



SHAKESPEARE'S FEMININE ENDINGS

PHILIPPA BERRY

disfiguring death in the tragedies

FEMINIST READINGS OF SHAKESPEARE

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In this elegant and provocative book, Philippa Berry rewrites critical perceptions of death in Shakespeare's tragedies from a feminist perspective.

Drawing on feminist theory, postmodern thought and queer theory, Berry shows how, through a network of images clustered around female or feminized characters, these plays 'disfigure' death as a bodily end.

Through her close reading of the main tragedies, Berry discovers a sensuous and meditative Shakespearean discourse of materialism. The scope of these tragic speculations was radical in Shakespeare's day, yet they also have a surprising relevance to current debates about gender and sexuality, as well as to contemporary discussions of time and matter.

Philippa Berry is Fellow and Director of Studies in English at King's College, Cambridge.

FEMINIST READINGS OF SHAKESPEARE

Literary studies have been transformed in the last 20 years by a number of new approaches which have challenged traditional assumptions and traditional ways of reading. Critics of Shakespeare and English Renaissance literature have been at the forefront of these developments, and feminist criticism has proved to be one of the most important areas of productivity and change.

'Feminist Readings of Shakespeare' is a series of five generically based books by leading feminist critics from Britain, continental Europe and North America. Each book outlines and engages with the current positions and debates within the field of feminist criticism and in addition provides an original feminist reading of the texts in question. While the authors share a commitment to feminist values, the books are not uniform in their approach but rather exemplify the richness and diversity of feminist criticism today.

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ROMAN SHAKESPEARE: WARRIORS, WOUNDS, AND WOMEN

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SHAKESPEARE'S FEMININE ENDINGS: DISFIGURING DEATH IN THE TRAGEDIES

Philippa Berry

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IN MEMORY OF PEGGY ANN HOWARD

1945–1994

I cannot thinke *Nature* is so spent, and decay'd, that she
can bring forth nothing worth her former yeares. She is
alwaies the same, like her selfe. And when she collects her
strength, is abler still. Men are decay'd, and *studies*: Shee is
not.

(Ben Jonson, *Timber*)

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

As I write this towards the end of 1996, feminist criticism of Shakespeare has just come of age. While we will no doubt continue to rediscover and celebrate notable pre-feminist and proto-feminist precursors, it is usually acknowledged that the genre as we know it began 'officially' just 21 years ago with Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London: Macmillan, 1975), a book taken as the obvious starting-point by Philip C.Kolin in his *Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography and Commentary* (New York and London: Garland, 1991) which lists 439 items from 1975 to its cut-off date in 1988. A glance at any publisher's catalogue will reveal that the rate of publication has certainly not slowed down during the eight years since then; it is clear in fact that feminist criticism continues to be one of the most lively, productive and influential of the current approaches to Shakespeare.

Shakespeare and the Nature of Women has just been reissued (London: Macmillan, 1996) with a substantial new Preface by Dusinberre entitled 'Beyond the Battle?'. The interrogative mode seems appropriate both in relation to the state of feminist scholarship itself—*is the battle lost or won?*—and to the extent to which the whole enterprise has been about asking questions: asking *different* questions about the Shakespearean texts themselves and using those texts to interrogate 'women's place in culture, history, religion, society, the family'. It seems to me that these questions are now inescapably on the agenda of academic enquiry, and that they have moved from the margin to the centre. The growth and variety of feminist approaches in Shakespeare studies has been complemented and supported by work in feminist theory, women's history, the study of women's relationship to language and the study of women's writing. A summary of the achievements of feminist criticism of Shakespeare in its first 21 years would for me include the following:

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

- 1 Since *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* looked at Shakespeare's works in the context of the history of contemporary ideas about women, drawing on non-literary texts to do so, feminist studies have contributed to the now widely accepted view that works of art can and should be treated within a social frame of reference.
- 2 While sharing some features of their work with new historicist critics, feminist critics have also provided a critique of new historicism, notably by objecting to its neglect of gender issues and its concentration on male power relationships, and by resisting the conservative idea that subversion is a calculated form of license, always in the end contained.
- 3 Feminist critics have changed what scholars and students read: there are many more texts by women of the Renaissance period available now, and more studies of women as writers, readers, performers, patrons and audiences. Publishers are responding to the demands of feminist critics and their students for more and different texts from those traditionally taught.
- 4 Feminist critics have changed how we read: women readers no longer have to pretend to be men. Reading is seen as a complex interaction between the writer, the text and the reader in which the gender of the reader is not necessarily irrelevant.
- 5 The performance tradition has been affected, with feminist approaches making new stage and screen interpretations possible. Supportive relationships exist between feminist scholars, directors and performers, and a female-centred study of Shakespeare in performance is burgeoning.
- 6 Our perceptions of dramatic texts have been changed by work on women's access to language and women's use of language. We are opening up the discussion of the gendering of rhetoric, public and private voices, the stereotypes of the 'bad' vocal shrew and the 'good' silent woman.

I believe of course that the five books in this series will help to consolidate these achievements and further the aims of feminist criticism of Shakespeare in a number of ways. The books are generically-based studies by authors who would define themselves as feminist critics but who would not see this as an exclusive or narrow label, preventing them from being, at the same time, traditional scholars, psychoanalytic critics, textual critics, new historicist critics, materialist critics and so forth.

When I first proposed the series in 1990 I wanted to commission books which would on the one hand outline the current positions and

debates within the field and on the other hand advance original feminist readings of the texts in question. I wanted the books to demonstrate the full range of possibilities offered by feminist criticism and to challenge the standard over-simplifications voiced by hostile critics, namely that feminist criticism is limited to the study of female characters and that it is driven by a desire to co-opt Shakespeare on behalf of the feminist movement.

Certainly the authors of the books in this series are not uninterested in female characters, but they are also interested in male characters. The first two books to appear are on the History plays and the Roman Tragedies—not on the whole noted for their wealth of substantial female roles. The authors are not asking ‘Is this woman a good or bad role-model for women today?’ as nineteenth-century writers did, or ‘Is Shakespeare capable of creating strong females?’ as some early feminist critics did, but ‘How has theatrical and critical tradition re-presented and re-read these texts in relation to the issue of gender difference?’ They accept that systems of gender differentiation are historically specific and they seek to relate the practices of Shakespeare’s theatre to their contemporary context as well as to the range of literary and historical materials from which the narratives are derived. They feel no obligation to claim that Shakespeare was a feminist, or to berate him for not being one, but they are interested in exploring ways in which his work can at times seem feminist—or can be appropriated for feminist purposes—while still being totally consistent with Renaissance conceptions of patriarchy.

The study of Shakespeare in the late 1990s is a vigorous and exciting field to which feminism is making a major contribution. In just 21 years it has become quite difficult for anyone to perform, read, teach or study Shakespeare without an awareness of gender issues and I am confident that this will prove to be a permanent and positive change in our attitude to the plays and their extraordinarily rich afterlife in international culture.

Ann Thompson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has had a long gestation period, and I am very sensible of the tactful restraint as well as kindness shown to me both by the series editor, Ann Thompson, and by my Routledge editor, Talia Rodgers, during the protracted process of composition. The unpalatable discovery, after a period of illness, that I would have to pace my speed of literary production gave me a vivid insight into a Renaissance commonplace which now seems of especial relevance to our hyperactive age: that intellectual digestion is a sometimes mysterious procedure, and one which does not always follow our preferred timetable. This required change of tempo also impressed upon me, in a most timely fashion, that the complexities of the Shakespearean corpus are not easily deciphered in a hurry—at least not by me!

In the course of writing, I have been assisted and encouraged by many friends and colleagues, all of whom have helped in specific as well as subtle ways to give the book its final shape. Dympna Callaghan and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton have read most of the chapters, and have given me both detailed and general advice as well as their consistent, very energetic support and friendship—gifts which no amount of thanks can adequately repay. Jayne Archer has been another generous friend both to myself and the project, who not only provided me with much practical assistance by researching numerous obscure points, but also, as the book neared completion, dialogued with me inspiringly and most productively on the feminist critical issues raised in [Chapter 1](#). Ann Lecercle, Patricia Parker, François Laroque, Susie Hamilton, John Kerrigan, Ian Donaldson, J. Leeds Barroll, Juliet Fleming, Willy Maley, Richard Wilson and Marie-Dominique Garnier all took the time to read individual chapters, offering me numerous critical

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insights which have enriched my argument. And the final manuscript has benefited significantly from the incisive comments of Ann Thompson. But many details of this book's argument also developed through dialogue with several generations of students at King's College and the University of Cambridge, in the context of courses on Western tragedy and Shakespeare; my thanks to Tansy Troy, Bibi Jacob, Susanna Parry, Leo Mellor, Patrick Sheil and David Jay, in particular, for some wonderful conversations.

I am grateful to the Provost and Fellows of King's College Cambridge for generously providing me with two periods of leave in which to research and write *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings*. For help with photographs, my thanks to Anthony Wells-Cole of Temple Newsam House, Leeds; to Elizabeth McGrath and Paul Taylor, of the Warburg Institute, London; and to Alessandra Corti, of Fratelli Alinari, Florence. I am also grateful to the staff of the following libraries for their friendly and prompt assistance: King's College Library; Cambridge University Library; the English Faculty Library, University of Cambridge; the British Library; the library of the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Outside the academic sphere, I have been sustained and re-energized by Barbara Harding's vigorous tuition in astanga yoga, by the herbal tinctures of Peter Jackson Main, and by the practical wit and inspired wisdom of Jean Churchman, Ann Walton, and Rhea Quien. My mother, Celia Berry, has been a constant source of encouragement and strength, as well as a superb example of ageless vitality. And above all, Frank Payne has given me endless emotional and psychological nourishment—besides acting as an uncomplaining trouble-shooter in numerous cases of computer crisis!

But several of those close to me died during the period in which I was pondering Shakespeare's creative disfigurement of dying. The death of my father, Tom Berry, had first prompted me to begin research into representations of death and mourning in Renaissance literature: a project that later metamorphosed into a book on Shakespearean tragedy. His death was followed, a few years later, by those of my aunt Monica Pateman, my uncle David Berry, and my godmother Irene Cooper. In different ways, this book has been touched by each of them. It is dedicated, however, to a dear friend whose warmth and ever profound insights are sorely missed, since it was she who warned me, with unnerving prescience, that this book might take rather longer to complete than I expected.

A section of [Chapter 3](#), 'Hamlet's Ear', was presented at the International Shakespeare Conference at Stratford-upon-Avon in August

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1996, and subsequently at the TIMEE seminar in Renaissance Studies held at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, in June 1997. This essay was published in *Shakespeare Survey*, 50 (1997) and is reproduced, in revised form, courtesy of Cambridge University Press. An early version of [Chapter 5](#) was published in the *European Journal of English Studies*, 1(3) (1997), as ‘Reversing History: time, fortune and the doubling of sovereignty in *Macbeth*’, and is reproduced, also revised, courtesy of Swets and Zeitlinger Publishers.

A note on citations of Shakespearean texts

All citations from the plays of Shakespeare are from the most recent Arden editions of these works; thus citations from *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Henry 5*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Titus Andronicus* are taken from the new editions published as part of Arden 3. Citations from *The Sonnets* use the edition by Stephen Booth (New Haven: University of Yale Press, 1977).

DISFIGURED ENDINGS:
SEXUAL MATTERS AND
SHAKESPEARE'S *ARS*
MORIENDI

What is then woven does not play the game of tight succession. Rather, it plays on succession. Do not forget that to weave (*tramer, trameare*) is first to make holes, to traverse, to work one-side-and-the-other of the warp.
(Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*)¹

[Y]ou'll be rotten ere you be half ripe, and that's the right virtue of the medlar.

(*As You Like It*, 3.2.117–18)

In one of Shakespeare's most evocative anticipations of tragedy in and through a female character, Richard II's queen laments her husband's recent departure for Ireland. And she tells one of Richard's favourites, Bushy, that she has a vivid premonition of disaster:

I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief,
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard. Yet again methinks
Some unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune's womb
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
With nothing trembles; at some thing it grieves,
More than with parting from my lord the king.
(2.2.10–13)

The queen's words—from a play described on the title page of its first Quarto as a tragedy—provide us with a proleptic insight into the topic which this book addresses: the ambiguous function, not simply of women, but of feminized figures of speech in a Shakespearean interrogation of the meanings of tragedy. For the tropes of her speech create a strikingly contradictory representation of the queen's state of

grief. The inexplicable amplification of her emotion is evidently allied to the impending tragedy; at the same time, however, conventional notions of tragic suffering are unsettled by the troping of grief's arrival in terms not just of hospitality but of a quasi-sexual penetration and a highly physical 'ripening'.

The future sorrow which Richard's queen uncannily anticipates is a state she imagines receiving as 'a guest' that is both like and unlike the 'sweet' or sexually intimate guest who is her departed husband. Indeed, this other 'guest', who uncannily arrives just as Richard departs, is figured as a mysterious addition to her present grief, since 'at some thing it grieves/*More* than with parting from my lord the king' (my emphasis). What the queen so fearfully anticipates, it seems, is some future experience of nullification or 'nothing'—the image ultimately invoked by Richard himself to trope his tragic fate—that will paradoxically involve both a coming to fruition and a very different 'parting': a birth from 'Fortune's womb'. This half-buried layer of sexual imagery performs a suggestive doubling of ends, as anticipation of the climactic closure of Richard's tragedy—with his death—becomes peculiarly conflated with an oxymoronic as well as interlingual conception of grief: as the bearing of a burden (in French, *grevé*) which compels the opening or 'parting' (and here a cognate French word is *crevé*) of a 'ripe' bodily end.²

This book argues that Shakespearean tragedy performs a comparable, albeit infinitely more extensive interrogation of tragic sensibility, as countless puns and other tropes that emphasize the open bodily 'ends' of women (and sometimes, those of men) enunciate a subtle differing—a *disfiguring*—both of tragic discourse and of concepts of death as bodily extinction. The Shakespearean 'shapes of grief' that are refracted through a feminine figural lens have an intricate cultural specificity. Moreover, they remind us of some of the complexity, indeed the inherent strangeness, of Renaissance thought, as quasi-philosophical as well as political speculations are perplexingly interwoven, not only with mythic or emblematic motifs, but also with a partially abjected vein of grossly material imagery, drawn from popular culture. Commenting on the often remarkable difficulty of Shakespeare's tropes, Ann and John O. Thompson point out that this Shakespearean drive towards figurative difficulty is inseparable from 'a sense of the groundedness of these elaborations in...everyday metaphor'.³ My contention here is that, if we examine these textual nodes from a critical perspective that aims to reassess the complex materiality of the Shakespearean text, we can hopefully decipher what might be described, *pace* Bakhtin, as an impacted lower stratum of this

textual archaeology, and begin to examine its complex relationship to other strata of tragic signification.⁴ For while this multilayered, 'earthy', and primitive sediment of meaning unsettles some of the seeming *gravitas* of tragedy, it has an obscure, philosophical and political 'weight' of its own, as it challenges dominant cultural notions of what is 'fundamental' and 'final' both to tragedy and to human identity.

A major study of the 'issues of death' in English Renaissance tragedy, by Michael Neill, has recently restated some of the key assumptions which typically inform critical responses to tragedy, by describing tragedy as 'a profoundly teleological form whose full meaning will be uncovered in *the revelation of its end*' (my emphasis).⁵ Neill's book is richly innovative in many respects, and he is certainly right in his observation that the formal structure, or the narrative design, of tragedy is 'fiercely end-driven' in its movement towards a seemingly unambiguous *telos*, or end, in and through which a heroic masculine identity will paradoxically be confirmed. But in a deliberate departure from this teleological and structural perspective, my reading of the tragedies uses a heightened attention to textual detail in order to question the presumed finality and fixity of these cultural versions of ending, along with the diachronic, linear versions of both identity and temporality that appear to inform them. The centrality to the Shakespearean literary corpus of what Patricia Parker describes as 'preposterous' or 'arsy-versy' figures and tropes that question the aesthetic, as well as political and sexual, drive to containment and the certainty of endings has been brilliantly demonstrated in her book, *Shakespeare from the Margins*.⁶ This seminal re-evaluation of Shakespeare's wordplay signals a new climate in Shakespeare studies, in which critics can at last begin to interrogate in detail these previously neglected aspects of the most 'canonical' of texts, and consequently, to elucidate the multifaceted, fluid model of sexuality which Shakespeare's puns delineate. In an attempt to draw out some of the wider philosophical implications of this complex figurative dimension within the tragedies, my book aims to show how a repetitive pattern of feminine or feminized tropes performs an allusive reweaving both of tragic teleology and of orthodox conceptions of death. Within this mobile textual process, as in the account of 'Fortune's womb' given by Richard's queen, endings are repeatedly unravelled, like those of Penelope's forever unfinished tapestry in the *Odyssey* (in fact, in a suggestive textual detail that is often overlooked, this famous textile was actually a shroud). And as the 'end' of tragedy is refigured not as a closure, but rather as an opening of meaning, Judaeo-Christian notions of history as a singular and successive movement towards 'a promised end' or *eschaton* are similarly undermined. Gesturing beyond death as a *fin* or end to a grossly sensuous as well as numinous version

of the *infini* or unfinished, this Shakespearean (dis-)figuration of tragic endings, not as a limit or boundary, but rather as a resonant surfeit of signification, may plausibly be compared to the ‘feminine endings’ found in much Shakespearean blank verse.

Feminine endings

The feminine endings of verse (which I distinguish here from the rather different device of ‘feminine rhyme’) are metrical supplements to an iambic pentameter in the form of an eleventh syllable, usually unstressed, that assists the transference of poetic sense from one line to the next. In *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, George T. Wright observes of this device:

Whether the choice of *feminine* as a term to describe this ending was accidental or fitted contemporary notions of gender, iambic verse that regularly ends with an unstressed syllable takes on a quality which, in different lines, may variously be described as soft, haunting, yearning, pliant, seductive. In verse that is enjambed, it helps to threaten our sense of the line as a line, as pentameter; in endstopped verse, it subtly undermines the line’s iambic (or masculine) character.⁷

In the queen’s speech quoted on p. 1, two words extend beyond the structural limit conventionally imposed by the ten-syllable line of the iambic pentameter: ‘soul’ at the end of line 11, and the last syllable of ‘grieves’ at the end of line 12. Both words imply a surplus of meaning, and also of affect, that issues beyond the expected poetic limit. Indeed, the selection of these particular words for metrical marginality hints at the connection of the feminine ending’s semiotic surplus both with the experience of grief *as a process* (in ‘grieves’), and with what, for the late Renaissance, was the increasingly problematic status of that ghostly supplement to visible human identity: *soul*, that ‘with nothing trembles’. The tragedies’ figurative insinuation of an abjected and feminized supplement to versions of death as an end is marked by a similar emphasis on the uncanny mobility, even vitality, which informs tragic experience.

In an elaboration and interrogation of Freud’s theory of the death drive, Julia Kristeva has commented on the ways in which ‘the unrepresentable nature of death [i]s linked with that other unrepresentable –original abode but also last resting place for dead souls

in the beyond—which, for mythical thought, is constituted by the female body'.⁸ In her work on abjection, Kristeva has shown how this liminal condition of the female body evokes a cultural response in which not only fascination and horror, but also motifs of sacredness and pollution, are peculiarly combined.⁹ But what has been described as 'the figure that crosses femininity with death' can be interpreted in diverse ways. Elizabeth Bronfen's elegant study of that distinctively modern aestheticization of death which is accomplished, as she convincingly demonstrates, by constant repetition of this figure, concludes that 'over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured'.¹⁰ My contention here, however, is that Shakespearean tragedy uses a similar figure precisely to unsettle cultural norms, since it tropes not only female characters, but also tragic protagonists whose masculinity is figuratively unsettled by their encounter with tragedy, not as stable signifiers of any singularity of either gender or meaning, but rather as sites of maximum undecidability or uncanniness. By redefining dying as a state that is open rather than closed, these tragedies both problematize and amplify orthodox religious knowledge of and around death, disrupting the orderliness of such established significations in a complex layering of figurative detail that is often emblematically embodied, near the end of the play, by a dead or dying woman.

Whether literally enacted or presented solely in tropical guise, Shakespeare's feminine dyings figure death repeatedly, not as an ending, but as a process: an *interitus* or passing between.¹¹ The motif is common to most religions; but—drawing on pagan currents of thought as well as the obscene imagery of popular culture—the tragedies reinfect it as a highly material, bodily process that is mysteriously productive. So the body of the living Juliet (who by her marriage is no longer a Capulet) proves to be an uncannily disruptive force in her own family vault, while the 'maimed rites' of Ophelia's corpse generate social and political disturbances on a comparable scale in the Elsinore graveyard. As they hover disturbingly upon the borders of death and life, Cordelia and Desdemona likewise have peculiarly equivocal 'ends'.

Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani has observed that Renaissance culture had a pervasive sense of the 'strange reversibility' of death and life, or *le jour de mourir*—the pleasure in dying.¹² This interrelationship could be variously inflected, however. In the religious literature of the period, the motif of death-as-life typically produced the grotesque conception of men and women as walking cadavers: a perception that is echoed at key points in Shakespearean tragedy, and most notably by Hamlet. At first glance, the dead or dying women of the tragedies are represented as effecting what

was culturally a quite familiar conjunction of sexuality or physical attraction with death (in the case of Cordelia, this imagery of desire is implicit rather than explicit, and focused in a single emblematic device, the mirror which is held to her dead lips—a familiar attribute of the medieval Venus luxuria). But whereas this well-worn trope was commonly used in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to reinforce the traditional Christian equation of sin (here in the form of female sexuality) with death, the tragedies accord it a notably heterodox significance, by using these feminine endings to explore the strangely erotic vitality of death and putrefaction, as ‘kissing carrion’. So Cleopatra’s dying words, as she suckles the asp that kills her, perform an ironic unsettling of biblical chronology, in a figurative conjunction of the fall of man (through the temptation of Eve by the serpent) with images of the Virgin and Christ child—the newborn ‘Prince of Peace’: ‘Peace, peace! /Dost thou not see my baby at my breast/That sucks the nurse asleep?’ (5.2.307–9). The dying pagan queen is momentarily both the first and the second Eve, while Eve’s serpentine tempter is problematically fused with the saviour of mankind. Several lines later, in a reference whose palimpsest-like layering of allusions assimilates both Protestant and Catholic imagery into a highly erotic spectacle of death which exceeds the doctrines of each faith, we are told by Caesar that: ‘she looks like sleep, /As she would catch another Antony/ In her strong toil of grace’ (5.2.345–7). These words evoke another contradictory medley of Christian images: the ‘dormition’ of the Virgin Mary—a final falling asleep whose difference from normal death was doctrinally reasserted at the Counter-Reformation; the first Christian disciples fishing for men’s souls; and the Calvinist emphasis on the role of divine grace in the process of salvation. Yet elided with these different versions of Christian salvation is the image of a female body whose sexuality is seemingly active even after death: Shakespeare and his contemporaries frequently punned on the homophonic association of ‘grace’ with the ‘greasiness’ of carnival pleasures (as in Mardi Gras or Shrove Tuesday), and the ‘greasy’ end of the genitalia in particular. In this late Renaissance ‘gallimaufry’—which involved a riddling juxtaposition of diverse images—contemporary religious concerns for the fate of the soul are diffused and dilated by a bawdy emphasis upon the seemingly inextinguishable vitality concealed within the dead or dying female body.

Reading tragedy awry

The Freudian definition of the *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanny, encompasses any moment when meaning has proceeded so far in the direction of ambivalence that it effectively coincides with its opposite, in a disturbing

collapse of semantic differences.¹³ In their exploration of death through a series of feminine, or what might best be described as *feminized* figures (since they invariably problematize the boundaries of both gender and desire), the tragedies privilege similarly uncanny moments of semantic ambiguity, in what seems a deliberate exploitation of the contemporary uncertainty as to death's meaning that was felt by many at this liminal moment of religious and intellectual crisis. The result is a quasi-alchemical transmutation of tragic discourse, in which the etymological connection of the Greek *tropos* or trope, with ideas of turning away from a particular course (*trope* was the word used by Greek astronomers to refer to the turning path of the sun at key points in the solar year), is performed in a recurrent turning aside or disfiguring of meaning.

In the same scene from *Richard II* which I took for my starting point, the king's favourite Bushy offers a response to the queen's speech whose pragmatism is designed to allay her fears; it is a reply, however, that indirectly provides us with further insights into the type of critical perspective which might be best suited to analysis of the supplementary meanings of Shakespearean tragedy. For he tells her that:

...Sorrow's eye glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects,
Like perspectives, which rightly gazed upon
Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,
Distinguish form: so your sweet majesty,
Looking awry upon your lord's departure,
Finds shapes of grief more than himself to wail,
Which looked on as it is, is nought but shadows
Of what it is not...

(2.2.16–24)

The favourite's argument, founded in an unemotional empiricism which anticipates a post-Renaissance or modern sensibility, is that 'Sorrows eye' finds a meaning in suffering which is erroneous. This 'eyeing awry' of what Bushy sees as the fundamentally meaningless shapes of grief by the mournful queen gives them a 'form' that he believes is a dangerous figural excess, producing 'shapes of grief more than himself [the departed Richard] to wail'. The sceptical favourite allies his rejection of her premonitory sadness with a brief dismissal of the new mannerist device of anamorphosis, whose 'perspectives' aimed uncannily to unsettle the viewer by inviting a 'looking awry' that revealed a formerly concealed dimension of the artistic work. But just as the 'more' that Bushy dismisses, yet which is positioned so emphatically at the caesura