texts tend to insist on rhetorical postures that diminish the nuanced subtlety of the language as well as enforce restrictions on tone and inflection at the level of performance.

9 It is, in fact, his very first word in the play.
10 Romeo and Juliet 1.4.95-96.
11 King Lear 3.1.16-17.
12 In the preface to Bartholomew Fair (published 1631), Ben Jonson takes a jab at The Winter's Tale's fast and loose play with the dramatic unities, saying that he was "loath to make Nature afraid in his plays...like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such-like drolleries."
13 Paulina is most often read as a substitute "mother" in the absence of Hermione; Peter Erickson describes her as "impersonat[ing] the mother figure that haunts Leontes' fears" (Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985]: 156), and Carol Thomas Neely asserts that "Paulina is the only mother in the romances who does not undergo a real or apparent death, and the fact that her sexuality and motherhood are dramatically invisible confirms the romances' requirement that mothers be dead" (Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985]: 174-175). Neely's rather circular argument only reinscribes Paulina
within the socially constructed role of "mother," a move Shakespeare seem to have taken pains to avoid. My reading of Paulina does not seek to deny her maternity, but rather to challenge its invocation as the defining characteristic of such a complicated figure.
CHAPTER TWO

'Is he gone, and hath nothing?': Mercutio and the Language of Dreams

Commenting on the death of Mercutio less than halfway through *Romeo and Juliet*, Dryden observed that "[Shakespeare] said himself, that he was forced to kill [Mercutio] in the third act, to prevent being killed by him."¹ However Dryden might have understood this gnomic comment, it gestures richly toward the vexed relationship between creative self and skeptical other being negotiated in and through Shakespeare’s nay-sayers. Especially since any attempt to name the “threat” to which Dryden obliquely refers—skepticism, mockery, fear of vulnerability, theatrical excessiveness, the step outside the frame—becomes hopelessly entangled with the Shakespearean preoccupation with theatrical “belief,” and cannot be understood without it.

Even Mercutio’s name and its attachment to him is woven complexly into the opening moments of the play. We first hear it in Romeo’s reading of those invited to the Capulet feast. Mercutio’s name flies by almost without notice in the middle of the list, surrounded by characters that, except for Tybalt, are never called up in the play:

Seigneur Martino, and his wife and daughter: County
Anselme and his beauteous sisters: the Lady widdow
of [Vitruvio], Seigneur Placentio, and his lovely
Neeces: Mercutio and his brother Valentine: mine uncle Capulet his wife and daughters: my faire Neece Rosaline, Livia, Seigneur Valentio, & his Cosen Tybalt: Lucio and the lively Helena (1.2.64-70).

Mercutio here is paired with a brother, Valentine, who is never mentioned again. This pairing may emphasize, as Joseph Porter suggests, the "increased brotherliness" that accompanies Shakespeare's transformation of Mercutio from the rival for Juliet's affection in Brooke's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* to the "very friend" of Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*. But equally, and even more importantly, it intimates the sense of loss and aloneness that pervades so much of Mercutio's language. The space marked by the absence of "Mercutio's brother, Valentine" couples Mercutio with a certain emptiness, paradoxically made more open and apparent by the fact that Mercutio never appears alone onstage but is always a member of a group or a pair.

If the first mention of Mercutio's name blends almost imperceptibly into Romeo's recitation of a faceless "cast of characters," Mercutio himself makes his first entrance as merely one of an anonymous crowd of "maskers" and "torch-bearers" that assemble before the Capulet house. Even when he emerges into singularity to enter into repartee with Romeo, it is only belatedly, when Mercutio becomes lost in the labyrinth of his Queen Mab speech, that Romeo, attempting to bring him back to himself, calls his name. For nearly 100 lines into his first scene, then, Mercutio
remains anonymous, unconnected to the name read earlier by Romeo.

Mercutio, still unidentified, finally comes forth unbidden from the crowd of revelers to challenge Romeo's reticence about the evening's festivities:

Rom. Give me a Torch, I am not for this ambling. Being but heavy I will beare the light. 
Mer. Nay gentle Romeo, we must have you dance. 
Rom. Not I beleeve me, you have dapcing shooes With nimble soles, I have a [soul]^{5} of Lead So stakes me to the ground, I cannot move. 
Mer. You are a Lover, borrow Cupids wings, And soare with them above a common bound (1.4. 11-18).

Mercutio's first line ("Nay gentle Romeo, we must have you dance") encapsulates the complex of issues that overdetermines the needling of Romeo's friend: the sense of vicarious investment present in the possessive "we," the impulse to theatricality that creates both audience and performance, the strange combination of possessiveness and selflessness, the elusiveness of this apparently collective "we," the "nay" that issues an imperative not to desist but to dance. Mercutio's first words seem energized by an urgency belied by their ostensible levity, as the need for vicarious participation voiced by "we must have you dance" gestures toward (even as it mocks) a desire that can only be fulfilled through the agency of another.

Throughout the exchange that ensues between the two "friends," asymmetries thread their way through the apparent complementarity of the pair. Romeo, for his part, counters
Mercutio's persistent "we," itself problematic in terms of its elusive referentiality, with his own separative and isolating "I's" and "me's." Romeo's language continues this process of disjoining itself from Mercutio's insistent plurals as he counters, "you have dancing shooes/ With nimble soles, I have a [soul] of Lead" (1.4.14-15), maintaining the singularity of "I" against the alteritive "you." Romeo turns the imperative to "dance" back on Mercutio, whom Romeo insists is the one with the "dancing shoes/ With nimble soles." Interpreting Mercutio's imperative as a projection of his own "nimbleness" onto the "heavy" Romeo, Romeo continues to image himself as "heavy" by saying, "I have a [soul] of Lead/ So stakes me to the ground, I cannot move," setting up a series of oppositions between himself and Mercutio: I/you, soul/sole, immovability/nimbleness, heaviness/lightness. As these oppositions blatantly inscribe difference, they more subtly refuse Mercutio's language of "we." Even Romeo's internal punning (soul/sole), so self-contained and self-inscribed, insulates itself from the sense of give-and-take on which Mercutio's own punning on the words of others depends.

Throughout the exchange, though, deeper statements and clashing tonalities seem to be clattering around inside Mercutio's ostensibly playful badinage. Mercutio responds to Romeo's refusals with "You are a Lover, borrow Cupids wings,/ And soar with them above a common bound," lines
which mock Romeo's insistence on his "groundedness" as well as his rather prosaic wordplay on such obvious puns as "heavy/light" and "soul/sole." Mercutio continues his pressure on Romeo's self-containment and inwardness when he introduces the idea of "borrowing" wings from Cupid, of reaching beyond oneself and out to the other, and when he speaks of "soar[ing]... above a common bound," his language ranging restlessly over the different connotations of "common bound": conventional limit, unimpressive leap, rogue in chains. Mercutio's language thus revels in the capacities for "leaping" and soaring above "conventional limits" that it ascribes to being "bound," as if his skepticism has inadvertently energized the very language of transcendence that it purports to disdain.  

Romeo, though, remains intractable, even though he does begin to respond to Mercutio through "borrowing" the words "soar" and "bound" for further punning:

I am too sore enpearced with his shaft,
To soar with his light feathers, and so bound:
I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe,
Under loves heavy burthen do I sinke (1.4.19-22).

Romeo's language continues to position himself in the "feminine" as the object of a phallic force—he is "enpearced" with a "shaft," "sore" and "bound"—and as a victim of a literally "oppressive" passivity ("Under love's heavy burthen do I sink") even as it remains indifferent to Mercutio's attempted interventions. Mercutio's response,
even as it carries on the typical male sexual badinage, strives to undo Romeo's feminization (a struggle in which Mercutio has complex stakes) by countering with "And to sinke in it should you burthen love,/ Too great oppression for a tender thing." By inverting Romeo's sense of himself from sinking "under" love's "heavy burthen" to being himself the burden that sinks into love, Mercutio restores Romeo to the "male" position, and also re-figures love as a "tender thing." The latter image, despite its bawdiness, releases suggestions of feeling and vulnerability that cannot quite be contained by its ostensible scornfulness. Mercutio's language of depersonalization ("it" and "thing") also suggests a vague sense of unease, and a desire not to come too close, even in language, to the depth of feeling that he nevertheless evokes and figures as feminine.

At line 25, the exchange between Mercutio and Romeo seems to take a different turn with Romeo's "Is love a tender thing? It is too rough,/ Too rude, too boysterosus, and it pricks like thorne." Even as the words "rough," "rude," and "boysterosus" counter Mercutio's ideas of "tenderness," they also evoke Mercutio's own "rough" badinage. Love, in other words, begins to sound suspiciously like Mercutio in Romeo's language, and the repartee itself as much about the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio and their competing articulations of "love" as about any infatuation with the ever-absent Rosaline.
Thus, by the time Mercutio counters with "If love be rough with you, be rough with love,/ Prick love for pricking, and you beat love downe" (1.4.27-28), there is a sense that he is talking to/about himself as much as anything else. There is a telling doubleness about Mercutio's remark: while it articulates an aggressive, almost punitive masculine sexuality, it also suggests an almost purely intrapsychic process of repression and keeping in ("you beat love down") that violently lashes back in like terms against the force of feeling, of tenderness, of love.

But as if his own language has said more than he wanted it to say, has come too close to feelings that must be "beaten down," Mercutio abruptly veers off with

    Give me a Case to put my visage in,
    A Visor for a Visor, what care I
    What curious eye doth quote deformities:
    Here are the Beetle-browes shall blush for me
(1.4.29-32).

Mercutio calls for "cases" and "visors" as if to mask this moment of potential vulnerability and exposure, abandoning his characteristic plural for an "I" that nonetheless plays itself off against otherness. Mercutio's "what care I" seems to protest too much, as if warding off the very "caring" he claims to disavow. The ironicalness of "A Visor for a Visor," which can indicate either redundancy or infinite regress, suggests the conflictedness of Mercutio's language here--between the notion of "I don't need a mask, I don't care who sees me" and the seemingly contradictory call to
mask something that is already a mask to begin with. As Mercutio then describes himself as the object of an observer's scrutiny ("what care I/ What curious eye doth quote deformities?") his language suggests both observation's power to "notice" or to "quote" and its paradoxical tendency to conceal or to cover ("quote" pronounced as "cote" thus functioning homonymically as "coat"). In Mercutio's language, then, the face becomes its own mask, and the body its own impostor.

Even Mercutio's "Here are the Beetle-browes shall blush for me" seems unexpectedly full of a kind of inverse vicariousness. As alliterative "b's" punctuate his language with a sense of strange, displaced anger and frustration (felt also in the harsh consonance of "case," "care," "curious," and "cote"), Mercutio's aggressive disavowals about love and "care" seem to circle back almost compulsively to the desire and feeling that has ostensibly been deflected, and to the "blush" that masks the face even as it "signals" unbidden feeling, vulnerability, shame, and/or desire.

II

The tendency of Mercutio's language to release the very energies his words attempt to block is always beset in turn by the weight of his own bitter ironies, especially in those moments where his skepticism energizes the language of transcendence to which it would seem fiercely inimical. His
initial "nay" issues forth an imperative to dance, yet it remains caught in the language of negation that Mercutio wields against unbidden risings of feeling and desire, and that paradoxically wounds the very vulnerabilities and "tender things" its would protect. As the conversation veers from talk of love to talk of dreams, Mercutio's deflationary skepticism vents itself against belief and against the feminine--themselves strangely linked in Mercutio's deepest imaginings--as if to exorcise himself (and the play) of the desire and eroticism that overflows his own language and experience.

As the wit-sally continues, eventually the subject matter turns toward the realm of dreams. It is Romeo who first tentatively broaches the subject of dreams, which Mercutio pushes toward the issues of truth and belief:

Rom. And we meane well in going to this Maske, But 'tis no wit to go. Mer. Why may one ask? Rom. I dreampt a dreame to night. Mer. And so did I. Rom. Well what was yours? Mer. That dreamers often lye. Rom. In bed a sleepe while they do dreame things true. Mer. O then I see Queene Mab hath beene with you: (1.4.48-53).

Mercutio almost seems to be "feeding" Romeo lines here, eliciting assertions of "truth" that his ruthless denials take as their points of departure into cynical nay-saying. And yet the language is so nuanced that rather than the expected "Well, what was it?" that would seem engineered by
Romeo's "I dreampt a dream to night," we get instead the
tonally elusive "And so did I." Indeed, the tentative
language of the exchange almost seems to be sending out
feelers that depend so much on tone--does Romeo's "Well what
was yours?" impatiently resign itself to the scene-stealing
of Mercutio's "And so did I," or does it eagerly take the
opening offered by Mercutio's own gambit? Mercutio's
subsequent rejoinder to Romeo, "That dreamers often lye"--
which imagines "dreamers" lying together in pairs in
contrast to Romeo's depiction of them as sleeping alone--
initiates the series of end-rhymes (I/lye, true/you) that
shape the repartee, even as it engages the pun on "lye" that
here is only a slight reverberation of what will become so
strong. Mercutio then eroticizes Romeo's desexualized images
of dreamers "In bed a sleepe while they do dreame things
true" (emphasis mine) with the sly suggestiveness (at least,
that is the literal reading at the level of tone) of "O then
I see Queene Mab hath beeene with you."

We would expect a one-liner from Romeo here, especially
since the language has been so carefully set up for
repartee, even with the growing end-rhymes. But instead a
long descriptive passage seems to come out of nowhere,
taking us completely by surprise:

O then I see Queene Mab hath been with you:
She is the Fairies Midwife, & she comes
In shape no bigger then Agat-stone,
On the fore-finger of an Alderman,
Drawne with a teeme of little Atomies,
Over mens noses as they lie asleepe: 
Her Chariot is an emptie Hazelnut, 
Made by the Ioyner Squirrel or old Grub, 
Time out a mind, the Faries Coach-makers; 
Her Waggon Spokes made of long Spinners legs: 
The Cover of the wings of Grashoppers, 
Her Traces of the smallest Spiders web, 
Her coullers of the Moonshines watry Beames, 
Her Whip of Crickets bone, the Lash of Philome, 
Her Waggoner, a small gray-coated Gnat, 
Not halfe so bigge as a round little Womme, 
Prickt from the Lazie-finger of a maid (1.4.53-69). 

 Mercutio's evocation of Queen Mab creates a loving, 
miniaturist space of creation where there seems to be all 
the time in the world to linger over the tiniest of things. 
It is a kind of timeless, narrative-descriptive space—"time out a mind"—where the imagination feels treasured and safe, 
as if lulled back into a childhood space, and where both the 
beauty and the fragility of the language—"Her traces of the 
smallest Spiders web,/ Her Coullers of the Moonshines watry 
Beames"—may be lovingly performed despite the cruelty 
sublimated in the description. However cynical a reading one 
may try to give these opening lines, the exquisite detail of 
the poetry—"Her Waggon Spokes made of long Spinners legs:/ 
The Cover of the wings of Grasshoppers"—gestures toward an 
astonishing sense of having invested so much in so little. 

As this primally enveloping language reaches the image 
of the "prickt" finger of a maid, however, a totally 
different syntax takes over, one whose rhetoric speaks a 
language of disenchantment and disillusionment: 

And in this state she gallops night by night,
Through Lovers' brains: and then they dream of love.
On Courtiers' knees, that dream on Cursies' strait: 
Ore Lawyers' fingers, who strait dreamt on Fees,
Ore Ladies' lips, who strait on kisses dreame,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breath with Sweet meats tainted are.
(70-76).

As Mercutio begins to speak of a world that he is cynical of, his language takes on a harsh cause-and-effect locution. And the cynicism here is over the world of pragmatics, of egotistical self-interest, and of total predictability where dreams are nothing more than wishes for reward and advancement. No longer in the realm of lovingly collected, delicately pieced things, Mercutio's language now ranges over a series of dismembered body parts—"brains," 10 "knees," "fingers," "lips"—that seems to reduce the human to its lowest common denominator.

With "Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues/ Because their breath with Sweet meats tainted are", however, the language spills over into an overdetermined anger which the structure of the previous lines, with their rigid series of single-line causes-and-effects, does not predict. Indeed, the complications of the subordinate clause register both a rhetorical change of direction and a growing obsessiveness. Mercutio's language veers into this sexual realm—one tinged by suggestions of infection and contamination 11—with a speed that threatens to reel out of control, and that propels the language into even darker places.
After the ostensible digressiveness of these "extra" two lines, there is an apparent return to the catalogue of dreamers and their dreams, but already with a difference:

Sometime she driveth ore a Souldiers necke,  
And then dreames he of cutting Forraine throats,  
Of Breaches, Ambuscados, Spanish blades:  
Of Healths five Fadome deepe, and then anon  
Drums in his eares, at which he startes and wakes;  
And being thus frighted, sweares a prayer or two  
And sleepes againe (82-88).

Whereas Mercutio's language at first proceeded out of a creative space of fragility and beauty, now we have violence, breaches, the fear of death... and a very different kind of dream.  

If the soldier's dream is still propelled by a rhetoric of cause and effect, it is projected rather than internalized: Even though the logic of the previous sentences would lead us to expect the soldier to dream of his own throat being cut, he dreams instead of "cutting Forraine throats" (emphasis mine). And although we would then expect closure on the soldier's dream, we get instead "Breaches, Ambuscados, Spanish blades" and "Healths five fadome deepe," as if the language itself seems to be opening up "breaches" in fortifications and "ambuscados," opening up to the deep places from which dreams come.

With "This is that very Mab/ That plats the manes of Horses in the night:/ And bakes the [Elf]-locks in foule sluttish haires,/ Which once untangled, much misfortune bodes" (88-91), we are returned to a version of Romeo's own foreboding into which Mercutio had first intervened. But
Mercutio is no longer the flitting, superficial cynic here. It is as if the capacity for violence unleashed by the soldier's dream has turned inward, even as the enormous sense of anger in the language is projected outward, fending off the frightening capacity for being wounded, and for opening up the tangled places deep inside.

Thus, even the characterization of Mab as the "hag, when Maides lie on their backs,/ That presses them, and learns them first to beare,/ Making them women of good carriage" (92-94), evokes an inner place. Mercutio, to be sure, seems the stereotypically sexist male here, and the object of the language's mockery would seem to be women. But complicating Mercutio's ostensible misogyny is a more free-floating sense of anger and fear of women that can't quite be pinned down. The language seems to betray a vicious self-hatred of himself as masculine—and in some even more obscure sense feminine—other, almost as if Mercutio is becoming the very Mab his language strikes out against. The vexed sense of the phallic that inhabits Mercutio's language ("Prick love for pricking and you beat love down"), with all its anxieties about keeping in and "down" through sexuality all the feelings and tenderness that rise up unbidden through that very sexuality, can be felt in Mab's "pressing" of the maids and "learn[ing] them first to bear," with all its attendant sense of vulnerability, exposure, and oppressiveness. But there also seems to be an anger at the
very institution that does this to women—"pressing" women, "learning" them to bear, "making" them women of "good carriage"—as if the tonality of contempt for this end-product intimates a desire within Mercutio's language for something else. Mercutio seems to be entering a more tangled realm of gender here, and with the powerfully indeterminate "This is she--" Mercutio breaks off, either as if able to go no further, or as if this is where he finally arrives, at the naming of (or even allegiance with) the feminine.

Into Mercutio's inability either to stop or to say more, Romeo enters with "Peace, peace, Mercutio peace,/ Thou talk'st of nothing" (95–96). Like the "prayer or two" sworn by the "frighted" soldier to ward off the terrors of his dreams, Romeo's "Peace, peace, Mercutio peace" breaks in as if to call Mercutio back to himself, and it is the very first time that Mercutio's name and character have been linked. Mercutio's reply, even as it ostensibly dispels one last time any notion of "dreaming things true," fills the emptiness left by the violent leveling of the Queen Mab speech with a lingering sense of disappointment in his own inability to "believe:"

True, I talk of dreames:
Which are the children of an idle braine,
Begot of nothing, but vaine phantasie,
Which is as thin of substance as the ayre,
And more inconstant then the wind, who wooes
Even now the frozen bosome of the North:
And being anger'd, pusses away from thence,
Turning his side to the dew dropping South
(96–103).
Even as Mercutio indicts the "nothingness" of dreams, his first word is, after all, a plangent "True." Beginning with a language of procreation and "begetting" that seems to usher us back into the realm of the female evoked by "This is she--", Mercutio's language engages oppositions that male stereotypes of women figure, oppositions that posit two equally unpalatable extremes--the Petrarchan chastity of "the frozen bosome of the North" (which seems directed at Rosaline), and the plague-inducing sexuality of "the dew-dropping South"--that are both masculine in nature. And the complex process described by Mercutio's language--a "wooing" that become angry, as if at rejection and unrequitedness--seems to take place intrapsychically, as oppositions are figured (North/South, frozen/dew dropping) only to become entangled within the very distinctions that the language is trying to make.

It may even be that there is a dialectic so internal to Mercutio's language--the idealism that is harbored within his disillusionment, the allegiance to the feminine so beset by misogyny--that one becomes an incessant critic of the other. The same Queen Mab speech, then, which began as a massive disavowal of dreams ends in an entirely different place. It is as if the prevailing mood of Mercutio's cynicism must keep reminding itself about its intentions, even while leaving those intentions behind and moving far beyond them.
III

In the gap of time that separates the Queen Mab speech from Mercutio's next appearance in Act Two, Romeo himself turns from the coldness of his self-absorbed love for Rosaline to the infinite bounty of Juliet's "Prodigious birth of Love" (1.5.140). In the space between the first meeting of the lovers and their mutual declarations of love during the famous balcony scene, however, an "interlude" takes place in which Benvolio and Mercutio inadvertently disrupt Romeo's solitary meditations (the scene begins with the stage direction "Enter Romeo alone") with invocations and conjurations meant to call up the friend whose presence they themselves have unwittingly just dispelled as Romeo withdraws from them. As Benvolio enters calling out for "Romeo, my Cozen Romeo, Romeo", he refuses to be dissuaded by Mercutio's "He is wise,/ And on my life hath stolne him home to bed" (2.1.3-4). Rather, Benvolio urges his friend instead to "Call good Mercutio," provoking a "Nay" that unbridles a massive series of conjurations set on "rais[ing] up" Romeo:

Nay, Ile conjure too. Romeo, Humours, Madman, Passion, Lover, Appeare thou in the likeness of a sigh, Speake but one rime, and I am satisfied: Cry me but ay me. Prouvant, but Love and Day, Speake to my goship Venus one faire word, One Nickname for her purblind Sonne and her, Young Abraham Cupid he that shot so true, When King Cophetua lov'd the begger Maid, He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not,
The Ape is dead, I must conjure him,  
I conjure thee by Rosalines bright eyes,  
By her High forehead, and her Scarlet lip,  
By her Fine foote, Straight leg, and Quivering thigh,  
And the Demeanes, that there Adjacent lie,  
That in thy likenesse thou appeares to us (2.1. 6-21).

Beginning with a burlesque of the conjuring ritual whereby a spirit is summoned by calling its different names, Mercutio’s invocation moves through a dense thicket of elliptical allusions from "Young Abraham Cupid"21 to "King Cophetua"22 and from the mesmerizing incantations of "He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not" to the stark necessity of "The Ape is dead, I must conjure him."

Mercutio’s conjurations almost compulsively mock the "smallness" of what they desire--for Romeo to "Speake but one rime," to "Cry me but ay me," to "Prouvant but Love and day," to speak but "one faire word," "one nickname." Like the Queen Mab speech, Mercutio’s imagination ranges over a language of pieces and fragments ("I conjure thee by Rosalines bright eyes,/ By her High forehead, and her Scarlet lip,/ By her Fine foote, Straight leg, and Quivering thigh"), even as certain intimacies are released into that language of smallness and ostensible insignificance.

Mercutio’s anatomization of Rosaline enacts a kind of depersonalization as the language moves from "Rosaline’s bright eyes," "her High forehead," and "her Scarlet lip" (emphasis mine) into the more generalized "her Fine foot,
Straight leg, and Quivering thigh" and finally into the vague abstractions of "the Demeanes that there Adjacent lie." Mercutio's conjuration invokes Rosaline by name only to set in motion a process of dissociation which severs that name from its "Demeanes," or lands of possession, as if to dispossess her of all claims to Romeo's affections.

Benvolio intercedes at this point to say, "And if he heare thee thou wilt anger him" (22), inadvertently gesturing toward the doubleness of the scene, as Romeo listens unseen from the shadows. Mercutio responds to this imagined "anger" by provoking it further:

This cannot anger him, t'would anger him
To raise a spirit in his Mistresse circle,
Of some strange nature, letting it stand
Till she had laid it, and conjur'd it downe,
That were some spight (23-27).

In the spirit of Mercutio's earlier "Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down," the language here enacts the "conjuring down" of a phallic force that still seems strangely intrapsychic, still within the "circle" of Mercutio's own desire and eroticism. As vague third person pronouns begin to take over in Mercutio's language here, the ambiguity about their referents creates a sense of Mercutio getting "lost" in his own conjurations, caught up within the forces of desire and longing unleashed by his own language.

It is then as if Benvolio's interruption ("Come, he hath hid himselse among these Trees/ To be consorted with the Humerous night:/ Blind is his Love, and best befits the
darke") means to call Mercutio back to himself, much as Romeo’s "Peace, peace, Mercutio peace" had intervened in the Queen Mab speech’s veer into terrifying otherness. But rather than quieting Mercutio’s conjurations, Benvolio’s call—with its first mention of "consorting" that will set off the fury between Mercutio and Tybalt in the third act23—stirs Mercutio’s language to even greater heights of vicarious eroticism and longing:

If Love be blind, Love cannot hit the marke,  
Now will he sit under a Medler tree,  
And wish his Mistresse were that kind of Fruite,  
As Maides call Medlers when they laugh alone,  
O Romeo: that she were, O that she were  
An open[-arse], thou a Poprin Peare (33-38).

Mercutio’s language begins so lucidly and with so much tenderness, full of open vowels, soft "s’s" and "m’s," and rolling "o’s." There is such an unexpected and poignant sense of gentle longing that fills Mercutio’s imaginings of Romeo’s wishful solitude, and of the brief glimpse into the company of women "laughing alone" in conversational moments of unselfconscious eroticism. Mercutio’s own sense of longing seems to overflow into the vicariously desiring "O Romeo: that she were, O that she were," which seems poised on some threshold of enormous feeling and desire. But with "An open[-arse], or thou a Poprin Peare" Mercutio’s language seems to pull violently back into cynicism and crudeness, as if to disavow the vulnerable openness to feeling that his language has so tenderly exposed. And there is also the
further irony that Mercutio himself is being heard and seen by a Romeo of whose presence he is unaware, and that he is thus made even more vulnerable and exposed.

The brokenness of Mercutio's language ("O Romeo: that she were, O that she were") seems to intimate a painful struggle to cross over into some other realm of intimacy and eroticism, to break through whatever bitter cynicism holds Mercutio back from admissions of feeling and experiences of desire. The coarse reductivism of "An open[-arse], or thou a Poprin Peare" that jerks Mercutio back into cynicism still seems full of the almost unbearable disappointment and anger at his own inability to "believe" that haunted the speech on dreams, and that complicates any sense of Mercutio as merely a crude misogynist. When Mercutio and Benvolio at last bid farewell to their "absent" friend, Romeo emerges from the shadows with the callous and uncomprehending "He jeasts at Scarres that never felt a wound" (2.2.1), a particularly cruel (and darkly prophetic) misreading of Mercutio that nevertheless manages to articulate sharply the dilemma of the Shakespearean nay-sayer, who jests at "scars" not because he has never felt a "wound," but because he experiences the depth of his woundedness all too painfully well.

IV

Mercutio's next appearance in the play comes in a rapidly shifting scene (the fourth of Act Two) that divides
itself roughly into three segments: an opening exchange between Mercutio and Benvolio, Romeo’s entrance and the subsequent wit-sally with Mercutio, and finally the exit of Mercutio (still with Benvolio) at the appearance of the Nurse and her man Peter. These abrupt comings and goings, which alter the composition of characters onstage with striking frequency, set into motion a series of highly charged moments between Mercutio and Benvolio, Romeo, and the Nurse. It is as if the space about Mercutio must constantly be filled, even as the rapid succession of company lends a sort of vague interchangeability to the different inhabitants of that space. With Mercutio, the sense of vicarious investment present in his insistent language of "we" comes to involve a complex process of substitution that never quite seems able to fill the emptiness that surrounds him, no matter how effusive his language or how strong the desire for company.

Indeed, the scene begins with Mercutio still in search of Romeo, calling out with impatient scornfulness "Where the devile should this Romeo be?" (2.4.1), just as Mercutio’s previous appearance in the play had been initiated with Benvolio’s own calls for Romeo. Mercutio’s language here tends towards an urgency that signals not merely anxiousness about "finding" Romeo but perhaps even a kind of ontological doubtfulness about where this Romeo "should be" (emphasis mine), rather the inverse of Juliet’s assured "I do remember
well where I should be:/ And there I am" (5.3.149-150) upon
first awakening in the tomb. Mercutio’s agitation
practically explodes when Benvolio mentions Tybalt’s
challenge to Romeo, setting off a firestorm of language that
swirls about this "Prince of Cats," this "Couragious
Captaine of Complements:"

... he fights as you sing pricksong, keeps time,
distance, and proportion, he rests his minum,
one, two, and the third in your bosom: the very
butcher of a silk button, a Dualist, a Dualist: a
Gentleman of the very first house of the first and
second cause: ah the immortail Passado, the Punto
reverso, the Hay.
Ben. The what?
Mer. The Fox of such antique lisping affecting
phantacies, these new tuners of accent: Iesu a
very good blade, a very tall man, a very good
whore. Why is not this a lamentable thing
Grandsire, that we should be thus afflicted with
these strange flies: these fashion Mongers, these
pardon-mee’s, who stand so much on the new form,
that they cannot sit at ease on the old bench. O
their bones, their bones (2.4.20-35).

Mercutio’s language catalogues almost talismanically the
various terms for a "dualist," as if sifting through word
after word to find one that can capture Tybalt, even as one
might recite a spell. Mercutio’s language pours out his
anger so violently that is difficult not to share Benvolio’s
obvious bafflement at the disproportion of Mercutio’s fury
to its ostensible object of scorn. Mercutio’s tirade seems
to come out of nowhere, as surprising for the fierce
overdeterminedness of its detailed catalogue against Tybalt
as for its cynical fury. But even more than this sense of
overdetermined investment in the object of its scorn,
Mercutio's language initiates a pattern of displacement that seems to hone in on Tybalt with a vengeance, provoking questions not only about why the mere mention of Tybalt sets off Mercutio, but also about the capacity for violence that is always so close to the surface in Mercutio's language.

One recent critic of the play merely begs the question by explaining Mercutio's vexed relationship to Tybalt in psychological terms of "jealousy" at "Tybalt's skill with a rapier" or "genuine disdain" for the "Good King of Cats." But such terms as "jealousy" and "disdain" are themselves hardly opaque, particularly when dealing with Mercutio's own vexed feelings. A glimpse into the tangle of emotional energies that conjoins Mercutio and Tybalt seems to be offered by the list of invited guests to the Capulet ball, in which Tybalt, like Mercutio—who is coupled in the list with a "brother Valentine" who never appears in the play—is paired with a "Seigneur Valentio," designated as his "cousin," who likewise is entirely absent from the play. Mercutio and Tybalt are both associated, then, with absence and lack, and with a kind of blank space beside them that nevertheless seems full of the erotic energies intimated by the overt amorousness of the names "Valentine" and "Valentio." It is as if both Mercutio and Tybalt bear the same kind of "charge" in the play, giving off a sort of friction whenever they come into contact with each other, even (especially) when that contact occurs only in language.
Indeed, the coming together of Romeo and Juliet seems almost entirely contingent (and not merely in terms of plot) on the absenting of both Mercutio and Tybalt, and the various resistances they offer, from the play. It is as if their destruction paradoxically enables the energies of desire that inhabit the spaces beside them to flow through the punctures of their wounds.

When Romeo then unexpectedly appears at the end of Mercutio’s tirade against Tybalt, Benvolio slips into silence for the first 60 lines of the exchange, speaking again only just before the Nurse enters with her man. Benvolio’s "withdrawal" thus allows Romeo to step into the place by Mercutio’s side, even as his continued presence maintains the triangular structure of the scene. Mercutio then immediately engages Romeo in the kind of fast-paced word play he had tried unsuccessfully to initiate in the first scene, creating through the give-and-take of the language a sense of intimacy in which feeling and desire are no sooner broached then deflected into jest:

Mer. I will bite thee by the eare for that iest.  
Rom. Nay, good Goose bite not.  
Mer. Thy wit is a very Bitter-sweeting 
It is a most sharpe sawce.  
Rom. And is it not well serv’d into a Sweet-Goose?  
Mer. Oh here’s a wit of Cheverell, that stretches from an yncn narrow, to an ell broad.  
Rom. I stretch it out for that word, broad, which added to the Goose, proves thee farre and wide, abroad Goose (2.4.77-87).
The erotic aggressiveness that charges these lines is matched only by the sheer exuberance of their bawdy, even as the exchange of mock insults hints suggestively of the thinly-veiled rivalry that energizes the relationship of Mercutio and Romeo.

Interestingly, it is Mercutio, and not Romeo, who then interrupts the reciprocity of the jests with an extravagant series of performatives that would restore Romeo to sociability and to self:

> Why is not this better now, then groning for Love, now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo: now art thou what thou art, by Art as well as by Nature, for this drivelling love is like a great Naturall, that runs lolling up and downe to hide his bable in a hole (88-93).

Mercutio's language, for all its exuberance, betrays a certain urgency with its insistent "now's" and its almost talismanic, repetitive namings of Romeo. Although Granville-Barker captures the sense of enormous affection in these lines with his characterization of them as a verbal "embrace" of Romeo when after a "breathless bandying of words" Mercutio "throws an affectionate arm around the younger man's shoulder," his reading misses the way Mercutio's language then veers almost compulsively into the coarse cynicism of the concluding lines. With the crude tale of the "great Naturall," Mercutio seems to disavow his own expressions of affection as much as Romeo's unseemly and unrequited "groning for love." And even the crudeness that
defends against making oneself vulnerable to feeling and affection paradoxically exposes the subterranean dark places (the "hole" in which the great natural runs to hide his "bable") that such disavowals struggle to "hide."

Mercutio's cynicism also seems to enact a process that occurs intrapsychically, and that has to do with Mercutio's own vexed sense of the phallic and the vaginal. When Benvolio forecloses on Mercutio's crude reductivism with "Stop there, stop there" (2.4.94), it is as if he tries to "come between" not only Mercutio and Romeo but also Mercutio and his own inwardly-directed phallic violence, which succeeds only in deepening the very wounds it is ostensibly intended to protect.

Into this force-field of masculine intimacies, anxiety, and aggression then walks the Nurse with "her man," and she is immediately engaged by Mercutio in wry ribaldry. The friction between the Nurse and Mercutio that develops during their brief exchange is almost electric, infused with equal parts of attraction and repulsion on both sides—as the Nurse says after Mercutio exits after an almost manic rendition of an extremely risque song, "Now afore God, I am so vext, that every part about me quivers" (161). The encounter between Mercutio and the Nurse is important because their meeting is the closest the play ever allows Mercutio to come into the realm of Juliet. Joyfully proclaiming the Nurse to be "A baud, a baud, a baud. So ho"
(130) after Benvolio's unusually low-minded "She will endite him to some Supper," Mercutio departs for "Romeo's father's," singing as he goes: "Farewell auncient Lady:/ Farewell Lady, Lady, Lady" (140-144).

But as the messenger for Juliet (her name, after all, is "Angelica"), the Nurse comes not to "endite Romeo to some supper" but to carry back to Juliet news of her marriage. And if we must say of Mercutio that he misunderstands his friend's new-found levity, that he distorts in his ignorance the sublime love between Romeo and Juliet into dark and twisted visions of "drivelling Naturalls" and "holes," then it must also be said that Romeo too misunderstands his friend, in moments of cruel dismissiveness like "He jests at scars that never felt a wound" and his description of Mercutio to the Nurse as "A Gentleman... that loves to heare himself talke, and will speake more in a minute, then he will stand to in a Moneth" (147-149). The bitter irony of these words will redound back on Romeo in Mercutio's next and final scene in the play, as he who "jest at scars" is felled by a "wound" suffered on Romeo's "behalf," as he who "loves to hear himself talk" does indeed "stand to" even more than he can "speak," as Mercutio's voice trails off into the whisper of a curse that punishes all.

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From the sense of a self-enfolding, protective enclosure that surrounds the marriage of Romeo and Juliet in
the last scene of Act Two, the play moves into the dangerous openness of the public space in which Act Three finds Mercutio and Benvolio. The scene begins with Benvolio’s suggestion to "retire" back into such private, interior spaces:

I pray thee good Mercutio let’s retire,  
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,  
And if we meet, we shall not spare a brawle, for now these hot days, is the mad blood stirring (3.1.1-4).

Mercutio, however, ignores Benvolio’s unease and instead launches into a massive projection of a strikingly alien personality onto Benvolio:

Thou art like one of these fellows, that when he enters the confines of a Taverne, claps me his Sword upon the Table, and sayes, God send me no need of thee: and by the operation of the second cup, draws him on the Drawer, when indeed there is no need (5-9).

Mercutio translates the sense of a protective withdrawal to a private space implicit in Benvolio’s request into "the confines of a Taverne," a restrictive space that offers no protection from the drawing of swords.

Benvolio’s bafflement ("Am I like such a Fellow?... And what too?") only provokes more elaborate rehearsals of Benvolio’s "quarrelsomeness" from Mercutio:

Nay, and there were two such, we should have none shortly, for one would kill the other: thou, why thou wilt quarrell with a man that hath a haire more, or a hair lesse in his beard, then thou hast: thou wilt quarrell with a man for cracking Nuts, having no other reason, but because thou hast hasell eyes: what eye, but such an eye, would spie out such a quarrell? thy head is as full of
quarrels as an egge is full of meat, and yet thy head hath bin beaten as addle as an egge for quarreleng. Thou hast quarrel'd with a man for coffing in the street, because he hath wakened thy Dog that hath laine asleepe in the Sun. Did'st thou not fall out with a Tailor for wearing his new Doublet before Easter? with another, for tying his new shooes with old Riband, and yet thou wilt Tutor me from quarelling (15-30).

Mercutio's "Nay" issues forth a massive defense that begins with a telling arithmetic error: shouldn't the killing of the "other" by "one" of "two such" still leave one standing, rather than the "none" left in Mercutio's equation? Mercutio's language seems unable to imagine a solitary "one" that could survive the "murder" of its other, even as an emphatic "thou" emerges to make even greater claims for (Benvolio's?) quarrelsome ness. The blatant arbitrariness of the anger that lashes out despite a lack of true "grounds"--a discrepancy in the number of "haires," the sound of "cracking Nuts," mere "coffing in the street" that wakes a sleeping dog--suggests that the notion of "cause" itself seems to be unraveling in the face of sheer human unpredictability.

Indeed, when Tybalt then unexpectedly appears accompanied by Petruchio and others with a relatively polite request for "a word with one of you," (3.1.38), the abrupt combativeness of Mercutio's "And but a word with one of us? couple it with something, make it a word and a blow" (40) seems to stun even Tybalt. Mercutio counters Tybalt's language of singularity ("a word with one of you") with
scornful disbelief and an imperative for that solitary
"word" to be "coupled" with a "blow." And yet when Tybalt
patently disregards Mercutio's provocative "Could you not
take some occasion without giving?" (43-44) with the
ostensibly innocent "Mercutio thou consortest with Romeo"
(45), it is that one word that seems to set off Mercutio's
violent fury:

Consort? what dost thou make us Minstrels? & thou
make Minstrels of us, looke to heare nothing
but discords: heere's my fiddlesticke, heere's
that shall make you dance. Come consort (45-49)

Mercutio's irate reply to Tybalt practically whirs around
the word "consort," as Mercutio's language presses in on the
word's meaning as combining in musical harmony--playing,
singing, or sounding together"28, again countering Tybalt's
language with one of plurality ("dost thou make us
Minstrels? & thou make Minstrels of us") and possessiveness
("heere's my fiddlesticke, heere's that shall make you
dance"). But even more importantly, Mercutio's language
seems furiously to ward off the sexual connotations of the
kind of intimacy associated with the word "consort,"29 even
as it cannot seem to help invoking the vexed phallicism
("heere's my fiddlesticke") that would defend against such
suggestions of unacknowledged intimacies.30

Before Mercutio's overt hostilities can flare into
physical violence, Benvolio again intercedes on behalf of
his friend, repeating his opening injunction to "retire" into some private space:

We talke here in the public haunt of men:
Either withdraw unto some private place,
Or reason coldly of your greevances:
Or else depart; here all elie gaze on us (50-53).

Given Mercutio's earlier articulation of a "private place" as "the confines of a tavern" in which swords are drawn even when there "is no need," it is not surprising that Mercutio rejects Benvolio's proposal with "Mens eyes were made to looke, and let them gaze." For Mercutio, the "public haunt of men" would seem to feel infinitely safer than "some private space," the "gaze" of "men's eyes" much more preferable to the penetrating glance of intimacy.31

When Romeo then walks unawares into the fray, fresh from his marriage to Juliet, Mercutio greets Tybalt's turn to confront his "man" with all the jealous aggression of a spurned lover:

But Ile be hang'd sir if he weare your Livery:
Marry go before to field, heele be your follower,
Your worship in that sense, may call him man (57-59).

Mercutio violently rejects Tybalt's claim to "possession" of Romeo even as he argues for Romeo's "manhood," vicariously "answering" Tybalt's letter of challenge to Romeo by insisting that Romeo will be Tybalt's "follower" into the "field," or dueling-place. Continuing to ignore Mercutio's provocations, Tybalt then challenges Romeo more directly ("Romeo, the love I beare thee, can affoord/ No better terme
then this: Thou art a Villaine"), only to be answered by a profession of "love" that proves more than Mercutio can bear:

I do protest I never injuri'd thee,  
But lov'd thee better then thou can'st devise: 
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love,  
And so good Capulet, which name I tender 
As dearly as mine owne, be satisfied (68-72).

The cry of "O calme, dishonourable, vile submission" (73) that Romeo's "answer" to Tybalt's challenge draws from Mercutio seems provoked as much by Romeo's admissions of love as any "submission" before Tybalt, as if Romeo has finally been crushed under "love's heavy burthen" despite Mercutio's efforts to "draw [him]... wherein [he] stickest."

Mercutio then turns back to Tybalt in challenge, much to the surprise of the "King of Cats" who seems genuinely puzzled at Mercutio's fury: "What woulds thou have with me?" (3.1.76). The sense of vicariousness engaged by Mercutio's challenge to Tybalt in the place of Romeo is further complicated by the lack of direct contact between Mercutio and Romeo throughout this scene--it is quite striking how little of Romeo and Mercutio's address in this scene is directed at each other until Mercutio is wounded by Tybalt "under Romeo's arm"; until then each speaks only brief sentences to the other, Mercutio's "O calm, dishonourable, vile submission" (which might not even be spoken to Romeo) and Romeo's "Gentle Mercutio, put thy Rapier up" and "good Mercutio." Only after Mercutio is fatally wounded does he
pointedly address his friend, and even here he does not use his name: "why the dev’le came you betweene us? I was hurt under your arme" (102-103).

Mercutio’s being "hurt under" Romeo’s "arm" is often discussed in terms of irony rather than vicariousness, like Norman Holland’s conclusion that there is a "grim irony in his being killed ‘under’ Romeo’s arm" since "Raising up seems to represent for Mercutio a child’s ithyphallic notion of virility; being laid- down- its opposite." Although Holland captures the persistent dynamic of "raising up" and "laying down" that energizes so much of Mercutio’s language, his move to invoke a rigidly psychoanalytic model for this process proves inadequate to the complexity of Mercutio’s own notions of the phallic. That Mercutio should be "thrust in" under the arm of his friend embodies theatrically the sense of vicariousness on which Mercutio’s own expressions of intimacies, feeling, vulnerability, and pain depend. And if, as many productions of the play stage Romeo’s "intervention," Romeo "comes between" Tybalt and Mercutio in the form of an embrace, then the tension between Mercutio’s overflowingness of feeling and his need to defend against such risings with phallic aggressiveness would seems caught in infinite regress as Romeo’s embrace and the point of Tybalt’s rapier reach him simultaneously.
With uncharacteristic brevity, and with a sense of disbelief almost painful in its desire to be wrong, Mercutio at last makes an admission of vulnerability and pain:

I am hurt.
A plague a both the Houses, I am sped:
Is he gone and hath nothing? (90-92).

Caught in the vise of pain, Mercutio's consciousness twists from its own "hurt" to strike out at the "cause" of its pain, only to be confronted with its own frailty ("I am sped") in the face of the opponent's seeming invulnerability ("Is he gone and hath nothing?"). Benvolio's "What art thou hurt?" (92) and Romeo's "Courage man, the hurt cannot be much" (95) suggest that Mercutio's wound remains hidden from sight--and it is a wound that Mercutio describes in terms of its almost absurd "shallowness:"

I, I, a scratch, a scratch, marry 'tis enough...
'tis not so deepe as a well, nor so wide as a Church doore, but 'tis inough, 'twill serve: aske for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man (93-98).

Even as it acknowledges the gravity of the wound he has received, Mercutio's language fights against the penetrating sharpness of Tybalt's thrust--Mercutio's "hurt" is "not so deepe as a well," is not "so wide as a Church doore." When Mercutio says that he is "pepper'd.. for this world," he suggests a pelting or beating with many small objects, not the singular fatal wound he has received, and his language even enacts a kind of "peppering" with a series of fragmented, scattershot words--"What, a Dog, a Rat, a Mouse,
a Cat to scratch a man to death: a Braggart, a Rogue, a Villaine" (100-102). Mercutio's "list" almost acts like a spell to stave off any admission of the hurt he suffers through the sheer conjurative power of language. With the final denunciation of Tybalt as a "Villaine, that fights by the booke of Arithmetick," Mercutio turns to Romeo (perhaps for the first time in the scene) and wonders, "why the dev'le came you betweene us? I was hurt under your arme," only to receive the woefully inadequate "I thought all for the best" in return.

Throughout this scene, the entrance of characters into the original dyad of Mercutio and Benvolio has created just this sense of "betweenness," from Tybalt "coming between" the conversation of Mercutio and Benvolio to Romeo "coming between" the argument of Mercutio and Tybalt to Mercutio "coming between" the challenge of Tybalt to Romeo. And within the larger context of the structure of the play, the duel itself "comes between" the marriage of Romeo and Juliet and its consummation, just as the earlier scene in which Mercutio had attempted to "conjure" Romeo's presence had "come between" the meeting of Romeo and Juliet at the mask and their declaration of love in the balcony scene.

And at the last, even Mercutio turns away from Romeo and towards the intercessory figure of Benvolio, ignoring Romeo's plaintive ministrations and turning instead to Benvolio:
Helpe me into some house Benvolio,  
Or I shall faint: a plague a both your houses.  
They have made wormes meat of me,  
I have it, and soundly to your Houses (105-108).

In his last moments on stage, Mercutio calls on Benvolio, who has never left his side throughout the play, at the expense of any acknowledgement of Romeo, who receives only the curse of "your houses" as he is absorbed into the vague plurality of Mercutio's "they." However much stagings of Mercutio's death tend to sentimentalize Mercutio's "farewell" to Romeo by adding some gesture of reconciliation—a wan smile in Romeo's direction, a touch of the hand on Romeo's cheek, a facial expression that suggests forgiveness or at least acceptance—Mercutio's language itself refuses any kind of conciliatory gestures, exhaling the curse "A plague a' both your houses" three times until there is only breath enough for "your houses". The Mercutio of the "public space," of the "square" and the "marketplace," is carried into "some house" to die, hidden from the gaze of men's eyes and accompanied not by Romeo, who remains onstage, but by Benvolio, who then re-enters to announce Mercutio's death: "O Romeo, Romeo, brave Mercutio is dead,/ That Gallant spirit hath aspir'd the Cloudes,/ Which too untimely here did scorne the earth" (16-18).

Mercutio does well to "entrust" the pronouncement of his death to Benvolio, who enacts with a language reminiscent of Mercutio's earlier description of dreams as "thin of
substance as the air" (1.4.96-103) the "aspiration" of Mercutio's great spirit to the "clouds," the ascension of a spirit who did "scorn the "earth."

Even the duel between Romeo and Tybalt that is instigated by Mercutio's death is phrased in terms of a "contest" that will decide who shall "accompany" Mercutio's tarrying soul as it lingers for companionship:

... Mercutios soule
Is but a little way above our heads,
Staying for thine to keep him company.
Either thou or I, or both, must goe with him (126-129).

In reply, Tybalt repeats the word that ignited Mercutio's fury earlier in the scene: "Thou wretched Boy that didst consort him here,/ Shalt with him hence" (130-131). But it is not Romeo, but Tybalt, who must "go with" Mercutio, who must "keep him company." Even in death Mercutio is imagined as a member of a pair, as "sociable," and in death, as in life, the space beside him stands empty, waiting to be filled.

Mercutio's untimely death seems so uncalled for that even those readers most harshly critical of his ethos find themselves, like Coppelia Kahn, feeling strangely conflicted about his death:

As much as we want the love of Romeo and Juliet to prosper, we also want the volatile enmity of Tybalt punished and the death of Mercutio, that spirit of vital gaiety, revenged, even at the cost of continuing the feud. Romeo's hard choice is also ours.
And even celebrative readings of Mercutio who find in his death "a small achieved tragedy" within an otherwise deeply flawed play share Kahn's sense of Mercutio's death as a carrier of the tragic:

Mercutio, careless of what may come (as Hamlet was to be), draws his sword and goes to his death. His last words are ironic and resentful. The wound was so small, yet fatal. The quarrel between the 'houses' was no concern of his. Yet the wound is 'enough,' the feud has finished him. No lesson is drawn from this destruction; there is no suggestion that good may come out of it. It has simply happened, to the world's impoverishment.37

Less explicitly partisan critics, like Susan Snyder, nevertheless grant the same kind of importance to Mercutio's death in terms of the play's structure, and see his death as the moment which plunges the play into tragedy:

If we divide the play at Mercutio's death, the death that generates all that follows, it becomes apparent that the play's movement up to this point is essentially comic... what place can [the Friar and the Nurse] have in the new world brought into being by Mercutio's death, the world of limited time, no effective choice, no escape?38

And readers like Hallam see in Mercutio's death the glint of grim theatrical necessity:

It seems to have been necessary to keep down the other characters that they might not overpower the principal one; and though we can by no means agree with Dryden, that if Sh.[sic] had not killed Mercutio, Mercutio would have killed him, there might have been some danger of his killing Romeo. His brilliant vivacity shows the softness of the other a little to a disadvantage.39

All these readings, however different their theoretical orientations, however at odds their ultimate pronouncements
on Mercutio's importance to the play, share in the 
limitation of their dependence on a Romeo-like perspective 
on Mercutio's death: "Romeo's hard choice is also ours."
Although phrased differently, this "choice" always assumes a 
dichotomy between friendship and love, homosexuality and 
heterosexuality, and male and female which becomes embodied 
as an opposition between Mercutio and Juliet. But such rigid 
dialectics ignore the subtextual links Shakespeare forges 
between Mercutio and Juliet, a complex web of connection 
that complicates any sense of their relation as solely 
rivalrous. Although Roger Allam argues that "By his death 
Mercutio does... force himself between Romeo and 
Rosaline/Juliet, and start a chain reaction that destroys 
them both", he does so at the expense of acknowledging the 
extraordinary way in which Mercutio's death seems to serve 
as a bridge into the unrestrained erotic of Juliet's "Gallop 
apace" speech, which in many ways acts powerfully to 
transform the sexual pathology of the Queen Mab speech into 
a radical expression of desire:

Gallop apace, you fiery footed steeds,
Toward Phoebus lodging, such a Wagoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the west,
And bring in Cloudie night immediately.
Spred thy close Curtaine Love-performing night,
That run-awayes eyes may wincke, and Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalkt of and unseen,
Lovers can see to doe their Amorous rights,
By their owne Beauties: or if Love be blind,
It best agrees with night: Come civill night,
Thou sober suted Matron all in blaccke,
And learne me how to loose a winning match,
Plaid for a paire of stainlesse Maidenhoods,
Hood my unmann’d blood bayting in my Cheekes,
With thy Blacke mantle, till strange Love grow bold, Thinke true Love acted simple modestie:
Come night, come Romeo, come thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night:
Whiter then new Snow upon a Ravens backe.
Come gentle night, come loving blackebrow’d night (3.2.1-20)

I have quoted Juliet’s speech at such length because of the striking ways in which it evokes Mercutio, through the repetition of words deeply suggestive of the Queen Mab speech ("gallop," "Wagoner," "whip"), by the use of whole phrases seemingly "lifted" from Mercutio’s speeches (compare Juliet’s "if Love be blind,/ It best agrees with night" with Mercutio’s "If love be blind, it cannot hit the mark" at 2.1.33), by the use of images associated with Mercutio ("Hood my unmann’d blood bayting in my Cheekes" and "blackebrow’d night" suggest Mercutio’s "Give me a case to put my visage in... Here are the Beetle-browes shall blush for me" at 1.4.29-32), and perhaps most uncannily through its reference to the loss of "a winning match,/ Plaid for a paire of stainlesse Maidenhoods." Juliet’s language intricately reworks the nexus of Mercutian anxiety into a celebrative experience of a self overflowing with desire, a transformation that extends even to the moment of Juliet’s death which, like Mercutio’s, come at the point of a sword: "O happy Dagger/ 'Tis in thy sheath, there rust and let me die" (5.3.169-170).
Unlike Mercutio, however, who defensively speaks of his
wound as a nonpenetrating "scratch," Juliet transfigures her
body itself into a "sheath," the container of the phallic
"dagger" which is "happy" to rest there. And in so doing,
Juliet transvalues the conflictedness of the phallic/vaginal
relation that inhabits Mercutio's cynicism into the
"restfulness" and "happiness" of the dagger not entirely
alien to but almost organically of the self: "this is thy
sheath." In one sense, then, Mercutio is crushed under the
weight of his own bitter ironies, and "run through" by the
force of his own overflowing feelings and desire. However
much Juliet's extravagant language of wonder and desire may
fill the empty space carved out by Mercutio's doubt,
distrust, and grief, the scar left by his woundedness
nevertheless remains to mock whatever kind of transcendence
the play may ultimately work.

1Dryden's remark, which is believed to be the earliest
critical commentary on Romeo and Juliet, is made in his
"Defence of the Epilogue" (Essays of John Dryden, Volume One
Dryden argues that "Shakespeare showed the best of his skill
in his Mercutio: and [Shakespeare] said himself, that he was
forced to kill him in the third act, to prevent being killed
by him. But, for my part, I cannot find he was so dangerous
a person: I see nothing in him but what was so exceeding
harmless, that he might have lived to the end of the play,
and died in his bed, without offence to any man."
2The name "Valentine" was used by Shakespeare previously in
Two Gentlemen of Verona to denote one of the "two gentlemen"
who, despite the amatory connotations of his name, is one
who "after Honour hunts", while friend Proteus hunts "after Love" (1.1.63). In the play’s opening scene, Valentine describes "be[ing] in love" as

... where scorne is bought with
Coy looks, with hart-sore sighes: one fading
moments [mirth]
With twenty watchfull, weary, tedious nights,
If hap’ly won, perhaps a haplesse gaine;
If lost, why then a grievous labour won;
How ever: but a folly bought with wit,
Or else a wit, by folly vanquished (1.1.29-35),

The name for "Mercutio’s brother," then, in Romeo and Juliet carries with it connotations that create a sense not of contrast with the "scornful" Mercutio but rather of true kinship—a brother who seems more a "twin" than an opposite.

4In Brooke, Mercutio and Romeo are seated on opposite sides of Juliet during the Capulet feast:

At thone side of her chayre, her lover Romeo
And on the other side there sat one cald Mercutio,
A courtier that eche where was highly had in pryce,
For he was coorteous of his speche, and pleasant
of devise
Even as a Lyon would among the lambes be bolde,
Such was among the bashfull maydes, Mercutio to beholde.
With friendly gripe he ceased fayre Juliets snowish
hand...
As soone as had the knight the vyrgins right hand
raught
Within his trembling hand her left hath loving
Romeus caught...
And well he wist she loved him best, unless she
list to fayne (253-266).

5The Folio has "soale."
6I would therefore take issue with Joseph Porter’s assertion that "Through the play of witty question, challenge, and response weaves a pattern of answering imperatives... and denials... that, together with the easy movement back and forth between the pronouns of address ‘thou’ and ‘you’ establish an essential equality... between the two men" (102). If anything, what emerges from this scene is a poignant sense of the disparity in the relationship, a difference marked by Romeo’s resistance—that evokes a kind of immunity, indifference—to Mercutio’s constant "we’s."
Mercutio's language even seems to be "seeding" the play with its themes, as the language is taken farther (Juliet's later call for Romeo to "Leape to these armes, untalkt of and unseeene" [3.2.7], and her sense that "There is no end, no limit, measure, bound/ In that words death" [3.2.125-126]) than Mercutio's skepticism can accompany it.

The Queen Mab speech presents a host of textual problems. Although Q2 is the acknowledged "good" quarto of the play, it sets the Queen Mab speech in a block of prose—only in Q1, a "bad" quarto of the play, is the speech (a much shorter version of it) set in verse. Since the explanations advanced for the problem of lineation here remain inconclusive, I have chosen to follow the Riverside edition's lineation of the speech as verse while retaining the old-spelling text of the authoritative Q2 version of the play. For a more detailed treatment of the textual problems presented by the Queen Mab speech, see the discussion in the New Cambridge edition of the play, edited by G. Blakemore Evans, on pages 209-210. For a contrarian view advancing the Q1 version of the Queen Mab speech as superior to that of Q2, see Sidney Thomas's provocative but ultimately unpersuasive argument in Shakespeare Survey 25 (1972): 73-80.

In a brilliant discussion of the miniature in terms of temporality and the body, Susan Stewart writes of the capacity of the miniature for creating "an 'other' time, a type of transcendent time which negates change and the flux of lived reality" (On Longing [Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984]: 65).

The use of "braines" is especially interesting here—almost always when Shakespeare employs the plural, violence and savage contempt lurk nearby. Cf. Juliet's "And in this rage, with some great kinsmans bone,/ As (with a club) dash out my desperate braines" (4.3.53-54), Lear's "Let me have Surgeons,/ I am cut to'th'braines" (King Lear 4.6.192-193), and Leontes's "The Bastard—braynes with these my proper hands/ Shall I dash out" (The Winter's Tale 2.3.140-141).

The reference to "Sweet meats" is to candied fruit or confectionery that was used to sweeten the breath. The New Cambridge edition of the play glosses the term as it is used by Mercutio as suggestive of "bad breath ('tainted') from eating too many sweets" and cites a quotation from Webster's The White Devil (1612): "O your breath! Out upon sweete meates, and continued Physicke!/ The plague is in them" (2.1.166-168).

The experience of the soldier's dream is strikingly reconfigured in The Tempest as Caliban's dream:

Be not afffeard, the Isle is full of noyses,
Sounds, and sweet aires, that give delight and
hurt not:
Sometimes a thousand twanging Instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That if I then had wak'd after long sleepe,
Will make me sleepe againe, and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and shew riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak'd
I cri'de to dreame againe (3.2.135-143).

The Folio has "elk."
Juliet's depiction of her love as a "birth" seems to
harken back to Mercutio's language of dreams as the
"children of an idle brain" and of Mab as the agent which
"learns [maids] first to bear," redeeming the vague
fearfulness and loathing of this language by replacing its
emphasis on invasiveness and alienation with a sense of
indwelling and ownership:

My onely Love sprung from my onely hate,
Too early scene, unknowne, and knowne too late,
Prodigious birth of Love it is to me
That I must love a loathed Enemie (1.5.138-141).

Juliet's language also seems to reach back to Mercutio's
first words to his friend ("Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have
you dance") when she asks the Nurse for Romeo's identity by
describing him as "he that follows here, that would not
dance" (1.3.132).

Exactly where Romeo stands onstage is a matter of some
conjecture here, as the stage directions remain silent on
this point (although most editors insert some equivalent of
the Riverside's "Romeo withdraws," no such direction exists
in any of the play's quartos or the folio). The Variorum
inserts the direction "He climbs the wall, and leaps down
within it," while the Arden editor provides a lengthy gloss
suggesting that "The present scene can be staged with the
utmost simplicity, Romeo entering through a door, concealing
himself behind a stage post when Mercutio and Benvolio enter
seeking him." Thus, the visibility of Romeo during the
exchange between Benvolio and Mercutio is left to the
discretion of the director--is he completely out of sight,
emerging only after his friends have departed? Or does he
remain partially visible to the audience, his reactions to
the words of his friends available to the audience alone? Is
he hidden from his friends by a wall, and/or does he watch
them from above? The staging will influence the degree to
which the scene plays on the "eavesdropping" role of Romeo
here as well as the degree to which we feel the "presence"
of Romeo to be invoked by his friends.

This scene seems an analog to the third scene of Act One
in which Lady Capulet asks the Nurse to "Call [Juliet] forth
to me," and the Nurse "conjures" Juliet's presence with a string of epithets:

Now by my Maidenhead, at twelve yeare old
I bad her come, what Lamb: what Ladi-bird,
God forbid!
Where's this Girle? what Juliet?
(1.3.1-4).

Juliet enters and asks, like a spirit conjured by a spell,
"Now now, who calls?" (1.3.5).
17The Folio attributes this line to Benvolio.
18Although "pronounce" is the accepted reading, the Variorum points out that the word as given in Q2 and Q3, "prouaunt," and in the Folio as "Prouant," may be "provant," which Steevens glosses as to "provide" or "furnish." The word "dove" is emended from the Q1 text by Pope; it appears as "dai" in Q2, Q3, and the Folio, and as "die" in Q4.
19The word in Q1 "heir."
20In Q1 the word is "trim."
21As Brian Gibbons, editor of the Arden edition, points out the various interpretations of this rather enigmatic reference,

Knight proposed an allusion to the 'cheat-the"Abraham-man"'- of our old statutes' and NCS has the note 'The sly rogue Cupid, with nothing but a scarf about his loins, is like the abraham men, who wandered half-naked about the world begging and stealing'... These extreme ideas of old age yoked to extreme youth, of slyness, of blond hair, near nakedness (of beggar and god) all seem appropriate to the present context.

Gibbons then characterizes this "teeming allusiveness" as "characteristic of the young Shakespeare."
22Mercutio refers here to a popular ballad invoked in greater detail in Love's Labor's Lost: "The magnanimous and most illustrate King Cophetua set eie upon the pernicious and indulgeit begar Zenalophon" (4.1.64-66).
23Mercutio's language practically explodes with Tybalt's "Mercutio thou consortest with Romeo":


24Edward Snow points out in "Language and Sexual Difference in Romeo and Juliet" that this line "matches [Juliet's] 'I
do remember well where I should be,/ And there I am'" (5.3.149-150) spoken when she awakens within the Capulet monument. These subtextual verbal links Shakespeare forges between Mercutio and Juliet weave a rich pattern of connection between these two characters so often figured in stark opposition to each other. Snow's essay appears in Shakespeare's Rough Magic ed. Peter Erickson and Coppelia Kahn (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985): 168-192.


23 Later in the scene Mercutio will say, "Come betwene us good Benvolio, my wits faints" (2.4.67), again gesturing toward Benvolio's rather odd status as an intermediary for both Mercutio and Romeo.


25 As defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, III.7. As the OED explains, the verb "consort" first appears at the end of the sixteenth century, and its origin and early history are "obscure and complicated." Citing three branches of origin, the OED notes that the first branch was apparently "formed on ... the notion of 'act as a consort to'", while the second branch "cannot be separated from a simple verb SORT...[with] an association with... sors, sortem lot, fate, destiny." The third branch is connected with the early use of "consort" as an "erroneous misrepresentation of the French concert," and thus associated with the musical connotations of the word, which Mercutio emphasizes when he refers to "minstrels" and "fiddlesticks."

26 The Riverside editor notes, "Mercutio takes the word in the sense 'play music with.' A group of musicians was called a consort." The Variorum points out that "To comprehend Mercutio's captious indignation it should be remembered that a consort was the old term for a set or company of musicians."

27 Mercutio's language here also echoes his first words to Romeo in the play: "Nay gentle Romeo, we must have you dance."

28 As earlier when Mercutio had mockingly proclaimed Romeo "dead stab'd with a white wenches blacke eye" (2.4.13-14).


30 See especially the 1977 film version of the play directed by Paul Bosner.

31 Cukor's film version is the most excessively sentimental on this point, as John Barrymore's Mercutio pats Leslie Howard's Romeo on both cheeks after "I thought all for the best" in a gesture Joseph Porter describes as a "debonair
version of the sentimental pardon" (Shakespeare's Mercutio
190). Even the Zeffirelli film version, which staunchly
resists the kind of sentimentalization Cukor's version
employs, allows a slight softening of this moment as John
McInery's Mercutio maintains an emphasis on jest even in the
utterance of the curse. For a detailed discussion of
Zeffirelli's film, particularly its innovations in
Mercutio's portrayal, see Jack J. Jorgens, Shakespeare on
Film (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). For a
discussion of the handling of this moment in important stage
productions, see Jill L. Levenson, Shakespeare in
Performance: Romeo and Juliet (Manchester: Manchester
University Press, 1987).

35Benvolio's narrative later strengthens this sense of
association between by Mercutio and Tybalt when his language
invokes a parity between them through the repetition of the
adjective "stout:" "An envious thrust from Tybalt, hit the
life/ Of stout Mercutio... ere I/ Could draw to part them,
was stout Tybalt slain" (3.1.168-173, emphasis mine).

36"The Coming of Age in Verona" in The Woman's Part: Feminist
Criticism of Shakespeare ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle
Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana: University of

37"The Moral Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet" in English
Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran and
Mark Eccles ed. Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough and
Richard Knowles (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University

38"Romeo and Juliet: Comedy into Tragedy" in Essays in

39As quoted in the Variorum.

40"Mercutio" in Players of Shakespeare 2 ed. Russell
Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge
CHAPTER THREE
Falstaff's 'Sweating Labor' and the Limits of Irony

Falstaff and the Prince both make their first appearance in *I Henry IV, Part One* in the second scene of Act One, the only scene in the play which opens with them alone onstage. Our first glimpses of Falstaff and the Prince, then, are as they appear in tandem and in conversation, their friendship and attachment grounded in jests and witticisms that reach tentatively—yet differently—towards the other. Although the conversation begins with Falstaff explicitly naming the Prince ("Now Hal, what time of day is it Lad?"¹), initiating a pattern of invocation that structures Falstaff's language throughout the play, the Prince's language leaves Falstaff anonymous for nearly one hundred lines. Not until Poins enters with "What saies Monsieur Remorse? What sayes Sir John Sacke and Sugar: Jacke? How agrees the Divell and thee" (1.2.112-114) does Falstaff's name emerge from the series of epithets that range from the caricatural to the familiar. Only after Poins' greeting does the Prince refer to Falstaff² by name: "Sir John stands to his word" (117).

Analogous asymmetries inhabit the language of the pair. The relaxed rhythms of Falstaff's opening question ("Now Hal, what time of day is it Lad?") suggest an offhandedness
about his language that is full of easiness, laziness, and
the rhythms of idleness, though nevertheless his first
question is an inquiry into time. The Prince’s lengthy reply
not only defers an answer to a seemingly straightforward
question, but also counters Falstaff’s dilatory language
with another that crackles with exactness and
punctiliousness:

Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of olde
Sacke, and unbuttoning thee after Supper, and
sleeping upon Benches afternoone, that thou hast
forgotten to demande that truely, which thou
wouldest truly know. What a divell hast thou to
do with the time of the day? unlesse hours
were cups of Sacke, and minutes Capons, and
clockes the tongues of Bawdes, and dials the
Signes of Leaping-houses, and the blessed Sunne
himselfe a faire hot Wench in Flame-coloured
Taffata: I see no reason, why thou shouldest be
so superfluous, to demand the time of the day
(2-12).

The almost qualitative difference between the two temporal
orientations is especially marked in the Prince’s
"translation" of Falstaff’s effortlessly nondescript "time
of day" into "the time of the day" (emphasis mine), with its
almost fastidious specificity, particularity, and
measuredness. Harbored within these subtle but important
distinctions are modulations of temporality that exert
pressures on the relationship between Falstaff and the
Prince, with their different notions of time and what kind
of accuracy it is we seek in its measure.

Embedded in the play’s concern with temporality is the
problematic of truth and falsehood first invoked by the
Prince's "thou hast forgotten to demand that truely, which thou wouldest truly know." The questions implicit in the Prince's use of "truly"—what is it that the Prince thinks Falstaff "truly" wants to know? what does it mean to "truly know"? what is the relation of "forgetting" to "knowing"?—lead us to consider what the conversation dances around that needs to be "truly known," what has been "forgotten" under all of Falstaff's (and the Prince's) "superfluousness" of language, and how "forgetting" can be a euphemism for "repressing," for forcibly excluding from consciousness.

Even though the Prince's language distances itself from the object of its discourse, enforcing a caricatural identity on Falstaff before he has spoken more than a line, Falstaff nevertheless crafts a kind of closeness out of such distancing mechanisms, answering the Prince with "Indeed you come neere me now Hal, for we that take Purses, go by the Moone and seven Starres" (13-14). Although Falstaff then pulls back from intimacy by asserting a counter-identity ("we that take Purses") that rejects the eroticism of the Prince's language with its vague suggestions of homoeroticism and transvestitism ("the blessed Sunne himself a faire hot Wench in Flame-coloured Taffata"), he nonetheless employs a "we" that can both include and exclude the Prince.

Not to be deterred from his concern with the "passing" of time, Falstaff moves from the realm of the "now" (his
first word in the play) to the indeterminate region of
"when," his discursive meditations on the Prince's future
kingship interrupted by the Prince's own (mis)leading
questions:

Falst. And I prythee sweet Wagge, when thou art
King, as God save thy Grace, Maiesty I shold
say, for Grace thou wilte have none.
Prince. What, none?
Falst. No, not so much as will serve to be
Prologue to an Egge and Butter.
Prince. Well, how then? Come roundly, roundly.
Falst. Marry then, sweet Wagge, when thou art
King, let not us that are Squires of the Nights
bodie, bee call'd Thieves of the Dayes beautie.
Let us be Dianaes Forresters, Gentlemen of the
Shade, Minions of the Moone; and let men say, we
be men of good Government, being governed as the
Sea is, by our noble and chast mistris the Moone,
under whose countenance we steale (16-29).

Falstaff's language seems to rehearse almost presciently a
loss of intimacy with the Prince, moving from "sweet Wagge"
to "King," and to a "we" that seems to absent the Prince
from its plurality. It is as if Falstaff's estrangement from
the Prince is already lurking deep inside his language. But
at the same time, Falstaff's plurals seem unable to resist
inclusion, and his language insistently circles back to the
fragile, tentative intimacy of master and servant inscribed
in such phrases as "Squires of the Nights bodie" (glossed as
attendants to a nobleman), "Gentlemen of the Shade" (members
of the royal household), and "men of good Government" (a
pun, the Arden edition points out, on "well-behaved" and
"serving a good ruler"). As Falstaff substitutes "our noble
and chast mistris the Moone" for the Prince's image of the
sun "himselfe a faire hot Wench in Flame-coloured Taffata," his language siphons off the intimations of eroticism and desire, not to mention illicitness and degradation, in the Prince’s language. Falstaff’s language thus oscillates between intimacy and distance, familiarity and formality, privacy and publicity, sexual licentiousness and chastity, structuring oppositions that blur the very distinctions they would enforce. For Falstaff, with his desire for intimacy and his need for protective distance, such blurring seems both feared and desired, and his familiarities paradoxically construct a guardedness as impenetrable as that enforced by formalities.

Falstaff’s depiction of himself as belonging to a cadre of thieves and robbers not only establishes his relentless sociality, but also raises the specter of his role as parasite. This shadow not only darkens allusions such as "Squires of the Nights bodie," but also reaches across exchanges between Falstaff and the Prince that interweave the strands of indebtedness and ingratiation:

Prince. Did I ever call for thee to pay thy part?
Falst. No, Ile give thee thy due, thou hast paid al there.
Prince. Yea and elsewhere, so farre as my Coine would stretch, and where it would not, I have us’d my credit.
Falst. Yea, and so us’d it, that were it heere apparrant, that thou art Heire apparrant.
But I prythee sweet Wag, shall there be Gallowes standing in England when thou art King? and resolution thus fobbd as it is, with the rustle curbe of old Father Anticke the Law? Doe not thou when thou art a King,
hang a Theeefe.
Prince. No, thou shalt.
Falst. Shall I? O rare! Ile be a brave Judge.
Prince. Thou judgest false already. I meane, thou
shalt have the hanging of the Theeves, and
so become a rare Hangman.
Falst. Well Hal, well: and in some sort it jumps
with my humour, as well as waiting in the
Court, I can tell you (51-68).

I have quoted at such length because these lines, which
trace out some of the major currents in the relationship
between Falstaff and the Prince, are particularly resistant
to excerption and paraphrase. As Falstaff resorts to
deliberately awful puns in order to thwart the
conversation’s initial veer into seriousness, his jests
continue to push almost compulsively toward the threshold of
what has ostensibly been deflected. Even the Prince’s
"baiting" of Falstaff, with Falstaff himself a willing
accomplice in his own ensnarement, releases the enormous
potential for transformation and accommodation inherent in
Falstaff’s ability to turn "diseases" into "commodity:"
"Well Hal, well: and in some sort it jumps with my humour,
as well as waiting in the Court." Despite the frequent
critical refrain that Falstaff is solely a creature of the
moment, a permanent denizen of his own insistent "now,"
Falstaff can become almost excessively absorbed in his
meditations on the Prince’s future accession to kingship
(the phrase "when thou art king" is repeated three times in
sixty lines). At the same time, the Prince relentlessly
deflates and deflects Falstaff’s hopes for future
attachment, demoting Falstaff from "brave Judge" to "rare Hangman," and echoing in the ominous "shadow of the gallows" Falstaff's convivial "Gentlemen of the Shade."

The "jest" of Falstaff as hangman concludes with a mock rehearsal of grief and sadness, as Falstaff and the Prince invoke an elaborate language of melancholy that speaks Falstaff's "humour:"

 Falst. I am as Melancholy as a Gyb-Cat, or a lugg'd Beare.
 Prince. Or an old Lyon, or a Lovers Lute.
 Falst. Yea, or the Drone of a Lincolnshire Bagpipe.
 Prince. What say'st thou to a Hare, or the Melancholy of Moore-ditch? (73-78).

These "unsavory similes," as Falstaff calls them, engage a complex network of powerlessness and persecution, castration and impotency, old age and compromised masculinity that invests "melancholy" with a frustrated aggressiveness that can only find release in language. Falstaff's language is full of this aggressiveness that charges his relationship with the Prince, and that flows both ways: the hostile impulses which find release in the tormenting of the baited bear, and the impotent fury of the bear so "lugg'd."

 Set within this constellation of friendship and aggression, jesting and melancholy, and attachment and rivalry is a meditation on the problem of knowing, delineated in terms of Falstaff's friendship with the Prince and couched in the humor of ironic hyperbole:

 Before I knew thee Hal, I knew nothing: and now
I am, (if a man should speak truly) little better then one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over: and I do not, I am a Villaine. Ile be damn'd for never a Kings sonne in Christendome (92–97).

Later in the scene, after Falstaff has gone, the Prince will reconfigure this speech as his famous soliloquy, which refutes Falstaff’s pretensions to knowing with even greater claims of knowledge: "I know you all." Falstaff’s language in this speech makes uncharacteristic recourse to the first-person singular, but it is still an "I" full of otherness that conceals the subjectivity it pretends to expose. The trajectory traced by Falstaff’s articulation of his history with the Prince moves from an insistent "I" to an anonymous "one of the wicked" and then back again, shuttling between solitariness and sociality. Although one recent discussion of Falstaff claims that "the plays tell us that to 'know' a man like Falstaff is to hate him," Falstaff’s own language suggests the very opposite, that to be known by Falstaff is to "hate" him. Although the "jest" of these lines clearly "lives" in provoking disbelieving laughter at their ludicrous exaggerations of the Prince’s "pow'r to hurt" and corrupt the pristine Falstaff, their comic excess is weighted down by a truthfulness that sinks through their sheer absurdity—-that "knowing" the Prince has indeed worked harm on Falstaff, that the intimacy they share whispers its claims not only in the gently melancholy strains of the
"lover's lute" but also in the muffled grating of the "lugg'd bear's" chains.

When the arrival of Poins interrupts Falstaff's "labor[ing] in his vocation" (105), the pair expands into an uneasy triangle, and Falstaff recedes into a twenty-line silence as he becomes the object rather than the author of jests. Falstaff's silence leads quickly to absence as he seems almost relieved to accede to Poins' request for him to "leave the Prince and me alone," ostensibly to persuade the Prince to join in the robbery at Gadshill but actually to plot the humiliation of Falstaff. As Poins lays out the details of this jest, in which he and the Prince will "rob" the thieves themselves to provoke the "incomprehensible lies" that Falstaff will tell later at the tavern, the Prince uneasily voices his concern that Falstaff's "knowing" will mean their undoing, and will pierce through their disguises with the stab of recognition: "Yea, but 'tis like that they will know us by our horses, by our habits, and by every other appointment to be ourselves" (174-176). The Prince's anxiety about being "known"--which itself raises the question of what one is known by and thus how one is known--is impatiently dismissed by the pragmatic Poins. His insistence that "our vizards weel change after wee leave them: and sirrah, I have Cases of Buckram for the nonce, to immaske our noted outward garments" (178-180) seems acutely reminiscent of Mercutio's call for "a case to put my visage
in, / A visor for a visor." But the Prince, like Mercutio, reveals after Poins's departure that the face can be its own mask, and that the best disguise can be a "case" that is transparent:

I know you all, and will a-while uphold
The unyoak'd humor of your idleness:
Yet herein will I imitate the Sunne,
Who doth permit the base contagious cloudes
To smother up his Beauty from the world,
That when he please againe to be himselfe,
Being wanted, he may be more wondred at,
By breaking through the foule and ugly mists
Of vapours, that did seeme to strangle him (195-203).

Like the "vizards" and "cases of buckram" that "immask" the Prince and Poins at Gadshill, so also do the "base contagious cloudes" threaten to "smother up" the sun. The Prince's poetry constructs his companions themselves as his "mask," a vehicle for withholding and encasing "himself."

But even this strategy is itself a performance, an "imitat[ion]" of the "Sunne," that enacts the doubleness of the mask as both that which "smothers" and "strangles," hiding the "true self," and that which protects the embryonic self like a shell. Before exiting at line 159, Falstaff had hoped that in his absence the "true Prince may (for recreation sake) prove a false theefe" (154-156), and his words prove more apt than he can know. Within the context of the soliloquy, the dramatic vehicle for confession and self-revelation, the Prince announces a strategy of concealment and deceit, a performance that folds
infinitely inward upon itself, much as the "incomprehensible lies" that Falstaff tells when he performs his own role in the tavern chase themselves in an infinite regress of pretense and truth.

II

The robbery at Gadshill is dramatized in such a way as to frame the labored exploits of Falstaff within the surreptitious whisperings of the Prince and Poins as they mock him. The scene (the second of Act Two) begins with the withdrawal of the Prince, Peto, and Poins at the approach of Falstaff who "frets like a gumm'd velvet" at the removal of his horse by Poins. As Falstaff enters, crying out angrily for Poins, the Prince suddenly comes forward from his hiding place only to depart just as quickly in "search" of Poins, leaving Falstaff momentarily alone onstage. The Prince's departure initiates a pattern that structures subsequent scenes, as Falstaff is left behind and alone as the stage empties itself in a flurry of arrivals and departures. In these solitary moments Falstaff delivers some of his most famous speeches, and in the process rehearses some of his most pressing dilemmas:

Well, I doubt not but to dye a fair death for all this, if I scape hanging for killing that Rogue. I have forsworne his company hourly any time this two and twenty yeare, & yet I am bewitcht with the Rogue's company. If the Rascal have not given me medicines to make me love him, Ile be hang'd; it could not be else: I have drunke Medicines. Poins, Hal, a Plague upon you both. Bardolph, Peto... a plague light upon you all. Give my Horse. you
Rogues: give me my Horse, and be hang'd (2.2.13-30).

Again, I have risked the tedium of lengthy quotation to allow Falstaff's language to trace out the complex of issues energized by Shakespeare's nay-sayers: their deflection of affection and its accompanying aggression into jest, their resistance to the claims of attachment that paradoxically reveals a profound overinvestment in the object of affection, their experience of feelings and desire as unbidden intrusions upon the self. Indeed, the excessiveness of Falstaff's disavowals manifests the very energies--love, attachment, need, desire--his words try to block. Even the aggressively Mercutian curses Falstaff hurls against this "company" ("a Plague light upon you both") dissolve into cries for their presence, which becomes in turn Falstaff's own curse.

Falstaff's soliloquy also glances at the problem of "truth" that attends the dilemma of knowing in the play. When Falstaff says that if "'twere not as good a deede as to drinke, to turne True-man, and to leave these Rogues, I am the veriest Varlet... A plague upon't when Theeves cannot be true one to another!" (2.2.22-28), his language appears to engage contradictory notions about what it means to be "true." For Falstaff, being a "True-man" seems to require "leav[ing] these Rogues" and thus abandoning company for solitariness. And yet the desire for "being true one to
another" (which still maintains the autonomous "one") rises up against the need for aloneness, as if to argue with the notions of "being true" that it follows. The contradictoriness of Falstaff's notions of "truth" suggest the conflictedness of his own skeptical impulses, which desire reciprocity even as they fear both requitedness and betrayal.

Falstaff's worst fears about the dangers of intimacy and attachment seem realized when the Prince comes forward at the end of soliloquy saying, "Peace, ye fat-guts, lie down. Lay your ear to the ground" (31-32). The Prince's "playful" imperatives harp on the very anxieties—about vulnerability and powerlessness, impotency and flaccidity, exposure and weakness—already vexing Falstaff, and that not even Falstaff's rejoinder, which hints wistfully of phallic potency, can entirely dispel: "Have you any levers to lift me up again, being down?" (34-35). Falstaff's "uncolting," then, not only stages a comic performance for the Prince and Poins's amusement, but also disarms Falstaff of his defenses against the claims of attachment. For to be "a'horseback" in this play is to held above the earthy reach of feeling and desire, safe from vulnerability and exposure. Thus, when Falstaff tells the Prince that he will "not bear my own flesh so far afoot again" (35-36), the pun on "bear" and "bare" suggests that for Falstaff, to "bear" his flesh while "uncolted" is also to "bare" that flesh, to be dangerously
open and vulnerable. The call from Gadshill, "Case ye, case ye, on with your vizards," together with the Prince's surreptitious whisper for "our disguises," gesture towards the mechanisms which defend against being known, against being "uncolted" and bare.

Not surprisingly, it is Falstaff who invents for himself the most ingenious disguise during the robbery, a "mask" which paradoxically reveals Falstaff's desires even as it encases the old age and infirmity that mock them:

> a whoreson Caterpillars: Bacon-fed Knaves, they hate us youth; down with them... Hang ye gorbelliied knaves, are ye undone? No ye Fat Chuffes, I would your store were heere. On Bacons, on, what ye knaves? Yong men must live (84-91).

Falstaff absorbs the "youth" of the "young men" he accompanies even as he projects his own corpulence and dependency ("caterpillar" was a frequent metaphor in the sixteenth century for a parasite or sycophant) onto the victimized travellers. This process of absorption and deflection mirrors the exchange of monies from the travellers to Falstaff, who empties his own burdens onto the pilgrims even as he "relieves" them of their own baggage.

This projection proves but a temporary stay, however, for soon the disguised Prince and Poins come forward to rob the thieves themselves of their freshly-acquired booty, as if taking back from Falstaff the youth and agility he has "taken" from them, as the monies again change hands. This second robbery disbands the loyalty and community of thieves
invoked earlier by Falstaff as it sows the seeds of bad faith in pursuit of a jest: "The Theeves are scattered, and possesst with fear so strongly, that they dare not meet each other: each takes his fellow for an Officer" (105-107). The jest not only thwarts being "known" but also engenders suspicion within the group it preys on: the thieves "dare not meet each other."

When the thieves do "meet each other" back in Eastcheap, Falstaff falls easily into his role as the butt of jokes, telling the "incomprehensible lies" he knows he is expected to tell, giving the performance of false bravado he knows he is expected to give. When the Prince challenges Falstaff's tale by revealing his own role in the escapade, Falstaff's answer deflects the Prince's gulling subterfuge into a claim for his own powers of "knowing:" "I knew ye as well as he that made ye" (2.4.267-268). Although C.L. Barber argues against Falstaff's recognition of the Prince because "To go so far in that direction obviously destroys the drama- spoils the joke which... must be a joke on Falstaff," textual evidence allows for just that possibility: Falstaff's "offhand" reference to the "two Rogues in Buckrom Sutes," the excessively blatant multiplication of four "Rogues" to seven in the same sentence, the even more preposterous claim to a "hundred" attackers. Attempting to decide whether Falstaff is "telling the truth" or "lying" leads quickly into deep waters,
especially since Falstaff's continuous invocations of "truth" and "lies" apply so much pressure to these oppositions that they no longer seem distinct: "if they speake more or lesse then truth, they are Villains, and the Sonness of darkenesse" (170-172); "I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a Lye, spit in my face, call me Horse" (193-194). Finally, when accused by the Prince's "These Lyes are like the Father that begets them, grosse as a Mountaine, open, palpable" (225-226), Falstaff's repetitive phrasing seems to unmoor the word "truth" into a dislocated echo of itself: "What, art thou mad? art thou mad? is not the truth, the truth?" (229-230). Falstaff phrases his invocations of "truth" in the interrogative or the conditional, a subtle grammar that makes the distinction between truth and lie even less discrete.

A.C. Bradley suggests that Falstaff "rarely expects to be believed, perhaps never." But Bradley's articulation of Falstaff's dilemma neglects the ways in which the suspicion of not being believed frees Falstaff somewhat from his wariness about self-exposure, and allows his guardedness to shield (from himself as well as others) the impulses that labor in creating belief. We are told after Falstaff exits briefly at line 297 that Falstaff had not only "hackt" his own sword "with his Dagger... [to] make you beleve it was done in fight," but also persuaded his accomplices "to tickle [their] Noses with Spear-grasse, to make them bleed,
and then to beslubber [their] garments with it, and swear it was the blood of true men." Falstaff would seem to have spared no expense of effort in making his performance believable, and in engaging his audience in a performance that oddly superimposes making others laugh with wounding oneself ("to tickle [their] Noses with Spear-grasse, to make them bleed"). And clearly he relishes overcoming the Prince's challenges to his story that the performance provokes.

And yet, traces of resentment escape in the allusions to torture and persecution which the Prince and Poins's relentless pressure on Falstaff's "lies" and "reasons" elicits: "What, upon compulsion? No: were I at the Strappado, or all the Racks in the World, I would not tell you on compulsion" (236-238). The volatile round of name-calling between the Prince and Falstaff that follows Falstaff's images of torture and confession releases the aggression and bitterness latent in Falstaff's language, even as it restores intimacy to a friendship that not only survives but actually thrives on verbal pummeling:

Prince. Ile be no longer guiltie of this sinne. This sanguine Coward, this Bed-presser, this Hors-back-breaker, this huge Hill of Flesh. Falst. Away you Starveling, you Elfe-skin, you dried Neats tongue, Bulles-pissell, you stock-fish: O for breth to utter. What is like thee? You Tailor's yard, you sheath you Bow-case, you vile standing tucke (241-248).
These insults strike at Falstaff’s corpulence and the Prince’s oppositional gauntness, obsessively cataloging the body in excess and in lack. They also suggest an erotic aggressiveness and anxiety that overflows references to "bed-pressers" and "horse-back-breakers," and that practically explodes in Falstaff’s furious rejoinders. Falstaff’s insinuations of the Prince’s shriveledness, flaccidity, dryness, and emptiness cannot quite stave off the phallic stiffness and erectness they would deflate, as the last image of the "vile standing tucke" (a rapier standing on end which has lost its resiliency) suggests.

The Prince’s exhortations of "sin" and "shame" that frame this exchange—"Ile be no longer guiltie of this sinne" and "canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?"—gesture obliquely towards the "personal shame" (neither open nor apparent) that William Empson discusses in the revised version of "Falstaff and Mr. Dover Wilson":

The picture of [Falstaff] as driven on by an obscure personal shame, of an amoral sort, has several advantages, I think... I daresay that the wincing away from the obvious... which I seem to find in recent critics is due to distaste for homosexuality... the idea of Falstaff making love to the Prince, they may feel, really has to be resisted. But surely Johnson gives us the right perspective here; Falstaff felt in himself the pain of a deformity which the audience could always see; no amount of expression of love from Falstaff to his young thieves would excite suspicion on that topic from the audiences, not because the audiences were innocent about it, but because they could assume
that any coming thief (let alone the Prince) would be too vain to yield to such deformity.\(^{10}\)

The vehemence with which the insults of Falstaff and the Prince attack the body as repulsive and disgusting generates the "shame" Empson delineates, even as the erotics of aggression lend the exchange the "amoral" cast that Empson suggests. The critical resistance to suggestions of homosexuality that Empson aptly describes replicates Falstaff's own recoil from the overwhelming feeling of attachment that rises within him and must be "guarded against." Like Mercutio, trying to "beat love down" with the same phallic force that gives rise to overflowingness of feeling, Falstaff "hacks" at his sword with his own dagger, creating an illusion of injuredness that guards against exposing the very real wounds he suffers.

III

The erotics of friendship and aggression released by Falstaff's laboring to "sware truth out of England" and make his "open, palpable lies" believable continue to be processed in the "play extempore" acted out by the Prince and Falstaff. The play extempore intricates the problematic of truth and falsehood within issues of temporality and theater--is time just an emptiness that must be filled? what does it mean to speak of performances that are "outside" of time? are there really such things as "unscripted" performances?--so that theater itself becomes the matrix for
Falstaff's constant pressure on the generation of belief and the structuring of desire.

The subject of the play extempore, announced by the Prince's command for Falstaff to "stand for my Father, and examine mee upon the particulars of my Life" (2.4.375-376), is in fact the third "argument" put forward by the Prince. Before Falstaff had entered the tavern, the Prince had summoned Poins to "call in Falstaffe, Ile play Percy, and that damn'd Brawne shall play Dame Mortimer his wife" (2.4.108-110), a performance that would not only engage the rivalry of the Prince and Hotspur but also negotiate the subtextual rivalry of the Prince and Falstaff (as well as process the rather complicated erotic dynamics that such an enactment would generate). Later in the scene, when Falstaff suggests "a play extempory" as a diversion from discussion of his "cowardice," the Prince refuses to be deferred and counters with "Content, and the argument shall be, thy running away," which not surprisingly is discarded by Falstaff: "A, no more of that, Hall, and thou lovest me (279-283). The theatrical space Falstaff attempts to place between himself and the increasingly aggressive claims of the Prince and Poins is instead co-opted by the Prince as a vehicle for reenacting Falstaff's shame and embarrassment, deferred only by Falstaff's appeal to his "love." That Falstaff and the Prince ultimately choose for their drama the roles of father and son suggests that the performance
plays out the tangled feelings that energize the relationship between Falstaff and the Prince under the safe cover of paternal and filial devotion, rather than rehearsing any Oedipal conflicts that may be experienced by the Prince and the King.  

At any rate, before the play extempore can even begin, Falstaff has no sooner noisily assembled his "props" ("This Chayre shall bee my State, this Dagger my Scepter, and this Cushion my Crowne") than the Prince tries to puncture the illusions Falstaff has so deliberately, almost pragmatically, created: "Thy State is taken for a Ioyn’d-Stoole, thy Golden Scepter for a Leaden Dagger, and thy precious rich Crowne, for a pittifull bald Crowne" (380-382). But instead of destroying Falstaff’s theatrical illusions, the Prince’s demystifications inadvertently render the very objects they would denigrate in even more concrete particularity: Falstaff’s unelaborated "Chayre," "Dagger," and "Scepter" become in the Prince’s denials a "Ioyn’d-Stoole," a "Leaden Dagger," and a "Golden Scepter." The rich interplay between illusion and reality, belief and its suspension, becomes even more complex with Falstaff’s call for a "Cup of Sacke to make mine eyes look redde, that it may be thought I have wept," which not only grabs an easy laugh but also, following as it does his "a plague of sighing and griefe, it blowes a man up like a Bladder" (331-333), intimates the possibility of an authentic grief
embedded in Falstaff's "disguise." Falstaff's expressions of love and grief seem actively to depend on their being taken as self-serving postures or strategic untruths in order to protect against self-exposure. Jest is not inimical to "sighing" and "grief" but the guarded vehicle for their release; pretense does not so much distort the truth as allow it to be shadowed forth from behind the protective enclosure of the mask. Falstaff can speak freely of his love for the Prince because he knows that others will interpret his admissions as self-aggrandizing ploys, and he can speak of remorse, sadness, and grief because he is assured that these "revelations" will appear only as ludicrous postures. To ask which stance is "real" and which is "only acting" is to become caught in the circularity that wheels around and within the presence of Falstaff.

Indeed, Falstaff’s unscripted impersonation of the King calls up uncanny echoes of the King’s own language—calling the Prince "Harry," which is the King’s appellation for his son (and one never previously or subsequently used by Falstaff), declaiming on the Prince’s paternity ("Thou art my sonne: I have partly thy Mothers Word, partly my Opinion"), alluding to the King’s earlier wish that "it could be prov’d,/ That some Night-tripping-Faiery, had exchang’d/ In Cradle-clothes, our Children where they lay,/ And call’d mine Percy, his Plantagenet" (1.1.86-89). Falstaff’s exaggerated theatricality conjures up the
"authentic" voice of authority that it mocks and parodies, as if summoning that power to endow his self-creations with compelling sway:

A goodly portly man yfaith, and a corpulent, of a chearefull Look, a pleasing Eye, and a most noble Carriage, and as I thinke, his age some fiftie, or (byrlady) inclining to threescore; and now I remember mee, his Name is Falstaffe... there is Vertue in that Falstaffe; him keepe with, the rest banish (422-431).

Embedded within this excessively self-flattering portrait--calculated, I think, to elicit jeers and laughter as a means of diverting attention from the very real feelings that it articulates--is an expression of need and desire spoken from behind the double mask of Falstaff's personation of the King and his artfully constructed self-portrait, a call to be "kept" and a call to "banish," a plea for attachment and a demand for separation.

The Prince does not respond to Falstaff within his fiction but instead interrupts the performance with a demand for a reversal of roles: "Do'st thou speake like a King? doe thou stand for mee, and Ile play my Father" (433-434).

Something in Falstaff's performance seems to compel the Prince to assume his role as King, to "seize the crown" as his father before him, and to resist Falstaff's claims. The obvious delight of Falstaff at the opportunity to embody his youthful companion ("Nay, Ile tickle ye for a young Prince"), to possess (if only through temporary personation) the body of the beloved, seems to obscure for him the darker
purposes that may be at work in the Prince's "usurpation" of his role. With this reversal, the play extempore diverges from its original premise of providing the Prince an opportunity to "practice his answers" and becomes increasingly self-reflexive. The roles Falstaff and the Prince now assume become the medium in which the latent dynamics of their own relationship are engaged.

Once ensconced as "King," the Prince turns on Falstaff with a viciousness mitigated only partially by the histrionicism of the play extempore, and his execration of the "old fat man" has the quality of unrestrained invective:

thou art violently carried away from Grace: there is a Devill haunts thee, in the likenesse of a fat old man: a Tunne of man is thy Companion. Why do' st thou converse with that Trunke of Humors, that Boulting-Hutch of Beasltinesse, that sowle Parcell of Dropsies, that huge Bombard of Sacke, that stuff Cloake-bagge of Guts, that rosted Manning tree Oxe with the Pudding in his Belly, that reverend Vice, that grey Iniquitie, that Father Ruffian, that Vanitie in yeeres? wherein is he good, but to taste Sacke, and drinke it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a Capon, and eat it? wherein Cunning, but in Craft? wherein Craftie, but in Villanie? wherein Villanous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing? (446-459).

It is almost as if the Prince wants to purge himself of Falstaff by exhaling furious epithets that finally empty themselves into "nothingness." Yet the process cannot help but make the object of its denigrations even more palpable, cannot help but betray an overinvestment in the very thing it would destroy. The Prince's catalog of Falstaff encases
him in heavy allusiveness, from the sacrificial and ritual overtones of the "rosted Manning tree Oxe" to the metatheatricality of "reverend Vice" and "grey Iniquitie," consigning him to the realm of the symbolic where he can be more easily depersonalized and disembodied. Falstaff's answer to the Prince's invective is a question ("I would your Grace would take me with you: whom means your Grace?") that registers both obviously disingenuous bafflement about the subject of the Prince's narrative (no doubt meant to amuse the tavern audience) and a genuine feeling of alienation from the Prince's description. And as the play extempore increasingly turns on the question of Falstaff's "character," the problem of knowing becomes more pressing:

Falst. I would your Grace would take me with you: whom means your Grace?
Prince. That villainous abominable mis-leader of Youth, Falstaffe, that old white-bearded Sathan.
Falst. My lord, the man I know.
Prince. I know thou do'st.
Falst. But to say, I know more harme in him then in my selfe, were to say more then I know (462-467).

The spare language of this exchange contrasts markedly with the verbal excessiveness of previous speeches, as if the Prince and Falstaff speak for a moment from within the private recesses of their relationship. Who inhabits these "I's"--so full of theatrical otherness--that make such strong claims on "knowing"? What is it "in" Falstaff that splits into "him" and "myself," and which is the Falstaff that is "known"? Does the excessiveness of language ("to say
more than I know") speak its hidden subtexts or bury them under obfuscatory "superfluousness?" Every repetition of "know" (four times in as many lines) reaches for a certainty that remains elusive, and grasps at a fixedness that escapes chimera-like.

The pleas not to be left behind ("I would my lord would take me with you") that infiltrate Falstaff's disingenuous bafflement finally escape in a series of imperatives that verge on conjurations:

No, my good Lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poines: but for sweete Iacke Falstaffe, kind Iacke Falstaffe, true Iacke Falstaffe, valiant Iacke Falstaffe, and therefore more valiant, being as hee is old Iacke Falstaffe, banish not him thy Harryes companie, banish not him thy Harryes companie; banish plump Iacke, and banish all the World. (474-480).

The mesmerizing repetitions seem almost talismanic as they call up the power of the name, even as Falstaff loads the space created by the "banishment" of the Prince's other companions with a plenitude of Falstaffs that multiply exponentially. Falstaff invokes his own banishment only to ward off its possibility, repeating the lines as if trying to cast a spell: "banish not him thy Harryes company, banish not him thy Harryes company." The awkward syntax of Falstaff's refrain positions him first as the object of banishment ("banish not him"), then as the indirect object of the banishment of the Prince's company ("banish not him thy Harryes company"), as the sentence's own grammar
absorbs any trace of Falstaff’s own banishment. The last line, though, broaches what the language thus far has assiduously avoided: "banish plump Iacke, and banish all the World." The Prince immediately seizes on the first phrase and shuts down the enormous claims of the second with the chilling "I doe, I will." The Prince’s answer to Falstaff drains all but the starkest necessities of subject and verb from its language, enacting the banishment of Falstaff without even naming him, without even saying the word "banish." The Prince’s language empties itself of Falstaff with an astringent severity that mocks Falstaff’s effusive invocations and excessive repetitions, and that scorns the syntactical complexity of Falstaff’s refrain with the absolute grammar of grim necessity. 12

The play extempore never recovers its momentum after the Prince’s pronouncement, and soon the arrival of the sheriff with "a most monstrous Watch" forestalls any kind of closure, much to the chagrin of Falstaff: "Out you Rogue, play out the Play: I have much to say in the behalfe of that Falstaffe" (484-485). Yet it is hard to imagine the performance continuing after the finality of the Prince’s words, and the "interruption" almost seems a deus ex machina that rescues the play from the silence that reverberates after the Prince’s "I doe, I will." Before Falstaff disappears into the recesses of the tavern, though, he turns
to the Prince and speaks with some urgency about "truth" and "counterfeit," "being" and "seeming:"

Do' st thou heare Hal, never call a true peece of Gold a Counterfeit: Thou art essentially made, without seeming so (491-493). 13

Instead of providing a sense of resolution about the problems of authenticity and pretense raised by the play extempore, Falstaff's language offers no way to make such distinctions even as it invokes and insists on them. Falstaff's words to the Prince, "thou art essentially made without seeming so," rather than clarifying the problem of "knowing" the other, seem instead to mock any kind of certainty. And yet the urgency in Falstaff's language ("Do' st thou heare Hal") conveys the need to make the Prince understand something unequivocal and vital—that the Prince's "counterfeiting" of "idlenesse" is the true piece of gold, is an authentic part of him (perhaps the best part) despite his disavowals, 14 that "counterfeiting" tends unsettlingly to manifest the "truths" it masks, that calling "truth" a "counterfeit" is a form of denial and disavowal with which Falstaff himself is only too familiar.

IV

After the sheriff's watch departs, Falstaff is discovered "fast asleepe behinde the Arras, and snorting like a Horse," his breathing so labored that the Prince exclaims, "Harke, how hard he fetches breath" (2.4.528-530). The noisy laboriousness of Falstaff's breathing, like the
pronounced hiss of a stage whisper, allows for the suspicion that Falstaff’s sleep may itself be a performance. Even the authenticity of the bills the Prince and Peto discover while rifling through Falstaff’s pockets becomes suspect for Hazlitt:

Such is Falstaff’s deliberate exaggeration of his own vices that it does not seem quite certain whether the account of the hostess’s bill... was not put there by himself as a trick to humour the jest upon his favorite propensities, and as a conscious caricature of himself.

The idea of Falstaff forging the contents of his own pockets in a "conscious caricature of himself," silently mocking the Prince and Peto’s attempt to exploit the temporary vulnerability of his sleepfulness, is almost too irresistible. The nagging suspicion that Falstaff has staged his own exposure, has turned the attempted violation of his privacy into yet another "jest upon his favorite propensities," gestures toward the complicated interplay of guardedness and exposure at work in Falstaff. The convolutions generated by this episode—an exhausted old man, breathing laboriously as his trusted companions rifle through the tawdry contents of his pockets, and a crafty performer staging his own exposure, pretending to be what indeed he is, practically luring the Prince and Peto into a thievery which deflects any invasion of privacy into a self-parody of his own well-known excesses—do not cancel each other but fold inward in infinite regress.
Falstaff's strategy of exposure and deflection is further elaborated when he next appears in the play, gesturing toward his own corpulence while harping on its abatement: "Bardolph, am I not falne away vilely, since this last action? doe I not bate? do I not dwindle?" (3.3.1-3). Falstaff's barrage of questions engenders even more self-reflexive similes ("Why, my skinne hangs about me like an olde Ladies loose Gowne: I am withered like an olde apple John") that cry out for refutations and denials. Falstaff's questions seem engineered to elicit counter-assertions of the same fatness he seems to want to disavow—as if Falstaff is attempting to reproduce the kind of exchanges he shares with the Prince, who constantly invokes Falstaff's corpulence in their wit-sallies. At times Falstaff seems to be "rehearsing" for such encounters, keeping sharp the wit with which he holds the Prince's attention. Intermingled with Falstaff's raileries are furtive glances at times past, at bygone days when he knew "the in-side of a church," before "Company, villainous Company hath beene the spoyle of me," when he was as "vertuously given, as a Gentleman need to be." Commingled with these wistfully comic allusions to the past are vague premonitions of the future to come ("Ile repent... I shall be out of heart shortly... I shall have no strength to repent") clustered among dark images of "Deaths-Heads," "Hell fires," and "Sunnes of utter Darkenesse." Despite Calderwood's assertion that "reality for Falstaff is
portioned out in a succession of lean present-tense slices, with one exception: his casting his expectations to... the future when... [Hal] is king," Falstaff’s language is always alluding to past and future as well as the ever-insistent "now." It oscillates between an artfully constructed, edenic past which manifests a poignant sense of regret, and a future of "repentance" and "amendment" that stretches out to embrace and redeem the chaotic "now" of living "out of all order, out of all compasse." One could even claim that Falstaff’s "now," despite its ostensible immediacy, is the space maintained between these poles of experience. There is also a lingering sense of displacement and alienation, of the loneliness of life on the margins, of the desolation of exile, that haunts Falstaff’s language. Thus, the movement from the "inside of a church" to "out of all order, out of all compass" captures not only the sense of a fall from innocence to sin, but also from the protective enclosure of interiors (the "Inne" at Eastcheap) to the unguarded openness that threatens beyond the borders.17

Falstaff’s invocations of his "dwindling" body acquire a more pointed irony when the Hostess enters and is immediately assailed by Falstaff’s "How now, Dame Partlet the Hen, have you enquir’d yet who pick’d my pocket?" (3.3.52-53). From the theft of his horse at Gadshill to the pilfering of his pockets at the Boarshead, the cumulative
effect of such jests has been the diminution ("bating") of Falstaff (the Prince says of the "uncolte" Falstaff that he "sweats to death, / And lards the lean earth as he walks along" [2.2.108-109]). Falstaff himself seems to acknowledge this furtive siphoning when he calls the Prince a "Sneake-Cuppe" (3.3.85), a term that implies not only "a cowardly, creeping, insidious rascal" but also "One who sneaks from his cup or shirks his drink" or "One who sneaks a cup and drinks slyly." Although any traces of parasitism that might adhere to the relationship between Falstaff and the Prince would seem to cast Falstaff as the parasite, Falstaff’s own language often reverses this construction in ways that seem not just self-serving but true. For the Prince does seem to attach himself to the great body of Falstaff as much as Falstaff may "bleed" the Prince’s funds and influence.

When the Prince again meets up with Falstaff, he responds to Falstaff’s complaint of his picked pockets with a question that substitutes loss for theft, invoking a rich dialectic that itself becomes an important thematic in the play: "What didst thou lose, Iacke?" (100). The Prince’s language insinuates the suggestion of loss as a subtle denial of his own role in the theft, and seems unwittingly to provide Falstaff with an opening to catch the Prince in his own evasions: "Wilt thou beleve me, Hal? Three or foure Bonds of fortie pound apeece, and a Seale-ring of my Grand-fathers" (101-103). Falstaff’s opening solicitation ("Wilt
thou believe me, Hal?"") operates on the assumption that Falstaff knows he won't be believed, or else severs believing from knowing, calling on the Prince to "believe" in spite of what he "knows" to be true. When the Prince finally confronts Falstaff with the Hostess' report that he had "sayde this other day, You ought him a thousand pound" (133-134), Falstaff's answer ("A thousand pound Hal? A Million. Thy love is worth a Million; thou ow'st me thy love" [136-137]) inverts the allegations in a crafty maneuver of extrication that paradoxically reveals the desire harbored within Falstaff's blatant and self-serving prevarications. As the Prince finally reveals that he is indeed familiar with the former contents of Falstaff's pockets ("if there were any thing in thy Pocket but Taverne Recknings, Memorandums of Bawdie-houses, and one poore peny-worth of Sugar-candie... if thy pocket were enrich'd with anie other injuries but these, I am a Villaine"), his language bespeaks Falstaff as a man "enrich'd" with "injuries," his pockets full of wounds and losses. And yet, the Prince's words seem to endow Falstaff with the energies to turn not only "diseases into commodity" but also injuries into riches, losses into restorations, or perhaps (and the difference here may or may not be crucial) only the ability to make them seem so. As the play moves toward the battle of Shrewsbury, Falstaff's "plain-speaking cynicism" will generate similar enrichment, as the strokes of wit that
puncture heroic illusions sketch the outlines of a belief that does not so much defeat the skeptical impulse as resurrect its latent hopes and desires.

V

In the play's final act, Falstaff finds himself transplanted from the enclosed, familiar space of the tavern to the open terrain of the battlefield, surrounded no longer by the likes of the Hostess, Bardolph, or Peto but by the major players in the historical drama. The participation of Falstaff in the chronicled events of Act Five allows the resistances he offers, including his "verbal skepticism," to be felt in the arenas of power he has been kept distant from thus far.

The last act opens as the stage fills with the great personages of the historical drama--the King, the Prince of Wales, Lord John, Sir Walter Blunt... and Falstaff. Falstaff's presence here complicates Calderwood's scheme of Shakespeare's "relegation" of Falstaff to a "side-world" that exists outside of "recorded doings," for however minimal Falstaff's action when he appears with this austere group (he speaks only once, a mock answer to the King's questioning of Worcester's betrayal, and is immediately silenced by the Prince ["Peace, Chewet, peace"]), he is nevertheless present in the historical moment, a part of it, an onlooking participant. The presence of Falstaff finds its way even into the scene's language of political maneuvering,
as Worcester’s speech to the King traces out a constellation of issues that gesture uncannily to Falstaff:

You tooke occasion to be quickly woo’d,
To gripe the generall sway into your hand...
And being fed by us, you us’d us so
As that ungentle gull the Cuckowes Bird,
Useth the Sparrow, did oppresse our Nest,
Grew by our Feeding, to so great a bulke,
That even our Love durst not come neere your sight
For feare of swallowing (5.1.56-64).

Another subtext seems to be speaking itself through Worcester’s words, ranging over the interlocking complex of issues that locate Falstaff and the Prince’s relationship: the erotic and desiring force of "wooing," the process of substitution and vicariousness inherent in the image of the co-opted "nest," a love that is wary and fearful of being engulfed by the need of the other (and oneself). Worcester negotiates the perilous currents of political exigencies in a language that speaks also of the intrapsychic claims of attachment and investment, rivalry and defense.

The fears about being "swallowed" and suffocated that accumulate in Worcester’s language seem embodied by the Prince’s anxiousness to leave Falstaff as soon as they are again alone together. Although Falstaff resists every attempt at departure by continuing to engage the Prince in conversation, the Prince at last takes his leave with the blunt "Why, thou ow’st heaven a death." Falstaff is left behind and alone to process the Prince’s loss and this idea of "owing" death in the famous "catechism" on honor. Unlike
other "nay-sayers" such as Mercutio and Enobarbus, Falstaff experiences on stage the absolute solitariness that engenders soliloquy, although as Blanpied observes, Falstaff's soliloquies tend to seem more like "provocative extensions of his barroom postures" than "disclosures of secret motivating factors." But with Falstaff, attempting to distinguish between "postures" and "disclosures" proves almost as difficult as trying to appraise the contents of his pockets.

The speech on honor is structured as a conversation, thus recreating the sense of sociality, of the need for the presence of others, that so strongly marks Shakespeare's nay-sayers, even (especially) in their isolation. Falstaff even engages the Prince's own language of debt and payment as he poses an answer to his absent friend: "'Tis not due yet: I would bee loath to pay him before his day. What neede I bee so forward with him, that call's not on me?" (127-129). Falstaff's question invokes a free-floating sense of unrequitedness that is immediately deflected by the dismissive "Well, 'tis no matter" that launches the "catechism" on honor:

But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it, therefore Ile none of it. Honour is a meere Scutcheon, and so ends my Catechisme (5.1.129-141).

It is as if Falstaff's histrionic meditation on honor is a massive defense against the unrequited desire intimated by his admissions of "need" and "forwardness." Falstaff's language is full of the "rhetorical aggressiveness" Harry Berger associates with the dramatic speaker who "floods his auditors with more meanings than the ear can catch," who participates in "inverse eavesdropping... [that] 'listens' to what his auditors do not hear and creates discrepant awareness by hoarding surplus meanings." With Falstaff, the process Berger describes occurs intrapsychically, and the "rhetorical aggressiveness" is directed inward even as the "flood" of words releases meanings that circulate away from the vulnerable and exposed self.

When Falstaff speaks of honor as that which "prickes me on" and "prickes me off," he grants to honor a phallic aggressiveness similar to Mercutio's invocation of a love that "pricks." Falstaff's interrogation of honor repeatedly invokes the body, more specifically the body in pieces, in opposition to the claims of honor: "Can Honour set too a legge? No: Or an arme? No: Or take away the greefe of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in Surgerie, then? No" (131-133). As Falstaff's insistent negatives harp on the pragmatic failure of honor, his language figuratively
encases honor within a kind of body of its own—"Can Honour set too a legge?... Honour hath no skill in Surgerie, then?". Even as Falstaff's language disavows the "realness" of honor, it creates almost in spite of itself an overwhelming sense of presence, as the abstractness of honor is "fleshed out" by Falstaff's figures of personification.

When Falstaff continues his monologue with "What is Honour? A word. What is that word Honour? Ayre" (133-135), his language turns from the body towards words and air, like Mercutio's denigration of "vain fantasy" as "thin of substance as the air" (I.iv.98-99). But also like Mercutio's language, which elegantly spins belief out of such "thin" and "insubstantial" threads as words, Falstaff's strategy of reduction works paradoxically to breathe into such "empty" words the power of his own eloquence. Falstaff's concluding dismissal of honor as a "mere scutcheon" (140) scornfully insists on the insubstantiality of the emblematic (a "scutcheon" is the "lowest form of heraldic ensign") even as it edges toward more fearful admissions (a "scutcheon" can also be a "funeral hatchment").

Falstaff's "catechism" on honor also serves as an untoward preliminary for the fatal meeting between the Prince and his rival Hotspur, the play's staunchest advocate of the "honor" that Falstaff derides. The Prince's declaration to Hotspur couches their overt animosity in
terms which seem to refer subliminally to his thinly-veiled rivalry with Falstaff as well:

I am the Prince of Wales, and thinke not Percy,
To share with me in glory any more:
Two Starres keep not their motion in one Sphere,
Nor can England brooke a double reigne,
Of Harry Percy, and the Prince of Wales (5.4.63-67).

As the Prince and Hotspur draw swords, their mortal combat seems to play out the aggressiveness that has also charged the Prince’s relationship with Falstaff. Indeed, Falstaff himself unexpectedly enters in the heat of the duel, creating a triangular configuration that just as quickly splits into replicate pairs with the entrance of Douglas, Falstaff’s own challenger. The death of Hotspur is thus theatrically superimposed upon the "death" of Falstaff (the Folio stage directions read, "Enter Douglas, he fights with Falstaffe, who falls down as if he were dead. The Prince killeth Percie"), thus powerfully enacting the sense of vicariousness and displacement that energizes the duels. As the Prince eulogizes his dead rival Hotspur, he performs "fayre Rites of Tenderness" and makes "so great a shew of Zeale" only after he has placed the mask of his "favours" (glossed variously as scarves, gloves, plumes, "or the like") on the visage of Hotspur to "hide [his] mangled face," a theatrical embodiment of the "encasing" of Hotspur in the rhetoric of encomium which the Prince’s language rather sinisterly works, speeding the passage of memory into
oblivion: "Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,/ But not rememb'red in thy epitaph!" (100-101).

When the Prince then "spieth Falstaff on the ground," he delivers a very different kind of eulogy over the body of "that old fat man:"

What? Old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh Keepe in a little life? Poore Iacke, farewell: I could have better spar'd a better man, O, I should have a heavy misse of thee, If I were much in love with Vanity. Death hath not strucke so fat a Deere to day, Though many dearer in this bloody Fray: Imbowell'd will I see thee by and by, Till then, in blood, by noble Percie lye (102-110).

While the Prince had begun his encomium for Hotspur by remarking Percy's "shrunkeness" in an ironic echo of Hotspur's own desire to "imbrace [the Prince] with a Souldiers arme,/ That he shall shrinke under my courtesie" (5.2.73-74), his "farewell" to Falstaff moves in the opposite direction, invoking "all this flesh" through a series of puns on Falstaff's corpulence: "a heavy miss," "so fat a Deere." The Prince's language hovers in the subjunctive and the conditional, tentatively extending expressions of affection and then deflecting them into jesting wordplay. The rhyming couplets of the last six lines impart to the speech an artfulness and artificiality that feel like hedges against loss--retreats into the wordplay that so marked his relationship with Falstaff, recourses to
jest by one only beginning to sense what has been lost to him.

But when Falstaff "riseth up" from the "vilest earth" after the Prince departs, his resurrection not only disrupts the neat symmetry enforced by the Prince's last line ("Till then, in blood, by noble Percie lye") but also releases the innate pun in the Prince's final word. In the Prince's absence, Falstaff mounts a massively overdetermined "defense" of his "lie," using the same dialogical structure that shaped the soliloquy on honor:

'Twas time to counterfet, or that hotte Termagant Scot, had paid me scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I am no counterfeit; to dye, is to be a counterfeit, for hee is but the counterfeit of a man, who hath not the life of a man: But to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeede. The better part of Valour, is Discretion; in the which better part, I have saved my life. I am afraide of this Gun-powder Percy though he be dead. How if hee should counterfeit too, and rise? I am afraid hee would prove the better counterfeit (113-124).

Falstaff's use of "counterfeit" in this single speech (nine times in nineteen lines) is more than double that word's appearance in any other Shakespeare play.24 The repetitiveness of Falstaff's language here feels almost obsessive, as if trying to ward off the unsettling possibilities (inevitabilities?) enacted by his performance—death, loss, woundedness, hurt. Perhaps Falstaff's seeming anxiety about Hotspur's dead body ("How if hee shold counterfeit and rise?") is itself a kind of wishful
thinking, yet another attempt at deferral, yet another relentless disavowing of "wounds" and "greefe."

Falstaff’s language traces out the confluence of "counterfeiting" and resurrection theatrically embodied by his own "reviving: "Why may not hee rise as well as I: Nothing confutes me but eyes, and no-bodie sees me" (122-127). Calderwood reads this moment as an intense crisis for the "realism" of drama, as "Falstaff rises up from pseudo-death to create a disconcerting double exposure of art and nature. As a rebel against realism he threatens a secession of the theatrical from the mimetic."25 But the very oppositions Calderwood tries to enforce—"art" and "nature," "theatrical" and "mimetic"—are the ones Falstaff has been inverting and revelling in from the beginning. Calderwood’s portrayal of the resistances Falstaff offers to the "realism" of drama fails to acknowledge the tendency of his disavowals and denials to generate the very energies they are ostensibly intended to dispel. Falstaff’s attack on counterfeits ends, in fact, by creating a belief in their realness so strong and disturbing that Falstaff must make the dead Hotspur "sure" by inflicting a wound in his thigh, lest he "rise as well."

And yet, for us who consider ourselves members of Falstaff’s "conspiratorial audience," Falstaff’s rise is not a moment of crisis but of apotheosis, when we can savor the pretense of it all, but still have our hero come back to
life. It is not Falstaff's resurrection but his stabbing of Hotspur that transgresses certain boundaries, and that betrays certain relationships. Falstaff's "nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me" places a huge strain on our relationship with him--unlike his speech on honor, in which Falstaff seems really to need us as an audience, Falstaff's post-resurrection soliloquy breaks those kinds of connections, and even as he addresses us he seems very much alone. When Falstaff stabs Hotspur--the vulnerable characterless body of the actor himself waiting to be carried offstage--and then claims that "nobody sees me," our own investments in Falstaff seem violently disavowed. The audacity of Falstaff's wounding of Hotspur overreaches itself, and turns the play very dark. It is almost as if the limits of how much alienation and identification the theater (and empathy) can bear are being pressed unmercifully.

Falstaff's pretenses here no longer serve to buoy the play but tend to make of him some kind of anti-trickster, "killing off" with a vengeance everything that would make us want to see the play again. It is tempting to smooth over the very problematical ending of this play--Falstaff dumping the lifeless body of Hotspur on the hard stage floor, the nastiness of Falstaff's outrageous "truths" ("I gave him this wound in the thigh"), the abruptness of the play's return to the world of the history play ("Come, brother, let us to the highest of the field,/ To see what friends are
living, who are dead") that itself plays with the living and the dead, the counterfeit and the real--by extending one's conceptualization of the play's trajectory into Part Two and Falstaff's banishment. One could then feel comfortably sorry for Falstaff, taking his absence from the final scene of the play, when the warriors gather to rehearse the day's victory at Shrewsbury, as a harbinger of things to come--Falstaff's gradual recession from the action of the history plays, his banishment by the newly-crowned Henry V in Henry IV, Part Two, his narrated, offstage death of a "broken heart" in Henry V. But taken on its own terms, the ending of Part One does not allow for such reassuring (if melancholy) deferrals. It holds our gaze fast upon the play's jarring turn from that "Falstaffian" zone which The Winter's Tale will recreate and transfigure--where anything, even resurrections of the dead, can happen, and where it is safe (even necessary) to "believe" despite what one "knows" to be true--to this shadowland of lies where intimate complicity is broken, and where belief feels like betrayal.

1 Henry IV, Part One 1.2.1. Where the Folio departs significantly from Q1, the authoritative text of the play, I have provided the relevant text from the Quarto in the notes.

2 The Oxford edition of The Complete Works, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, premised on "restore" Sir John's "original surname for the first time in printed texts" by referring to Falstaff as Sir John Oldcastle. Despite their
own mention of the fact that "The earliest title-page advertises the play's portrayal of 'the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaff,'" Wells and Taylor maintain that when the play was "first acted, probably in 1596, this character bore the name of his historical counterpart, the Protestant martyr Sir John Oldcastle." No subsequent editions of the play, however, subscribe to Wells and Taylor's "restoration." See the brief discussion of Wells and Taylor's rationale in their introduction to the play in The Complete Works (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986): 509.

For a brilliant discussion of parasitism that integrates the conventional aspects of the parasite (taking without giving, weakening without killing) with the more subversive role of "interrupting" the linear flow of words of language, see Michel Serres's The Parasite, translated by Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1982).


Falstaff's "labor" is richly suggestive of the "sweating labor" of Cleopatra, herself accused by Anthony of being "Idlenesse it selve": "Tis sweating Labour,/ To beare such Idlenesse so neere the heart/ As Cleopatra this" (1.3.93-95).

The Variorum notes that in the old morality plays, a "true-man" was always placed in opposition to a "thief." Cf. Hycke Skorner ( "And when me list to hang a true-man, Thieves I can help out of prison") and The Four Prentices of London (1632) ("Now, true-man, try if thou canst rob a thief"). In the next scene, Hotspur says to Kate that "when I am a'horseback,/ I will swear/ I love thee infinitely," as if only then will it be "safe" to make such confessions of affection.


"Falstaff" in Essays on Shakespeare: William Empson ed. David B. Pirie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 67. For one of the most brilliant readings of Falstaff, which addresses the enormous sense of authorial investment in Falstaff, and which locates the dynamics of Falstaff's relation to the Prince in terms of the sonnets to the young man, see Empson's unexcelled "They That Have ower" in Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950): 89-115.

Most psychoanalytical readings of the play see the extemore performance as the defining moment of the relationship between the Prince and Falstaff. These
readings, such as Ernst Kris's influential discussion of Oedipal dynamics in the play ("Prince Hal's Conflict" in The Psychoanalytic Quarterly 17 [1948]: 492-504), tend to articulate that relationship in terms of substitution and displacement. Similarly, J.I.M. Stewart has argued that Falstaff functions as a "substitute" upon which the Prince's ambivalence for his father can be displaced ("The Birth and Death of Falstaff" in Character and Motive in Shakespeare [London: Longmans, 1949]: 111-139). And Philip Williams, in "The Birth and Death of Falstaff Reconsidered," expands the process of substitution elaborated by Kris and Stewart to include Falstaff's own defensive attachments: "Falstaff, without a son of his own, has found that son in Hal; and Hal, rejecting and rejected by his real father, has found Falstaff" (in Shakespeare Quarterly 8 [1957]: 362). Although more recent readings, such as John Blanpied's, forego the strictly Freudian terminology that frames earlier discussions, the emphasis on substitution and displacement can nevertheless be felt in the insistence on Falstaff's role as intermediary: "In the Boarshead rehearsal, Hal tries intensely to imagine a [filial] relationship, but it all turns upon the intermediary role of Falstaff" (Time and the Artist in Shakespeare's English Histories [Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1983]: 163). While all these readings offer rich accounts of the complex energies that circulate within the triangular relations of the Prince, Falstaff, and the King, they tend to limit the complexity of Falstaff's attachment to the Prince to the dilemmas of the father-son relationship, and to circumscribe Falstaff's role in the play within the dictates of his role as a father-substitute.

And yet, the passage from "I do" to "I will" is itself enormously complex. Does the repetition involve a doubly emphatic resolve, or does it enact yet another performative which is immediately deferred in the shift from present to future tense, and from "doing" to "willing"?

Falstaff's cryptic advice has puzzled generations of critics. Capell suggests that this "unintelligible" passage is best rendered as an "insinuation" that Falstaff "was the true piece of gold, the thing of value that a man should not part with; and advises the prince not to call it a counterfeit, that is, to throw it away; as he would do by giving him up to the sheriff." Malone takes a very different tact, paraphrasing the line as a command to "never call that which is a real danger, fictitious or imaginary. If you do, you are a madman without seeing so. Should you admit the sheriff, you would deserve that appellation." Cowl reads Falstaff's command in terms of friendship and intimacy: "You will prove to be true in your friendship (a true piece of gold), you will not play me Falst for you are by nature true gold (essentially made) though you seem a counterfeit." The
editor of the Variorum finally concludes that "A literal, and certain interpretation is obviously impossible."

Although even this desire seems wishful thinking on the part of Falstaff.

The Variorum editor cites Hurd's suspicion that "It is not likely that a man who runs behind the curtain for fear will fall asleep."


This more subtle and plaintive side of Falstaff's language, though, is often missed. For example, John Blanpied argues that Falstaff both "flaunt[s] and den[ies] his own manifest bulk... forever pointing both at and away from the assumed center of his huge performing power" (Time and the Artist in Shakespeare's English Histories 152-153).

Blanpied's celebratory metatheatrical reading, though, ignores the tendency of Falstaff's manipulations of his excessive corporeality to be less a matter of "power" than of poignancy. Blanpied's praise of Falstaff's ability to "body forth something that is absent- a source of presence- and therefore, to point away from what is toward what my be" comes at the expense of acknowledging the sense of lack and powerlessness out of which Falstaff's "becomings" emerge.

15. The contents that Falstaff invents here carry an inordinate amount of Shakespearean weight, particularly the "bonds" and "ring" which invoke the central devices of The Merchant of Venice, written shortly before Henry IV, Part One. The sentimental attachment implicit in Falstaff's allusions to his grandfather's seal-ring is reminiscent of the unexpected poignancy of Shylock's memory of the ring that the runaway Jessica exchanges for a monkey in Genoa: "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (III.i.121-122). And the invocation of the lost ring as a ploy to trap the Prince in his own deceipts recalls for me the "ring plot" in which Portia and Nerissa seek to ensnare Bassanio and Gratiano.

16. The phrase is Calderwood's: "Falstaff needs no instruction in verbal skepticism. He knows instinctively that words can be turned inside out like cheveril gloves and that all large ideals have small cash value" (Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad 39). Calderwood's jump from skepticism to "shallowness," however, seems reductive and premature.

17. Ibid, 42-43.


19. Ibid, 144.


21. Much Ado About Nothing and As You Like It tie for the second highest rate, with four instances of the word "counterfeit" apiece.
25 Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad 88.
CHAPTER FOUR

Lear's Shadow: The Fool and the Sum of Nothing

Of all Shakespeare's plays that involve the phenomenon of nay-saying, *King Lear* may be the most powerful. While it is the Fool who inherits the personality of the Shakespearean ironist from Mercutio and Falstaff, in the end it is Lear who takes over the role of the charismatic and demonic nay-sayer, and whose nihilistic refusals wind up razing the ground upon which affirmations can be built. If, as Norman Holland suggests, the Fool "seems to stand for Cordelia,"¹ ministering to Lear in her stead, then it also seems true that Lear mediates the attachment of the Fool to Cordelia almost as much as Cordelia may mediate the intimacies shared by the Fool and Lear. Although the Fool's disappearance is perhaps the necessary bridge across which Cordelia returns to the play, his "death" also crosses over into that realm which Lear's last-scene nay-saying seems to clear the space for--whatever "life" it is that all his great refusals paradoxically create--as Lear's nihilism levels the ground upon which the radical affirmations of *Anthony and Cleopatra* can be built.

We first experience the Fool indirectly, through two references to him that precede his actual entrance into the
play. The initial reference comes in Act One scene three, immediately after Goneril steps on stage:

Enter Gonerill, and a Steward
Gon. Did my Father strike my Gentleman for chiding of his Foole?
Ste. I Madam.
Gon. By day and by night, he wrongs me, every howre
He flashes into one grosse crime, or other,
That sets us all at ods: Ile not endure it;
His knights grow riotous, and himselfe upbraides us
On every trifle. When he returns from hunting,
I will not speake with him, say I am sicke,
If you come slacke of former services,
You shall do well, the fault of its Ile answer.
Ste. He’s comming Madam, I heare him.
Gon. Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your Fellowes: I’d have it come to question;
If he distaste it, let him to my Sister,
Whose mind and mine I know in that are one,
Remember what I have said.
Ste. Well Madam.
Gon. And let his Knights have colder lookes among you: what growes of it no matter, advise your fellows so, Ile write straight to my Sister to hold my course; prepare for dinner (1.3.1-26).

In retrospect, it is striking that Goneril first mentions the Fool, and that she does so with her very first line. From the very beginning, then, the Fool is caught in a web of possessives that pulls in many ways at once: "Did my Father strike my Gentleman for chiding of his Foole?". Goneril’s "my’s" ("my Father," "my Gentleman") almost instinctively assert her own dominion even as they come up against her father’s unequivadable "his."² In Goneril’s language, the possessive is profoundly flexible, and becomes a locus of ambiguity and contradictoriness. Goneril’s two
"my's" situate themselves over and against Lear's solitary "his," and thus avoid the kind of attachment that would entail a blurring or absorbing of identities. Even the sense of complicity with Regan created by the language of "let him to my Sister,/ Whose mind and mine I know in that are one" nonetheless requires Lear to be the matrix of that attachment. The phonetic blending of "mind" and "mine," together with the amorphousness of Goneril's "that," signal the ambivalence inherent in a language of connectedness that poses one form of attachment—full of impulses toward blending and melting—against another whose very function is to diffuse those impulses.

Possessive pronouns also figure prominently in the next mention of the yet-to-appear Fool, when Oswald's practiced negligence to Lear's calls for his daughter sets off baffled reprisals at the "slacking" of "former services:"

Lear. Dinner ho, dinner, where's my knave? my Foole? Go you and call my Foole hither. You you Sirrah, where's my Daughter? Enter Steward.
Ste. So please you-- Exit.
Lear. What saies the Fellow there? Call the Clotpole backe: wher's my Foole? Ho, I thinke the world's asleepe, how now? Where's that Mungrell?..but where's my Foole? I have not seene him this two daies.
Knight. Since my young Ladies going into France Sir, the Foole hath much pined away.
Lear. No more of that, I have noted it well, goe you and tell my Daughter, I would speake with her. Goe you call hither my Foole (1.4.42-77).

Lear's calls for dinner, steward, Fool, and daughter blur together to create a sense of need and confusion, maybe even
an odd sort of permutability and impotent conjuring. Lear's calls for "my Foole" trigger calls for "my Daughter" which in turn trigger more calls for the Fool--setting into motion a complex chain of surrogacy which reaches even to Cordelia by virtue of the ambiguous reference to "my Daughter," even though Goneril is of course understood as the "daughter" in question.

So already the Fool is linked to absence, and to Cordelia, even before the Knight's answer links them specifically in loss and grief: "Since my young Ladies going into France Sir, the Foole hath much pined away." The connectedness between Cordelia and the Fool nonetheless remains embedded in the language of the play, emerging again only in the play's final moments with Lear's "And my poore Foole is hang'd" (5.3.306). The intimacy shared by the Fool and Cordelia thus proves almost as elusive as that between the Fool and Lear, and seems entirely contingent on absence, as they never appear onstage together. Although at times the distance created by the Fool and Cordelia never sharing the stage becomes paradoxically a space of intimacy in which they are, as it were, collapsed, the sense of attachment between them nonetheless remains stubbornly subtextual.

The Fool's first appearance in the play, then, is striking for its belatedness, which in turn calls attention to the absence of the Fool from the first scene of the play, where in retrospect we might expect to find him. Indeed,
when the Fool finally does appear about twenty lines after Lear's "conjurings," interrupting Lear's payment of the disguised Kent for his "service," his rather abrupt entrance ushers us back into the theatrical space of the opening scene, as his bitter jests parody Lear's relinquishment of authority:

Enter Foole.
Foole. Let me hire him too, here's my Coxcombe.
Lear. How now my pretty knave, how dost thou?
Foole. Sirrah, you were best take my Coxcombe.
Lear. Why my Boy?
Foole. Why? For taking one's part that's out of favour, nay, & thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly, there take my Coxcombe; why this fellow ha's banish'd two on's Daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will, if thou follow him, thou must needs weare my Coxcombe. How now Nuncle? would I had two Coxcombes and two Daughters.
Lear. Why my Boy?
Fool. If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my Coxcombes my selfe, there's mine, beg another of thy Daughters.
Lear. Take heed Sirrah, the whip.
Foole. Truth's a dog must to kennell, hee must bee whipt out, when the Lady Brach may stand by'th'fire and stinke.
Lear. A pestilent gall to me.
Foole. Sirha, Ile teach thee a speech.
Lear. Do.
Foole. Marke it Nuncle;
Have more than thou showest,
Speake lesse than thou knowest,
Lend lesse then thou owest,
Ride more then thou goest,
Larne more then thou trwest,
Set lesse then thou throwest;
Leave thy drinke and thy whore,
And keep in a dore,
And thou shalt have more,
Then two tens to a score.
Lear. This is nothing Foole.
Foole. Then 'tis like the breath of an unfeed Lawyer, you gave me nothing for't, can you make no use of nothing Nuncle?
Lear. Why no Boy,
Nothing can be made of nothing.
Foole. Prythee tell him, so much the rent of his
land comes to, he will not beleve a Foole. (1.4.
95-135).

I have quoted at such length in order to capture all the
inflectedness of the Fool's own language. There is the
idiosyncratic appropriation of the proverbial and the
commonsensical, the peasant cynicism inherent in the
proverbial, the tendency to reduce motivation to the lowest,
self-serving denominator. And yet there is also this schism
in the Fool between his savage realism and everything within
him that his pragmatism describes as "folly" ("if thou
follow him, thou must needs weare my Coxcombe"). Even the
Fool's most hard-nosed rhetoric of common sense--the song
that "teaches" Lear to "Have more than thou showest" and
"Speake lesse than thou knowest"--articulates a dividedness
(Perhaps even a conflictedness) that complicates the Fool's
blunt pragmatism.

From his very first line ("Let me hire him too, here's
my Coxcombe") the Fool's language seizes on the rhetoric of
payment and debt spoken by Lear ("there's earnest of thy
service") even as it mocks the deceptiveness of Lear's
postures of self-divestment. As the Fool proceeds to ignore
Lear's "How now my pretty knave, how dost thou?" (the text
is ambiguous here about exactly whom the Foole is
addressing); he engages Kent in a performance of mock-
divestment that aims its sarcasm at the "folly" of following
one who's "out of favor:" "there take my Coxcombe; why this fellow ha's banish'd two on's Daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will, if thou follow him, thou must needs weare my Coxcombe" (101-104). While it is a commonplace of Lear criticism that the Fool's plain-speaking barbs speak as the voice of "truth," of "common sense," and of "sanity," the Fool's constant needling of Lear also defends against being absorbed into Lear's own boundlessness, against being caught in the grip of Lear's own pathology of self-delusion. When the Fool asks Lear, "Can you make no use of nothing Nuncle?", he seems to speak Cordelia's own "nothing" in scornful rebuke of Lear's own appropriations, those pretentious acts of "giving all" which "make use" of that which they appear to give away. The Fool's question also plays uncannily upon Lear's earlier warning to Cordelia that "Nothing will come of nothing" (1.1.90), as if to show up Lear's failure to recognize the fullness of Cordelia's "nothing," which is itself hopelessly mired in the language of division and fractions that it resists.

In her classic essay on the Fool, Enid Welsford argues that the Fool's "tactless jokes and snatches of song spring so evidently from genuine grief." But it is also true that the Fool's jests deflect as well as express "genuine" grief, and that any such grief is itself most difficult to apprehend, especially in regard to its "genuineness."
Although most readings of the Fool stress his loyalty and attachment to Lear, in this scene it is Lear's language that speaks of endearment and familiarity—"my pretty knave," "my Boy," my Foose"—and always with elements of condescension and belittlement. One would have to look far and wide for traces of any kind of attachment in the Fool's language that is not beset by a corresponding cynicism about that very attachment. It is almost as if the play goes out of its way to keep us unsure about any kind of "sentimental" reading of the Fool, as the sense of investedness that is so evident with Mercutio and, for all his gruff posturings, Falstaff, remains so elusive here.

The Fool's recital of songs that structures so much of his first scene, and that has subsequently been seen as so integral to his character, is in fact rather uncharacteristic—Lear asks the Fool as if somewhat discomfited, "When were you wont to be so full of Songs sirrah?" (1.4.170-173). The Fool's bitter reply ("I have used it Nunckle, ere since thou mad'st thy Daughters thy Mothers, for when thou gav'st them the rod, and put'st downe thine owne breeches [1.4.170-173]" encapsulates the anxieties about feminine power and masculine vulnerability that pervade King Lear. The Fool's denigration of Lear as an "O without a figure" and as "nothing," with its feminization of loss as a castrating wound, may participate in the play's pathological terror of the vaginal that finds its voice most
often in the ravings of Lear.\footnote{10} But the "O" of the Fool's language is an utterance as well as a visual cipher, a verbal expression of pure, naked feeling that makes of Lear the very figure of exposed emotions. The Fool's own phallic jokes—"thou gav'st them the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches" (1.4.173-174), "Cry to it nuncle, as the cockney did... she knapp'd em... with a stick, and cried, 'Down, wantons, down!'" (2.4.122-125)—deploy the strategy of "beating love down" initiated by Mercutio, with its need for phallic "rods" and "sticks" to "beat down" longing and grief, and its despair that phallic defenses only manage to inflict even deeper wounds and ever more naked expressions of feeling. The Fool's songs and jests may act to "siphon off... the potentialities of comedy in Lear's behavior,"\footnote{11 as Norman Holland suggests, in their attempts to deflect Lear's own grief and madness into jest. But more importantly, they vent the Fool's bitterness at his own growing irrelevance and powerlessness, and at Lear's determination to assume a posture of "wrongedness" despite the Fool's pragmatic insistence that Lear has gotten precisely what he has deserved. Whether the Fool may be located squarely within this notion of "deserving"—a word whose ostensible innocence is itself problematized over the course of the play—or whether he is ironically situated towards the language of "causes" remains a problem that goes
to the heart of the necessity of his disappearance from the play.

Traces of the Fool’s complex ambivalence toward Lear also adhere to the rather strange reluctance with which the Fool "follows" Lear. Although readings of the Fool tend to elide this hesitancy while stressing the Fool’s unshakeable loyalty, an important exception is Empson’s trenchant critique of Fool’s ostensible "highmindedness:" "The Fool boasts of staying with Lear, but he has been sent with him, and would probably be afraid of going off alone. When we last see him, he is again ordered to follow Lear, this time by Kent." Indeed, the Fool must be summarily dismissed by Goneril—"You Sir, more Knave then Foole, after your master (1.4.314)—when he lingers behind after Lear and his knights have already left the stage. The Fool’s subsequent cry for Lear to "take the Foole with thee" is thus spoken six lines after Lear has exited, and after Goneril’s sharp proddings. Goneril’s language evokes the Fool’s doubleness ("more Knave then Foole") in ways that suggest the Fool’s own spinning out of all the contradictoriness of himself as a "fool"—"Do’st thou know the difference my Boy, betweene a bitter Foole, and a sweet one"; "I had rather be any kind o’thing than a foole, and yet I would not be thee, Nunckle"; "If I speake like my selfe in this, let him be whipt that first findes it so." Such self-referential moments suggest the ways in which the only Shakespearean cynic who can
unabashedly call himself a "fool" does so both ironically ("If I speake like myselfe in this") and yet with the ring of bitter truth ("I had rather be any kind o' thing than a foole").

The diffidence that manifests itself in the Fool’s reluctance to leave with Lear can also be glimpsed in the seemingly irrelevant asides that also act to forestall any tandem departures. In the scene following Goneril’s blunt dismissal, the Fool again remains onstage alone after Lear’s exit, warning the audience that "She that’s a Maid now, & laughs at my departure, Shall not be a Maid long, unlesse things be cut shorter" (1.5.51-52). Indeed, one of the Fool’s most famous speeches, the 15-line "prophecy" that closes the second scene of Act Three, is likewise a solitary "aside" spoken on an empty stage that acts to delay the Fool’s following of Lear and Kent offstage. In fact, that the prophecy acts to delay the Fool’s exit with Lear has been seen as grounds enough for claims that the speech (which appears only in the Folio text) is a spurious interpolation.14 But the Fool’s lingering behind and alone after Lear’s exits is not an aberration, as these critics would like to claim, but part of a pattern of reluctance that structures many of the Fool’s scenes. His solitary asides to the audience invest the Fool with a self-reflexive theatricality (that is, after all, implicit in his intra-dramatic role as "fool") that does not so much threaten the
suspension of belief in the truth of character and the reality of theater as implicate the audience itself in the process Cavell describes as "acknowledgment:"

How is acknowledgment expressed; that is, how do we put ourselves in another’s presence? In terms which have so far come out, we can say: By revealing ourselves, by allowing ourselves to be seen. When we do not, when we keep ourselves in the dark, the consequence is that we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him. There is fictional existence with a vengeance, and there is the theatricality which theater such as King Lear must overcome, is meant to overcome, shows the tragedy in failing to overcome."

When the Fool reaches across the permeable boundary that uneasily maintains the distinction between theater and the real, his tentative steps beyond the frame challenge the protective "darkness" that conceals the audience, and that protects us from his gaze. When the Fool scorns "laughter" at his departure, he implicates us in our own responses to the tragedy. But paradoxically, it is his own status as a "fiction" that the Fool must exploit to show up our tendency toward the kind of theatricalization that Cavell describes. The Fool must gesture towards his own existence as a "character" to expose our own complicity in "mak[ing] the world a stage for him." There is a rich irony in the fact that these moments of potential exposure and vulnerability have often been dismissed as spurious by editors who insist that they come not from the pen of Shakespeare but out of the mouth of "some buffoon actor."
For then the Fool remains concealed, even in these moments of ostensible revelation, hidden in the illicit corporeality of the actor. That these metatheatrical moments delay the Fool's following after Lear gestures toward the preference for theatricalized display over unmediated intimacy that characterizes Shakespeare's nay-sayers, a preference in constant tension with a vague but pervasive dissatisfaction with the limits of theatrical relationship. And these solitary moments of self-referentiality will also, in retrospect, become painfully ironic, as it is the Fool's very skepticism, which he deploys both to keep Lear sane and to keep him at a distance, that Lear absorbs into his own discourse, and that allows Lear to pull the trigger on "life" in the play's final scenes.

II

As the play moves out of the enclosed spaces that dominate the first two acts and onto the open heath that Act Three inhabits, Lear's nihilism paradoxically comes to seem almost quixotic, even as the Fool's own pragmatism begins to show signs of strain. Our first glimpses into the changing dynamics of the Fool's skepticism and Lear's nihilism comes with the anonymous gentleman's narrative of Lear "Contending with the fretful Elements" (3.1.4), accompanied by "None but the Foole, who labours to out-jest/ His heart-stroke injuries" (3.1.16-17). The complicated syntax here allows
"heart-strook injuries" to refer both to the Fool and to Lear, as if it is his own "heart-strook injuries" that the Fool "labors to outjest." The gentleman's narrative articulates the Fool's "labours" as a kind of exorcism, an attempt to "out-jest" the griefs of Lear as one might drive out an evil spirit. But the ambiguous syntax also allows for the Fool's "labour" to take place intrapsychically as well, as an exhalation of his own deeply internal longings and griefs. Empson's reading of the line suggests even more layers of complexity in the language:

The idea in 'out--' is that of defeating an enemy by doing more of the same kind of thing... if [the Fool] can laugh at Lear's injuries more than they (being personified) laugh at Lear, he will have saved him. 17

Where Empson's brilliant reading of the dynamics of "out" goes awry, it seems to me, is its paraphrase of "out-jest" as "laughing at Lear's injuries" (emphasis mine). Thus, when Empson claims that "the actual words only say that he is trying to make jokes adequate to so big an occasion," his reading misses the more subtle side of the Fool's "labours" as that which attempts to expel his own vexed feelings of "injury." Like Romeo's "He jests at scars that never felt a wound" (emphasis mine), 18 Empson's paraphrase withholds the language's "outward" movement and redirects it in such a way that the Fool's own griefs and longings disappear--"that never felt a wound." Sometimes it seems that the nay-sayers become the victims of their own strategies of deflecting
pain into jest, as their "sweating labor" to "outjest... heart-strook injuries"--a labor born all too near the heart--is misappropriated and misconceived as the derisive and empty laughter of a fool. 19

Immediately following the gentleman's brief narrative, we finally witness the Fool's "labours" during the only scene in the play in which the Fool and Lear appear alone onstage together. 20 The raging Lear ("Blow windes & crack your cheeks; Rage, blow") makes no acknowledgment of the Fool's presence or pleas, and doesn't seem to see or hear him; not until Kent re-enters approximately thirty lines later does Lear speak directly to the Fool. The Fool's pleas for Lear to move "inward" ("Good Nunkle, in, ask thy Daughters blessing, heere's a night pitties neither Wisemen, nor Fooles" 21) are drowned out by the sheer force of Lear's earth-shaking commands--"Rumble thy belly full: spit Fire, spowt Raine:/ Nor Raine, Winde, Thunder, Fire are my Daughters" (3.2.14-15) --and by the ferocity of the elements themselves that Lear claims to command. The Fool's rhyming set-piece (interrupted by the arrival of Kent) seems painfully aware of its own irrelevance to Lear, even as it resonates with the bitterness of attachments severed and betrayed:

The Codpiece that will house, before the head has any,
The Head, and he shall Lowse: so Beggers marry many.
The man y makes his Toe, what he his Hart shold
make,
Shall of a Corne cry woe, and turne his sleep to
wake (3.2.27-34).

The Fool's language seems especially cryptic and self-
referential here, oscillating between vulgar proverbs and
bitter cynicisms. The Fool begins by invoking the "codpiece"
with an oblique gesture toward the impotence of his own
phallic jests in penetrating Lear's increasing self-
absorption. With the reference to "lowse," which releases
vague suggestions of sexual disease, the Fool's language
becomes subtly intricated in the pathology of Lear's own
terror of "that dark place." It is as if the Fool's anger
and frustration at Lear's relinquishment of phallic power
(and to "daughters," no less) turns inward upon itself,
triggering the almost compulsive misogyny that the Fool's
concluding non-sequitur makes seem both irrelevant and
defensive: "For there was never yet faire woman, but shee
made mouthes in a glass" (3.2.35-36). Harbored in the Fool's
intermittent misogyny may also be a longing for Cordelia
that neither the Fool nor Lear ever articulate but that
feels so palpable in their language, a depth of feeling
whose "rising" force—"O how this Mother swells up toward my
heart!/ Hystoricall passio, downe thou climbing sorrow,/ Thy
Elements below"22—must be defended against through a
phallic violence that can only puncture the very wound it
would protect.
With the entrance of Kent, the Fool lapses into silence, as if ceding the voice of sanity and self-consciousness to him. The Fool emerges from his uncharacteristic silence only at Lear's rather feeble attempts at conversation, and even then his words seem hopelessly aware of their own insignificance:

Lear. Come on my boy. How dost my boy? Art cold? I am cold my selfe. Where is this straw, my Fellow? The Art of our Necessities is strange, And can make vilde things precious. Come, your Hovel; Poore Foole, and Knave, I have one part in my heart That's sorry yet for thee (3.2.68-73). Fool. He that has and a little-tyne wit, With heigh-ho, the Winde and the Raine, Must make content with his Fortunes fit, Though the Raine it raineth every day (3.2.68-77).

Although this passage is frequently read as a demonstration of Lear's developing powers of empathy, the language itself articulates the insidiousness of a presence whose hugeness seems to absorb even as it reaches out toward the other---Lear no sooner shows concern for the Fool ("Art cold?") then his language swallows up those feelings into self-interest: "I am cold myself." When Lear admits that "I have one part in my heart/ That's sorry yet for thee," his language partakes in the divisive arithmetic that has plagued almost all the play's expressions of feeling. With what measured sparingness does the Lear who says without apparent guile, "I gave you all," anatimize the regions of his own heart in
an attempt at empathy that still cannot escape self-centeredness.

For his part, the Fool sings a haunting verse that echoes the melancholy song of Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and that speaks a poignant language of smallness and insignificance in opposition to Lear’s magnitude and "moreness." But already the Fool’s language seems unable to extricate itself from Lear’s, engaging a "he" that can include both himself and Lear, as if the Fool’s own subjectivity is gradually but irrevocably being overwhelmed by the force of Lear’s enormous presence. There is also, though, a sense of separateness that emerges with Lear’s "Poore Foole, and Knave," the first time in the play that Lear has not prefixed the Fool’s name with "my." As Lear’s language subtly modifies "Poore Foole" with the amplified "and Knave," the chain of possessives that initiated the conversation ("Come on my boy, How dost my boy? Art cold? I am cold my selfe. Where is this straw, my fellow?") is, for the moment, broken. Whether the brief disappearance of "my" from Lear’s language signals the emergence of a Cavellian ethic whereby the renunciation of "my" is necessary for acknowledging the separateness of the other, or in fact lets fall the last buffer between "me" and "you," remains uncertain.

As if not trusting the possibilities for separateness contained in Lear’s’s language, the Fool again remains
onstage alone after Lear and Kent depart, announcing his intention to "speake a Prophesie ere I go" (3.2.80). This prophecy, which has been called a "parody of some pseudo-Chaucerian verses to be found in [the]... Arte of English Poesie" is itself, like the Fool’s song, a reworking of earlier material, but this time twice removed from the "original" source. The derivative nature of the Fool’s prophecy has, in fact, provoked ongoing critical disagreement about its authenticity. While earlier commentators, such as White and Clarke, have cited the absence of the prophecy in the Quarto text as evidence of its spuriousness, later critics, such as John Kerrigan, point to the speech’s presence in the Folio text as supporting their arguments for the Folio’s superior stature as an authorial revision of the Quarto. In his essay for Gary Taylor and Michael Warren’s The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of King Lear, Kerrigan argues that the "addition" of the Fool’s prophecy "marks an important stage in the Fool’s extrication of himself from the action," and therefore "dramatizes, most relevantly, the F[olio] Fool’s growing sense of his own irrelevance". Although I agree with Kerrigan that the prophecy is full of a sense of the Fool’s increasing extraneousness, I am as wary of his arguments against the Quarto on interpretive grounds as I am of White and Clarke’s arguments against the passage’s inclusion in the text on similarly interpretive
grounds ("The fact of the Fool's present speech occurring after Lear has left the stage alone serves to condemn it as spurious"). That the Fool's speech, which itself involves the problematics of truth and belief by declaring itself a "prophecy," and by mocking the very "soothsaying" which it performs, should itself become the object of critical attempts to establish its "authenticity" and "realness" is yet another of the many ironies that surround the skepticism of the Fool.

The prophecy itself piles up line after line of wryly cynical jests that mock the very ominousness that they so disingenuously purport:

When Priests are more in word, then matter;
When Brewers marre their Malt with water;
When Nobles are their Taylors Tutors,
No Heretiques burn'd, but wenches Sutors;
When every Case in Law is right;
No Squire in debt, nor no poor Knight;
When Slanders do not live in Tongues;
Nor Cut-purses come not to throngs;
When Usurers tell their Gold i' th' Field,
And Bauds, and whores, do Churches build,
Then comes the time, who lives to see't,
That going shalbe us'd with feet.
This prophecie Merlin shall make, for I live before his time (3.2.81-96).

Even as the prophecy ends on a line calculated to disappoint any anticipation of ominous prediction that may have been created by "Then comes the time, who lives to see't," the Fool then utters an unexpected line which seems to generate belief in that which the Fool's own skepticism derides:
"This prophecie Merlin shall make, for I live before his time." Kerrigan's argument that

In the clever last line, the rewriter ostensibly makes the Fool pile prophecy on prophecy with dizzying rashness, but actually draws attention to the truth inculcated throughout the tragedy, that the only sure knowledge is hindsight. 

falls short by emphasizing the last line's "cleverness" and truncating its power to put us in the presence of the prophetic which the speech itself disavows, to make "real" for us the apocalyptic visions that the speech is ostensibly meant to dispel. The Fool's speech is in fact only the prophecy of a prophecy ("This prophecie Merlin shall make"), and the stunning last line infuses the prophecy with an unexpected otherness—as if the Fool's cynical soothsaying has inadvertantly possessed him of the anachronistic spirit of Merlin. When the Fool announces that "This prophecy Merlin shake make," he "step[s] out of the remote period as a contemporary," and rather unsettlingly flaunts the discontinuity in theatrical illusion his asides and addresses to the audience create. In so doing, the Fool paradoxically makes even more sure the tremendous hold and seductiveness of such illusion. Theatrical and "real" presentness converge as the Fool's prophecy insists on both the inscrutable presence and the haunting absence of he who speaks the scripted "I."

Long speeches, like this prophecy of the Fool, also function in King Lear to delay conversational intimacy or to
evade potentially fraught encounters—and the Fool does seem to linger in the emptiness of the stage rather than subject himself to what being with Lear has come to involve. The prophecy’s last line, "That going shalbe us’d with feet," is couched in the language of "using" and "making use" that marks some of the Fool’s most paradigmatic utterances ("Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?"). Its complicated syntax reverses the expected "feet shalbe us’d for going," a dislocation that paraphrases of the line, such as "feet shall be used for walking," tend to regularize. The reference to "feet" seems to emerge from the undercurrent of lowliness and subjectedness that flows through the Fool’s language, even as the syntax would transform the expected object status of "feet" ("feet shall be us’d for...") into a more complicated, coactive process whereby "going shall be us’d with feet" (emphasis mine). Readings like Kerrigan’s that insist on the Fool’s agency—"As he recites Merlin’s prophecy, the F[olio] Fool begins to leave Lear"—miss the more subtle, other side of the Fool’s language—the wistfulness about "going" that escapes the Fool’s conflictedness about his attachment to Lear as well as his anxieties about being swallowed up by the sheer magnitude of Lear’s presence. Lear’s cry for "Close pent-up guilts" to "Rive your concealing continents" (3.1.57–58), then, may serve as a description of the Fool’s own intrapsychic
fracturedness, "concealed" by bitterly humorous jests and cynicisms that nonetheless bear (bare) its traces.

III

The Fool's prophecy is his final tour-de-force "performance" in the play. As Lear becomes increasingly transfixed by the histrionics of Edgar's "Poor Tom," the Fool's sane-minded promptings seem supplanted by the voice of self-pitying madness, a seductive language of externalized "foul fiends" and "acts of darkness" that gives Lear's own madness the vocabulary it needs to speak itself fully into being. But even as "Mad Tom" brings out so much in Lear, Lear's own psyche becomes a kind of crucible where the elements of Mad Tom and the Fool mix, even though each tries to defuse the other. Indeed, the discourse of "Mad Tom" winds up catalyzing the energy of the Fool's nay-saying, as both are transfigured into Lear's own discourse of "nothings" and saying "no." The appearance of "Poor Tom," then, does not simply take over the Fool's place at Lear's side, however much it may seem that the Fool's pragmatism is drowned out by the embodiment of Lear's own pathology, the "thing itself," "one of my hundred," the "spirit" of Lear's indulgent guilt. Rather, the advent of "Poor Tom" sets into motion a complex process whereby both the Fool's nay-saying and "Poor Tom's" madness are absorbed and magnified into Lear's own complicated nihilism.
That Edgar's arrival barely overlaps the disappearance of the Fool has hardly gone unnoticed by criticism of the play, or by performances of King Lear--Antony Sher, who played the Fool in Adrian Noble's Stratford production, explains that the Fool "is eventually replaced by Poor Tom whose elemental violence acts like a drug in releasing the full force of Lear's madness, a more powerful 'hit' than the relatively safe anarchy which the Fool can provide". John Kerrigan similarly observes that Edgar's "Poor Tom" is an "important arrival in both versions of King Lear" that initially "upstage[s] the Fool." Kerrigan goes on to say that "It is particularly noticeable in performance that, after an abortive attempt to mediate between Lear and the newly-arrived Bedlam... the Fool lapses into silence". What these accounts of "Poor Tom's" overshadowing of the Fool leave out, however, is the way Lear absorbs both the Fool's skepticism and Edgar's self-pitying vengefulness into his own discourse. "Poor Tom" may, as Sher suggests, release Lear's more violent impulses, but his discourse also seems to get transvalued into something else--another voice trying to articulate some kind of forgiveness in a bizarre, nihilistic way ("None do's offend, none, I say none, Ile able 'em; take that of me my Friend" [4.6.168-169]).

"Poor Tom" makes his first appearance after chasing the Fool out of the hovel, as the Fool cries "Come not in heere Nuncle, here's a spirit, helpe me, helpe me" (3.4.39-40). It
is as if Edgar's "Poor Tom" emerges from the womb-like darkness and enclosure of the novel like some kind of monstrous birth—even as the force of that birth expels the Fool from the protection, however meager, of the novel and thrusts him back into the storm. From "Poor Tom's" first scattershot ravings, his language almost insidiously targets the Fool's presence even while playing on Lear's growing paranoia. The language of "Poor Tom" invokes certain touchstones of the Fool's language only to distort and cast suspicion on them—like the tendency of the Fool's language to cluster almost talismanically around "follow" ("let go thy hold, when a great wheele runs downe a hill, least it breake thy necke with following"; "That Sir, which serves and seekes for gaine,/ And followes but for forme"), which seems particularly vulnerable to the language of "Poor Tom's" insistent casting of suspicion and distrust ("Away, the foule Fiend followes me"; "Beware my Follower"). "Poor Tom" employs the Fool's language only to subvert it, speaking to Lear's pathology in the seductive language of its own self-absorption and paranoia. The Fool's attempts to interject wry jests into Lear's increasingly delusional ramblings—and to break "Poor Tom's" almost hypnotic hold on Lear—fall on deaf ears. When he voices a bitter "Nay" to Lear's "Would'st thou give 'em all?," even the Fool's trenchant cynicism ("he reserv'd a Blanket, else we had bin all sham'd" (3.4.65-66) is powerless to impede Lear's rush
into bitter ravings: "Now all the plagues that in the
pendulous ayre/ Hang fated o’re mens faults, light on thy
Daughters" (3.4.67-68).

Although the presence of "follow" in the language of
both the Fool and "Poor Tom" may seem too circumstantial to
carry the weight of argument, another ostensibly
inconsequential phrase caught in the middle of "Poor Tom’s"
first extended speech seems to gesture towards the Fool even
more explicitly, when "Poor Tom" speaks of "cours[ing] his
owne shadow for a traitor" (3.4.57-58). This malevolent echo
of the Fool’s own language ("Who is it that can tell me who
I am?" —"Lear’s shadow") seems to whisper sinisterly of the
disloyalty and treason of "followers" and "shadows," holding
out to Lear the mirror image of man "more sinned against
than sinning" that the Fool’s own bitter truths struggle to
"shame" Lear into abandoning. The Fool’s few attempts to
intercede between "Poor Tom" and Lear in this scene (he
tries again at line 78 with "This cold night will turne us
all to Fooles, and Madmen") are crushing failures—Lear
already seems to have absorbed "Poor Tom’s" language of
self-pity and violent recriminations. The Fool’s image of "a
little fire in a wilde Field" that "were like an old
Lecher’s heart, a small spark, all the rest on’s body, cold"
(3.4.111-113) articulates a fierce smallness that will not
yet yield to the encroaching coldness of the body that
surrounds and threatens to extinguish it. This haunting
image imbricates the Fool's own situation into that of Lear, as if the Fool himself is that "little fire" in the "wild field" of Lear's madness, the "heart" that is but "a small spark" to the all but insensible coldness of the body that now possesses it.

Only one more scene must be played out before the Fool disappears from the play, and it dramatizes the Fool's increasing voicelessness and irrelevance to Lear's growing attachment to "Poor Tom" with such wrenching clarity that it is hard not to sympathize, if still not to agree, with those commentators who would expunge the scene's mock trial of Goneril and Regan on the grounds of its absence from the Folio text. As the scene begins with Lear, "Poor Tom," Kent, and the Fool clustered inside the hovel, the Fool gamely tries to interrupt "Poor Tom's" steady stream of overwrought non-sequiturs by attempting to re-establish the familiar pattern of repartee with Lear ("Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a fool?") but with no success. The Fool's jests struggle to realign Lear with sane-mindedness by calling attention to the overt madness of "Poor Tom," whom Lear (mis)apprehends as the true "philosopher" of his condition, even as the Fool's syntactically complex and discursive rebuke to Lear's "wrong answers" ("No, he's a Yeoman, that he's a Gentleman to his Sonne: for hee's a mad Yeoman that sees his Sonne a Gentleman before him") struggles to force Lear's weakening
mind to trace its complicated patterns in a kind of therapeutic mental exercise. But the Fool’s ministrations cannot penetrate the increasing inwardness of Lear’s turn toward a madness that defends against the threatening reality that the plain-speaking jests of the Fool would thrust upon him. And the Fool’s bitterness at Lear’s unreachability and at his own irrelevance to the aged king seems to escape in the wry, sad cynicism of "He’s mad, that trusts in the tameness of a Wolfe, a horse’s health, a boyes love, or a whores oath" (3.6.18-19).32 The Fool’s language veers into the sexual disgust and misogyny that haunts the nay-sayers’ defenses against being made vulnerable by the claims of love and loyalty, even as the unexpected tenderness and wistfulness of the reference to "a boy’s love" is immediately undercut by the biting sarcasm of "a whore’s oath."

In the mock trial which follows, the Fool seems to take part only to expose the inanity of the proceedings, to bring Lear up hard against the "reality" which he seems so bent on obscuring. As Lear orders the "arraignmnt" of Goneril, the Fool ostensibly joins in the pretense: "Come hither mistriss is your name Gonorill." But after Lear eagerly takes up the Fool’s opening gambit with "She cannot deny it," the Fool explodes the indulgent and deceptive pretenses of Lear’s courtroom with "Cry you mercy I tooke you for a ioyne-stool" (3.6.52), puncturing illusions which flatter
Lear's sense of himself as mightily abused. The Fool thus refuses to play his scripted role in a "scenario" which acts, as Harry Berger so acutely observes, to "reinforce [Lear's] sense of the inevitability of his... plight," and to enable Lear to go on evading the knowledge of his own complicity while "magnifying the complicity of others." 33 If Berger is right in claiming that scenarios like the mock trial "seem to have the effect which Freud ascribed to dreams in that their displacements and condensations enable the dreamer/character to go on sleeping, to delay re-entry into a world or knowledge or self whose reality is feared," 34 then the Fool's unwillingness to participate in the mock trial, indeed his futile attempts to "wake" Lear from the unnatural sleep of his self-delusion by interrupting with the stark facts of their surroundings, are the Fool's last efforts to reclaim Lear from the madness that serves to protect his self-absorption, however much that madness may be feared: "O let me not be mad, not mad sweet Heaven: Keepe me in temper, I would not be mad" (2.1.46-47). But any resistance to madness or encouragement of the Fool's attempts to "keep him in temper" have fallen hopelessly away, as now Lear can only say "Make no noise, make no noise, draw the curtains" (3.6.83-84). And for the Fool there is only "And I'll go to bed at noon" (3.6.85), and then silence.
The Fool’s disappearance from the play, however, is much more nuanced than my account of it has thus far managed to suggest. Indeed, there is a sense in which the play is trying to overcome the very language of "causes" and "deserving" that dominate the Fool’s discourse, and to get beyond the reduction of human motivation to the lowest common denominator that the Fool’s peasant cynicism relentlessly avows. If the essential subtext of the Fool’s pragmatism may be distilled as "That's the way the world is" or "Well, what did you expect?," then the play’s need to be "rid" of the Fool becomes more complex, and cannot be managed simply by claiming that he is "replaced" by "Poor Tom," or absorbed in toto by Lear’s madness.

Indeed, Lear himself speaks the language of "causes" immediately before the Fool’s last line, saying to Edgar "Then let them Anatomize Regan: See what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in Nature that make these hard-hearts" (3.6.76-78). For all the bitterness implicit in the notions of "anatomization" and "breeding," Lear’s language nonetheless manages to create an opening, however slight, with "Is there any cause," its subtle mode of questioning (along with the plaintive "any") gently clearing the way for a language beyond causes and deserving—a language that can say "no cause, no cause" with negations that clear the space for a radical kind of forgiveness.
At any rate, the Fool's haunting last line—"And Ile go to bed at noone"—is actually a rephrasing of Lear's own "so, so, wee'll go to Supper i'th'morning," which it immediately follows. The Fool's language draws an emphatic "I" out of Lear's "we," even as it inverts the particularity of Lear's language of time and place—Supper/bed, morning/noon. The Fool's cryptic last line has been probed relentlessly for clues to his unexplained and unacknowledged disappearance from the play. Does it imply, as Kerrigan suggests, that the Fool "resolves to call it a day at 'noone', to abandon the action at its mid-point, to absent himself from half the story"35 in an act of self-preserving desertion? Or does the line intimate, as Cowden Clarke asserts, that the Fool has finally "sunk beneath the accumulated burden, and... gone to his eternal rest in the very 'noon' of his existence"?36 Or perhaps the Fool is merely uttering yet another proverbial rejoinder, roughly paraphrased as "And I'll play the fool" in the Riverside edition of the play, and not meant to carry too much interpretive weight? The Fool's final line is richly suggestive of the similarly off-stage and liminal demises of other Shakespearean nay-sayers—Mercutio's third-act, offstage death in the mid-day heat, Falstaff's undramatized, bed-ridden death "just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o' th' tide" (2.3.12-13). With "And Ile go to bed at noone," the Fool's language creates a sense of both the
inevitability and the wistfulness that surrounds the disappearances of the nay-sayers. "And Ile go" expresses both resignation and decision, both self-sacrifice and desertion, even as the allusion to the bed implicates the anxiety-ridden site where "dreamers often lie... while they do dream things true," and the final habitation of the heartbroken Falstaff, his body "as cold as any stone" (Henry V 2.3.26).

If, in the logic of the play, Cordelia's presence is irrevocably contingent on the Fool's absence, then that absence also seems a function of Lear's own enormous presence, as if the Fool must be absorbed into Lear before somehow returning as Cordelia. Antony Sher and Frank Middlemass both describe the Fool's disappearance in terms that suggest this contingency—Sher comments that the Fool "has simply been absorbed by Lear, replaced by his madness, digested as fodder," while Middlemass explains that "One sees [the Fool] almost as a reflection of the king, like the king's conscience or the king's common sense... When the brain goes, the fool goes!" Like Sher and Middlemass, Calderwood sees the Fool's disappearance in relation to Lear's "absorption" of the Fool's role, arguing that the Fool's disappearance "makes foolish sense. When Lear has absorbed the Fool's truths and begins to utter them himself, the Fool becomes redundant." Enid Welsford goes even further than Calderwood in suggesting that Lear not only
absorbs but actually becomes the Fool: "the King, having lost everything, including his wits, has now himself become the Fool". Perhaps Welsford comes closest to articulating the way in which Lear seems to absorb the very cynicism with which the Fool had tried to maintain distance between himself and Lear’s enormous presence. And yet it is that very spirit of nay-saying which becomes embodied not by the Fool but by Lear himself in the nihilistic refusals of the last scene. It is Lear’s own incarnation of the Fool’s discourse that opens up that space of woundedness which the Fool’s ironies seek so vexedly to protect.

IV

It is paradoxical that with the disappearance of the Fool, everything he represents—from the cynicism that permeates his quotidian way of thinking to the painful vulnerability that attends his guardedness—gets fearlessly articulated when Lear’s explosiveness becomes the vehicle for the language of negation and the phenomenology of skepticism. In the scenes following the Fool’s disappearance (a space of time in which Lear, too, is absent from the play), his presence is nonetheless invoked by a series of references that create a free-floating sense of the anxieties about vulnerability and betrayal that have attended the Fool’s own language: Gloucester’s "O my Follies! then Edgar was abus’d" (3.7.91) when told by Regan of Edmund’s treachery (and after being blinded by Cornwall),
Edgar's "Bad is the Trade that must play Foole to sorrow" (4.1.38) as he withholds his own identity from his father, even Goneril's "Oh vaine Foole" (4.2.61) that berates the "Milke-Liver'd" Albany for "bear[ing] a cheeke for blowes" (50-51). While these linguistic echoes may be construed as rather straightforward manifestations of the Fool's continuing presence in the play, the ways in which the Fool's nay-saying is transformed by Lear's own cynicism, which seems almost through its sheer volume to explode the contradictions energized by the Fool, is a much more complex phenomenon that resists simplistic notions of absorption or incarnation.

Although Sher argues that the Fool has been "replaced" by Lear's madness, traces of the Fool's nay-saying nonetheless remain in that very "madness." From the vengeance with which Lear makes himself vulnerable, to the self-mockery with which he derides his "kingship," Lear seems to incorporate the Fool's cynicism in all its contradicitoriness within his own discourse. Indeed, Lear's first utterance after the Fool's disappearance ("No, they cannot touch me for crying. I am the King himselfe" [4.6.83-84]) speaks a language of negation that spans both vulnerability and guardedness, even as it winds up making affirmations tinged with mockery and self-derision. Even as Lear transvalues Edgar's madness and the Fool's cynicism into an odd language of forgiveness ("I pardon that man's
life. What was thy cause?/ Adultery? thou shalt not dye" [4.6.109-110], that language nonetheless remains mired in the notions of "causes" and deserving that so permeated the Fool's ethos. The dishearteningness of what passes for common sense that the Fool's fierce pragmatism makes so palpable can be felt even more bitterly in Lear's "You see how the world goes" (4.6.147-148), which is in fact repeated as if for emphasis: "A man may see how the world goes, with no eyes" (150-151). The second utterance follows Lear's impatient dismissal of Gloucester's "I see it feelingly" with "What, art mad?" (149-150), thus articulating the dialectic of madness and common sense that the Fool was trapped in and which Lear still can't seem to escape. For Middlemass to say, then, that the Fool is "common sense" and that when "The Fool goes, the brain goes" not only divests the Fool of all his complicated "heartfulness," but also ignores the play's critique of what passes for common sense--of what the stakes are when the voice of sanity is itself defined as "common sense."

Indeed, the violence that had always lurked around the Fool's proverbials ("For you know Nunackle, the Hedge-Sparrow fed the Cuckoo so long, that it's had it head bit off by it young" [1.4.214-216]) seems to increase in Lear's own cynicism in almost direct proportion to the language's attempts to escape it. Even as the bitter pragmatism of Lear's "Pla[t]e sinnes with Gold, and the strong Lance of
Iustice, hurtlesse breake: Arme it in ragges, a Pigmies straw do's pierce it" (4.6.165-167)—which oscillates between "hurtlessness" and puncturedness, strength and "straw," impregnable defenses and useless "armor"—gives way to the nihilistic refusals of "None do's offend, none, I say none, Ile able'em" (168), the impulse to "enable" nevertheless remains caught within the language of negation. But if the Fool's cynicism was marked by a fierce guardedness against any kind of vulnerability, then Lear's introjection of that cynicism pursues vulnerability and exposure with a vengeance: "Now, now, now, now. Pull off my Bootes: harder, harder, so" (172-173).

Still, the fear of help and rescue that involves Shakespeare's nay-sayers continues to make itself felt in Lear's interruption of the anonymous Gentleman's "Oh heere he is: lay hand on him, Sir./ Your most dear daughter--" with "No rescue? What, a Prisoner? I am even/ The Naturall Foole of Fortune" (188-191), together with his abrupt exit ten lines later ("Come, and you get it,/ You shall get it by running: Sa, sa, sa, sa"). It is as if Lear's interruption signals a desire not to hear of any attempt at "rescue" by issuing preemptive denials and self-denigrating assertions of "foolishness," even as his sudden departure seems as much a defensive ploy to evade rescue as to avoid being held a "prisoner."
Thus, it seems that when the Fool disappears from the play, his discourse of cynicism and guardedness paradoxically gets writ large when Lear’s explosiveness becomes its vehicle. Furthermore, all that the Fool has come to represent in the play—the voice of sanity defined as common sense, a quotidian way of thinking permeated with cynicism and pragmatism, a fierceness of allegiance that decries its own attachments as unthinkable "folly"—is not merely internalized by Lear but actually transvalued in his "madness" by Lear’s own nihilistic utterances. This complex process of incorporation is further complicated by the way Cordelia’s return also seems a function of the Fool’s absence—as if there is some kind of impossible mechanism whereby if the Fool could return to the play, he would return as Cordelia. Yet more than a crossing over into Cordelia’s return, the Fool’s death seems a necessary bridge into the area that Lear’s charismatic nay-saying seems to clear the space for in the play’s last scene.

Indeed, when Lear enters with his "poor Foole" dead in his arms, he comes as the very embodiment of the Fool’s image of an "O without a figure," exploding the silence with his cries of brutally exposed feeling: "Howle, howle, howle: O your are men of stones,/ Had I your tongues and eyes, il’d use them so,;/ That Heavens vault should crack" (5.3.258-260). Lear’s nihilistic refusals—"she’s gone forever./ I know when one is dead, and when one lives,/ She’s dead as
earth" (260-262)—wind up creating possibilities of the very "life" they so forcefully deny: "Lend me a Looking-glass,/ If that her breath will mist or staine the stone,/ Why then she lives" (262-264). And no sooner does Lear grasp at such "life" than it disappears chimera-like into the language of possibility and "chance"—"This feather stirs, she lives: if it be so,/ It is a chance which do's redeeme all sorrowes/ That ever I felt" (266-268). It is as if the "life" that all Lear's demonic nay-saying paradoxically creates nonetheless remains caught within the very language of negation by which it is generated. Even Edgar's meager attempt at comfort—"'Tis noble Kent your Friend" (268)—is met only with Mercutian curses and accusations of betrayal: "A plague upon you Murderers, Traitors all,/ I might have sav'd her, now she's gone for ever" (270-271).

Lear's most violent negations, though, come after Albany's regress to the language of deserving—"All friends shall/ Taste the wages of their vertue, and all Foes/ The cup of their deserving" (303-305)—triggers the reappearance of "fool" in Lear's greatest nihilistic refusals:

And my poore Foole is hang'd: no, no, no, life? Why should a Dog, a Horse, a Rat have life, And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never. Pray you undo this Button. Thanke you Sir, Do you see this? Looke on her? Looke her lips, Looke there, looke there (306-312).

It is as if "Foole" becomes the catalyst for Lear's own nay-saying, even as "life" emerges tentatively from a series of
broken denials. It is Lear's fiercely nihilistic incarnation of the Fool's language of negation that winds up initiating the process of "undoing" that survives even Lear's own stabbing "nevers." Not only survives, but emerges to stake powerful claims for belief in what lies beyond what eyes can behold, beyond what one knows to be true, beyond what one must taste from the bitter cup of deserving. It yet remains for Anthony and Cleopatra to build its radical affirmations on the ground leveled by Lear's nihilistic refusals, and in the realm of "life" that all his great denials paradoxically create.

2Even the possessive force of this "his" is diffused, however, by the fact that its immediate antecedent is not Lear but Goneril's Gentleman, and thus Lear's own possessiveness is subtly kept at one remove.
3The sense of interchangeability may even involve the long-standing assumption that the same actor played both the Fool and Cordelia. See Stephen Booth's "Speculations on Doubling in Shakespeare's Plays" in the second appendix to King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), for the fullest elaboration of this possibility. For more on the practice of doubling in Renaissance drama see W.W. Greg, Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1931) and William A. Ringler, Jr., "The Number of Actors in Shakespeare’s Early Plays" in The Seventeenth-Century Stage ed. Gerald Eades Bentley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968): 110-134. The classic work which meticulously assigns roles to specific actors in Shakespeare’s company is Thomas Whitfield Baldwin’s The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927). Baldwin assigns the role of the Fool to Robert Armin (which Booth challenges) and that of Cordelia to the comic apprentice James Sands, who is also credited with the role of Hermione in The Winter’s Tale. One noted production of the play which explicitly resists the notion of doubling Cordelia with the Fool is Jonathan Miller’s for the BBC, which places the Fool in the first scene with Cordelia as her confidante—her first words are addressed to him as asides. Miller acknowledges the "great traditional theory that the Fool was played by the same person who played Cordelia" but objects to the ostensible limitations such doubling places on the Fool’s age: "I think that something much more interesting happens if you really do make it an old man." See Miller’s comments in "The Production" in Reading Shakespeare in Performance: King Lear eds. James P. Lusardi and June Schlueter (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991): 172-185.

4 This is the one time the Fool makes a distinction among the three daughters—almost all his chidings of Lear rave against putting oneself in the hands of one’s daughters without differentiating among them ("I have used it Nunckle, ere since thou made thy Daughters thy Mothers").


6 Jonathan Miller, as quoted in "The Production" 174.


8 "That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry/ Half my love with him, half my care and duty./ Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,/ [To] love my father all" (1.1.101-104).


10 "...beneath is all the Fiends. There’s hell, there’s darkenes, there is the sulphurous pit; burning, scalding, stench, consumption" (4.6.127-129).

11 Norman Holland, The Shakespearean Imagination 245.

12 In "King Lear: The Transference of the Kingdom", Jeffrey Stern gives this traditional argument a psychoanalytical twist as he argues that Shakespeare’s quintessentially narcissistic King Lear surrounds himself with loving-male-companions like Kent and the Fool whose devotion is
absolute... the hallmark of each is loyalty: the Fool is a fool for love: he is faithful and will tarry" (307). I would argue that the Fool's oft-quoted "But I will tarry, the Fool will stay" (2.4.82) to which Stern alludes is energized and complicated by the ambivalence of "tarry", which gestures toward the Fool's delays and dilatoriness in following Lear as well as his loyalty in remaining with the king.

132.
14The Variorum cites White's objection that "This loving, faithful creature would not let his old master go off half-crazed in that storm, that he might stop and utter such pointless and uncalled-for imitation of Chaucer." Cowden Clarke's criticism of the speech is, if possible, even more blunt: "This prophecy is clearly a a scrap of ribaldry tacked on, by the actor who played the Fool... The fact of the Fool's present speech occurring after Lear has left the stage alone serves to condemn it as spurious."
16The Variorum cites C.A. Brown's contention that "There are three passages, foisted in by the players, and adopted by the printers, which ought to be for ever expunged from the text: The couplet at the end of Act I ['She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure']; the whole of Merlin's prophecy... as the Fool should go out with Lear, and those brutal words: 'And I'll go to bed at noon''.
17William Empson, "Fool in Lear" 135.
18Romeo and Juliet 2.2.1.
19Here I am struck by the remarkable resonance of Cleopatra's language to the dilemmas of the nay-sayers: "'Tis sweating labor/ To bear such idleness so near the heart/ As Cleopatra this. But, sir, forgive me,/ Since my becomings kill me when they do not/ Eye well to you" (Antony and Cleopatra 1.3.93-97). Especially poignant is Cleopatra's intimations of "becomings" that "kill," with the attendant suggestions of the anxieties and fears that infuse the transformative power of the theater's own "becomings"; and if one goes so far as to grant the proposition that the same actor played both the Fool and Cordelia, then the Fool's "transformation" into the longed-for Cordelia after his disappearance from the play is just such a fatal "becoming."
20Although even here the time together is brief, as Kent re- enters at line 37.
21King Lear 3.2.11-13.
22King Lear 2.4.56-58.
23The song of Feste also speaks of absence and endings, and is the concluding gesture of Twelfth Night:
When that I was and a little tine boy,
with hey, ho, the wind and the raine:
A foolish thing was but a toy,
for the raine it raineth every day.

But when I came to man's estate,
with hey ho, &c.
Gainsk Knaves and Theeves men shut their gate,
for the raine, &c... 

But when I came unto my beds,
with hey ho &c.
With tospottes still had drunken heades,
for the raine, &c.

A great while ago the world begun,
with hey ho &c.
But that's all one, our Play is done,
and wee'll strive to please you every day
(5.1.389-403).

Feste's song chronicles aging and loss (When I was and a little tine boy) while tracing the trajectory of "man's estate," finally arriving at cynical, Falstaffian images of old age ("[coming] unto my beds," "toss-pots," and "drunken heads."

24Kenneth Muir, the Arden edition of the play.
26Ibid., 223.
28Ibid., 229.
30John Kerrigan, "Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool in King Lear" 226.
31In "The Folio Omission of the Mock Trial", Roger Warren argues that the absence of the mock trial in the Folio is a Shakespearean excision of material which "is given more effective treatment later in the play" in Lear's great mad scene at 4.6. Warren argues that the mock trial is untenable since "the difficulty here is that audiences tend to respond to madness on stage merely as a general effect: when they see a character go mad they assume that, being mad, he can't have anything to tell them, and therefore they need concentrate line-by-line even less than they usually do", which still does not explain why this "audience" should pay any more attention to the even longer and more monologic
mad scene that Warren valorizes. Besides being condescending, Warren's hypothesis that "the mock trial's combination of real and assumed madness keeps pulling the scene in different directions" with the terrible result that the audience "should lose concentration on Lear's sense of mock-justice because they are so distracted (and perhaps bewildered) by the eccentricities, songs and jokes of Tom and the Fool" only replicates Lear's own self-absorbed perception of the Fool's sane-mindedness as a "distraction" that interferes with his own delusional "sense" of things. Warren's essay appears in _The Division of the Kingdoms_ 45-57.


34Ibid., 351.

35John Kerrigan, "Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool in King Lear" 229.

36As quoted in the Variorum. This dramatic possibility was embodied in Adrian Noble's production, in which Antony Sher's Fool was accidentally but mortally stabbed by Lear after a wildly raucous mock trial. Sher recounts that the actor playing Lear (Gambon) "delivered his line, 'Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart' (3.6.76-7), as a direct instruction to me. I grabbed a pillow, jumped in the oil drum and proceeded to 'anatomize' it savagely. The next time we ran through the scene I happened to be already holding the pillow when that line occurred, so this time Gambon attacked it himself with his knife, hacking and stabbing. Afterwards we cautiously discussed the possibility of Lear stabbing through the pillow and thus accidentally killing the Fool" ("The Fool in King Lear" 265). I was especially struck by the similarity of this Fool's end to the death of Mercutio, particularly in that the other characters "simply failed to notice what has happened to him", just as Romeo and Benvolio do not appreciate the severity of Mercutio's wound: "Courage, man, the hurt cannot be much" (Romeo and Juliet 3.1.95).

37Antony Sher, "The Fool in King Lear" 165.

38As quoted in "The Production" 174.

39James Calderwood, "Creative Uncreation in King Lear" 10.


41The Fool utters his last line at 3.6.85, and Lear does not appear again until 4.6.80, in the middle of the famous scene that begins with Gloucester's attempted suicide.
CHAPTER FIVE

At the Very Heart of Loss: Enobarbus and the Rhetoric of Remembering

An actor famous for his portrayal of Antony once remarked that "'Whoever plays the parts of Antony and Cleopatra should look to it that they have a first-rate Enobarbus, for Enobarbus creates Antony's nobility and Cleopatra's fascination as much as the protagonists can hope to do.'" Indeed, while it is true that Enobarbus embodies a skepticism which argues powerfully against the "realness" of character, the suspicion of theatrical embodiment imbricated in that skepticism proves central to the play’s meditations on the creation of belief and the power of imagination. Enobarbus’s skepticism, in all its contradictory variousness, impinges on the play’s thematic of imagining in ways that lead that thematic to escape and infiltrate the terms of memory and remembering. In such moments of Enobarbus’s unbidden imaginings, his vexed skepticism places us most powerfully in the presence of what his cynical disavowals seek to dispel.

And in what may be Shakespeare’s most sustained investigation of the problem of knowing and the difficulty of belief, Enobarbus also functions as a site of contestation among the play’s seemingly infinite series of oppositions: Roman and Egyptian, masculine and feminine,
stoic and epicurean, public and private, true and false, real and imaginary. Even the pendant scenes which open the play seem concocted to create as radically different milieux as possible, with Enobarbus making his first appearance in an amorphous, indeterminate scene which places him uncertainly within a mysterious contingent of characters²:

Enter Enobarbus, Lamprius, a Soothsayer, Rannius, Lucilius, Charmian, Iras, Mardian the Eunuch, and Alexas.

Char. L. Alexas, sweet Alexas, most any thing Alexas, almost most absolute Alexas, where's the soothsayer that you prais'd so to' th' Queene? O that I knewe this Husband, which you say, must change his Hornes with Garlands.
Alex. Soothsayer.
Sooth.Your will?
Char. Is this the Man? Is't you sir that know things?
Sooth.In Natures infinite book of Secrecie, a little I can read.
Alex. Shew him your hand.
Eno. Bring in the Banket quickly: Wine enough, Cleopatra's health to drink (1.2.1-13).

In contrast to the first scene of the play (where, retrospectively, we might expect to find Enobarbus), with its structured formalities and overoriented framing of the action--Philo not only announces the identities of the approaching Antony and Cleopatra but also tells us what we are to see and what to think about that spectacle: "Looke where they come: Take but good note, and you shall see in him/ (The triple pillar of the world) transform'd/ Into a Strumpets Foole"³--the second scene leaves us to find our
way in a radically different milieu whose most salient features involve anonymity, directionlessness, formlessness, and mingling.

The milieu of indeterminacy in which we first encounter Enobarbus both provokes and resists attempts by editors and directors to normalize it. Staging mechanisms intended to impose structure on the scene and give Enobarbus a clear place within it tend to provoke more questions than they answer. Ridley, for instance, would have "The two groups come in... by different doors... Enobarbus is there [in the Roman group] to give his order, and the soothsayer is where we want him, in the non-Egyptian group." But since Enobarbus does not address or gesture towards these other "Romans," does his presence within the "Roman" group (if he is indeed included in it) signify the sociability so characteristic of the nay-sayers or their relentless solitariness? What of the silent presence that surrounds Enobarbus, the wordless (and, for the audience, nameless) characters whose allegiances are at best ambiguous? Does Enobarbus enter solidly within the company of his Roman fellows or somewhat apart from them? And if he is singled out, does he lead the way or hang behind? Even his identity remains anonymous until Cleopatra enters at line 80 and calls his name, drawing "Enobarbus" out of the silent, enigmatic cohort of men who then promptly vanish from the play forever. And regardless of whether she calls him to her
from sociability or summons him from solitariness, it is striking that he is first made known to us by Cleopatra, not Antony.

Enobarbus's presence first makes itself known within the potential earnestness of the Soothsayer's prophecies, even as their gravity is deflected by Charmian and Iras into counteractive jests and ribaldry. Indeed, Charmian's first words to the Soothsayer ("Is this the man? Is't you sir that know things?") gesture towards the problematic of knowing in which Enobarbus himself will become so thoroughly imbricated. That the Soothsayer answers Charmian with the evasive yet richly diffuse "In Nature's infinite booke of Secrecie/ A little I can read" (11-12), a dilatory and syntactically complex reply that refuses the simple affirmative expected by Charmian's question, only adds to the aura of mysteriousness and indeterminacy that surrounds Enobarbus's first appearance in the play. The Soothsayer not only deflects any definitive confirmation of his identity, but also dislocates Charmian's stark assertion of an empirical "knowing" of "things" into a more shadowy region of "secrecy" and "reading," translating her straightforward questions into a cryptic poetry of metaphor and personification.

It is when Alexas commands one of the group to "Shew him your hand" that Enobarbus speaks for the first time in the play: "Bring in the Banket quickly: Wine enough,
Cleopatra's health to drink" (12-13). These first words, with their quirky syntax and quick succession of alliterative "b's," betray a certain urgency—possibly to deflect the potentially self-implicating prophecies of the Soothsayer into the more familiar oblivion of wine and revelry, possibly to dispel the nervousness incited by that realm of the uncanny in which Enobarbus seems so intricated. While his words may suggest a compulsion to parody and re-enactment (displayed by the burlesque of Egyptian "bacchanales" aboard Pompey's galley) that colors Roman straightforwardness, there is also a deeper, more relaxed sense of belonging that attends his presence in Egypt, and that complicates any sense of Enobarbus as merely a manipulator of self-concealing postures.

Indeed, almost every utterance in this scene will impinge on the indeterminacies generated by Enobarbus's hopelessly divided character. Enobarbus asks for wine enough, and the intricate structuring of his language allows even this seemingly insignificant word to embody the guardedness that resonates from the first syllables of his name.10 The punctuation of the line works carefully to allow both "quickly" and "enough" to resonate within the brief pauses of the semicolon and comma which follow them,11 as the constellation of issues they invoke—alacrity and aimlessness, over-compression and long drawn-outness, excessiveness and lack—are crystallized in Enobarbus's
language. The grammar of Enobarbus's utterance ("Wine enough, Cleopatra's health to drink") is itself most odd, as if the desire were not just to drink to Cleopatra's health but somehow to drink that "health" itself.\textsuperscript{12} Enobarbus's language, while emerging from a sense of scarcity that desires "enough" to replenish its lack, nonetheless edges toward the threshold instead of "overflowing the measure," rejecting both the "not too much" of Roman stoicism\textsuperscript{13} and the "never too much" of Egyptian epicureanism.\textsuperscript{14}

Enobarbus's call for wine and food seems so disjunctive that some editors, beginning with Steevens, have deferred the entrance of Enobarbus until this line, which is spoken, as it were, over his shoulder as he strides onstage.\textsuperscript{15} But such editorial rationalizing only begs the questions Enobarbus's deferral provokes. Why does Enobarbus forestall (if indeed he does) the palm readings? Do his words emerge from the impatient scornfulness that attends his staunch pragmatism? Is he merely being true to form as the gruff soldier who disdains such aimless, spurious nonsense? Is he trying to postpone or prevent the reading of Charmian's palm, or perhaps even seeking to avoid that of his own? Is there a suggestion of vague discomfort in the offhandedness of his words? Does Enobarbus hold back because he fears the vulnerability and exposure threatened by "showing his hand," so to speak, rather than playing close to the chest? Similar questions attend almost every manifestation of
Enobarbus’s cynicism in the play, as the tonal elusiveness and verbal aggressiveness of his language screens any direct, unmediated experience of his character.

As the Soothsayer’s reading of Charmian’s palm unfolds, the unease intimated by Enobarbus’s deferrals shadows into apprehension. The Soothsayer’s words detach themselves from their direct address to Charmian and adhere to the darkening aura that envelops the larger group as well:

Char. Good sir, give me good Fortune.
Sooth. I make not, but foresee.
Char. Pray then, foresee me one.
Sooth. You shall be yet farre fairer then you are.
Char. He meanes in flesh.
Iras. No, you shall paint when you are old.
Char. Wrinkles forbid.
Alex. Vex not his prescience, be attentive.
Char. Hush.
Sooth. You shall be more beloved, than beloved.
Char. I had rather heat my Liver with drinking.
Alex. Nay, heare him.
Char. Good now some excellent Fortune: Let me be married to three Kings in a forenoone, and Widdow them all: Let me have a Childe at fifty, to whom Herode of Iewry may do Homage. Finde me to marrie me with Octavius Caesar, and companion me with my Mistris.
Sooth. You shall out-live the Lady whom you serve.
Char. Oh excellent, I love long life better than Figs.
Sooth. You have seene and proved a fairer former fortune, then that which is to approach.
Char. Then belike my Children shall have no names: Prythee how many Boyes and Wenches must I have.
Sooth. If every of your wishes had a wombe, & fore-tell every wish, a Million.
Char. Out Foole, I forgive thee for a Witch.
Alex. You think none but your sheets are privie to your wishes.
Char. Nay come, tell Iras hers.
Alex. Wee’l know all our Fortunes.
Eno. Mine, and most our Fortunes to night, shall be drunke to bed (14-46).
The jocular cynicism of Enobarbus’s last line tries to siphon off the earnestness of the Soothsayer’s gnomic readings. It also poses a language grounded in inclusiveness and generalities ("Wee’l know all our Fortunes") against another that claims singularity and possessiveness ("Mine, and most our Fortunes to night, shall be drunke to bed"). Enobarbus’s language struggles to extricate the nominalistic ("mine," "most," "tonight") from its absorption into the comprehensive "allness" of Alexas’s language, which in turn echoes the Soothsayer’s own all-encompassing pronouncements: "Your fortunes are all alike." Of all the characters in this scene, it is Enobarbus who will live out with greatest passion the details of the Soothsayer’s prophecies. "You shall be more beloved than beloved" reaches towards him with a fateful grasp, piercing the irreverent laughter of Charmian and Iras to whom the prophecy seems strangely inapplicable.

While it may be true that "Mine, and most our fortunes to-night, will be drunk to bed" merely reflects the impatient cynicism of the gruff soldier, even that cynicism gets hopelessly entangled with the realm of dreams and prophecies that it wants to dispel. As Enobarbus’s words circle back to the site of dreams so troubling to Mercutio, the "bed" in which dreamers lie, dreaming things true, the elaborate, halting syntax of the line complicates the ostensibly matter-of-factness of Enobarbus’s words. Is it
really clear what Enobarbus means when he speaks of fortunes that "shall be drunk to bed" (to say nothing of what Cleopatra imagines when she speaks of "drinking" Antony "to his bed")? While Enobarbus may only be trying to make light of the Soothsayer's prophecies, his vexed cynicism, unlike the careless bawdy of Charmian and Iras, remains entangled in the frightening energies which it wants to dispel.

The initial configuration of Enobarbus vis-a-vis Cleopatra complicates his ostensibly primary role in the play as Antony's foil, confidante, and boon companion. Indeed, when Cleopatra's unexpected entrance interrupts the palm readings, Enobarbus's peculiar "misrecognition" of her for Antony seems to replicate Enobarbus's own dividedness:

Enter Cleopatra.

Enob. Hush, heere comes Anthony.  
Char. Not he, the Queene. 
Cleo. [Saw] you, my lord. 
Eno. No lady. 
Cleo. Was he not heere? 
Char. No Madam. 
Cleo. He was dispos'd to mirth, but on the [sudden] 
A Romane thought hath strooke him. 
Enobarbus? 
Eno. Madam. 
Cleo. Seeke him, and bring him hither (79-85).

Cleopatra's commanding (invoking, summoning, intimate enlisting?) of Enobarbus makes him seem not merely a messenger, but almost an accomplice in her desires and a fellow-sufferer in her disappointments. Readings of
Enobarbus's infamous "mistaking" of Cleopatra for Antony, however, tend to ignore the ambivalence of Enobarbus's cynicism and focus instead on its ostensible misogyny. For instance, William Rossky, disputing the rather unlikely possibility that Enobarbus's "mistake" stems from the appearance of a crossdressed Antony and Cleopatra in the opening scene, argues that Enobarbus's misrecognition is "accurately, though ironically, assessing the relationship between the principals, making the familiar point that Antony has become effeminate." Similarly, Janet Adelman, one of the most perceptive readers of the play, finds that "Enobarbus's error" works to suggest "the diminution of Antony's masculine identity," and thus functions to underscore the Roman preoccupation with Antony's Egyptian dotage that is the subject of the play's first lines. In a promising shift from irony to the realm of theatrical experience, William Gruber reads Enobarbus's "mistake" as part of a larger pattern of thwarted audience expectation. Enobarbus's misrecognition of Cleopatra thus comments on the play's refusal to satisfy the expectations created by its own overt theatricality:

This momentary reversal reveals nothing significant of any individual psychology... Its mimetic value is nil; but its affective value lies in the reflexive code it enacts for spectators... [who] momentarily anticipate seeing Antony, but they see someone else instead... Enobarbus speaks what sounds to an audience like a conventional cue for an actor's entrance... the emphasis is upon Antony's failure to appear when 'summoned' by a
line of dialogue momentarily problematizes spectators' relationship with him. In spite of his subtle reading's promising shift to theatrical experience, Gruber's flat denials only wind up repeating the critical reluctance demonstrated by Rossky and Adelman to bring Enobarbus's remark to bear on "any individual psychology." Furthermore, if we consider the possibility that Cleopatra enters before Enobarbus says his line (which is indeed what occurs in the Folio), then what happens is not a reversal of expectation, as Gruber would have it, but rather bafflement where we expect clarity and straightforwardness. Even as it adds to the perplexity of the scene, Enobarbus's "mistake" does make a kind of important sense, gesturing towards a momentary doubleness that implicates Enobarbus's own divided (or amplified) investment in both Antony and Cleopatra. Enobarbus's dividedness and overinvestment implicates us, as well, in our responses to the often contradictory theatrical embodiments generated by the play.

The unexpected entrance of Antony, his attendants, and a messenger at this point in the scene renders Enobarbus's exit unnecessary, and provokes Cleopatra to take a surprisingly different tack:

Cleo. wher's Alexias?
Alex. Heere at your service.
My Lord approaches.

Enter Anthony, with a Messenger
Cleo. We will not look upon him: Go with us (85-87).

Cleopatra's language deploys a royal "we" that may or may not invite Enobarbus into its plurality. At any rate, though Enobarbus does exit the stage, he does so not alone, but with Cleopatra and her attendants,22 leaving Antony behind onstage.

The entrance of Antony evacuates the stage of its original inhabitants, provoking a sudden shift as Cleopatra's departure and Antony's arrival are almost simultaneous. These abrupt comings and goings set into motion yet another disconcerting series of arrivals and departures, as the messenger who accompanies Antony delivers the "stiff news" of Fulvia's wars against Caesar and then departs, barely crossing paths with a second messenger who delivers even stiffer news ("Fulvia thy wife is dead") and departs with a hastiness to match the jarring bluntness of his message.

After the flurry of messengers has finally quieted, Antony is briefly left alone onstage before the re-entry of Enobarbus. Announcing his impending departure from Egypt with a series of "musts" that signal the Roman ethos of expediency and alacrity, Antony has no sooner declared his intentions of breaking from Cleopatra and abandoning "idleness" than Enobarbus reappears at his side. Although most modern editions of the play construe Antony's
subsequent "How now Enobarbus" as an "exclamation of summons" by transposing the stage direction "Enter Enobarbus," the Folio allows Enobarbus simply to appear:

Anth. I must from this enchanting Queene break off,
Ten thousand harmes, more than the illes I know
My idlenesse doth hatch.
        Enter Enobarbus
How now Enobarbus.
Eno. What's your pleasure, Sir?
Anth. I must with haste from hence.
Eno. Why then we kill all our Women. We see how mortall an unkindnesse is to them, if they suffer our departure death's the word.
Anth. I must be gone.
Eno. Under a compelling occasion, let women die. It were pitty to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause, they should be esteemed nothing. Cleopatra catching but the least noyse of this, dies instantly: I have seene her dye twenty times uppon farre poorer moment: I dothink there is mettle in death, which commits some loving acte upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.
Anth. She is cunning past mans thought.
Eno. Alacke Sir no, her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure Love. We cannot cal[l] her winds and waters, sighes and teares: they are greater storms and tempests than Almanackes can report. This cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a showre of Raine as well as Iove.
Anth. Would I had never seen her.
Eno. Oh sir, you had then left unseen a wonderfull peecce of worke, which not to have been blest withall, would have discredited your Travaile.
Anth. Fulvia is dead.
Eno. Sir.
Ant. Fulvia is dead.
Eno. Fulvia?
Ant. Dead.
Eno. Why sir, give the Gods a thankfull Sacifice: When it pleaseth their deities to take the wife of a man from him, it shewes to man the Tailors of the earth; comforting therein, that when olde Robes are worn out, there are members to make new. If there were no more women but
Fulvia, then had you indeede a cut, and the case
To be lamented: This greefe is crown'd with con-
solation, your old Smocke brings forth a new
Petticoate, and indeed the teares live in an
Onion, that should water this sorrow.
Anth. The businesse she hath broached in the
State,
Cannot endure my absence.
Eno. And the businesse you have broach'd heere
cannot be without you, especially that of
Cleopatra's, which wholly depends on your abode.
Anth. No more light Answeres:
Let our officers
Have notice what we purpose. I shall breake
The cause of our Expedition to the Queene,
And get her [leave] to part...
... Say our pleasure,
To such whose places under us, require
Our quicke remove from hence.
Eno. I shall doo't (128-197).

I have quoted at such length, certainly more than I would
wish, to give the full sense of the complex interplay
between the languages of Enobarbus and Antony in this scene.
Extracting fragments of Enobarbus's language from this
exchange has only led to flat characterizations of him as a
sneering misogynist (Norman Holland goes farthest in this
direction, arguing that Enobarbus "makes most of the nasty,
smutty jokes at Cleopatra's expense")24), or as an
unrelenting cynic about attachment and sentiment (Mary Ann
Bushman asserts that "When Antony tries to mourn for Fulvia,
Enobarbus undercuts the display by alluding to the prop he
would need to shed real tears")25). And yet such readings, so
attuned to Enobarbus's skeptical self, miss the subtly
hidden, defensively protected "other" Enobarbus--the one who
urges Antony to remain in Egypt with Cleopatra, the one who
argues passionately against Antony's own misogynistically reductive characterizations of Cleopatra, the one who wishes to offer consolation in the face of loss.

This "other" Enobarbus offers the compelling visions of Cleopatra in all her contradictoriness that are shot through the oft-quoted expressions of his misogynistic cynicism. Enobarbus's language, so beautifully lucid and tender, gestures towards a Cleopatra of mythic proportions ("she makes a showre of Raine as well as Iove") whom Antony obtusely dismisses with "She is cunning past man's thought." Even as Enobarbus speaks of women as "nothing," a memory of Cleopatra emerges unbidden from his cynical musings, as if to argue with the reductivism that it follows:

I have seene her die twenty times uppon farre poorer moment: I do think there is mettle in death, which comitls some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying (1.2.139-142).

Tone is an issue here; yet even the most sardonically wry delivery of these lines cannot erase their luminousness and grace. Pity the poor actor directed to maintain the posture of the unreserved cynic while such clean, loving language (the alliterative "c's" and "t's," the unexpected lushness of "celerity") rolls off his tongue.

It may even be that these two "pulls" in the language are interdependent, each empowering the other. Perhaps as Enobarbus hears his own cynicism speak through Antony's baffled allegation of Cleopatra's "cunning," it strikes him
as other, and his language rises up to denounce Antony's own
disavowals. Enobarbus's language seems to rush in upon the
emptiness Antony's desire to "erase" Cleopatra from memory
would create ("Would I had never seen her!"), the
painstaking negatives ("Alacke Sir no") breaking through to
"passions" that are made of a "nothing" that turns out to be
"the finest part of pure love."

Rather than spurring Enobarbus's own cynicism, Antony's
uncomprehending disavowals of Cleopatra may have the
opposite effect, inciting Enobarbus's language to strike
back at its own bitter ironicisms. Enobarbus's forceful
denials ("This cannot be cunning in her") intimate certain
passionate, necessary convictions that cannot survive if the
affirmative they negate (This can be cunning in her) proves
true. Yet these negations yield willingly, almost
expectantly, to the hypothetical mode they engender, not
just surviving the conditional but emerging from it to stake
even more hyperbolic claims ("or if it be, she makes a
showre of Raine as well as Iove"). Enobarbus's fiercely
vicarious "we" ("We cannot call her winds and waters, sighes
and tears") tries to draw Antony into an imaginative
experience of Cleopatra which may itself be a wishful
fantasy of Antony's own experience.

Enobarbus's desire to speak with Antony a language of
"we" is continually thwarted, however, by Antony's own
unreachability, as if he has already removed his thoughts
from Egypt and his heart from Cleopatra. Antony speaks but four spare lines in the twenty-six of the exchange, fully engaging his language only in a lengthy speech which begins by silencing Enobarbus: "No more light answers." Antony makes use of a plural that is not a potentially inclusive gesture (like Cleopatra's "Go with us") but rather an exclusive, royal "we" ("Let our Officers/ Have notice what we purpose. I shall breake/ The cause of our Expedition to the Queene") that revokes the plurals of Enobarbus. The "we/I" partition in Antony's language may intimate as well an intrapsychic division of selves that protects Anthony from the crushing weight of investedness that Enobarbus bears. In any case, Antony's concluding speech enforces a very different agenda (about "business" and "expedience," about "breaking" and "quick removes") from that imagined by Enobarbus. Provoked by Antony's "The businesse she [Fulvia] hath broached in the State,/ Cannot endure my absence," Enobarbus's passionate insistence on Cleopatra's precedence throws Antony's own pretentious language back at him, compelling him to hear its contradictions and selfishness.

Enobarbus's language does not merely mimic Antony's words, but works in subtle ways to evacuate the sense of "business" from Antony's language (the word disappears into the ambiguous pronouns "that" and "which"), insist on the importance of staying "here," and oppose a "business" that "cannot endure... absence" with the notion of something that
"cannot be without you," that is "wholly" dependent "on your abode." Enobarbus's bawdy reinscribes the presence that Antony would withdraw, repeatedly invoking a "you" and forcefully committing it to Cleopatra. But Enobarbus is utterly unable to break through Antony's preoccupation, or elicit any more from him than distracted meditations on his own dilemmas. The scene's concluding "I shall doo't" can suggest either staunch loyalty or quiet resignation, its imperatives reaching into the language of "deeds" and "doing" that permeates the play. The spareness of Enobarbus's reply enacts an absorption into Antony's own language, which is oblivious to the sound of all voices but its own.

Antony, then, remains oblivious to all that Enobarbus would say, hearing nothing of the Cleopatra with which Enobarbus wants to bring him in touch. Not until he arrives back in Rome will Enobarbus's role as the narrator, fabulist, and "knower" of Cleopatra be played out for an audience eager to hear his narratives of her mythic seductiveness and variety. Yet even amongst the greedy listeners who consume his tales, an aura of isolation will surround Enobarbus, his performances of Cleopatra's greatness coming up against the impenetrable uncomprehension of his audience. Enobarbus's lush language will become increasingly remote from listeners too caught up in their
own desires to glimpse the enormity of Enobarbus's feelings for the Cleopatra his remembrances imagine.

II

Enobarbus's role as the fabulist of Cleopatra's greatness rests largely on the famous Cydnus speech, which issues from a series of meditations on what might be called the languages of remembrance. As the play oscillates between Egypt and Rome, it crosses over gaps of time and space not formalized by clearly demarcated act and scene divisions. These gaps suggest that the play itself is implicated in what enters history and what falls away, what witnesses can observe and what goes unseen, and what survives through "memorialization" and what lives on in the individual memory.

The disorientation and dislocatedness generated by the play's rapid shifts between Egypt and Rome create a sense of the fracturedness of time and memory, and call attention to the cracks in narrative history through which private remembrances tend to slip. Thus, Cleopatra and Antony have barely exchanged their farewells when we are suddenly transported to Rome, where Caesar's recitation of Antony's "faults" (already inscribed as "news" in the letter with which Caesar enters) gives way to a memory of Antony's soldiership in the Alps, a mythic remembrance which mourns the Antony who reveled not in "lascivious Wassailes" but bore the hardships of war with fortitude: "Yea, like the
Stagge, when Snow the Pasture sheets,/ The barkes of Trees thou brows’d" (1.4.65-66). Just as suddenly we are carried back to the realm of Cleopatra, where erotic imaginings of Antony fill the "gap" created by his absence ("Stands he, or sits he?/ Or does he walke? Or is he on his Horse?/ Oh happy horse to beare the weight of Anthony!"), and memories of desire reach even farther back in time: "Broad-fronted Caesar,/ When thou was’t heere above the ground, I was a morsell for a Monarke" (1.5.29-31). The varied languages of remembrance that speak through both Caesar and Cleopatra ("That time? Oh times!") whisper of all that finds its way into the narratives of history and all to which the historical record remains indifferent, from moments scrupulously preserved for posterity to times that don’t ask to be remembered.

Indeed, when Enobarbus re-enters the play at 2.2, the conversation turns quickly to matters of "time," and to the "giving way" of small things to great:

Lep. ’Tis not a time for private stomacking.
Eno. Every time serves for the matter that is then borne in’t.
Lep. But small to greater matters must give way.
Eno. Not if the small comes first (2.2.8-12).

Enobarbus contests the absorption of the "small" into the magnitude of "greater matters," even as his language breaks up Lepidus’s monolithic notion of "time" into the multiple particularities of "Every time." Such resistances continue with Enobarbus’s argument that "Every time serves for the
matter that is then borne in't," as Enobarbus's language of pregnancy and generativity counters the stagnancy of Lepidus's notion of "private stomacking." The seemingly redundant "then" thus makes sense in light of Enobarbus's use of "matter" as "material," creating a sense of time which is malleable and amorphous even if bound to the linear sequentialness that emerges with Enobarbus's insistence on "firstness."

Despite Enobarbus's passionate denials, "small things" do indeed give way to "greater" as Enobarbus recedes into a silence of some fifty lines upon the entrances of Antony and Caesar. While the triumvirs rehearse their grievances and exchange recriminations, Enobarbus manages only the ostensible locker-room misogyny of "Would we had all such wives, that the men/ might go to Warres with the women" (2.2.65-66), which apparently falls on deaf ears. Enobarbus's next interruption, however, provokes quite a different reaction:

Maec. If it might please you, to enforce no further
The griefes betweene ye: to forget them quite
Were to remember: that the present neede,
Speakes to atone you.
Lep. Worthily spoken Maecenas.
Eno. Or if you borrow one anothers Love for the instant, you may when you heare no more words of Pompey, return it again: you shall have time to wrangle in, when you have nothing else to do.
Ant. Thou art a Souldier, onely speake no more.
Eno. That trueth should be silent, I had almost forgot.
Ant. You wrong this presence, therefore speak no more.
Eno. Go too then—your Considerate stone (99-110).

Enobarbus's cynical remarks about "borrowing" and "returning" love disrupt the scriptedness of the meeting and thus incite Antony's anger at such unscheduled interruptions. Enobarbus again speaks of time as if it were some kind of physical space or "matter" ("you shall have time to wrangle in"), as if he could clear a space within the Roman ethos of expediency and alacrity for idleness ("when you have nothing else to do") and seemingly pointless "wrangling." For all their offhandedness, Enobarbus's words have about them a trace of resentfulness—of the voluble talker at being "written out" of the scripted exchange, of the soldier whose well-meaning intrusion into his general's affairs provokes not accolades (like the "Worthily spoken" accorded to Maecenas) but censure, of the friend who doubts that the Antony in whom he is so invested even realizes the depth of that attachment.

Enobarbus's parting shot at Antony clings to a sense of possessedness ("Go too then: your Considerate stone") even while resigning itself to giving Antony leave to "go." Enobarbus's image of the "Considerate stone," which plays on the ambiguity of "considerate" (showing regard for others, engaging in introspection, deferring to political exigencies), not only takes a sarcastic jab at Antony's demeaning insistence on his silence, but also hints of
resentment at being so callously misrecognized by Antony. Enobarbus takes on the role of the "considerate" stone almost like a mask, encasing the vulnerability risked by investedness and attachment within a hardness impervious to hurt and pain. Yet the mask itself is encased within the protective exterior of cynicism and offhandedness, like a "visor for a visor," as Mercutio might say.

Enobarbus then falls back into silence for the rest of the negotiations, not even responding to the arrangement of Antony's marriage to Octavia, which seems especially ripe for cynical interjection. Although Antony makes a point of inviting Lepidus to depart with the triumvirs for the "dispatching" of this "business" ("Let us Lepidus not lacke your company"), no such gesture is forthcoming to Enobarbus, and he remains with Agrippa and Maecenas after Antony, Caesar, and Lepidus depart. It is unclear whether Enobarbus leaves Antony to seek out the company of these "soldiers" or is left behind by a distracted Antony, consigned to the milieu of soldier's talk which, if Antony is right ("Thou art a Souldier, onely speake no more"), should most be Enobarbus's element.

Left alone with Enobarbus, Agrippa and Maecenas do indeed clamor for "news" of Egypt. They do not so much want stories of Egypt's legendary excesses, though, as confirmations of tales already in circulation:

Maecenas. She's a most triumphant Lady, if
report be square to her.
Enob. When she first met Marke Anthony, she
purt up his heart upon the River of Sidnis.
Agr. There she appear'd indeed: or my reporter
devis'd well for her.
Eno. I will tell you,
The Barge she sat in... (2.2.184-191).

Both Maecenas and Agrippa condition their assertions of
Cleopatra's fabled seductiveness on the "squareness" of
"report," as if seeking little more from an eyewitness like
Enobarbus than substantiation of tales already told. But in
the middle of the conversation, Enobarbus's "I will tell
you," with its weighted monosyllables, decelerates the easy
flow of conversation and shifts into a different narrative
register. Full of a strangely gnomic quality, Enobarbus's "I
will tell you" forcefully wills the Cydnus speech into the
already crowded space of "reports" and "truths," and as this
gap opens up the famous Cydnus speech begins:

Eno. I will tell you,
The Barge she sat in, like a burnisht Throne,
Burnt on the water: the Poope was beaten Gold,
Purple the sails :and so perfumed that
The Windes were Love-sicke,
With them the Owers were Silver,
Which to the tune of Flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beate, to follow faster;
As amorous of their strokes. For her owne person,
It beggred all discription, she did lye
In her Pavillion, cloth of Gold, of Tissue,
O're-picturing that Venus, where we see
The fancie out-worke Nature. On each side her,
Stood pretty Dimpled Boyes, like smiling Cupids,
With divers colour'd Fannes whose winde did seeme,
To [glow] the delicate cheekes which they did
cool, And what they undid did.
Agr. Oh rare for Anthony.
Eno. Her Gentlewoman, like the Nereides,
So many Mer-maides tended her i' th' eyes,
And made their bends adornings. At the Helme.
A seeming Mer-maide steere: The Silken Tackle,
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
That yarely frame the office. From the Barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent Wharves. The Citty cast
Her people out upon her: and Anthony
Enthron'd i' th' Market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th' ayre: which, but for vacancie,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopat[ra] too,
And made a gap in Nature.
Agr. Rare Egiptian! (2.2.184-218).

The most striking effect of this many-sided "report" is its calculated construction of a static tableau in which Cleopatra is "framed" for public view. In this way the speech replicates Cleopatra's own deliberative staging of her arrival at Cydnus, posing her for the Roman listeners even as she has (already) posed herself before Mark Antony. While the language evokes in rich detail all that surrounds Cleopatra ("The barge she sat in... On each side her... those flower-soft hands [of a "seeming Mer-maide"],/ That yarely frame the office"), the Queen herself seems to disappear into the lushness of the language. When Enobarbus turns at last to Cleopatra's "person," it is only to register the insufficiency of narrative structures to capture it: "For her owne person,/ It beggerd all description." For all its static picturedness, though, the Cydnus speech is still infiltrated by a feeling for transcendence (to "O're-picture... that Venus, where we see/
The fancie out-worke Nature") that nonetheless can only prefix the very terms which keep that impulse grounded, even
as the mitigating "seem" subtly restrains the language's outward movement from the pictured quality of the tableau.

When Enobarbus then speaks of "ayre: which but for vacancie,/ Had gone to gaze on Cleopat[ra] too,/ And made a gap in nature," his language verges on a "gap" in which the full imaginative richness of a Cleopatra can materialize. Yet Enobarbus's language holds back from risking these "gaps" in which Cleopatra's own language revels and seems so at home. "But for vacancie" reverts to Aristotelian "laws" that insist on a "natural" abhorrence of vacuums, bespeaking a certain anxiety about desolation and emptiness. Like the air surrounding Antony, Enobarbus's own language is reluctant to risk "vacancy," however much his attachment to Antony, increasingly beset by disillusionment, feels the pull of his attraction to Cleopatra drawing him from "firm security" toward the fearful "gaps" in time and nature that she inhabits.

But such subtle intimations of Enobarbus's own investment in Cleopatra appear to be lost on his audience. Agrippa's punctuation of Enobarbus's "report" with "Oh rare for Anthony" and "Rare Egyptian" suggests that the soldiers still haven't apprehended the change in narrative space signaled by the different conversational registers of "My reporter devis'd well for her" and "I will tell you." Enobarbus, remaining alone and self-absorbed even as a "reporter," makes no sign that he has taken in the
uncomprehending interjections of Agrippa, not even when pulling back into sarcasm and coarseness:

Eno. Upon her landing, Anthony sent to her,
Invited her to Supper: she replyed,
It should be better, he became her guest:
Which she entreated, our Courteous Anthony,
Whom nere the word of no woman [heard] speake,
Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the Feast;
And for his ordinary, paires his heart
For what his eyes eate onely.
Agr. Royal wench:
She made great Caesar lay his Sword to bed,
He ploughed her, and she cropt (219-228).

The returning notes of Enobarbus’s soldierly tale-telling are matched by even coarser remarks from Agrippa, who enters into the renewed spirit of story and rumor with all the enthusiasm of a co-conspirator. Even Enobarbus’s cynicism, however, possesses multiple inflections which differentiate it from the gratuitous coarseness of Agrippa, ranging from the casual locker-room misogyny of "Whom nere the word of no woman [heard] speak" to the distant bitterness of "for his ordinary, paires his heart/ For what his eyes eate onely."

Leaving soldierly tale-telling behind, Enobarbus follows Agrippa’s bawdy with a memory of Cleopatra that comes out of an entirely different place, and that seems almost Proustian in its powerful unwilledness:

Eno. I saw her once
Hop forty Paces through the publicke streete,
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
That she did make defect, perfection,
And breathlesse powre breath forth (2.2. 228-232).^
This memory of Cleopatra, which doesn’t ask to be remembered, and doesn’t seek memorialization, is small in relation to the greatness of the Cydnus speech, fleeting in opposition to its weightedness—so much so that Enobarbus’s self-absorbed, involuntary memory seems to come out of nowhere, a spontaneous recollection of Cleopatra for some reason "hopping" through a public street. Unlike the Cydnus speech, with its calculating presentation of Cleopatra as the mistress of appearances and theatrical effects, Enobarbus’s memory seems to glimpse Cleopatra when she isn’t aware of being seen, in a moment to which Enobarbus somehow has been accidentally privy. The monosyllabic "I saw her," which may at first seem reminiscent of the tale-telling rhetoric initiated by "I will tell you," ushers us into a different narrative space, where the willful exertions of "telling" give way to the quietude of "seeing," and the self-consciousness of performance drops away in wonder at what the eyes behold.

Enobarbus’s memory, for all its smallness, thus constitutes an important counter-weight to the Cydnus speech. The multiple oppositions figured by the Cydnus speech and Enobarbus’s memory—public and private, premeditated and spontaneous, monumental and insignificant, staged and unrehearsed—interpenetrate different kinds of memories, from what belongs to the realm of public knowledge to what resides in the tissues of individually lived
experience, from what can be captured in the framework of narrative to what escapes into the anecdotal. The opposition of the Cydnus speech (lifted almost straight out of Plutarch) and Enobarbus's memory (not in Plutarch at all) sets history against memory, and memory against memorialization.

The doubleness of Enobarbus's speeches corresponds, moreover, to the doubleness of Cleopatra herself: the calculating, preparatory mistress of theatrical stagings whose "person" disappears into the artful constructions of the Cydnus speech, and the emergent Cleopatra of Enobarbus's memory, with her body and her breath, who expends herself to a point of "breathlessness" which "powre[s] breath forth."

The strangeness of Enobarbus's memory blurs into the mysteriousness of this other Cleopatra, as Enobarbus's attempts to formulate ontological contradictions ("make defect, perfection," "Breathlesse powre breath forth") come up against the constraints of the oppositions in which they still work.

Enobarbus's stake in this "other" Cleopatra can be glimpsed in the series of passionate denials that Maecenas's apparently innocuous distillation of Enobarbus's own cynicism elicits:

Mece. Now Anthony, must leave her utterly.
Eno. Never he will not:
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feede, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy Priests
Blesse her, when she is Riggish (2.2.234-240).

The urgency of Enobarbus's "never" seems strangely out of
place in the context of casual bantering, as the negations
of "Never he will not" come across not as cynical nay-saying
but as passionate conviction: "Age cannot wither her, nor
custom stale/ Her infinite variety." Enobarbus becomes
enthralled not only in his intensely vicarious response to
Antony's experience of Cleopatra, but also in his own direct
sense of her, which may even be deflected as Antony's in a
kind of inverse vicariousness. Like the earlier "This cannot
be cunning in her" (1.2.149-150), Enobarbus's denials sound
like articles of faith, abiding within his skeptical
distrust of the other, and within his disavowals of feeling.

III

It may seem paradoxical that characters involved in
such "unexcerpable" complexities as Enobarbus should best
be known for their set pieces. Like the disappearance of
Cleopatra's "owne person" into the heavy folds of the Cydnus
speech, the nay-sayers themselves tend to be absorbed into
their own theatrical displays. After the sustained
performance of the Cydnus speech, Enobarbus recedes for a
time into the background of the play, appearing in the wakes
of entrances to and exits from the great scenes.

Some of the play's most pressing issues, however, are
engaged in such "inconsequential" moments. Enobarbus is the
principal inhabitant of these liminal spaces where contradictions accumulate, and where themes crucial to the play's attempts at transcendence but with no apparent link to skepticism--memory, time, history, narrativity--become entangled with meditations on the nature of knowing and the problem of belief. Whether he is interrupting Pompey's jibes at Antony's "fine Egyptian cookerie," deflecting Menas's needling about rumors of marriage between Antony and Cleopatra, or insisting that Antony "married but his occasion heere" in Rome, Enobarbus's emphatic denials almost always wind up making powerful claims for belief--in the truth of his own experience of Cleopatra, in the realness of Cleopatra's feelings for Antony, in the authenticity of Antony's devotion to Cleopatra--that strain the resolve of his seemingly pragmatic skepticism.

As the play moves toward Antony's defeat at Actium, the mounting pressures on Enobarbus's dividedness create fissures in the already thin exterior of his skepticism. After we hear Caesar's declaration that Antony "hath given his Empire/ Up to a Whore, who now are levying/ The Kings o'th'earth for Warre" (3.6.66-68), Enobarbus unexpectedly appears deep in conversation with Cleopatra, their strikingly intimate exchange fraught with anxiety and contentiousness:

Enter Cleopatra, and Enobarbus.
Cleo. I will be even with thee, doubt it not.
Eno. But why, why, why?
Cleo. Thou hast forspoke my being in these Warres, 
And say' st it is not fit. 
Eno. Well: is it, is it. 
Cleo. If not denounc'd against us, why should not 
we be there in person? 
Enob. Well, I could reply: if wee should serve 
with Horse and Mares together, the Horse were 
meerly lost: the Mares would beare a Soldiour 
and his Horse. 
Cleo. What is' t you say? (3.7.1-15).

Enobarbus's relentless questions, punched out with 
monosyllabic emphasis, lock themselves into a vicious circle 
of repetition. Even his reply to Cleopatra's own "why's" 
only rehearses an answer, itself phrased in the conditional 
and spoken more to himself than Cleopatra: "Well, I could 
reply: if wee should serve with/ Horse and Mares together, 
the Horse were merely lost:/ the Mares would beare a 
Soldiour and his Horse" (3.7.6-9). The Variorum refers to 
this speech as an "overheard" aside, meaning that Cleopatra 
"has heard but not quite made out Enobarbus's words."

Indeed, Enobarbus's language becomes increasingly remote as 
his modes of irony and cynicism grow more tenuous, as if no 
longer able to bear the weight of his hopelessly divided 
attachments to Cleopatra and Antony.

Even Enobarbus's attempts at humor become increasingly 
self-referential, frustrating the efforts of commentators 
like Ridley to "see the precise point of Enobarbus' 
(presumable) ribaldry." Ridley's bafflement may indicate the 
tendency of Enobarbus's language to resist paraphrase, but 
more importantly it suggests that deeper statements may be
rattling around inside Enobarbus's apparently nonsensical bawdy. Enobarbus's "the Mares would beare a Soldiour and his Horse," for all its coarse sarcasm, seems uncannily in touch with the imaginative erotics of Cleopatra's "Oh happy horse to beare the weight of Anthony!" (1.5.21). Paradoxically, it is Enobarbus's bawdy in which this romanticism is ensconced, harbored within ironies that both disavow and defend.

Enobarbus's bawdy is itself enclosed within the protective "bubble" of the aside, which deflects unmediated intimacies into theatricalized displays. And yet, if the soliloquy allows interiority to be revealed in onstage isolation, then the aside underscores the speaker's isolation within the presence of others, and exposes the speaker's vulnerability to being "overheard." As Enobarbus is increasingly drawn from "firm security" to "chance and hazard," the growing number of his asides and soliloquies dramatizes the giving way of aggressive defenses that have blocked unmediated access to Enobarbus, and that have minimized the risks of exposure and vulnerability.

Enobarbus's first "soliloquy," a mere three lines long, comes after the disastrous defeat at Actium, which Enobarbus announces with "Naught, naught, al naught, I can behold no longer" (3.10.1). In the brief moments he is left alone onstage after the exits of Scarrus and Cannidius, Enobarbus first broaches the growing conflictedness of his feelings for Antony with the tentative "Ile yet follow/ The wounded
chance of Anthony, though my reason/ Sits in the winde against me" (3.10.35-37), his language enacting the very dividedness it would defend against by opposing "my reason" to "me."

Enobarbus's language enacts a fierce conflictedness as well, as "my reason/ Sits in the Wind against me" alludes to hunting terms (to "sit in the wind" is to "have the scent coming towards you") that depict Enobarbus as prey to his own "reason," which scents and tracks him down as its victim. The language thus conflates the "woundedness" of Antony with the psychic pain of Enobarbus's own conflictedness, creating a sense of Enobarbus's deepening vulnerability as his growing estrangement from the aggressive defensiveness of his "reason" becomes more profound.

As rationales for "follow[ing] the wounded chance of Anthony" thus fall by the wayside, Enobarbus clings at the last to "earn[ing] a place i'th'Story," invoking it as though it were some kind of metaphysical category:

    Mine honesty, and I, beginne to square,  
The Loyalty well held to Fools, does make  
Our Faith meere folly: yet he that can endure  
To follow with Allegiance a falne Lord,  
Does conquer him that did his Master conquer,  
And earnes a place i'th'Story (3.13.41-46).

The halting, difficult syntax of these lines suggests how labored Enobarbus's attempts to rationalize his attachment to Antony have become. Enobarbus's language oscillates
between the claims of attachment and pragmatic resistance to such claims, as "Loyalty well held" turns out to be the mark of a "fool," and "our faith" becomes "meere folly." The cynicism of these lines nevertheless gives way to romantic visions of "follow[ing] with Allegeance a falne Lord" and "conquer[ing] him that did his Master conquer" as Enobarbus grasps for one last reason to stay with Antony. Enobarbus's final appeal, though, leading as it does into the famous scene of Cleopatra's "betrayal" of Antony, can no more stave off the gathering uncertainties generated by Antony's increasingly erratic behavior (not to mention Cleopatra's capriciousness) than could his previous appeals to "reason" and "honor." The play almost seems to be deconstructing the notion of "character" itself, as "motivation" and "intention" unravel into sheer unpredictability—Cleopatra's puzzling insistence on Enobarbus's presence during her ostensible betrayal of Antony, Antony's reckless beating of Caesar's messenger for kissing Cleopatra's hand, the baffling shift from Antony's explosive anger at Cleopatra's "treachery" to his brave, conciliatory declarations that "We will yet do well."

When the furious activity of the betrayal scene finally subsides, Enobarbus does not follow the reconciled Antony and Cleopatra when they depart to "mocke the midnight Bell" with "one more gawdy night." Rather, he is left behind in
the emptiness of the vacant stage, bereft of reasons to stay
with Antony yet still needing to convince himself to leave:

Now hee'1 out-stare the Lightning, to be furious
Is to be frighted out of feare, and in that moode
The Dove will peck the Estridge; and I see still,
A diminution in our Captaines braine,
Restores his heart; when valour prays in reason,
It eates the Sword it fights with: I will seeke
Some way to leave him (3.13.195-201).

Enobarbus's language can only formulate contradictions as it
struggles to divest itself of loyalty and attachment, the
flow of his words continually arrested by heavy punctuation
and dense alliteration.

Even as Enobarbus's language constructs opposition
after opposition, it is inhabited by an impulse towards
transvaluation that would create "restoration" out of
"diminution," that wants to make defect perfection. And yet,
the language cannot escape its anxieties about consumption
and predation, about emptiness and lack: "when valour prays
in reason,/ It eates the Sword it fights with." Enobarbus's
language releases aggressive energies that are consumed by
their own phallic violence, and that only deepen the
woundedness they defend against. Although usually read as a
staunch declaration of resolve, Enobarbus's concluding "I
will seeke/ Some way to leave him" nevertheless harbors
within its imperatives a hesitancy suggested by the
intervening "seeke/ Some way to." Even at the very core of
Enobarbus's pragmatism, the stirrings of an even deeper
sentimentalism—one that knows seeking a way to leave will be
as wrenching as finding a reason to stay—still make themselves felt.

Enobarbus’s resolve to leave Antony appears confirmed by the play’s immediate shift to Caesar’s camp and the announcement there that "Within our files there are... those that serv’d Mark Anthony but late" (4.1.12-13). The expectations generated by these persuasive allusions to Enobarbus, however, are just as quickly thwarted by the re-appearance of Enobarbus with Antony, sharing moments of conversational intimacy that lead in turn to moments of confederacy with Cleopatra. As the scene draws to a close, Enobarbus exits with the rest of the company on the heels of Antony’s "Let’s to supper, come,/ And drowne consideration" (4.2.44-45), and only in retrospect will we realize that this is the last time we will see Enobarbus and Antony together.

Even though Enobarbus has been rehearsing his decampment for the last eight scenes, his departure, when it comes, still feels strangely unanticipated. After the expectations generated by Enobarbus’s soliloquies and asides have been continually thwarted, Enobarbus’s unexplained absence during the brief period following his last appearance with Antony does not arouse much suspicion about his whereabouts. When it finally comes, the report of Enobarbus’s desertion is delivered by a soldier named Eros, who discloses his news with startling rhetorical power:
Eros. The Gods make this a happy day to Anthony.
Ant. Would thou, & those thy scars had once prevail’d
To make me fight at Land.
Eros. Had’st thou done so,
The Kings that have revolted, and the Soldier
That has this morning left thee, would have still
Followed thy heeles.
Ant. Whose gone this morning?
Eros. Who? one ever neere thee, call for
Enobarbus,
He shall not heare thee, or from Caesar’s Campe,
Say I am none of thine.
Ant. What sayest thou?
Sold. Sir he is with Caesar.
Eros. Sir, his Chests and Treasure he has not with him.
Ant. Is he gone?
Sol. Most certaine (4.5.1-11).

Eros’s language invokes the “spirit of anonymous intimacy” Laura Quinney associates with the uncanniness of the play’s mysterious messenger figures, as if the language is being spoken not by Eros but through him, emerging unbidden from some private place of loss and regret.

The protractedness of Eros’s disclosure ("who? one ever neere thee, call for Enobarbus...") does not merely build suspense, but opens up a space for Enobarbus’s absence that slowly widens into a sense of loss. As this palpable feeling of loss presses in on Antony’s baffled questions, his language shatters into fragmented imperatives that finally can only call for Enobarbus:

Go Eros, send his Treasure after, do it,
Detaine no jot I charge thee: write to him,
(I will subscribe) gentle adieu’s, and greetings;
Say, that I wish he never find more cause
To change a Master. O my fortunes have
Corrupted honest men. Dispatch Enobarbus (4.5.12-17).

At first, Antony seems to be searching for an appropriate rhetorical posture for the performance of his grief, sifting through magnanimity, self-accusing mournfulness, and self-conscious apostrophe. The theatricalized display of grief, however, at last exhausts itself, and the name "Enobarbus" tears from Antony as if it had power to conjure Enobarbus's presence once more.

Antony's invocation does indeed summon Enobarbus's presence, but rather than appearing at Antony's side he enters silently in the company of Caesar and his men. If Eros had imagined an Enobarbus who "from Caesar's Campe,/ Says I am none of thine," the language of Enobarbus's soliloquy creates an alternative embodiment that refuses Eros's flat assertions of Enobarbus's dispossession of Antony:

I am alone the Villaine of the earth,
And feele I am so most. O Anthony,
Thou Mine of Bounty, how would'st thou have payed
My better service, when my turpitude
Thou dost so Crowne with Gold. This blows my hart,
If swift thought break it not: a swifter mean
Shall outstrike thought, but thought will doo't. I feele
I fight against thee: No I will go seeke
Some Ditch, wherein to dye: the foul'st best fits
My latter part of life (4.6.30-39).

Even as self-consciousness becomes increasingly unbearable, Enobarbus's language, with its rolling "o's" ("alone," "so," "most," "O," "gold," "blows"), possesses a sense of
expansiveness as well as woundedness. For all its expansiveness, though, Enobarbus's language still seems caught within the oppositions it twists anxiously between: "thinking" and "feeling," "my better service" and "my turpitude," "the foul' st" and the "best." If one way of thinking about Antony and Cleopatra is in terms of the oppositions it constructs only to problematize, then Enobarbus acts as a conduit between opposing forces, energized and yet ultimately exploded by them: "This blowes my hart,/ If swift thought breake it not: a swifter meane/ Shall out-strike thought, but thought will doo't."

Enobarbus imagines a celerity in dying\(^\text{35}\) ("swift thought," "a swifter meane") that is at odds with the halting motions--harsh consonants ("breake," "outstrike,"), broken phrasing, difficult syntax--of his language. This contradictoriness finds its locus in the ambiguity of "blowes,"\(^\text{36}\) which suggests a process of swelling, of "mak[ing]... full to bursting," as the Arden editor explains, and also of being struck, or "smites," or "broken." "This Blowes my hart" thus articulates both the overflow of feeling that bursts through the thin veneer of Enobarbus's skepticism, and the self-inflicted blows struggling to "beat love down" that only open the wound once more. Indeed, the play itself seems to be creating a space of grief and loss, a place of woundedness which the death of Enobarbus pulls open and wide.
IV

Enobarbus's death scene is remarkable for the direct, unmediated experience of Enobarbus which it allows. Even the soliloquies and asides leading up to Enobarbus's death, for all their complexity of feeling, still hold back from the total exposure exacted by the death scene. As the tenuous layers of Enobarbus's skepticism are pulled back, it is as if a wound is being opened. And what we glimpse when we look into that space of loss and grief is what remains when the last vestiges of Shakespearean irony fall away.

Unlike Enobarbus's first scene in the play, with its theatrical indeterminacy and ambiguity, Enobarbus's last scene is explicitly staged: "Enter a Centerie, and his Company, Enobarbus followes." The blocking of the scene specifically isolates Enobarbus from the watch he "followes," dramatizing the solitarinesss only implied by Enobarbus's first appearance in the play. Enobarbus's detachment continues on the level of language, as his words speak with a terrible remoteness that lays his grief bare:

Cent. If we be not releev'd within this houre, We must return to'th'Court of Guard: the night Is shiny, and they say, we shall embattaile By'th'second houre i'th'Morne.
1.Watch. This last day was a shrew'd one too's. Eno. Oh beare me wistesse night.
2 What man is this?
1 Stand close, and list him.
Enob. Be witesse to me (O thou blessed Moone) When men revolted shall upon Record Beare hatefull memory: poore Enobarbus did Before thy face repent.
Cent. Enobarbus?
2 Peace: Hearke further.
Eno. Oh Soveraigne Mistris of true Melancholly,
The poysous dampe of night dispunge upon me,
That life, a very Rebell to my will,
May hang no longer on me. Throw my heart
Against the flint and hardnesse of my fault,
Which being dried with greefe, will breake to
powder,
And finish all foule thoughts. Oh Anthony,
Nobler than my revolt is Infamous,
Forgive me in thine owne particular,
But let the world ranke me in Register
A Master leaver, and a fugitive:
Oh Anthony! Oh Anthony!
1 Let's speake to him.
Cent. Let's heare him, for the things he speakes
May concern Caesar.
2 Let's do so, but he sleepe.
Cent. Swoonds rather, for so bad a Prayer as his
Was never yet for sleepe.
1 Go we to him.
2 Awake sir, awake, speake to us.
1 Heare you sir?
Cent. The hand of death hath raught him.
Drummes afarre off.
Hearke the Drummes demurely wake the sleepers:
Let us beare him to'th' Court of Guard: he is of
note:
Our houre is fully out.
2 Come on then, he may recover yet (4.9.1-33)

I have quoted the scene in its entirety because the sense of
Enobarbus's death as something witnessed ("Oh beare me
witnesses," "Be witnesse to me") is crucial to understanding
the way the scene enlists us as well in the poignancy of its
utter exposure of Enobarbus's vulnerability. At the same
time, Enobarbus's death is also an intensely private
experience that is entirely absent from the "record" of
public doings and stagings, whatever Enobarbus's desires to
"earn a place in the story" may have been. In this way the
fact of the scene is almost more important than its
contents— that it allows such total exposure of Enobarbus, that it opens onto this space of grief and loss, that the play itself pulls open to this place of woundedness.

The expansiveness of Enobarbus’s language flows through the fissures of his brokenness, spilling its sacrificial largesse and extravagant grief into hyperbole and apostrophe. Enobarbus’s language, with its soft "s’s" and open vowels, possesses a tenderness ("Oh Soveraigne Mistris of true Melancholly,/ The poysenous dampe of night dispunge upon me") that infiltrates even the brittle consonance of "Throw my heart/ Against the flint and hardness of my fault,/ Which being dried with greefe, will breake to powder,/ And finish all foule thoughts," in which gently alliterative "h’s" and "f’s" mingle with sharp, crisp "t’s" and "d’s."

The lucidity and syntactic release of Enobarbus’s language makes his death all the more wrenching, allowing almost total exposure of feeling and pain. That Enobarbus’s death scene leaves him so utterly vulnerable also makes his death seem more heart-rending than the deaths of Antony or Cleopatra. While Antony envisions death as a process of dissolution ("even with a thoght/ the Racke dislimes, and makes it indistinct/ As water is in water") that he observes dispassionately from someplace outside himself, Enobarbus experiences the pain of dying from all the way inside. Although it is Antony who speaks of being
"beguil'd... to the very heart of losse" (4.12.29), it is Enobarbus's death of a broken heart which opens most fully onto this space of grief and loss.

And while Cleopatra's death scene is as extravagantly and knowingly staged as her arrival at Cydnus ("Shew me my Women like a Queene: Go fetch/ My best Attyres. I am againe for Cidnus,/ To meete Marke Anthony") in order to pre-empt Caesar's own "extemporal stagings" of her in Rome, Enobarbus's death take place specifically "off the record:"

"Oh Anthony,/ Nobler than my revolt is Infamous,/ Forgive me in thine own particular,/ But let the world ranke me in Register/ A Master leaver, and a fugitive." Even as his language enacts the "breaking" of "flint and hardness," Enobarbus's acts of penance crack open the adamantine structures of memorialization already beginning to encase him. If Cleopatra can say, "I have nothing / Of woman in me: Now from head to foote/ I am Marble constant: now the fleeting moon/ No planet is of mine" (5.2.237-240), then Enobarbus opens up his deepest feelings of regret and sorrow to this "fleeting" and inconstant planet ("O thou blessed Moone"), abandoning forever the way that leads to firm security and giving himself over to chance and hazard.

Enobarbus spends his last breath on the name of Antony, as if to exorcise the powerful spirit that has possessed his heart so utterly, as if to breathe his own life into an Antony strong enough to bear the enormous weight of
Enobarbus's investment in him. Enobarbus's life runs out even as the final hour of the company's watch comes to an end ("Our houre is fully out"), even as the "Drummes demurely wake the sleepers." Enobarbus's apparently lifeless body is born by the watch to the "Court of Guard," now that he has no more need of guardedness, now that his heart is broken, now that "all foul thoughts" are finished.

And yet, even as the body of Enobarbus is being carried offstage, the scene closes with the Second Watch's "Come on then, he may recover yet." Whether to believe the Sentry's gnomic pronouncement that "The hand of death hath raught him," or the Second Watch's insistence that Enobarbus only "sleeps," we cannot be sure. Of all the nay-sayers, only Enobarbus dies before our eyes, only Enobarbus has his ending. Shakespeare's critique of what these solitary figures embody--skepticism, nay-saying, Kierkegaardian irony--seems too deeply internal to the creative process at work in the plays to allow the resistances that the nay-sayers assert with such seductive force simply to cease.

As the ancient anecdote about Mercutio ("If I hadn't killed him, he would have killed me") suggests, there is still the inner necessity of the nay-sayer's death to whatever kind of transcendence the plays ultimately work. While *Romeo and Juliet* actively seems to require the death of Mercutio (who in some sense is crushed under the weight of his own bitter ironies) to cross over into the
unrestrained erotic of Juliet's soliloquy, the inner necessity of Enobarbus's death to Anthony and Cleopatra's crossing over into Cleopatra's radical imaginings is not so clearly apprehended.

In part this is so because Anthony and Cleopatra is itself engaged in a project of re-imagining transcendence--as a process of "undoing" and yet also of things "well-done," as an escape from vicious circularity and yet an escape into a kind of Nietzschean circularity--in ways that Romeo and Juliet is not. And Enobarbus is more intricated in these attempts at redefining transcendence than either Antony or Cleopatra, however largely they may figure in its final manifestations. For it is Enobarbus's attempts to formulate ontological contradictions ("make defect perfection," "breathlesse powre breath forth") that come closest to articulating the contradactoriness of notions about transcendence that populate the play.

Indeed, it may be even be that the crux on which the whole vision of the play turns is Cleopatra's

But if there be, nor ever were one such
It's past the size of dreaming: Nature wants stuffe
To vie strange formes with fancie, yet t'imagine
An Anthony were Nature's piece, 'gainst Fancie,
Condemning shadowes quite (5.2.96-100),

which participates in the grammar of expectant negations initiated by Enobarbus's own "This cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a showre of Raine as well as Iove"
(1.2.148-149). Modern editors who emend the crucial "nor" to "or" ("But if there be, or ever were one such") lose the sense of contradictoriness upon which Cleopatra's entire project of "imagining an Anthony" depends. Cleopatra's "nor" disengages her imaginings from the realm of the historical past ("nor ever were") in such a way as to blur the very distinctions which separate imagining and remembering. Thus, when Cleopatra says that "one such" man as this she dreamt of is "Past the size of dreaming," she reaches both beyond the space of the imagination and back to that place where remembrances dwell.

Cleopatra's claim that "t'Imagine/ An Anthony were nature's piecee, 'gainst Fancie" reconfigures Enobarbus's own "O're-picturing that Venus, where we see/ The fancie outworke Nature" (2.2.200-201), where "fancie" (glossed as "the artist's imagination") and "nature" are separate and in opposition. Cleopatra's formulations not only locate the imagination within the realm of nature, but oppose both to "Fancie," creating a new metaphysical category for the process of imagining like that invoked by Enobarbus's own sense of "Story." While Cleopatra's language has no need of the limited action of prefixes upon which Enobarbus's attempts at transcendence depend, her radical imaginings of an "Emperor Anthony" nevertheless come out of that space of grief and woundedness opened up by Enobarbus's death, that "heart of loss" which is exposed when skepticism falls away.
When Cleopatra announces that she is "againe for Cidnus,/ To meete Marke Anthony," she claims for her point of departure into the realm where imaginings and remembrances converge the space cleared by Enobarbus’s own narrative. Cleopatra’s "strong toil of grace," that would "catch another Anthony" though it may "look like sleep," rouses itself in her final moments with a "Nay" ("O Anthony! Nay I will take thee too./ What should I stay---") that cancels acquiescence ("As sweet as Balme, as soft as Ayre, as gentle") and reaches back to take everything, from what hurts to what is desired, with her into death. Caesar’s wonder at the alabaster perfection of Cleopatra’s lifeless body may suggest that the "gash" in the play pulled open by Enobarbus’s own death has been "kissed whole" by Cleopatra’s deeply erotic labors. Yet the scars (figured as open) still remain ("Heere on her brest,/ There is a vent of Bloud, and something blowne") to remind us of that place of woundedness at the very heart of loss.

2Of the nine (or eight, if "Lamprius" is the Soothsayer like Ridley’s Arden edition of the play suggests) characters listed in the Folio stage directions, four (or three) say
nothing throughout the scene, and none appear in North's Plutarch, Shakespeare's major source for the play.

"Antony and Cleopatra 1.1.10-13.
'With the Soothsayer's prophetic "readings" we are once more in the realm of doom-saying dreams and shadowy omens that recall Romeo's premonitions ("And we mean well in going to this masque,\ But 'tis no wit to go... I dreamt a dream tonight") and Mercutio's violent imaginings of Queen Mab, which manifest the terrifying energies his words attempt to block. Romeo's other dream ("all this day an unaccustomed spirit/ Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts./ I dreamt my lady came and found me dead-/ Strange dream, that gives a man leave to think!/ And breath's such life with kisses in my lips/ That I reviv'd and was an emperor") is also strangely prescient of the unfolding process of Antony and Cleopatra, which seems almost to "revive" Romeo as the Emperor Anthony, his bruised body "lift[ed]... above the ground" by Cleopatra's strenuous, deeply erotic labors ("But come, come, Anthony-/ Help me, my women- we must draw thee up"), and imagined by her to "quicken with kissing." As Cleopatra calls for "strong-wing'd Mercury" to "fetch [Anthony] up" (4.15.35), and as Romeo imagines "thought" as "lifting" him "above the ground," strange links are forged between the realms of transcendent dreams and the self-consuming preoccupation with thinking and knowing that plagues the nay-sayers.

'This problematic of thinking and knowing infiltrates Enobarbus' language throughout the play, from the wounded retort of "Go too then: your Considerate stone" (2.2.110) to the agonized "Throw my heart/ Against the flint and hardnesse of my fault,/ Which being being dried with greefe, will breake to powder,/ And finish all foul thoughts" (4.9.15-18) of his final speech, from the tortured refrain "But why, why, why" (3.7.2) that punctuates his contentious exchange with Cleopatra to his "Think, and die" that answers her "What shall we do, Enobarbus?" (3.13.1). Enobarbus even frames his own dividedness within the terms of "reason" and "thought:" "Ile yet follow/ The wounded chance of Anthony, though my reason/ Sits in the winde against me" (3.10.35-37), "when valoure prays in reason,/ It eates the Sword it fights with: I will seeke/ Some way to leave him" (3.13.199-201), "This blowes my hart,/ If swift thought breake it not: a swifter meane/ Shall out-strike thought, but thought will goo't" (4.6.34-36).
'A similar process will be enacted by Cleopatra's interview of Dolabella later in the play, when Cleopatra answers Dolabella's anxiously pressing "Assuredly you know me" (which even more resolutely presumes straightforward affirmation) with the elusive and compelling "No matter,
sir, what I have heard or known./ You laugh when boys or women tel their dreams;/ Is't not your trick?" (5.2.73-75). The motif of "hands" is an especially rich one in Antony and Cleopatra, in which the gesture of "showing" one's hand is fraught with habitual anxieties about masculine vulnerability and female promiscuity (often accompanied by a bitter and frequently contradictory resentment of female "closefistedness"). It is Cleopatra's extension of her hand to Thidias that incites Antony's fury ("To let a fellow that will take rewards,/ And say, God quit you, be familiar with/ My play-fellow, you hand"), even as later in the play he will take great pleasure in offering Cleopatra's hand to his "brave Warriour": "Behold this man,/ Commend unto his Lippes thy favouring hand."

The word "quick" carries an unusual amount of referential weight in this play, from its suggestiveness of the Roman preoccupation with alacrity so strongly tied to the great Caesar (Antony marvels, "Is it not strange, Cannidius,/ That from Tarentum, and Brandusium/ He could so quickly cut the Ionian sea,/ And take in Torsyn?" [3.7.20-23]), to its presence in the play's final scenes almost wholly in the preserve of Cleopatra's erotic and compelling urgency: "Yare, yare, good Iras; quick: methinks I hear/ Antony call" (5.2.282-283). Enobarbus's language here also contains subtextual echoes of Romeo's poignant "Thy drugs are quick", which gestures toward the regenerative power of "quickening" that Cleopatra's language releases so powerfully with her image of Antony "quickening" with her kisses.

In "But Why Enobarbus?" in Notes and Queries 34 (1987): 216-217, Dawson explicates Shakespeare's transmutation of Plutarch's Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus into the Enobarbus of the play. Dawson argues that the change from Domitius to Enobarbus reflects Shakespeare's desire to mark Enobarbus as "a master-leaver and a fugitive' from the first time he made his first appearance" (217) by emphasizing the cognomen's origins in the red beard and hair traditionally possessed by the family members of the gens Domitia, which would in turn evoke the red beard and hair worn by the player of Judas in the early miracle plays. Dawson explains, "What could be more natural than that the man who was to leave his master and die of a broken heart... should ne identifiable as soon as he came on stage?"(217). Although I would be inclined to argue that Shakespeare's use of stock devices would tend to subvert and problematize the assumptions they would generate, Dawson's explanation also ignores the wonderful phonetic resonance of "Enobarbus" (striking in its way like "Mercutio"), with its soft and expansive "o" surrounded by harsh consonants, its resistant "no" and sharp "barb," its whisper of the first-person plural at the end, and its echo of "enough."

Only the New Cambridge edition of the play drops the comma after "enough," although the positioning of "enough" as an enjambment enables a similar pause. The line appears in the Folio as "Bring in the Banket quickly: Wine enough, Cleopatra's health to drinke."

Enobarbus's language initiates the grammatical weirdness of "drinking" that will insinuate itself into the language of the play, from Enobarbus's subsequent "Mine, and most our fortunes tonight will be drunk to bed" to Cleopatra's memory of "That time? O times" when "the next morne, Ere the ninth houre, I drunke him to his bed" (2.5.18-21).

Ventidius seems to employ "enough" in this fearful sense of "too much" when he cries out to his fellow soldier, "O Silius, Silius, I have done enough. A lower place, note well, May make too great an act" (3.1.11-13). Somewhat differently, the Soothsayer while in Rome invokes the anxiety attendant on the dangerous uncertainty of "enough" when he warns Antony that near Caesar, "thy angel/ Becomes afeard; as being o'erpower'd, therefore/ Make space enough between you" (2.3.20-22).

This sense of excessiveness operates in Seleucus's use of "enough" to refer to the treasure which Cleopatra has horded; when she responds to his allegations (elicited at her own insistence) with "What have I kept back?", the treasurer replies, "Enough to purchase what you have made known" (5.2.146-147).

Although Enobarbus's name does appear first in the stage directions, textual scholars are still divided over whether Shakespearean stage directions list characters in the order of their entrances or simply enumerate the characters to appear in the scene as a whole.

Enobarbus's reference to the bed is also a disturbingly fatalistic echo of the Fool's last words before disappearing from King Lear ("And I'll go to bed at noon"), as well as a subtextual link to the site of Falstaff's own agonizing death.

Laura Quinney, in her beautiful essay "Enter a Messenger", unfolds the imbrication of even these "minor" characters in the play's fascination with the realm of the uncanny. For Quinney, the role of the messenger in Antony and Cleopatra is "so transformed that this figure comes to have its own thematic," which comes to involve "the quasi-human, but impersonal and anonymous traits of the alterity of language—its generosity, intimacy, and distance." Quinney's essay appears in Modern Critical Interpretations of Antony and Cleopatra (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988): 151-167.


Ridley thwarts this possibility altogether by transposing the stage direction "Enter Cleopatra" and Enobarbus's line, explaining that "the actual presence of Cleopatra on the stage would make the remark nonsensical."

Exactly whom Cleopatra addresses when she says "Go with us" remains uncertain, and it is somewhat surprising that Enobarbus does indeed go with her (he is, at any rate, no longer on stage when Antony converses with the messengers). Jonathan Miller's production of the play for the BBC sidesteps the issue while dramatizing Enobarbus's conflictedness: as Cleopatra exits, Enobarbus looks anxiously toward her and then back at the approaching Antony as if torn between the two. The camera then cuts away to Antony's face, thus begging the question of Enobarbus's exit.

Although retaining the placement of Antony's line before Enobarbus's entrance (as well as the added exclamation point), David Bevington (editor of the New Cambridge *Antony and Cleopatra*) at least acknowledges the "possibility" of the Folio arrangement: "Enobarbus is usually close at hand to Antony and might be expected to know that his presence is desired now that Antony has had a chance to consult with the messengers." But Enobarbus may just as likely be acting under the suggestion of Cleopatra as on any anticipation of Antony's need of him.


Enobarbus's language can only go so far, though, towards the transvaluation for which it strives, reaching for claims of "firstness" rather than asserting the "greatness" of "small things."

So much of this scene seems elaborately and premeditatively scripted, like the way Caesar's "Yet if I knew,/ What Hoope should hold us staunch from edge to edge/ At t'world: I would serve it" seems to serve as a "prompt" for Agrippa's suggestion of marriage between Antony and Octavia: "to knit your hearts/ With an un-sliping knot, take Anthony,/ Octavia to his wife" (which Agrippa himself allows to be a "studied not a present thought,/ By duty ruminated").
Several critics have read the Cydnus speech as gaining momentum as Enobarbus entralls himself as well as his listeners. Ronald MacDonald argues that "Enobarbus begins the speech in the spirit of competition with his interlocutors... [but] by the time he finishes it he has persuaded himself" ("Playing till Doomsday: Interpreting Antony and Cleopatra" in English Literary Renaissance 15 [1985]: 78-99). Holland's take on the speech is characteristically less generous: "By giving the speech to Enobarbus, Shakespeare says, in effect, Cleopatra is so magnificent, she can transfigure even this stern, cynical, Roman... this speech is quite 'out of character,' quite 'inconsistent with the rest of what Enobarbus does" (The Shakespearian Imagination 263).

The New Variorum provides one of the most comprehensive explanations of the textual crux at "breathless, powre breathe forth," which appears in the Folio as "breathless power breath forth":

The orthological ambiguity of powre and breath, as well as the grammatical alternatives, are summarized by Blake (1983): 'Breathlesse could modify powre, which could be the object of breath with the senses "and breathes out breathless charm," or it could modify she... so that the sense becomes "'And she breathless breathes forth charm.'" If breathlesse is taken as a qualifier to she.... the meaning would be "And breathless she pours forth breath".... If, however, breath is taken as a nominal group rather than as a verb, it would mean that powre is better understood as the verb "pour" rather than the functionally shifted verb "power."

My own sense of the crux is that as many of the line's complex ambiguities as it is possible to sustain should be accommodated, although I will admit that my own reading does seem to favor the verb/object construction of "power breath forth." It is also important to stress, despite the insistent paraphrasing of "power" as "charm" by most editors, that Enobarbus speaks not of charm, or seductiveness, or enchantment, but of power.

The words are Enobarbus's as he pleads with Anthony to desist from his rash plan to encounter Caesar at sea: "Most worthy Sir, you therein... quite forgoe/ The way which promises assurance, and/ Give up your selfe meerly to chance and hazard, From firme Securitie" (3.7.41-48).

Some editors see a reference to the winds of Fortune in light of Enobarbus's reference to Antony's "wounded chance." Williamson, for example, notes in the Variorum that "The image here involves one of Fortune's most familiar
attributes, her winds." Somewhat differently, Ridley compares the idea behind Enobarbus's figure to the sense of the colloquialism "There's something in the wind." My own reading of the lines privileges the New Cambridge edition's gloss of "Sits in the wind" as "on my trail."

Enobarbus's articulation of his dividedness is an immediate precursor to Antony's own "I have fled my selfe" (3.11.7), which nonetheless maintains a sense of escape more than pursuit, and dissolution rather than fracturedness.

Ronald Macdonald, in "Playing Till Doomsday: Interpreting Antony and Cleopatra" considers the line to be spoken "without apparent equivocation" (84). Macdonald argues that "The assured tone of this simply proves false to the complexity of his feelings for Antony," his reading's promising shift into a discussion of Enobarbus's "complexity" hindered by its inattentiveness to the language itself.

Laura Quinney, "Enter a Messenger."

That Enobarbus imagines the end of consciousness in terms of "swiftness" suggests the "celerity" he imagines of Cleopatra's own "deaths:" "I have seen her die twenty times upon farre poorer moment: I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying" (1.2.139-142). For Enobarbus, though, death is imagined not in terms of "loving acts" but of "breking" and "blowing."

"Blows" also seems uncannily suggestive of Cleopatra's own death, as Dolabella examines her lifeless body to discover "Heere on her brest,/ There is a vent of Bloud, and something blowne/ The like is on her Arme" (5.2.346-348).

French's Acting Edition of the play seems uncannily attuned to the sense of aloneness that surrounds Enobarbus, even in his first scene in the play. The diagrams which accompany its annotations consistently block Enobarbus apart from the onstage company, thus anticipating the explicit staging of his final scene.


Antony and Cleopatra 5.2.226-228.

Cleopatra's language does not articulate a monolithic notion of "The Imagination" with a capital "I," but rather phrases it in terms of process and activity--"t'Imagine an Anthony."

In the scene prior to Enobarbus's death, Anthony had instructed his followers to "Enter the City, clip your Wives, your Friends,/ Tell them your feats, whilst they with joyfull tears/ Wash the congealment from your wounds, and Kisse/ The Honour'd-gashes whole" (4.8.8-11).

Antony and Cleopatra 5.2.348-350.
CHAPTER SIX

Life in the Level of Dreams:
Paulina and the Work of Restoration

In a way, Shakespeare finally breaks through in Antony and Cleopatra, putting to rest the specter of skepticism that has haunted even his most powerful explorations of belief and imaginative becomings. This is not to say, however, that the romances, with their epilogic reconfiguration of the nature of belief, do not continue to engage the problematic of skepticism or to explore the resistances maintained so compellingly by Shakespeare's naysayers. My intent in concluding with a discussion of The Winter's Tale is not to construe the play as a "happy ending" to the crisis of belief staged in the preceding plays. Rather, The Winter's Tale reconfigures elements that have dominated previous meditations on skepticism and distrust—male friendship and rivalry, sacrifice and scapegoating mechanisms, the plain-speaking ironist hopelessly overinvested in the objects of his vexed scorn—into a powerful exploration of the creation of belief. And it does so in a way that never ceases to remind us of the loss that lies at the heart of restoration, of the dying that initiates the process of resurrection, and of the sacrifice that pays the cost of redemption.
Central to the process of resuscitation and restoration undertaken by the play is the character of Paulina, who in many ways plays the Fool to Leontes's Lear. If, by the end of King Lear, it is Lear who has taken over the role of the charismatic nay-sayer, then the opening scenes of The Winter's Tale locate that nihilistic skepticism within the habitation of Leontes:

Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning Cheeke to Cheeke? is meating Noses?
Kissing with in-side Lip? stopping the Cariere
Of Laughter, with a sigh? (a Note infallible
Of breaking Honestie) horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? wishing Clocks more swift?
Houries, Minutes? Noone, Mid-night? and all Eyes
Blind with the Pin and Web, but theirs; theirs
only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
Why then the World, and all that's in't, is
nothing,
The covering Skie is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My Wife is nothing, nor Nothing have these
Nothings,
If this be nothing (1.2.284-295).

Even as the world and all its fullness recede into Leontes's language of "nothingness," that same language cannot help but disappear the signs of betrayal that it strives so insistently to make present—"whispering," "leaning Cheeke to Cheeke," "Kissing with in-side Lip," they too are absorbed into Leontes's all-encompassing "nothing." Leontes himself moves over the course of the speech from looking onto the betrayal (the signs of it strangely anatomized and disembodied by his catalog) from the outside to being drawn inside the ethos of (illicit?) love and desire itself:
"wishing Clocks more swift?/ Hourse, minutes? Noone, Mid-
night?". In much the same way that the Queen Mab speech
"traps" a furious Mercutio inside the very dreams that his
language would deny, Leontes's speech draws him deeper into
memories/experiences/imaginings of desire that his vicious
(yet somehow plaintive) "nothings" must then rise up to
decry.

Leontes himself has already articulated his doubt and
distrust in terms eerily suggestive of the violent
Mercutian language of dreams and their begetting:

\begin{quote}
Affection?² thy Intention³ stabs the Center.
Thou do'st make possible things not so held,
Communicat'st with Dreames (how can this be?)
With what's unreal: thou co-active⁴ art,
And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent,
Thou mayst co-joyne with something, and thou do'st
(And that beyond Commission) and I find it
(And that to the infection of my Braines,
And hardning of my Browes) (1.2.138-146).
\end{quote}

There is such an opacity—"affection," "intention,"
"center"—in the metapsychological language here. Leontes's
language seems to get lost inside its own convolutions as it
struggles to make sense of the "co-active" process of
engendering belief in "things not so held." The language
proceeds from a sense of woundedness (and that at the very
"center" of feeling) that recalls Mercutio's own vexed
phallicism, and that ultimately "hardens" over the course of
the speech like a scar.⁵ Later in the play, Leontes
diagnoses his own pathology as having "too much beleev'd
mine owne suspition" (3.2.151), and while some of the play's
most astute readers have argued that Leontes's "confession" is self-serving and still locates him within that very "suspicion," Leontes's words nevertheless manage to convey that in some sense, the skeptic's most terrifying fear is not of being incapable of belief, but of believing too much. Not that the other is only a fiction, but that one's investment in and attachment to that other is all too real. And not that the eyes cannot be trusted, but that the heart will not be deceived.

Thus, when Paulina rather belatedly enters the play in the second scene of Act Two, it is as if the trajectory of skepticism traced by King Lear—with the disappearance of the Fool and his attempts to provoke self-consciousness after his skepticism is finally absorbed into Lear's own discourse—has been reversed so that the arrival of Paulina comes only after the ground has already been razed by Leontes's own nihilistic skepticism. Indeed, Paulina's first appearances in the play are staged as a series of forced entries: first at the prison where she is denied access to Hermione, then at Leontes's court where she is greeted with a stern "You must not enter" (2.3.26). Leontes even seems to have expressly forbidden Paulina's appearance before him, charging Antigonus after Paulina has nevertheless managed to intrude on his presence with "I charg'd thee that she should not come about me, / I knew she would" (2.3.43-44). Like the Fool, Paulina comes forth with "words, as medicinall, as
true;/ (Honest, as either:) to purge [Leontes] of that humor,/ That presses him from sleepe" (2.3.37-39), even as her language inadvertently engages the same vocabulary of masculine sexual anxieties released by the Queen Mab speech ("This is the hag, when Maides lie on their backs,/ That presses them, and learnes them first to beare"9) and that circulate during the opening scenes of the play.

Like the Fool, who is first linked to Cordelia (specifically in grief and loss), Paulina is from the beginning associated with Hermione, and with the pain of her absence. This is not to say, however, that Paulina merely substitutes for Hermione, much less "impersonates the mother figure that haunts Leontes's fears," as Peter Erickson would have it.10 Paulina's aggressive resistance to Leontes's own refusals are more concerned, in fact, with prodding Leontes into a language of plurals and possessives that would force Leontes to recognize his own enormous investedness in what he casts off as irreducibly other. Thus, when Paulina thrusts her way into Leontes's presence, carrying in her arms the newborn child, she tries unsuccessfully to draw Leontes into her language of possessiveness: "'twere past all doubt/ Youl'd call your children, yours" (2.3.81-82), "It is yours:/ And might we lay th'old Proverb to your charge" (96-97), "Looke to your Babe (my Lord) 'tis yours" (126). As for Leontes, his constant refrain for Paulina to be driven "out"—"Force her hence" (62), "Out" (67), "out o'
dore" (68), "Will you not push her out?" (74), "Out of the
Chamber with her" (122)--may even posit an intrapsychic
process at work within Leontes that Paulina's voice of
sanity and reason fearfully embodies.

Indeed, while it is easy to dismiss Leontes's own Lear-
like expressions of sadness and grief as self-absorbed and
self-serving--"I have Tremor Cordis on me: my heart
daunces,/ But not for joy; not joy" (1.2.110-111), "While
she lives/ My heart will be a burthen to me" (2.3.205-206),
"This Sessions (to our great griefe we pronounce)/ Even
pushes 'gainst our heart" (3.2.1-2)--it is also possible to
read them in terms of Leontes's subsequent admission that
Hermione is "The partie tried,/ The Daughter of a King, our
Wife, and one/ Of us too much belov'd" (3.2.2-4). That is,
Leontes's rage at Hermione and the child may be an attempt
to exorcise his own overflowing feelings and desire, and his
highly wrought schemes of betrayal thus a defensive
mechanism for disavowing his own literally heart-rending
investedness in Polixenes, in Hermione, in his children, in
what the eyes behold.

Thus, when Leontes responds to Hermione's "Sir,/ You
speake a Language that I understand not:/ My Life stands in
the levell of your Dreames" with "Your Actions are my
Dreames" (3.2.80-82), their language creates an explosive
moment of the frightening "realness" of dreams and illusions
that exists entirely apart from any notion of "truth" or
"reality." Even more importantly, the strangely gnomic quality of the language of "dreams" here gives the moment an almost electrical charge, as if "Life" itself is in danger of being levelled by Leontes's dreams. The "truth" of the oracle then read by the officer—that "Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blamelesse, Camillo a true Subject, Leontes a jealous Tyrant, his innocent Babe truly begotten" (3.2.132-134)—thus becomes irrelevant to Leontes's desperate portrayal of himself as a man more "sinned against than sinning" and is immediately dismissed as "meere falsehood."

But the heavy cost of Leontes's bitter refusals is exacted with a speed and cruelty almost beyond belief, as a servant enters immediately after Leontes's dismissal of the oracle with news of Mamillius's death. Yet even at this, Leontes continues to maintain his posture of "wrongedness," interpreting the child's death as "punishment" for his disregard of the oracle:

    Ser. O Sir, I shall be hated to report it.  
    The Prince your Sonne, with meere conceit, and feare 
    Of the Queenses speed, is gone.  
    Leo. How? gone?  
    Ser. Is dead.  
    Leon. Apollo's angry, and the Heavens themselves 
    Do strike at my Injustice (3.2.142-146).

Leontes's language almost compulsively circles back to his own dilemmas with an almost complete denial of feeling or pain—notice how quickly his language distances itself from
the experience of grief and loss ("How? gone?") as it moves to invoke externalized blows that still do not seem to penetrate too deeply ("the Heavens themselves/ Do strike at my Injustice"). Even Hermione’s collapse at the news of her son’s death becomes only another occasion for a refusal to acknowledge grief and loss. Leontes—despite, or perhaps because of, Paulina’s command for him to "Look downe/ And see what Death is doing"¹² (3.2.148-149)—orders the seemingly lifeless body of Hermione borne "hence," with the rather callous observation that "Her heart is but o’re-charg’d: she will recover" (3.2.150).

It is left to Paulina, who re-enters after accompanying the body of Hermione offstage, to explode Leontes’s self-consciously rhetorical stagings of his "grief"—"How he [Camillo] glisters/ Through my rust? and how his Pietie/ Do’s my deeds make the blacker?"—performed in her absence during Leontes’s lengthy monologue. In contrast to the symmetricalness of Leontes’s carefully constructed speech—"Ile reconcile me to Polixenes,/ New [woo]¹³ my Queene, recall the good Camillo"—Paulina’s language practically breaks open the artifice of Leontes’s lament to the very heart of loss that it conceals:

O cut my Lace, least my heart (cracking it)
Breake too...
What studied torments (Tyrant) hast for me?
In Leads, or Oyls? What old, or newer Torture
Must I receive? whose every word deserves
To taste of thy most worst. Thy Tyranny
(Together working with thy Jealousies,
Fancies too weake for Boyse, too green and idle
For Girles of Nine) O thinke what they have done,
And then run mad indeed: starke-mad: for all
Thy by-gone fooleries were but spices of it.
That thou betrayed'st Polixenes, 'twas nothing,
(That did but shew thee, of a Fоole, inconstant,
And damnable ingratefull) Nor was't much.
Thou would'st have poyson'd good Camillo's Honor,
To have him kill a King: poore Trespasses,
More monstrous standing by: whereof I reckon
The casting forth to Crowes, thy Baby-daughter,
To be none, or little; though a Devill
Would have shed water out of fire, ere don't:
Nor is't directly layd to thee, the death
Of the young Prince, whose honorable thoughts
(Thoughts high for one so tender) cleft the heart
That could conceive a grosse and foolish Sire
Blemish'd his gracious Dam: this is not, no,
Layd to thy answere: but the last: O Lords,
When I have said, cry woe: the Queene, the
Queene,
The sweet'st, deer'st creature's dead: &
Vengeance for't
Not drop'd downe yet (3.2.172-202).

I have quoted at such length because the language's very
excessiveness is so much a part of its power to make grief
and sadness almost unbearably present. Paulina's language
twists bitterly between hyperbole ("To taste of thy most
worst") and cynical reductiveness ("That thou betrayed'st
Polixenes, 'twas nothing") as she exposes the griefs and
losses that Leontes's monologue had rather conveniently
"forgot"--the "casting forth to Crowes thy Baby-daughter,"
"the death/ Of the young Prince." Whereas Leontes had
construed the death of Mamilius in the exacting terms of
Apollo's "anger," Paulina speaks of a heart "cleft" by
"honorable thoughts," evoking the sense of consciousness
finally made unbearable that Enobarbus's own death of a
broken heart ("This blows my hart,/ If swift thought break it not") enacts. Paulina's language of ironic negation--"'twas nothing," "nor was't much," "none or little," "this is not, no,/ Layd to thy answer"--counters Leontes's own "nothings," as if to level the "language of dreams" that has enabled Leontes's refusals to believe.

And if Falstaff's language is one that pushes almost compulsively toward the threshold of what has been ostensibly deflected, then Paulina's language circles back again and again to what has already been declared hopelessly lost and irretrievable. Indeed, Paulina's wonderfully ironic "apology" for the "boldness" of her speech not only refuses to let Leontes wallow in his comfortable language of "deserving" ("Go on, go on:/ Thou canst not speake too much, I have desper'd/ All tongues to talke their bittrest"), but also continues to remind him of all that has been lost:

All faults I make, when I shall come to know them, I do repent: Alas, I have shew'd too much The rashnesse of a woman: he is toucht To th'Noble heart. What's gone, and what's past helpe Should be past greefe: Do not receive affliction At my petition; I beseech you, rather Let me be punish'd, that have minded you Of what you should forget. Now (good my Liege) Sir, Royall Sir, forgive a foolish woman: The love I bore your Queene (Lo, foole againe) Ile speake of her no more, nor of your Children: Ile not remember you of my owne Lord, (Who is lost too:) take your patience to you, And Ile say nothing (3.2.219-232).

The doubleness of Paulina's language can especially be felt in the ambiguity of "What's gone, and what's past helpe/
Should be past greefe," which like Cleopatra's "past the size of dreaming" reaches beyond as well as back, as if no amount of grief could ever be enough to mourn such a loss. Paulina refuses Leontes the "punishment" that he would prefer to admitting any need for forgiveness by taking it mockingly onto herself instead ("Let me be punish'd"), even as her own "show" of "repentance" mocks the lack of it in Leontes. In the very act of apologizing for "minding" Leontes of what he "should forget," Paulina renders any such forcible repression impossible with her constant needling: "Ile speake of her no more, nor of your Children:/ Ile not remember you of my owne Lord,/(Who is lost too:)." If the Fool is the voice of self-consciousness that would penetrate Lear's defensive madness, then Paulina is the voice of memory that would break through all of Leontes's willful "forgettings."

With Leontes's invitation to "Come, and leade me/ To these sorrowes" (3.2.242-243), the stage empties of Paulina and its other inhabitants as the play then crosses over great gaps of space and time, moving from Sicilia to Bohemia, and from tragedy to pastoral. But the play's own crossing over the wide gap of sixteen years that separates the third and fourth acts is itself a kind of willed "forgetting" in which we too become complicit--Time asks our "patience this allowing... As you had slept betweene" (4.1.15-17).
The play crosses into the lovely pastoral of the fourth act only, in fact, over the bridge of Antigonus's death. In the lengthy but richly complex monologue that precedes his disappearance from the play, the husband of Paulina processes some of the play’s most pressing dilemmas as he recounts his "dream" of Hermione’s "ghost" that makes a powerfully subliminal connection between Hermione and Paulina:

Come, poore babe;  
I have heard (but not beleev’d) the Spirits o’th’ dead  
May walke again: if such thing be, thy Mother  
Appear’d to me last night: for ne’re was dreame  
So like a waking. To me comes a creature,  
Sometimes her head on one side, some another,  
I never saw a vessell of like sorrow  
So fill’d, and so becomming: in pure white Robes  
Like very sanctity she did approach  
My Cabine where I lay: thrice bow’d before me,  
And (gasping to begin some speech) her eyes  
Became two spouts; the furie spent, anon  
Did this breake from her. Good Antigonus,  
Since Fate (against thy better disposition)  
Hath made thy person for the Th[r]ower-out  
Of my poore babe, according to thine oath,  
Places remote enough are in Bohemia,  
There weepe, and leave it crying: and for the babe  
Is counted lost for ever, Perdita  
I prethee call’t: For this ungentle businesse  
Put on thee, by my Lord, thou ne’er shalt see  
Thy Wife Paulina more: and so, with shriekes  
She melted into Ayre. Affrighted much,  
I did in time collect my selfe, and thought  
This was so, and no slumber: Dreames, are toyes,  
Yet for this once, yea superstitiously,  
I will be squar’d by this. I do beleeve  
Hermione hath suffer’d death, and that  
Apollo would (this being indeede the issue  
Of King Polixenes) it should heere be laide,  
(Either for life, or death) upon the earth  
Of it’s right Father. Blossome, speed thee well,  
There lye, and there thy character: there these,  
Which may if Fortune please, both breed thee
(pretty)
And still rest thine. The storme beginnes, poor wretch,
That for thy mothers fault, art thus expos'd
To losse, and what may follow. Weepe I cannot,
But my heart bleedes: and most accurst am I
To be by oath enjoyn'd to this. Farewell,
The day frownes more and more: thou'rt like to have
A lullabie too rough: I never saw
The heavens so dim, by day. A savage clamor?
Well may I get a-boord: This is the Chase;
I am gone forever. Exit pursued by a Beare
(3.3.15-58).

What is perhaps most striking about Antigonus's narrative is the way its language moves from wary expressions of doubt--"I have heard (but not beleev'd)"--to emphatic performatives ("I do beleev") that nevertheless veer off into damaging half-truths: "I do beleev/ Hermione hath suffer'd death...
(this being indeede the issue/ Of King Polixenes)." Even as conditionals give way to assertions in the speech's opening lines--"I have heard (but not beleeved) the Spirits o' th' dead/ May walke again:/ if such thing be, thy Mother/
Appear'd to me last night"--one can almost feel the language struggling to formulate oppositions that still can only approximate the ontological contradicitoriness of the dream experience: "ne'er was dreame/ So like a waking." And for all its willed certainty, Antigonus's "I do beleev" never quite manages to break free from the grudging language of caution that precedes it: "Dreames, are toyes,/ Yet for this once yea, superstitionally,/ I will be squar'd by this." Antigonus's fragmented language clings to this sense of
"oneness" as if to avoid getting too carried away by the 
"realness" of his dream, as if still holding back from being able to believe fully in what the eyes behold.

The sheer length of Antigonus's monologue, though, also serves to delay his abandonment of the child, and language itself thus begins to feel like a hedge against loss. Indeed, the speech becomes intimately concerned with naming losses, from "Perdita" ("for the babe/ Is counted lost forever") to "Paulina," who is called by name for the first time in the play ("thou ne'er shalt see/ Thy Wife Paulina more"). Even Antigonus, who is finally forced offstage when he is "pursued by a Beare," pronounces with his last words his own loss to the play (and to Paulina)--"I am gone for ever." And yet for all its poignant sensitivity to the pain of loss, Antigonus's language remains plagued by a sense of loss as something out there--"poore Thing, condem'd to losse" (2.3.192)--and outside the self's experience--"poore wretch,/ That for thy mothers fault art thus expos'd/ To losse" (3.3.49-51). Antigonus's language also holds fast to the very notions of blame and deserving--"That for thy mothers fault"--that have made Leontes's language of wrongedness so suspect, and that seem so profoundly at odds with the direction toward which this play is heading-- "beyond" repentance, "beyond" forgiveness.

It is not quite so easy, then, to say that Antigonus simply "carries off" the sins of Leontes, as Peter Erickson
would have it: "Leontes thus delegates his problems to Antigonus, who, like a scapegoat, takes on the suffering that Leontes would have to endure if the play were a tragedy." Antigonus may be a scapegoat, but he is a scapegoat of a different sort—one whose death may be enough to carry the play from tragedy to pastoral romance, but which leaves the work of grief that is necessary for restoration and reconciliation still undone. In the telling of his dream, Antigonus relates his instructions from Hermione as twofold: "Places remote enough are in Bohemia,/ There weep, and leave it crying" (3.3.31-32, emphasis mine). However, the first of Hermione's imperatives, to weep, is left undone, even to Antigonus's deep sorrow and chagrin: "Weep I cannot,/ But my heart bleedes" (3.3.51-52). We are not yet arrived at that place where sorrow weeps to take its leave of the sorrower, and where joy itself wades in tears. It remains for Paulina to lead us to these healing sorrows, and to perform the acts of grief that Antigonus's death leaves yet unfinished.

II

When the play at last returns to Sicilia for the final act, not even the realm of Bohemia, with its intricately textured pastoral beauty and its relaxed rhythms of idleness, has proved more than a temporary stay against the energies of denial and distrust released in the demonic nay-saying of the first act. As Perdita and Florizel flee to
Sicilia after Polixenes, like Leontes, violently disclaims his own paternity ("Mark your divorce (yong sir)/ Whom sonne I dare not call: Thou art too base/ To be acknowledge[d]\textsuperscript{20}) and threatens to have Perdita brutally killed ("I will devise a death, as cruell for thee/ As thou art tender to’{t}\textsuperscript{21}), we too return with them to the initial habitation of masculine anxieties about love and desiring, about sexuality and generativity, about attachment and openness.

When suddenly we are back in the court of Leontes, the first words we hear (spoken by the lord Cleomines) evoke a rather pragmatic language of "making" and "doing" that disapproves of the ostensible excessiveness of Leontes’ sorrows:

Sir, you have done enough, and have perform’d
A Saint-like Sorrow: No fault could you make
Which you have not redeem’d; indeed pay’d downe
More penitence than done trespass: At the last Doe, as the Heavens have done; forget your evill,
With them, forgive your selfe (5.1.1-6).

It is as if we have moved from the extreme of "too much" that dominated the language of the first scenes in Sicilia ("I have too much beleev’d mine own suspition", "one/ Of us too much belov’d") to the equally suspect realm of "enough," with all its fearfulness and anxiety about "o’erflowing the measure." With its careful measuredness and strict accountings, the language of Cleomines remains locked in the ethos of "deserving" that paradoxically blocks the very
"forgiveness" he calls on Leontes to perform, not to give or to accept.

Cleomines also links forgiveness to the process of forgetting, eliciting immediate counter-assertions of the power of memory from Leontes:

> Whilst I remember
> Her, and her Vertues, I cannot forget
> My blemishes in them, and so still thinke of
> The wrong I did my selfe: which was so much,
> That Heire-lesse it hath made my Kingdome, and
> Destroy'd the sweet'est Companion, that ere man
> Bred his hopes out of, true (5.1.6-12).

The ambiguous syntax of "The wrong I did my-selfe," which allows Leontes once more to assume a posture of "wrongedness," complicates the language's ostensible longing and regret. Leontes's language seems almost unable to escape from its compulsive self-absorption--"my blemishes," "my-selfe," "my Kingdome"--even as thoughts of "her" turn quickly to concerns about "heirs."

And throughout the exchange with Leontes that follows, Paulina counters the "forgetting" of Hermione demanded by the logic of patriarchal succession with the utter inadequacy of any such attempts at substituting for the longed-for lost object:

> There is none worthy,
> (Respecting her that's gone:) besides the Gods
> Will have fulfill'd their secret purposes:
> For ha's not the Divine Apollo said?
> Is't not the tenor of his Oracle,
> That King Leontes shall not have an Heire,
> Till his lost Child be found? Which, that it shall,
> Is all as monstrous to our humane reason,
As my Antigonus to breake his Grave,
And come again to me: who, on my life,
Did perish with the Infant. 'Tis your counsell,
My Lord should to the Heavens be contrary,
Oppose against their wills. Care not for Issue,
The Crowne will find an Heire. Great Alexander
Left his to th' Worthiest: so his Successor
Was like to be the best.
Leo. Good Paulina,
Who hast the memorie of Hermione
I know in honor: O, that ever I
Had squar'd me to thy counsell: then, even now,
I might have look'd upon my Queenes full eyes,
Have taken Treasure from her Lippes.
Paul. And left them
More rich, for what they yeelded (5.1.34-55).

Paulina's language continues to circle back to all that has
been lost, and all that is gone: "her that's gone," "his
lost Child," "My Antigonus." Indeed, the recovery of the
lost becomes in her language as "monstrous to our humane
reason" as the resurrection of the dead, with all the
strange mixture of horror and hopefulness that the
"breaking" open of graves implies.

While Paulina's language is one that ostensibly agrees
with that of Leontes ("Too true my Lord")^{22}, it yet asserts
an independent will with quite a different agenda. For
instance, Paulina's completion of Leontes's "even now,/ I
might have... taken Treasure from her Lippes" with "And left
them/ More rich, for what they yeelded" attempts to create a
feeling for reciprocity within Leontes's own self-absorbed
language of "taking." Paulina's sense of reciprocity avoids
the power-seeking propensities that insinuate themselves
into Leontes's language of assimilation, even as she
attempts to formulate ontological contradictions ("More rich, for what they yeelded") that would move beyond the expected opposition of taking and giving. Paulina's every word here seems calculated to encompass antithetical possibilities: "left" as departed from, yet also not taken away; "yeelded" as having surrendered or submitted upon compulsion, yet also having brought forth as a natural process of generation. Paulina's language thus appears to conform to Leontes's own conventional expressions of desire even as it subversively counters them with another, more nuanced language that celebrates the fluidity and flexibility of differences.

These subtle modulations continue in an oddly disconcerting exchange between Leontes and Paulina that co-actively imagines the nightmarish return of a vengeful and jealous Hermione:

Leo. Thou speak'st truth:
No more such Wives, therefore no Wife: one worse,
And better us'd, would make her Sainted Spirit
Againe possesse her Corps, and on this Stage
(Where we Offenders now appeare) Soule-vext,
And begin, why to me?
Paul. Had she such power,
She had just such cause.
Leo. She had, and would incense me
To murther her I marryed.
Paul. I should so:
Were I the Ghost that walk'd, I'd bid you marke
Her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't
You chose her: then I'd shrikke, that even your eares
Should rift to heare me, and the words that follow'd
Should be, Remember mine.
Leo. Starres, Starres,
And all eyes else, dead coales: feare thou no Wife;
Ile have no Wife, Paulina (5.1.55-69).

Even as it elicits the desired response from Leontes,
Paulina’s language seems to become disturbingly caught up in
Leontes’s own dark imaginings of possession and murder. As the exchange begins, Leontes’s "No more such Wives,
therefore no Wife" cannibalizes Paulina’s own complex
language of negation into a reductive rhetoric of strict causality and rigid dialectics, thus foreclosing on the willed inconclusiveness of Paulina’s language. Paulina’s initial attempt to disrupt Leontes’s appropriation of Hermione’s voice at line 60 ("Had she such power,/ She had just such cause") then finds itself caught in the very language of "causes" and "justness" that it would oppose.

With the mention of the "stage," an odd metatheatricality seeps into Leontes’s language—"and on this Stage,/ (Where we Offenders now appeare)"—as if the eerie scenario being imagined is a scene from a play. And just as abruptly, with Leontes’s "She had, and would incense me/ To murther her I marryed" we are thrust suddenly into pathological fantasies that evoke the nexus of masculine sexual anxieties explored by Othello. But rather than resisting the conversation’s veer into terrifying visions of violence and murder—the syntax of "She had, and would incense me/ To murther her" comes awfully close to imagining the murder of Hermione—Paulina’s language seems to lose
itself in Leontes's own delusions: "I should so:/ Were I the Ghost that walk'd."

As the vicarious fantasy continues, Paulina's "I's" grow more and more elusive, and it is almost as if (an)other voice(s) now inhabit(s) them: "I'll shriek, that even your eares/ Should rift to heare me, and the words that follow'd/ Should be, Remember mine." One even has to follow Paulina's language all the way back to "I'd bid you marke/ Her eye" for the supposed referent to the eerily gnomic "Remember mine." With the forbidding repetitions of "should," a certain moral prescriptiveness creeps into Paulina's language, and with it the alien harshness of "shriekes" and "rifts." If we began at one place, where Paulina's language was involved in exploring the possible in the realm of necessity, now we are in an entirely different place, in the grip of a language contaminated by frustration and driven by anger.

The sudden arrival of Florizel and Perdita seems almost a deus ex machina that rescues the play from this descent into subterranean rage and resentment. Although she largely remains silent for the rest of the scene, Paulina's interjections—"Oh Hermione,/ As every present Time doth boast it selfe/ Above a better, gone; so must thy Grave/ Give way to what's seene now" (5.1.95-98), "Sir (my Liege)/ Your eye hath too much youth in't: not a moneth/ 'Fore your Queene dy'd, she was more worth such gazes,/ Then what you
looke on now" (5.1.224-227)—may appear no longer to enable
the transformative work of memory or the curative experience
of grief. Rather, Paulina's language seems bitterly to
disparage the "now" ("to what's seene now," "what you looke
on now") and the atmosphere of "presentness" and possibility
which it brings to the play, even as her insistence on
expiation seems to stand in the way of the play's turn
toward a grace "beyond" the necessity of sacrifice.

We seem to have reached a point where the problem to be
gotten over is not admitting grief or resolving grief, but
rather refusing to let go of grief (which may even be a
refusal to really feel). For The Winter's Tale does seem to
be as much about letting go—of things past, of wrongs done,
of hopes unfulfilled—as about reclaiming. It may even be
that Hermione's miraculous restoration to Leontes in the
play's final scene is as much about Paulina's willingness to
let her go as it is about Leontes's "fitness" to receive
her, and as much about leaving behind the protective shell
of unfeeling alabaster as it is about reclaiming the warmth
and vulnerability of the flesh.

But the project of The Winter's Tale may be not letting
go of grief, as if in some kind of baffling illogic the
refusal to let go of grief—if one can only grieve long
enough and hard enough—can actually restore the longed-for
lost object. Paulina's function, then, is in keeping
Leontes's grief alive, and never letting him forget or let
go of that grief until the work of wish-fulfillment can be at last performed.

III

Thus far I have been writing about the problem of skepticism that haunts *The Winter's Tale* in the sense that skepticism is the refusal to believe in what the eyes behold. And yet against this there is the voice of *Othello* demanding ocular proof, and the relentless logic of Don John's "If you dare not trust that you see, confesse not that you know." It may even be that the problem is not believing what one sees, but rather trusting despite what one thinks that one sees—as if it is "eyes" themselves, or the whole ethos of "seeing," that need transvaluation.

Indeed, we first hear about the "statue" of Hermione in the third gentleman’s fantastic narrative of reunion that is intimately concerned with juxtapositions of seeing and hearing, showing and telling, beholding and describing. The third gentleman’s extended narrative seems to want to exceed its intention of "reporting" and be released into a language of sheer wonder:

Gent.2. ...How goes it now (Sir.) This Newes, (which is call’d true) is so like an old Tale, that the veritie of its is in strong suspition: Ha’s the King found his Heire?

Gent.3. Most true, if ever Truth were pregnant by Circumstance: That which you heare, you’l swerae you see, there is such unitie in the proofes... Did you see the meeting of the two Kings?

Gent.2. No.

Gent.3. Then you have lost a Sight which was to bee seene, cannot bee spoken of. There might you
have beheld one Joy crowne another, so and in such
manner, that it seem'd Sorrow wept to take leave
of them: for their Joy waded in teares. There was
casting up of Eyes, holding up of Hands... Our
King being ready to leape out of himselfe, for joy
of his found Daughter; as if that Joy were now
become a Losse, cryes, Oh, thy Mother, thy
mother... I never heard of such another
Encounter, which lames Report to follow it, and
undo's description to doe it,
Gent.2. What, 'pray you, became of Antigonus,
that carried hence the Child?
Gent.3. Like an old Tale still, which will have
matter to rehearse, though Credit be asleepe, and
not an eare open; he was torne to pieces with a
Beare...
Gent.1. What became of his Barke, and his
Followers?
Gent.3. Wrackt the same instant of their
Masters death, and in the view of the Shepheard:
so that all the instruments which ayded to expose
the Child, were even then lost, when it was
found... But oh the Noble Combat 'twixt Joy and
Sorrow that was fought in Paulina... Shee lifted
the Princesse from the Earth, and so locks her in
embracing, as if shee would pin her to her heart,
that she might no more be in danger of loosing.
Gent.1. The dignitie of this Act was worth the
audience of Kings and Princes, for by such was it
acted... Are they returned to the Court?
Gent.3. No: The Princesse hearing of her Mothers
Statue (which is in the keeping of Paulina) a
Peece many yeeres in doing, and now newly
perform'd, by that rare Italian Master, Julio
Romano, who (had he himselfe Eternitie, and could
put Breath into his Worke) would beguile Nature of
her Custome, so perfectly he is her Ape: He so
neere to Hermione, hath done Hermione, that they
say one would speake to her, and stand in hope of
answer. Thither (with all greedinesse of
affection) are they gone, and there they intend to
Sup.
Gent.2. ... Shall wee thither, and with our
companie peece the Rejoicing?
Gent.1. Who would be thence, that ha's the benefit
of Accesse? every wink of an Eye, some new Grace
will be borne: our Absence makes us unthriftie to
our Knowledge. Let's along (5.2.27-112).
I have quoted the scene almost in its entirety because of the "unexcerptable" complexities into which it leads us—the possibility that truth itself may be constituted within the realm of the fictive ("an old tale"), the permutations that are being worked on an ostensible language of news-telling and reporting, the striving for a way to articulate the "realness" of experience that propels the language into the realm of the counterfactual conditional.

Yet even as the third gentleman's language strives to break free from the rhetorical constraints of narrative, the interjections of his auditors—"What, 'pray you, became of Antigonus, that carried hence the Child?" "What became of his Barke, and his Followers?" "Are they returned to the Court"?—nevertheless show them still to be under the "tyranny of plot" that keeps them from apprehending the change in narrative space. Indeed, even as the third gentleman struggles to evince the inability of narrative modes like causality and linearity to capture the fullness of the experience, there is still a kind of sameness about the gentleman's language that holds it back from any real achievement of narrative transcendence. Even at moments in which the narrative reaches into a language of wonder—"I never heard of such another Encounter, which lames Report to follow it, and undo's description to doe it"—associated with the realm created by Enobarbus's own language of transcendence, with its formulation of ontological
contradictions ("And what they undid did") that gesture toward transcendence as a matter of "undoing" and yet also of things well done, there is still the sense that the third gentleman seems quite happy merely to be "reporting" and telling all the "news."

Even so, while the narrative begins with assertions of "truth," "unitie in the proofes," and "Evidences" for "certaintie," over the course of the speech this concern for verity, and with the need to overcome "suspicion," seems to fall away as the speaker becomes almost transported into the wonder of what his eyes have beheld. The gentleman's language moves from the realm of the verifiable and the factual—"The mantle of Queene Hermione: her Jewell about the Neck of it: the Letters of Antigonus found with it, which they know to be his character... and many other Evidences proclayme her, with all certaintie, to be the Kings Daughter" (5.2.32-39)—into the realm of the intuitive and the impressionistic: "Shee lifted the Princesse from the Earth, and so locks her in embracing, as if shee would pin her to her heart, that shee might no more be in danger of loosing" (5.2.76-78). For all its allegiances to the "squareness" of "report," the third gentleman's narrative manages to embrace a radically excessive poetry of deeply lived experience with this striking passage about Paulina, which is so charged with the thematics of holding on and letting go, of "lifting from the earth" in gestures of
radical transcendence, of being no longer in "danger" of "losing" that seems almost an ontological experience of the process of loss itself.

And the whole ethos of "doing" and "performing"--Cleomines's "you have done enough, and have perform'd/ A Saint-like Sorrow" (5.1.1-2), for instance--is suddenly transformed into an aesthetic that has more to do with the "sweating labors" of Cleopatra than with the meanly pragmatism of Cleomines when we finally reach the description of Hermione's statue:

a Peece many yeeres in doing, and now newly perform'd, by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano, who (had he himselfe Eternitie, and could put Breath into his Worke) would beguile Nature of her Custome, so perfectly he is her Ape: He so neere to Hermione, hath done Hermione, that they say one would speake to her, and stand in hope of answer (95-102).

The third gentleman's "they say" seems to usher us into the realm of the fabled, with all its sense of the miraculous and the magical. And the language here seems to be pulling out all the stops to sound a note of absolute wonderment, and to create a powerful sense of expectation that is still wonderfully content to simply "stand in hope." The third gentleman's language evokes an art that is more about "nearness" than verisimilitude, and more about engagement than absorption.

And yet, the description of the statue still seems to belong to the realm of "fancy"--the imitative, the
derivative, the "copied"—that Cleopatra's own language so strongly opposes to the transcendent realm of the imagination.\textsuperscript{26} We are not yet in the realm of "life," even as the third gentleman has already gestured toward the limitedness of Julio Romano's art: "had he himselfe Eternitie, and could put Breath into his work" (97-98, emphasis mine). If the ending of Romeo and Juliet enacts a "killing into art" of love and longing with its raising of the two gold statues,\textsuperscript{27} then the last scene of this play, as a statue comes to life, performs a reversal of this process. And if "life" had been the target of all Lear's last-scene nay-saying--"no, no, no life"--or rather what finally emerges out of all his nihilistic skepticism, then the last scene of The Winter's Tale, so weirdly focused on the word "life" itself\textsuperscript{28}, ushers us into that realm leveled by Lear, and built on by Antony and Cleopatra.

The play's last scene also recreates and transfigures the "Falstaffian" zone of "counterfeits" and "resurrections" at which Henry IV, Part One arrives. At the end of The Winter's Tale, however, we are in the presence of a powerfully willed trustfulness, and not under the shadows of betrayal; in a place where it is safe (even "required") for us to believe despite what we "know" to be "true," and not in danger of intimate complicities being broken, or theatrical relationships being betrayed.
But the opposition between Falstaff and The Winter's Tale may not be quite so dialectical as I have claimed. If, in Henry IV, Part One we are betrayed by our own complicity with someone who is manifestly duplicitous, then in the final scene of this play we are in a sense also "betrayed" most blatantly by someone in whose confidences we have not been taken, and with whom we have no intimate complicity at all.

Thus, the last scene of The Winter's Tale is anything but divorced from psychological complications or ethical complexity. Indeed, the language of the scene's initial exchanges "remembers" things past in such a way as to give us pause about Leontes's ostensible "reformation:"

Paul. As she liv'd peerlesse,  
So her dead likenesse I doe well believe  
Excells what ever yet you look'd upon,  
Or hand of Man hath done: therefore I keepe it  
[Lonely"29], apart. But here it is: prepare  
To see the Life as lively mock'd, as ever  
Still Sleepe mock'd Death: behold, and say 'tis well.  
I like your silence, it the more shewes-off  
Your wonder: but yet speake, first you (my Liege)  
Comes it not something neere?  
Leo. Her naturall Posture.  
Chide me (deare Stone) that I may say indeed  
Thou art Hermione: or rather, thou art she  
In thy not chiding: for she was as tender  
As Infancie, and Grace. But yet (Paulina)  
Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing  
So aged as this seemes.  
Pol. Oh, not by much.  
Paul. So much the more our Carvers excellence.  
Which lets goe-by some sixteene yeeres, and makes her  
As she liv'd now (5.3.14-32).
Leontes’s initial reference to "chiding" triggers on some level a remembrance of the anxieties about Hermione’s voice (Leontes’s first words to her, after all, were the ambivalent "Tongue-ty’d our Queene? speake you") in circulation at the beginning of the play, even as a kind of willful mis-remembering that effectively silences Hermione ("thou art she,/ In thy not chiding) seems to be taking over in Leontes’s language. It is as if Leontes on some level comes dangerously close to preferring the "dead likeness" of Hermione to the "life" that his idealizations mock.

It is for Paulina to insist, against Leontes’s discomfiture at the "wrinkles" that impede the rush of his language toward memorialization, on the necessity of accepting both the passage of time and the presentness of the "now": "So much the more our Carvers excellence./ Which lets goe-by some sixteene yeeres, and makes her/ As she liv’d now." Paulina speaks a language of "letting go" that paradoxically initiates the scene’s first tentative steps toward its final apotheosis of restoration, and that speaks to the sense of loss inherent in a process that is as much a weaning as a rebirth.

And Paulina herself becomes deeply implicated in the series of "letting go’s" that propel the play toward its fantastical conclusion. The "statue," after all is hers—something that the possessiveness of her language ("If I had thought the sight of my poore Image/ Would thus have wrought
you (for the Stone is mine), / Il'd not have shew'd it"
makes poignantly clear. And the series of psychological
motions through which Paulina leads Leontes seems designed
as much to enable Paulina to release Hermione from her care
as to prepare Leontes to receive her:

Leo. Doe not draw the Curtaine.
Paul. No longer shall you gaze on't, least your
Fancie.
May thinke anon, it moves.
Leo. Let be, let be:
Would I were dead, but that me thinkes alreadie.
(What was he that did make it?) See (my Lord)
Would you not deeme it breath'd: and that those
veines
Did verily beare blood?
Pol. Masterly done:
The very Life seemes warm upon her Lippe.
Leo. The fixture of her Eye ha's motion in't,
As we are mock'd with Art.
Paul. Ile draw the Curtaine:
My Lord's almost so farre transported, that
Hee'le think anon it lives.
Leo. O sweet Paulina,
Make me to thinke so twentie yeeres together:
No setled Sences of the World can match
The pleasure of that madnesse. Let't alone
(59-73).

Although Paulina’s interventions may only be part of her
strategy to awaken Leontes's own longing and desire, they
also suggest a protectiveness, a sense of belonging, that
lingers despite their ostensible "misleadingness." Paulina’s
language also holds out a tantalizing sense of possibility––
"lest your Fancie/ May thinke anon, it moves", "Hee'le
thinke anon it lives"––that seems at first almost cruel, as
if we have somehow been thrust back into the realm of King
Lear’s last scene, with all its desperate searchings for
signs of "life:" "Do you see this? Look on her! Look her
lips,/ Look there, look there!" (5.3.311-312).

But with Paulina’s "It is requir’d/ You doe awake your
Faith" (5.3.94-95), we are ushered into an entirely
different realm, one in which our belief in what the eyes
behold is not disappointed or placed in doubt but radically
fulfilled:

Paul. Musick; awake her: Strike:
'Tis time: descend: be Stone no more: approach:
Strike all that look upon with mervaille: Come:
Ile fill your Grave up: stirre; nay, come away:
Bequeath to Death your numnesse: (for from him,
Deare Life redeemes you) you perceive she stirres:
Start not: her Actions shall be as holy, as
You heare my Spell is lawfull: doe not shun her,
Untill you see her dye againe; for then
You kill her double: Nay, present your Hand:
When she was young, you woo’d her: now, in age,
Is she become the Suitor?
Leo. Oh she’s warme:
If this be Magick, let it be an Art
Lawfull as eating (98-111).

What is perhaps most striking about Paulina’s ministrations
is that they wind up being as much concerned with leave-
taking--"nay, come away"--as with return, and as suggestive
of things left behind--"be stone no more", "Bequeath to
death your numbness"--as about life reclaimed. And that
Hermione seems to need Paulina’s urgings to come forward
into life suggests that the process is anything but
effortless. There is such a deep (and deeply moving) sense
of the sweating labor required by the work of restoration,
and of all that must give way for "life" at last to emerge.
With Leontes's "O, she's warm!" (110), the play seems to reach a maximum authenticity of feeling. It is as if the return of Hermione has managed, in the words of Lear, to redeem all the sorrows that we have ever felt. And yet the spirit of "redemption" that inhabits the play's last scene is less a matter of theology than of sheer transcendence, as if the language itself is trying to leave behind notions of scapegoating and sacrifice, payment and debt, sin and expiation—"Dear life redeems you" (emphasis mine)—and reaching toward a language of wish-fulfillment. Even Hermione's words of blessing on Perdita—"You gods, look down/ And from your sacred vials pour your graces/ Upon my daughter's head" (5.3.121-123) imagines a relationship with the sacred that is radically connected to this world ("look down"), and that celebrates the ideas of overflow and of things exceeding their limits. It is as if the language is trying to imagine a sense of "grace" that is unencumbered by the weight of theology, and that is less a "state" than an abundance of sheer "being-ness" and life.

The ending of The Winter's Tale, then, does not so much enact a resolution to the crisis of belief staged in the previous plays as reconfigure all the terms by which distinctions—between truth and lie, authenticity and pretense, belief and its suspension—can be made. Indeed, we seem to be no longer caught within an object-dependent ethos of belief in, with its falling emphasis on what's out there,
but rather ushered into a realm where the sheer experience of belief as wish-fulfillment and as process--of letting go, of giving up, of crossing over--is all.

1Compare Mercutio's "True, I talke of dreames:/ Which are the children of an idle braine,/ Begot of nothing, but vaine phantasie,/ Which is as thin of substance as the ayre,/ And more inconstant than the wind" (Romeo and Juliet 1.4.96-100).

2Leontes's use of the word "affection" in this speech has been the subject of much editorial debate. Comment seems to be rather evenly divided between editors who gloss the word as "imagination" (Steevens, Collier, Staunton) and those who lean toward some variant of love, lust, passion, or jealousy (Mason, Crosby, Evans).

3Like "affection," the word "intention" has been the subject of much editorial comment, ranging from glosses of the word as "eagerness of attention, or of desire" (Mason) and "vehemence of passion" (Collier) to "intenseness" (Singer) and "intensity" (Staunton). In the Variorum's lengthy gloss, Steevens's quote of Locke is cited: "when the mind with great earnestness, and of choice, fixes its view on any idea, considers it on every side, and will not be called off by the ordinary solictaions of other ideas."

4Shakespeare seems to have coined this term himself. The OED cites this line from The Winter's Tale as the first appearance of the word "co-active," which is defined as "Acting in concert; acting or taking place together."

Although its use in The Winter's Tale is the sole instance of "co-active" in all of Shakespeare, a slight variant may be found in Troilus and Cressida, in the context of Cressida's farewell to Troilus:

\[
\text{Cres. Troilus, farewell! one eye yet looks on thee,} \\
\text{But with my heart the other eye doth see.} \\
\text{Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,} \\
\text{The error of our eye directs our mind.}
\]
What error leads must err; O then conclude,
Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.
Ther. A proof of strength she could not
publish more,
Unless she said, 'My mind is now turn'd whore.'
Ulyss. All's done, my lord.
Tro. It is.
Ulyss. Why stay we then?
Tro. To make a recordation to my soul
Of every syllable that here was spoke.
But if I tell how these two did co-act,
Shall I not lie in publishing truth?
Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert th' attest of eyes and ears.
As if those organs [had deceptive] functions,
Was Cressid here? (5.2.107-124, emphasis mine).

Cressida's concluding remark--"Minds sway'd by eyes, are
full of turpitude"--could almost be an epigram for this
play.

Of course, Leontes's "hard'ning of my brows" refers most
directly to the legendary horns of the cuckold. Still, it is
interesting that like Mercutio's "prick love for pricking,"
Leontes's language imagines a perversely phallic "horn" as
the outward and visible sign of his internal "stabbing" by
the force of his own "affection."

Stanley Cavell, for instance, calls this a "fully
suspicious statement, I mean one said from within his
suspicion, not having put it aside." Cavell goes on to say
that "The statement merely expresses his regret that he
believed his suspicion too much. How much would have been
just enough? And what would prevent this excess of belief in
the future?" ("Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: Reading The
Winter's Tale" in Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of
Shakespeare [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987]:
396-197).

Although the name "Paulina" has most often been explicated
in terms of the traditional Pauline emphasis on grace and
redemption, to me it also intimates the "thorn in the flesh"
which was given to Paul so that he should not be "exalted
above measure through the abundance of the revelations":
"For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool;
for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man
should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or
that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above
measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was
given to me a thorn in the flesh... lest I should be exalted
above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:6-7, King James
version).

Of all the nay-sayers, Paulina remains strangely anonymous
for the greatest span of time--although we know her to be a
"gentlewoman," Antigonus's wife, and Hermione's friend, she is not named until 3.3, during Antigonus's account of his "dream" of Hermione: "'for the babe/ Is counted lost forever, Perdita/ I prithee call't. For this ungentle business,/ Put on thee by my lord, thou ne'er shalt see/ Thy wife Paulina more" (31-36). The language is actually Hermione's, spoken through the remembrance of it by Antigonus--Paulina's name, then, is from the first associated with loss and grief, with dreams and the telling of them.

"Romeo and Juliet" 1.4.91-91.
11 Glossed variously as "within reach," "within the range or compass," "in a direct line with, and so in danger of being it." Compare Leontes's earlier use of the word in 2.3: "for the harlot-King/ Is quite beyond my Arme, out of the blanke/ And levell of my braine" (4-6).
12 Paulina's language, here and throughout the play, also tends to enact a series of downward movements, as if to counter Leontes's heavenward gazes—which preclude seeing what is actually before him—with notions of transcendence more akin to the groundedness and "earthiness" that pervade Antony and Cleopatra.
13 The Folio has "woe."
14 Antony and Cleopatra 4.6.34-35).
15 Here I am reminded of Lear's words to Cordelia at their reunion--"If you have poison for me, I will drink it./ I know you do not love me, for your sisters/ Have (as I remember) done me wrong:/ You have some cause, they do not" (4.7.71-74)--with their sad preference for being the object of retribution even when forgiveness is so close at hand.
16 A significant departure from the ethos of King Lear, in which lengthy monologues or soliloquies tend to delay or foreclose on conversational intimacy.
17 Antigonus's brutal death is made grimly ironic when one thinks of his recollection, after swearing to do Leontes's bidding and thus abandon the child, that "Wolves and bears, they say,/ Casting their savageness aside, have done/ Like Offices of pity" (2.3.187-189).
18 Peter Erickson, Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama 156.
19 Here I am paraphrasing the Third Gentleman's astonishing description of the great scene of reunion between Polixenes and Leontes: "There might you have beheld on joy crown another, so and in such manner that it seem'd sorrow went to tale leave of them, for their joy waded in tears" (5.2.41-44).
20 The Winter's Tale 4.4.417-419.
21 The Winter Tale 4.4.440-441.
22 The Winter's Tale 5.1.12.
Much Ado About Nothing 3.2.119-120. The Winter’s Tale almost seems a reconfiguration of that earlier play, from the "staging" of Hero’s disloyalty that provokes Claudio’s angry "are our eyes our own?" (4.1.71) as he violently casts off Hero, to the "substitution" of one Hero for another in the play’s last scene: "Another Hero! ... The former Hero! Hero that is dead!" (5.4.62-65).

He is, in fact, "Lady Paulina’s steward" (5.2.26-27).

I have in mind the first stirrings of this language in the Cydnus speech:

... For her owne person,
It beggarded all description, she did lye
In her Pavillion, clothe of Gold, of Tissue,
O’re picturing that Venus, where we see
The fancie out-worke Nature. On each side her,
Stood pretty Dimpled Boyes, like smiling Cupids,
With divers colour’d Fannes whose wind did seems,
To glowe the delicate cheekes which they did coole,
And what they undid did (2.2.92-100).

"Nature wants stuffe/ To vie strange formes with fancie,/ yet t’imagine/ An Anthony were Natures peece, ’gainst Fancie,/ Condemning shadowes quite" (Antony and Cleopatra 5.2.97-100).

Montague promises to "raise her statue in pure gold,/ That whiles Verona by that name is known,/ There shall no figure at such rate be set/. As that of true and faithful Juliet" (5.3.297-302). Not to be outdone, Capulet promises "As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie,/ Poor sacrifices of our enmity" (303-304).

The word "life" appears seven times in the play’s last scene. Indeed, the word "life" appears in The Winter’s Tale more times (39) than in almost any other Shakespeare play—only Measure for Measure (with 48 mentions) is the exception.

The Folio has "lovely."

It is as if the language "remembers" Juliet’s "Thy lips are warm" (5.3.167), which seems to go to the very heart of grief.

"This feather stirs, she lives! If it be chance which does redeem all sorrows/ That ever I have felt" (5.3.266-268).
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