CHAPTER SEVEN

Christians and Marxists: Allegory, Ideology

> It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between *literal* and *metaphorical*. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honours usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds symbols with allegories. Now an allegory is but an abstraction of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot.
>
> Coleridge[1]

With the exception of deconstruction — ceaselessly fissuring Shakespeare's text to prove its theory of the indeterminacy of language and meaning, in the process reducing characters to mere 'traces'; purely verbal effects — all the critical schools so far discussed accept the substantiality of the characters within the play, but then force them into preconceived patterns. For the feminists it is essential that characters be seen as gendered, culturally superior or inferior, oppressor or oppressed. For the New Historicists the people in a play can be criticised for being in a dominant, exploitative relationship, or sympathised with as the victims of power, colonialism, or whatever. To the Freudians, they are individual case-studies, each manifesting one version or other of a limited, but endlessly recombinable repertoire of fantasies and neuroses. All these forms of criticism can be described as only partly literary, for they all ignore the primary experience of drama as a sequence of action which unfolds over time. Literary criticism which is not serving some political ideology or reductive theory of human behaviour holds that characters in a work of literature are figures in an organised whole which is structured on various levels, its outcome achieving a decisive re-disposition of the characters' relations to each other. Whether experienced in the theatre or in private reading, drama is a representation of human interaction which demands an intellectual, emotional, ethical response and is pleasing in itself. — That is a brief and all too sketchy description, but it suffices to show that none of these schools of criticism has an aesthetic or literary theory derived from, or applicable to the plays as theatrical or reading experiences. Each of them uses the plays to validate its own theories, overlooking, rejecting, or falsifying whatever does not match the template which they superimpose on literature. The play is subordinated to the paradigm.

The last two critical approaches I discuss, Christian and Marxist, go a stage farther than any of the others. They, too, ignore the theatrical experience, dramatic structure, aesthetic properties of the plays. They, too, use them to demonstrate the truth or applicability of their own paradigms, ignoring whatever does not fit. Here, too, the characters are not regarded as parts functioning in a complex whole having its own rationale. But these two schools take the abstracting process to its extreme, regarding characters not in gender-roles, nor even as clinical types, but as mere *representatives*. They 'stand for' something else in an external allegory, to be read outside, and independent of the play, having its own narrative-pattern, and a quite different conclusion. For Christian interpreters Shakespeare's characters represent Biblical personages (Christ, the Virgin Mary, Judas, and so forth), or religious figures from a later period (medieval Saints, say), or such Christian virtues as Mercy, Pity, Love. For Marxist interpreters they represent levels in society, viewed either synchronically (ruling class, bourgeoisie, proletariat), or according to a Marxist view of history (decaying feudalism, emerging bourgeoisie). This shared practice of allegorising, each in its own way abstracting characters from being, in Coleridge's words, 'objects of the senses' to figures in an alien scheme, is the main focus of this chapter.

That Christian and Marxist approaches share this type of abstraction when interpreting literature may seem accidental. On a wider view, however, it may derive from their common status as belief-systems, or ideologies. As Christopher Butler observes in a shrewd analysis of the ideological element in literary criticism, ideology can provide an individual belonging to a group with 'an overall "framework of belief" or "world picture" giving rise to moral norms which typically guide his actions' (Butler 1984, p. 95). It is important that such beliefs cohere, forming an inter-related whole, but an ideology goes beyond 'a framework of belief, in that it is wedded to a programme for action in the light of a *model* of the nature of human society'. For Lenin the ideology of the labour movement was '"the set of those attitudes and beliefs which would best enable the workers to reconstruct society in their own interest"' (*ibid.*). Ideologies are developed by separate interest groups, each claiming a universal appeal, and are thus always in competition. Roman Catholic and Marxist ideologies, in Butler's example, each

> have a peculiar certainty about the truth revealed to them, and indeed about the direction of history, towards revolution or salvation. They are thus also teleological, setting before us a goal, an ideal state of earthly or heavenly society. . . . The end-states they aim at, including that of a liberal democracy, are often justified by the freedom which we are expected to enjoy within the society they project. Paradoxically enough,

> the process of obtaining this freedom within history may involve a high degree of obedience to authority and extinction of self-will. (p. 96)

Theological dogma, the party-line, both regard those who question the authority vested in an institution as heretical, displaying a form of deviance which cannot be tolerated beyond a certain point, either in time or in degree. The subordination of the individual to the system is echoed in literary criticism, I suggest, by the way in which characters in literary works are subordinated to an overall scheme, which they are seen as illustrating or validating, reduced to 'figures' or 'types'.

Ideological interpretations of literature, as we shall see shortly, also move outside the individual work of art, involving readers, texts, and other readers in various forms of collision. Since ideologists have definite ideas 'about human nature or human values', Butler observes, they 'invade the sphere of moral values' and project their ideas as 'certainties' — man is born to serve God; his value for society consists in his labour. This sense of certainty may produce 'a direct confrontation between the beliefs of the interpreter and those supposedly asserted by the text' (p. 97), when the potentially literary response becomes a political one, posing the question: 'does the text confirm or contradict the beliefs independently held by the interpreter?' (p. 100). In terms of Christian interpretation, this juxtaposition of incompatible belief-systems led to an initial rejection of the literature of the Greeks and Romans as heathen, a reaction which put the Church Fathers in a difficult position, since classical literature was also the single available body of knowledge, which — from the fundamental educational triad of grammar, rhetoric and logic up to the moral philosophy of Plato and Cicero — had formed men like Jerome and Augustine, and to which they themselves made notable contributions. The Church's response to this dilemma, familiarly enough, was to develop allegorical interpretation as a way of saving heathen texts by attributing moralising meanings to them. In recent Marxist criticism, as we shall see, a comparable move towards allegory has taken place, for not dissimilar reasons. Linking these two ideologies, then, is not an arbitrary procedure.

I

To begin with the Christian readings, and acknowledging the fact that, as Richmond Noble definitively showed in 1935,[2] Shakespeare was himself well acquainted with Christianity and quoted from or alluded to the Bible and prayerbook hundreds of times, the basic question remains: by what criteria can an interpreter argue that a character in the plays 'represents' a person from holy writ or Christian legend? The prior condition to be fulfilled, one answer holds, would be to show that allegorical interpretations of secular texts were common in the Renaissance. R.M. Frye, in his sober and reliable study of *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine*, showed that this was not common. Even professional theologians, who read classical literature in traditional ethical and rhetorical terms, did not try to find theological meanings in it (Frye 1963, pp. 65–90). A supporting argument would concern the nature of allegory as commonly understood in the Renaissance. Medieval exegetes used a four-fold scheme, conventionally illustrated by reference to Jerusalem: on the literal level, it is the holy city; on the allegorical (or 'figurative') level, the Church militant; on the tropological (or moral) level, the just soul; and on the anagogical (or analogical) level, the Church triumphant.[3] But Renaissance writers, as William Nelson showed, did not adopt this elaborate structure, and commonly took 'allegorical' to mean 'moral'.[4] An allegorical reading in the Renaissance sense would bring out the ethical implications of the represented action, without necessarily reducing the characters to types or personifications. One well-known characteristic in Renaissance hermeneutics, exemplified by Erasmus, was indeed the rejection of four-fold exegesis as scholastic, typifying medieval pedantry.[5]

Consideration of historical issues is in any case irrelevant to most modern Christian allegorical readings of Shakespeare, which ignore history and simply assume that the Bible has meant the same thing in all ages, and that the parallels they detect in Shakespeare's text are really there, whether or not consciously meant. The result is a general free-for-all, a game which anyone can play, since the rules are so easy to learn. The simplest move is to connect one Shakespeare character with one Christian. To Paul N. Siegel Lear's death has 'a deeper meaning', the 'miracle' being Lear's redemption 'for heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the Son of God had come down to earth. The analogy between Cordelia and Christ . . . is made unmistakable' by the choric commentator who says that she 'redeems nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought her to' (*King Lear*, 4.6.210–11). Wrongly taking 'twain' to refer not to Goneril and Regan but to Adam and Eve, Siegel suggests that 'the Elizabethans . . . would have more readily apprehended than we do that Cordelia's ignominious death completes the analogy between her and Christ' (Siegel 1957, p. 186). Desdemona, too, dies an ignominious death, but takes on a redemptive function far wider than Cordelia (who only saved her father, after all):

> Desdemona raises and redeems such earthly souls as Emilia. Belief in her, the symbolic equivalent in the play of belief in Christ, is a means of salvation for Cassio as well as for Emilia. (*ibid.*, p. 134)

Othello, however, is not saved. 'Crushed by the sight' of Desdemona on her death bed, 'he calls to be transported to hell at once', in words which remind Siegel, at least, of what an Elizabethan homily calls 'Judas' repentance', a parallel which is instantly endorsed: 'In committing selfmurder at the conclusion he is continuing to follow Judas' example. His behavior in his last moments, therefore, would have confirmed Elizabethans in the impression that his soul is lost' (p. 131).

Siegel frequently invokes Elizabethan attitudes as confirming his allegorising readings, but never proves that this habit of mind existed then. The truth seems to lie with R.M. Frye's counter-assertion: 'there is no evidence from any source contemporary with Shakespeare to support the notion that Elizabethan audiences customarily allegorized the plays they saw or that Elizabethan dramatists (save, possibly, in rare instances of clearly topical interest) allegorized the plays they wrote' (Frye 1963, p. 33). Such observations, although true, have no effect on critics who wish to draw large and precise parallels between Shakespeare and Christian story. Thus on one page discussing *Othello*, Roy W. Battenhouse finds in Othello's 'Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them' an irresistible echo of Christ's words to Peter at Gethsemane: 'Put up your sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' (John 18:11). To Battenhouse 'the two scenes have a strange affinity, as if Othello were revealing to us a grotesque version of the biblical Christ' (Battenhouse 1957, p. 209). What purpose this 'affinity' could have in the structure of the play, and in what sense Othello could be even a 'grotesque' version of Christ, are questions not discussed. Instead, Battenhouse rushes on to identify more 'analogues':

> Another analogue is suggested by Act III, scene iii, when Desdemona, like Veronica of Christian legend, would soothe her lord's anguished face with a handkerchief. Othello brushes her off and the handkerchief is dropped and lost. Thus the analogue is both like and unlike the Christian legend, a kind of antitype to it.

That selective attention, however improbable, typifies the method of Christian allegorising: pick out the one detail that makes a parallel, ignore the rest. As Richard Levin has said, such 'parallels' are merely 'pieces of special pleading, in that they have always been subjected to a double screening in advance' by the allegoriser: 'out of all the facts in the play he selects only those suiting his purpose, and since each of these chosen facts has many aspects, he selects again those of its aspects that he will consider relevant and ignores all the others. The result is therefore never in doubt . . .' (Levin 1979, p. 221).

To return to Battenhouse, still on the same page, is to see him finding 'still another analogue, this time to Job', when Othello exclaims that he 'could have had patience, had it pleased Heaven "To try me with affliction" and "all kinds of sores" . . .'. This parallel, if reflected on, would suggest certain difficulties (notably that God must be punishing Othello). Battenhouse meets these by saying that 'Othello is suffering no sores other than of his own making', that he trusts in 'a Satan-like Iago', and that Othello also trusts 'in his own righteousness substituting as god' (with a small G!). So the Job analogue makes this 'an upside-down parallel of Christian story'. (Who is on top?) Battenhouse feels much happier with his final analogue, as Othello, having in one page been identified with Christ and Job, is now equated with Judas. His dying words to Desdemona, 'I kissed thee ere I killed thee', Battenhouse writes, 'bring to mind Judas', as does his (earlier) 'remorseful cry that "like the base Judean" he has thrown "a pearl away/Richer than all his tribe"'. Although he doesn't tell his readers, Battenhouse is quoting the Folio reading *Iudean* or *Judean*: the Quarto text gives *Indian*, and the majority of editors have opted for this reading.[6] Undeterred by textual considerations, Battenhouse comments:

> Here we have a true parallel. Judas was the Judean who threw away the pearl-of-great-price (charity, or Christ), and then committed suicide.

Battenhouse, who never faces the fact that the jewel Othello laments having thrown away is not Christ but Desdemona, goes on to discover other parallels between Othello, Judas, and the Pharisees. Finally, by saying 'Put out the light . . .' Othello is said to be 'enacting unwittingly a kind of *tenebrae* service' (Battenhouse 1957, p. 210) — that is, we recall, the Roman Catholic service on Good Friday. That Othello enacts it 'unwittingly' makes it perhaps not quite so inappropriate that Judas officiates at this ceremony.

* * *

We can already see the criteria by which a Christian allegoriser finds a significant parallel: any resemblance to anything in Biblical or legendary material will do, any handkerchief can be Veronica's, any sword Peter's. As for the negative instances, that recognition of contrary evidence which makes us qualify an interpretation, or abandon it altogether, they are thin on the ground. The result is a veritable *fay ce que vouldras*, to re-apply Rabelais. Staying with *Othello*, and drawing on a recent analytical bibliography,[7] we find that Desdemona was seen in 1939 as Christ (#30) and in 1950 as 'both the soul and the Redeemer', with her handkerchief 'a "sacred talisman", a necessary possession for anyone seeking "the harmony of the Divine Union"' (#140) — unfortunate to lose it, then. To Peter Milward in 1967, drawing on medieval moralities, Desdemona was the Virgin Mary (#633), but in 1985 he identified her with Christ (#1379). For Arthur Kirsch in 1978 Desdemona 'embodies the Christian value of pity', but is also 'an "incarnate ideal of marital love and of the charity which subsumes it"' (#1068). In 1981 Kirsch saw her as exemplifying 'the religious and psychological commitments of marriage as articulated by St. Paul and Freud' (#1204: does Freud ever write about commitments in a healthy relationship?). As for Iago, most allegorisers have seen him as a Satan figure, Battenhouse repeatedly, in 1969, 1964, and 1957 (#696, 488, 278). Going back to 1952, however, Battenhouse saw Othello as 'the "liberal humanitarian" of today', setting himself up outside Christianity, while 'his entrapment by the Satanic Iago offers a message to us today, who are "so easily victimized by the Communist conspirator"', with his 'materialistic deceit' (#173). So the Cold War claimed another victim.

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The liberty of interpreting that the Christian allegorisers grant themselves is total. J.A. Bryant, Jr., in one of the most bizarre examples of this art, equates Othello with God, Cassio with Adam, Iago with Lucifer (also 'passed over for promotion'), Desdemona with Christ.[8] As R.M. Frye drily comments, 'we may perhaps be pardoned for feeling some slight anxiety along the way as to the approaching suicide of God the Father' (Frye 1963, p. 31). That suicide, indeed, for the majority of allegorisers, places Othello in hell, on the simple process of what Frye calls 'proof by assertion' (*ibid.*, p. 22). For Paul Siegel it is self-evident that Gertrude is damned, Cassio saved, Roderigo damned. Desdemona, meanwhile, gains heaven by her 'martyrdom', with Emilia to attend her, while Othello and Iago are damned beyond redemption (Siegel 1957, pp. 114–15, 134–9). Sitting in judgment over characters in tragedy may give one a comforting sense of power, but it wholly mistakes the nature of that genre, and is in any case irrelevant. As Sylvan Barnet observed in a penetrating essay, the ethics in Shakespeare's plays

> partake of Christian ethics, but they are not based, as Christian ethics in fact are, upon the eschatology of the Christian system. Shakespeare . . . does not concern himself with the fortunes of his lovers and haters in the next world, nor does he insist that the meek shall inherit the earth.[9]

The plays 'partake of Christian ethics', we might add, in the sense that the Church shared a broad band of ethical teaching with classical moral philosophy. Luther (like many Christians) could praise both Cicero and Aristotle for their writings on ethics, but still believe that, '"however excellent they are . . . they cannot show the way to God into the kingdom of heaven"' (*cit.* Frye 1963, p. 79). Similarly, although characters in the plays may refer to the 'four last things' comprised in Christian eschatology (death, judgment, heaven, hell), Shakespeare never uses this scheme to suggest what happens to his characters 'after the play is over'. He, at any rate, could tell the difference between life and art.

Refutations of Christian allegorical interpretation have long ago pointed out its deficiencies,[10] but are unlikely to extinguish it as a critical option. For one thing, its very flexibility, the absence of limiting criteria, makes it combinable with other approaches, directed by the intentionality of the critic. Arthur Kirsch, as we briefly saw, could combine St. Paul and Freud in describing Desdemona. Stanley Cavell, writing about *Coriolanus*, starts with a psychoanalytic reading and ends up with a Christian one. This essay has been so much admired, especially in psychoanalytical-feminist circles, and Cavell's standing as a philosopher is so high, as to make it worth more detailed discussion. Although the essay is called '*Coriolanus* and Interpretations of Politics', Cavell wholly ignores the political dimension of the play, that re-working of Plutarch in which Shakespeare made the family conflict between Coriolanus and his mother an integral part of the political situation, so that tensions in each exacerbate the other, with Coriolanus being caught in a series of dilemmas that destroy him.[11] His real interests psychoanalytical, Cavell baldly classifies Coriolanus as a Narcissus figure in whom, moreover, 'narcissism' is 'another face of incestuousness' (Cavell 1987, p. 144), a juggling of categories which it must take a Freudian to understand. Cavell's psychoanalytical model (Adelman 1978) encourages him to lump Volumnia and Coriolanus together in a complicated sequence of 'feeding, dependency, and aggression', based on just two passages in the play. First, Volumnia's reply to Menenius' invitation to dinner, immediately after Coriolanus' banishment:

> Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself
> And so shall starve with feeding. (4.2.50–1)

In its context this means 'I shall go on being angry: I can sustain my anger indefinitely, simultaneously consuming and renewing itself' — a paradox, perhaps, but not too unfamiliar from angry people in life. Second, Coriolanus' bitter soliloquy, earlier on, as he goes through the to him degrading ceremony of begging from every 'Hob and Dick' the recognition by Rome which his bravery in war has already earned him:

> Better it is to die, better to starve,
> Than crave the hire which first we do deserve. (2.3.118f)

Ignoring the dramatic situation and the conflicts arising out of the notions of class and service, the curiously anachronistic and pseudo-democratic voting customs in early Rome, that tension between enforced and voluntary recognition of the ruling patrician class which Shakespeare exploited to form a tragedy, Cavell takes these two remarks, a total of four lines made by two characters many scenes apart, for very different ends, as proving that mother and son are 'starvers, hungerers', expressing 'a condition of insatiability' (p. 148).

In ascribing to both mother and son the 'presiding passion' of 'human insatiability' (pp. 148–9), Cavell reduces to one level two very different people. Volumnia is indeed greedy, but on behalf of her son, that he fulfil her supreme ambitions by becoming consul (e.g., 2.1.146–9, 196–200). She has bred him to military and political success since he was a boy, perverting maternal love in the process (e.g., 1.3.1–25). For his part, although happy to fight for the ideal of Rome (2.2.131f; 3.1.76f), Coriolanus wants no part in politics, and loathes the sycophancy expected of him (e.g., 2.1.200ff; 2.2.135ff; 2.3.48ff; 3.1; 3.2; 3.3). The voting scenes, with the demagogic activities of the tribunes being juxtaposed with the ineffective efforts of the patricians to make Coriolanus a tactful vote-catcher, enact a collision that fills up the centre of the play. Coriolanus' resentment of political vote-begging produces conflict within the family, for Volumnia puts her role as Roman before that as mother. In rebelling against the one, Coriolanus inevitably rejects the other, making protests which Volumnia crushes by tactical withdrawals of love, culminating in his disastrous capitulation after he has defeated Rome for the Volsces (3.2.7–147; 5.3.19–209).[12] Ignoring the interweaving of politics and family which sets Volumnia and Coriolanus on opposed paths, using his Freudian idea of 'insatiability' to level out the opposition between them (as if you were to put Claudius and Hamlet on the same side), Cavell lumps mother and son together not only in their 'way of starving . . . their hunger', but in a further and more dramatic stage, 'their sense of being cannibalized'. If this word describes a human being eaten by another human, readers will look in vain to find either Volumnia or Coriolanus complaining of it happening to them. To Cavell, however, they do feel this, and are not alone, for he finds that 'the idea of cannibalization runs throughout the play' (p. 150).

But as any reader with a literary training can see, it is not so much an 'idea' as a metaphor for human relationships — especially ingratitude — which is never meant to be taken literally. Furthermore, like so much of the language in this play, it has been politicised. Each political group using this metaphor does so for its own polemical purposes. One of the tribunes says of Coriolanus, 'May the present wars devour him!' (1.1.257); Menenius says that the plebeians would like to 'devour' Martius (2.1.9); Coriolanus says that were it not for the Senate the plebs 'Would feed on one another' (1.1.192); the plebeians argue that the patricians are trying to 'eat us . . . up' (1.1.87); Coriolanus attacks the Tribunes: 'You being their mouths, why rule you not their teeth?' (3.1.36f); Menenius hopes that ungrateful Rome will not 'like an unnatural dam . . . eat up her own' by expelling Martius (3.1.288ff); and when Coriolanus goes over to the Volsces he complains that he has only his name left, the people's 'cruelty and envy . . . hath devoured the rest' (4.5.82). In all these instances the reader must decode 'eat', 'feed', 'devour' (none of which, incidentally, is used with unusual frequency in this play), as meaning 'destroy' or 'deprive', not taking the metaphor literally, and seeing it as embodying political rivalry, expressed throughout this play as intense hatred.

Such considerations would be lost on Cavell, who regularly conflates literal and figurative meanings. According to him Cominius comes 'to battle as to a feast', suggesting that Coriolanus sees it in those terms: but the metaphor is Cominius' own: 'Yet cam'st thou to a morsel of this feast' (1.9.10), in any case a metaphor for 'part of'. When Menenius prays that Rome will not behave 'like an unnatural dam', Cavell hopes that 'all readers . . . will recognize in this description of Rome as potentially a cannibalistic mother an allusion to Volumnia', suggesting to him not merely an 'identification of Volumnia and Rome' but 'an identity . . . between a mother eating her child and a mother eating herself' (p. 151). Pursuing a metaphor in this literal-minded way leads Cavell to the absurdity of imagining Volumnia first eating her child (Coriolanus is a grown man by now), then eating herself, a grotesque idea which is peculiarly hard to visualise. The resulting 'identity', or 'identification', as Cavell puts it, cannot distinguish cannibalism from metaphor, as if this play presented another banquet of Thyestes. The culminating point in this muddle is Cavell's reading (following Adelman 1978) of the lines where Volumnia rebukes Virgilia for expressing anguish at her mother-in-law's auto-induced militaristic vision of Coriolanus victorious in battle, covered in blood. 'The breasts of Hecuba', Volumnia contemptuously replies, 'When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovelier / Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood / At Grecian sword, contemning' (1.3.39ff). This (horribly militarist) contrast between Hector as baby and Hector as grown man was fated to be destroyed by these Freudian critics, Adelman and Cavell agreeing that it transforms Hector from 'infantile mouth to bleeding wound', and Cavell adding his further insight that 'the suckling mother is presented as being slashed by the son-hero, eaten by the one she feeds', a typical Volumnia fantasy, he suggests (p. 154). But no, a typical Freudian fantasy, rather, as the learned philosopher shows that he is unable to read the lines that Shakespeare has written, collapsing a time-scale of twenty years, at least, between baby and warrior, into one garbled and violent phrase ('slashed . . . eaten'), again confusing literal and metaphorical.

The turning-point in Cavell's essay, from psychoanalysis to Christian allegorising (it could be subtitled 'Cannibals and Christians'), comes with his further misreading of Volumnia's lines. Where she made a nauseating comparison of the *beauty* of Hecuba's suckling breasts with the *beauty* of Hector's battle-wounds, for Cavell 'the lines set up an equation between a mother's milk and a man's blood'. Pushing ahead with the consequence of what it would *literally* imply if blood were the same as milk, he suggests that 'the man's spitting blood in battle' is a way of 'providing food, in a male fashion', so that Coriolanus' 'spitting blood in battle is his way of deserving being fed, that is to say, being devoured, being loved unconditionally' (p. 154). Thus 'effective bleeding', then — as if Coriolanus should say, 'here, drink my blood while it is still warm' — 'depends (according to the equation of blood and milk) upon its being a form of feeding, of giving food, providing blood identifies him with his mother' (p. 155). But it is only Professor Cavell who wishes to equate blood and milk, to identify Coriolanus and Volumnia, to suggest that battle-wounds provide food 'in a male fashion'. His perverse reading of these lines, the product of a long, intense, and tortuous meditation on the issues of feeding, cannibalising, and killing, reaches its improbable climax as he begins to plot a relation between Coriolanus and 'the other sacrificial lamb I have mentioned, the lamb of God, Christ', — not to 'identify them', he hastens to add: 'I see Coriolanus not so much as imitating Christ as competing with him. These are necessarily shadowy matters . . .' (p. 157).

But what would it mean to see Coriolanus, who lived some centuries before Christ, as 'competing with him'? Competing for Shakespeare, as if the dramatist were somehow associating the two? Or competing for Cavell, as if they were simultaneously present in his consciousness, role models perhaps? Whichever it is, Cavell now inserts Christ into his own interpretation of 'food' in *Coriolanus*. 'Christ is the right god' — I presume he means 'right' for *his* interpretation — 'because of the way he understands his mission as providing nonliteral food, food for the spirit, for immortality; and because it is in him that blood must be understood as food' (p. 157). We are grateful for the word 'nonliteral' there, but must say all the same that the difference between Coriolanus' imputed equation of blood and milk — based on Cavell's perverse interpretation of Volumnia's reference to Hector — and Christ's 'this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins' (Matt. 26:28) is so great that it may seem an act of astonishing insensitivity, or critical hybris, to compare the two. But Cavell finds 'surprising *confirmation* for it' in two of Coriolanus' actions.

> First is his pivotal refusal to show his wounds. I associate this generally with the issue of Christ's showing his wounds to his disciples, in order to show them the Lord — that is, to prove the Resurrection . . .

and in particular his rebuke of doubting Thomas. 'Thomas would not believe until he could, as he puts it and as Jesus will invite him to, "put mine hands into his side"; Aufidius declares the wish to "wash my fierce hand in's heart" (1.10.27)' (p. 158; my italics). Every reader must judge whether they find this parallel convincing. To me it seems a desperate, superficial, fortuitous link between two utterly different incidents. Aufidius does not want to see, and know, the risen God: he wishes to cut his enemy's heart out and wipe his hands in its blood.

Cavell's second 'confirmation' of his thesis is even more fantastic, describing the scene where 'Volumnia, holding her son's son by the hand, together with Virgilia and Valeria', intercedes on behalf of Rome. Now what does this remind you of?

> I take this to invoke the appearance, while Christ is on the cross, of three women whose names begin with the same letter of the alphabet (I mean begin with M's, not with V's), accompanied by a male he loves, whom he views as his mother's son (John, 19:25–7). (Giving his mother a son presages a mystic marriage.) (p. 158)

So that young Coriolanus is to be archetypically equated with John the Evangelist, then . . . — but there would be no point in pursuing the issue. One can only wonder to what depths of introversion a scholar's mind can have descended for him to regard this as a proof of anything. The propensity to make your own meaning out of isolated letters of the alphabet suggests the gulled Malvolio ('what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me. Softly. M, O, A, I . . .': 2.5.130ff), or poor mad Kit Smart.[13] But Cavell has a 'second source of confirmation for Coriolanus' connection with the figure of Christ', namely 'some parallels that come out of Revelation'. He summarises that book as briefly as possible — a rhetorical effect — as containing a lamb, a dragon, 'and a figure who sits on a special horse and on a golden throne, whose name is known only to himself, whose "eyes were as a flame of fire", and who burns a city that is identified as a woman; it is, in particular, the city (Babylon) which in Christian tradition is identified with Rome' (p. 159). But where, in Shakespeare, are the seven beasts, and the four and twenty elders, and the book with seven seals?

'And I associate', Cavell continues, sure in the knowledge that he cannot be refuted (that is, he truly does associate) Coriolanus' first diatribe against the citizens with Christ's warning 'I shall spew thee out', the common factor being a passage in North's Plutarch. But in fact Plutarch writes that Coriolanus *lacked* (Cavell hasn't noticed this) the 'base and faint corage, which spitteth out anger from the most weak and passioned parte of the harte' (p. 158). Fortified by such hasty misreadings Cavell moves on into a realm of purely private associations. To him Coriolanus and Christ 'are identified as banished providers of spiritual food' (p. 160): what could possibly be 'spiritual' about Coriolanus? Yet another 'equation' that he finds in the play, again collapsing difference into identity, that between 'words and food', links Coriolanus further with Christ, 'invoking the central figure of the Eucharist' (pp. 163, 167). But Christ's 'food' is for others, and Cavell's point has been that people in this play eat each other, so he has to add that to Coriolanus 'the circulation of language is an expression of cannibalism' (p. 165). I can only hope that Cavell will one day eat his words.

Cavell pursues his parallel to the extent of seeing Coriolanus as a kind of failed Christ figure — for which, of course, his mother is to blame:

> She has deprived him of heaven, of, in his fantasy, sitting beside his father, and deprived him by withholding her faith in him, for if she does not believe that he is a god then probably he is not a god, and certainly nothing like the Christian scenario can be fulfilled, in which a mother's belief is essential. If it were his father who sacrificed him for the city of man then he could be a god. But if it is his mother who sacrifices him he is not a god. The logic of his situation, as well as the psychology, is that he cannot sacrifice himself. (p. 161)

I can find no comment adequate to such a serious pursuit of the parallel between Coriolanus and Volumnia on the one hand, Christ and the Virgin Mary on the other, with a missing father-figure as the excluded middle.

(Cavell has a few suggestions, by the way, as to who Coriolanus might conceivably have lined up as a father-figure.)

Cavell's final point about *Coriolanus*, his Parthian dart, the butt-end of his discourse (as in *Othello*), concerns the significance of a name. When I reviewed Janet Adelman's essay on its first appearance, I made the jocular suggestion that 'If Volumnia is castrating Coriolanus, . . . and if Corioli represents defloration', as Adelman suggested, 'then what dark deed is commemorated in our hero's honorific soubriquet, Coriol-anus? You may laugh, dear reader, but thin partitions do the bounds divide.'[14] I should have been more careful: whatever fantastic Shakespeare interpretation one can think of, it either has been or one day will be made. So for Cavell — to whom, as we recall, 'farce and tragedy are separated by the thickness of a membrane' — the 'anality in the play is less explicit than the orality', but he finds, all the same, that 'the issue [is] given full explicitness in the play's, and its hero's name'. Kenneth Burke once pronounced that 'in the light of the Freudian theories concerning the fecal nature of invective, the last two syllables [*-anus*] are so "right" . . .', so right that Cavell can find 'a kind of poetic justice' in the language having given 'the same sound equally to a suffix that encodes a name's military honor and to the name of the shape of a sphincter . . .' (p. 174). While feeling sorry for German readers who can't share the joke in Coriolan, just like the Italians who can't see 'hell' in Otello, and while wondering how many dozens of Latin names end in the suffix *-anus*, the real question that this comment raises is what, for the psychoanalytic critic, as for the Christian allegoriser, would constitute inadmissible evidence? Where could they draw a line between the relevant and the fortuitous, between the statistically improbable and the simply silly? Cavell's account of *Coriolanus* will long remain one of the most bizarre episodes in modern Shakespeare criticism.

II

While drawing certain parallels between Christian and Marxist approaches, I must say at once that the latter are more restrained, less fantastic. Whatever we may think about Marx's theory of society and history, or the many divergent theories of those who call themselves Marxists, no critic I know is quite as eccentric as J.A. Bryant or Stanley Cavell. The most common objection to Marxist literary criticism is, indeed, its lack of imagination, its mechanical discovery of Marxist concepts in literary texts on a 'one here, one there' basis (e.g., Barthes 1972, p. 255). Some thirty years after his Christian allegorising of the tragedies, Paul N. Siegel produced what he claimed to be 'a Marxist approach' to Shakespeare's history plays, English and Roman (Siegel 1986), with much the same simple stereotyping.[15] Quoting Marx and Engels on Shylock as a 'representative of the capitalist ethic' (p. 25), and E.C. Pettet's comment on Timon in his philanthropic phase as '"the representative of specific medieval values, a dispenser of feudal bounty"' (p. 26), and T.A. Jackson's view of Falstaff and his crew as representing the '"decomposition of an absolute class . . . dependants upon the feudal order"' (p. 21), Siegel continues in the same vein of simply labelling characters as 'representative'. Falstaff and Hotspur are 'representatives of social classes', Falstaff 'a member of the decadent feudalistic aristocracy, Hotspur a member of the same class at its best' (p. 34). Richard III is a 'representative of the spirit of capitalism', a claim that Siegel supports with a relentless list of every 'monetary' or 'commercial' term used by Richard, interspersed with disapproving reference to 'the bourgeoisie' (pp. 80–85). This approach depersonalises Richard, turning a uniquely daemonic figure into the mere representative of a class, and in the process destroys the play's ethical structure, responsibility for Richard's evil deeds now being transferred to the 'rampant individualism' of capitalism. In addition to damaging both character and play, this approach notably fails to explain why Richard was defeated, especially as capitalism subsequently 'gained world domination' (p. 85). Was Shakespeare a closet feudalist?

Eroding individuality, creating deterministic models of human behaviour, naïve Marxism resembles naïve Freudianism. The privileged categories are supposedly higher-level generalisations, but they produce just that 'abstraction from objects of the senses' which Coleridge complained of, losing the reality and vitality of the individual in bland and repetitive abstractions. More complex theoretical models now exist, as we shall soon see, but the paradigmatic structures used by naïve Marxism are incapable of being further energised, and the syntagmatic structures — the overthrow of capitalism, the withering away of the state — propose a narrative line which cannot be echoed in Shakespeare or any work not deliberately constructed on millenarian lines. The parallel with Christian narratives is again close, as Raymond Aron observed:

> In Marxist eschatology, the proletariat is cast in the role of collective saviour. The expressions used by the young Marx leave one in no doubt as to the Judaeo-Christian origins of the myth of the class elected through suffering for the redemption of humanity. The mission of the proletariat, the end of pre-history thanks to the Revolution, the reign of liberty — it is easy to recognise the source of these ideas: the Messiah, the break with the past, the Kingdom of God. (Aron 1957, p. 66)

The political reality, however, Aron could observe in the mid-50s, was that in communist countries 'it is the Party rather than the proletariat which is the object of a cult', and that whenever socialism has succeeded in democracies, 'the factory workers, having become petty bourgeois, no longer interest the intellectuals and are themselves no longer interested in ideologies' (*ibid.*).

Yet the proletariat remains the hero in much Marxist criticism, the role of enemy being played by the bourgeoisie and capitalists, with the intellectuals occupying an uneasy middle ground. A striking example of this idealisation of the people is Robert Weimann's book on Shakespeare and the popular tradition in the theatre, whose very favourable reception among Cultural Materialists again makes it worth examining in more detail.[16] His broad argument is that drama originated in folk-rituals, whether in ancient Greece or medieval England; that the 'popular' element is always fresh, 'realistic'; that intervention by 'humanists' or other intellectuals damages the true nature of drama; and that Shakespeare's best work derives from the popular tradition. None of these ideas is new, indeed the superiority of *das Volk* is a fixed principle having a venerable tradition in Marxist criticism. Weimann supports his argument with the citation of a great deal of secondary literature, some of it relatively modern and reliable (restating the views of C.L. Barber, Bernard Spivack, Alfred Harbage), but much of it obscure and obsolete, dating from the end of the nineteenth century.[17] The fact that Weimann can seriously cite Franz Mehring's view that Shakespeare's stage 'still had one foot in the Germanic Middle Ages' shows how much he relied on German sources which have been totally superseded, and is a sad testimony to the difficulty writers in the former DDR had in obtaining access to modern, non-communist scholarship. Perhaps as a result of his cultural isolation — or perhaps because it fitted his Marxist simplification of Elizabethan drama — Weimann based a large part of his argument on amazingly outdated works of anthropology and social history. His views on the ritual origins of drama derive from Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (p. 218), that 'monumental exercise in futility', as a modern anthropologist described it,[18] backed up with Gilbert Murray on 'Hamlet and Orestes', and those predictable Marxist studies of Greek tragedy by Thomson and Lindsay. The most glaring example of his reliance on outmoded sources is his citation of Margaret Murray's totally discredited book, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*.[19] These are not just 'old' books: they simply offer an unscholarly mess of speculation without evidence, or with evidence cooked to fit a thesis. Weimann knows that some of them have been discredited, but shows a rather slippery readiness to use them when it suits his argument.[20] It is remarkable that such work could be published in 1978 by an American university press which prides itself on being out front in critical theory.

The result of Weimann's reliance on such bad secondary material is that he accumulates a morass of unproven and unprovable theories about the origin of drama, linking 'miming' (whatever that was) with magic, with the 'cultic sphere', with the 'orgiastic cult' (p. 3), and with 'ecstatic or magic ritual', 'the shaman, the poet-priest', and the 'initiation ceremony' (p. 5). There is no evidence, of course, for any of these links, nor for a connection between 'magical rite and mimic representation (which survived in phallic fertility symbolism)' (*ibid.*). These are the detritus of nineteenth-century whimsical speculations about the pre-history of the race. Weimann gives wholly imaginary accounts of the Ur-form of drama, describing the fool as a 'descendant of a ritual', an 'atavistic agent of the cult' (p. 11); he blurs Dionysus, 'Orphic and shamanist traditions' (p. 14); dabbles indiscriminately with satyr cults and tribal culture (p. 19), saturnalia, seasonal rites, and vegetation magic (p. 23); and discourses on 'the relationship between the fool's motley and the pagan traditions of vegetation magic' (p. 31). This is all wild invention.

The fictitious nature of such speculations may be only fully evident to those who have worked in these fields, but every reader can see the methodological faults in Weimann's treatment of the Mummers' Play. He knows that our sole evidence for this 'tradition' consists of 'nineteenth-century versions [*sic*] of the texts' (p. 18), but he still credulously takes something set down at Weston-sub-Edge in 1864 as showing how the fool traditionally (on his vague time-scale, anything from one to three thousand years ago) had a 'ritual' connection with inversion, a topic which, he assures us, 'can best be studied in plays where this ambivalence is *reflected* in modern verbal structures' (pp. 33, 36; my italics).[21] Such a self-confirming attitude to evidence or proof, not even bothering to consider that this text might derive from more immediate dramatic traditions, written and printed drama performed in urban theatres, has no claim to be taken seriously as scholarship, Marxist or otherwise.

Throughout Weimann's book, from his discussions of medieval plays to his survey of late Elizabethan drama, it is simply assumed that drama retains in one way or another its 'cultic' or 'postritual' origins. All such references beg the question and pile myth on myth, but their function is to lay the historical or scholarly base for the book's main argument, that the real hero in the rise of English drama is the English people. Not all Englishmen, of course: not the humanists who taught the dramatists how to read and write, introduced them to classical drama, and gave them a practical mastery of the arts of language and thought; nor the noblemen whose interest in, and willingness to stand as patrons of, the companies gave them and the actors legal and social status; nor the dramatists, finally, many of them university-educated, and all of them having a good working knowledge of Latin and considerable respect for classical culture; but *das Volk*. Without the popular tradition, Weimann tells us, 'Shakespeare's drama is unthinkable.' Furthermore, 'the popular stagecraft that Shakespeare incorporated into his unique dramatic method was a popular theatre already developed to its fullest artistic possibilities' (p. xvi) — a hyperbole that begs the question by appropriating as 'popular' an art-form which had a much wider genesis. The wordplay in the popular morality supposedly has 'a meaning and a dramatic function that is, in its way, superior to anything found' in the Senecan tradition or humanist drama (p. 135) — not that Weimann analyses either of those genres. He claims that Queen Elizabeth I condescended to prefer 'plebeian drama' (to 'court art' (p. 172), a statement which quite distorts the issue (the actors who performed at court were the normal professional London companies), and conveniently ignores the fact that she could also enjoy Latin academic drama, and critically evaluate orations and disputations in Latin. In the drama 'humanism' (which Weimann never defines and does not seem to understand, opposing it at one point (p. 179) to 'neo-classical poetics'), 'was greatest when closest to the people', which explains why Marlowe's greatest play is so indebted to 'a popular source *par excellence* — the *Volksbuch*' (p. 180). The fact that Marlowe's play also draws on learned traditions in both philosophy and magic is beneath Weimann's notice. To him the people can do no wrong, nor could Elizabethan society until 'nascent capitalism', acquisitiveness, and the Puritan ethos destroyed its communal existence. (That would have been surprising news to them.) It is important to note that 'popular' and 'plebeian' are not neutral words to Weimann, but terms of praise. Over Shakespeare's critical, often disapproving treatment of mobs he remains silent, referring only once to Jack Cade's 'Saturnalia' (p. 240) — a myth-and-ritual reference which glosses over the brutality and specifically anti-intellectual nature of that rebellion. Just one out-of-the-way footnote (p. 292 n. 26) records Weimann's agreement with other Marxist critics that Shakespeare is 'no partisan of popular rule.'

Weimann's work obviously belongs to naïve Marxism, with its explicit preference for literature that endorses the correct views about the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, about class-consciousness and class-struggle. We are still far away from the highly abstract theoretical models of Althusser, Macherey and Godelier that were being produced in Paris while Weimann was writing this book, and of which no notice was taken in its revised version published in America at the end of the 1970s. This book was already an anachronism when it was published, judged by Marxist standards, and it must be an increasing embarrassment to more sophisticated and politically aware readers today. It is valuable evidence, though, of how ideological expectations can distort historical, social, and aesthetic categories. Weimann uses the inappropriate Marxist categories of 'plebeian' and 'bourgeoisie' to describe what he takes to be the two main groups in Elizabethan London, the latter supposedly attempting 'to suppress stage plays altogether' (p. 99) — where does he think the audience came from? Real historical evidence about the social composition of the audience, which has produced a controversy in our time,[22] is easily available, but Weimann ignores it in favour of a pious Marxist hope for a 'social unity' beyond the class struggle. This in turn distorts his conception of the theatrical profession, since his ideal of a theatre where all the participants come from the same social structure imagines that 'as long as no class divisions separate actor and audience, the spectator remains a potential actor and the actor a potential spectator' (p. 7). In modern society, of course, this situation can happen seldom, and only in closed social groups

(schools, prisons). But in any case the social status is irrelevant. What matters is the willingness of one side to act, to adopt a role implying competence in performance, and the readiness of the other side to fill the complementary role of audience, and to pay the performers. (The whole economic side of the Elizabethan theatre, for which profuse documentation exists, is neglected — surprisingly enough in a Marxist critic — in favour of outdated anthropology.) Throughout, Weimann ignores the knowledge we have of the increasing professionalism of Elizabethan actors, their struggle to be accepted as craftsmen, members of a serious professional institution — all topics that have been illuminated by Muriel Bradbrook and by other writers known to Weimann.[23] What poses as objective scholarship is a pre-formed political attitude that ignores all evidence that would call it in question.

Weimann then elevates his simple two-part social model into an aesthetic category. Opportunistically invoking Hegel on the desirable 'identity of the subject and object of comedy' (p. 8), he claims that the 'indivisibility of play and audience' (p. 9) can be seen, or re-created in direct audience-address. According to him this technique achieves 'direct actor-audience contact' (p. 7). He seems blind to the fact that the actor does not actually speak *in propria persona*, but is *pretending* to 'speak to the audience' (uttering lines set down by the author for him to speak at this point), and in that sense is 'manipulating' the audience just as much as (according to Weimann) the other characters do who are pretending to speak to each other. Weimann in fact thinks that the best drama contains the least illusion, and that direct 'audience-contact' is made most properly by the Vice or Fool, who represents a subversive intent with which necessarily *all levels* of the audience (!) identify. It seems to have escaped him that the vice figure is often meant to be rejected, and that in Shakespeare's two great applications of that convention, for the characters of Richard III and Iago, we can hardly do anything but loathe them. Weimann's curious blend of old anthropology and old Marxism results in some very odd aesthetic and critical positions, which are interrelated in ways that the innocent or casual reader may not notice.

Take for instance the Marxist category of 'realism' or 'the real', again, like 'plebeian' not a neutral but a laudatory concept. S.L. Bethell's 'important book' on Shakespeare and the popular dramatic tradition[24] — a work that did much to clarify the use of theatrical convention in Elizabethan drama — is praised but also rejected for its 'unveiled hostility towards realism' (p. xx). In ancient Greece, we are told, 'the dramatic representation of reality found its characteristic art form not in the stylized festival theater but in the popular *mimus*,' which broke away from religion to become 'modern and entirely secular' (two more praise-words), and in which the popular player renounced buskin and mask to become 'a describer of reality' direct, as it were (p. 41). Most of Greek drama, we realise, is thus dispensed with, in favour of a minor and tenuously-documented form. In *As You Like It* Touchstone, that marvellously varied court fool, is praised for introducing 'images of real rural living' (p. 46; 'I remember the kissing of her batler, and the cow's dugs that her pretty chopt hands had milk'd . . .'). Weimann suggests that Lear's lines 'Thou rascal beadle' are meant to be spoken to 'an individual in the audience singled out by an icy stare or accusing finger', so that Lear can engage the audience 'effectively' with issues that are

> experienced realistically as the role dissolves and the man behind the actor speaks directly to his fellow man in the audience. In the final analysis Shakespeare not only strengthens a realistic approach to the world, but to the world of art as well. (p. 220)

In all these instances Weimann, either unaware of or ignoring what philosophy since Nietzsche has taught us about the questionable concept of reality, or indeed of the language in which we discuss reality, assumes that reality is a known and fixed category that we all understand in the same way (perhaps older Marxists did). He privileges it still further by opposing it to 'the ideal' on the one hand, with depressingly predictable results (e.g., p. 5), and to illusion, on the other, with another disastrous mixture of pseudo-anthropology and aesthetic theory.

The historical argument, that the original drama was based on 'cultic, non-illusionary elements', and that even the Attic scene was 'not an illusionary locality' (pp. 4–9) — as if Medea's chariots, or Oedipus' blinding were 'real', not represented events — can be dismissed as fictitious. As for the pseudo-anthropological argument, it rests on a crushingly simple dichotomy. Ritual miming, in the good old days, was an embodiment of action; it was non-representational, non-symbolic; it was the thing itself; it was effective. Imitation, on the other hand, the product of mental activity, art, language, cooperation, the skills of writer and actor and artist, is all of the following negative things: it is 'disenchanting; referential; representational; symbolic; empirical; affective'; and of course, it is illusionary (see pp. 4, 17, 22, 36, 41, 65ff, 77). By an irony of cultural history, Weimann's old-Marxist attack on imitation found a similar target to post-structuralist aesthetics, partly explaining why his book has been hailed by critics who otherwise pride themselves on their theoretical sophistication. Weimann's position, however, is much cruder: the 'dramatic illusion of verisimilitude' signalled an absolute decline of drama, a second fall of man, and we can only regain that prelapsarian unity of actor and audience with the help of the Fool, who can 'break through the "fourth wall" . . . and again conjure and renew the old audience contact' (p. 12). Yet of course we then get only the illusion of breaking the illusion.

What Weimann's assumptions and mental categories offer us is a simple endorsement of 'the people' and 'realism' in drama as against 'the rulers' and 'illusionism'. These binary models are then applied to theatre architecture, to the audience, and to the play as an experience. The polar categories from theatre architecture are the *platea* and the *locus* of the medieval stage. To anyone who has figured out Weimann's social attitudes the resulting configuration is predictable. He opposes the *platea*'s 'platform-like acting area' or 'unlocalized place' to the 'scaffold, be it a *domus*, *sedes*, or throne (the *locus*)' (p. 74), to make a distinction as inevitable as that between mountain and plain in Elizabethan satire, or velvet and cloth breeches. This opposition apparently represents the 'continuing tension between realistic imitation and ritual embodiment' (p. 77), with the *platea* (for *das Volk*) characterised by 'neutrality' and realism, the *locus* (for the bourgeoisie) displaying its 'symbolic' nature and conventionalism (pp. 84, 89, 212, 221), a dichotomy which somehow also involves a distinction between representational and non-representational acting. Scholars of medieval drama will have their views on this distinction: to me it seems both rigid and fictitious. When applied to literary texts it results in the equation of Hamlet's passages of direct address with 'the *platea* tradition of the Vice', which is non-representational; whereas Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in the same scene (3.2), are said to 'move on the level of the purely representational *loca*', so that the two sides 'operate on different levels' (pp. 131ff). This is to split a play, within one scene, into two illusory levels, in order to correlate it with an illusory dichotomy in society and in theatre architecture. The division does not help the play, and it signally fails to deal with the other instances of direct address. When Hamlet speaks to us in verse, is he then a Vice or a Prince? Socially, Claudius clearly belongs on the *locus*; but do his two passages of direct address shift him to the *platea*? And if so, does he thereby break down dramatic illusion, and recreate the primitive *Ur-einheit* of audience and actor?

These deductions about theatre-architecture and dramatic convention are all the product of an *a priori* belief in the superiority of people over rulers, realism over illusion, expressing a pre-formed ideology which is then used as a critical category to be reproduced in the commentary on drama. The circularity of this process, protected from criticism on either historical or ideological grounds, validating itself by not questioning any of its postulates, has a predictable effect on the literary material it deals with. The 'plebeian' proverb, that verbal resource cultivated and collected at great length by humanists and rhetoricians from Erasmus downwards, is casually appropriated for the people and equated with 'popular idiom' (p. 10), with 'nonaristocratic standards' (p. 130). Hamlet, assigned — partly — to the *platea* position, in speaking 71 of the 140 proverbs in the play, is said to draw on 'rural and plebeian experience' and 'the background of the common worker' (p. 130). Shakespeare supposedly uses proverbs, together with 'nonliterary syntax' and 'colloquial forms', to re-create 'practical life' and 'the common man's concrete world of objects and ideas' (p. 206). But of course Shakespeare used the proverb for characters from all walks, or levels, of life. It is only the critical model that is too narrow to do justice to his range. Not that Shakespeare is ever belittled, quite the opposite.

Indeed Weimann praises his universality and seizes every chance to draw parallels between 'folk drama' and that of the great bard. Thus an instance of 'topsy-turvydom' in the Weston Mummers' Play of 1864 — 'I met a bark and he dogged at me' — seems to the author to suggest not only Lear's 'Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?' but also Portia's 'Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?' and even Bottom's 'The eye of man hath not heard . . .'. There is no mention of St. Paul for this last instance, nor of the rhetoric books' discussion of this figure (*hypallage*), nor of the commonness of such forms in all types of language. Weimann claims that such feeble and naïve parallels demonstrate 'the usefulness of such a comparative method' (pp. 39ff), but in fact they only parody it.

Once again we face the issue of what constitutes evidence in a literary argument. Here, as elsewhere, Weimann is completely uncritical, unaware of the circularity of his method, the speculative and tendentious nature of the historical and anthropological evidence on which his case rests. To give one last example of the kind of historical material cited to substantiate his claims for some ritual connections with drama, Weimann takes as literal fact what he describes as 'the new Puritan morality' which 'thundered against the "Dionysian" freedoms characteristic of popular custom'. Weimann knows that Philip Stubbes was a Puritan, and violent, especially given to 'sexual repression', so he ought to have taken Stubbes's diatribes as something other than historical evidence. Stubbes's account of May and Whitsun pastorals, with the lasses and lads dancing around a May-pole ('this stinking Ydol') drawn by oxen, his belief that these pastimes should be led by Satan, and result in some mass orgy (pp. 162ff) — such attitudes may reveal the prurient and self-repressed imagination of a Pentheus in *The Bacchae*, but are in no way reliable historical testimony. Yet, because Stubbes refers to the devil, Weimann is prepared to endorse his manic account, since the 'devilry' could refer back 'to the late ritual heritage,' whatever that means (p. 171; the documentation, p. 285 n. 19, is exceptionally vague). One has the impression that Weimann would be quite glad to find that the Devil existed, since he might be able to link him with ritual drama.

Weimann's book has been praised by critics belonging to the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist groups, and it is easy to see that their dilute form of Marxism would react favourably to his account of a clown in a fragment of the Oxyrhynchos papyri who mocks the onstage action, thus having 'a kind of subversive function' (p. 13), and they no doubt approve of the term 'subversive' becoming an automatic plus-concept, to be equated with Misrule, Utopia, the Roman Saturnalia and Maygames, all representing the blessed state of inversion and topsy-turvydom (pp. 20ff, 94, 121, 158ff). Weimann's automatic endorsement of the subversive, whatever form it takes, and whatever the contextual evidence for its ethical status, comes out most crudely in his treatment of the vice figure. In the morality play *Mankind* Weimann sides with what he takes to be the representative of the people, the vice Myscheff, in his mangling of Latin (pp. 116ff), which supposedly makes us laugh at his opponent Mercy, since the vice is 'subversive' (p. 119) and 'criticizes from the audience's point of view' (p. 153). The vice Hickscorner, too, represents both Utopia and topsy-turvydom (p. 121); it is Saturnalian and even Lollard (p. 126). Similar judgments are made about the vice Sedycyon in *King Johan* (p. 144), and the vice Iniquytie in *King Darius* (p. 146). It never seems to have occurred to Weimann that some members of the audience, if asked to choose one of the two, might have sided with Mercy. He has not noticed that to introduce a comic character mangling Latin presupposes an audience capable of telling the difference between right and wrong usage. Nor has he reflected on the other ways in which such scenes work in drama, let alone the moral significance of the vice to the dramatists.

However pleased some critics may be at Weimann praising subversion or attacking imitation, no-one who takes Marxist thought seriously can be long satisfied with his naïve combination of a sentimentalised proletariat and an ahistorical pseudo-anthropology.

III

The deficiencies of naïve Marxism were most evident to Marxists themselves, as the development of critical theory from Lukács to Adorno, Goldmann, Althusser and others shows all too well. (I think particularly of Adorno's attack on Lukács.) The nature of Marxist literary and aesthetic theory since the 1930s is a vast subject, but several useful surveys exist.[25] The phase that most concerns Shakespeare criticism in the 1980s and 90s is, once again, a product of Paris in the 1960s, the work of Louis Althusser and his associates. Like the other iconoclasts of that place and time, Althusser wished to wipe the slate clean of all existing work in his field, making a total rejection of previous interpretations of Marx, and giving rise to the very strange situation, as a group of English Marxist sociologists put it, that his theory —

> which rejects the entire history of marxism as a chronicle of errors, . . . which rejects as irrelevant the experience of the working-class movement within which marxism has developed, and which finds the secret of marxism in various avant-garde (and often very esoteric) versions of psychoanalysis and philosophy of science

— should have been so rapidly accepted by its followers as the new 'marxist orthodoxy' (Clarke *et al.* 1980, p. 6). Yet some of the most prominent Marxist intellectuals vigorously attacked Althusser's theories from the outset,[26] and over the last twenty-five years an impressive body of Marxist writing — which cannot be dismissed as bourgeois reactionism — has described the theories of Althusser as having in fact perverted Marx's legacy, and 'discarded from his work almost all that is of value' (McDonnell and Robins 1980, p. 168). The charge against Althusser is that he expunged 'the revolutionary theoretical, philosophical and political content of marxism in favour of bourgeois sociology, idealist philosophy and stalinist politics' (Clarke 1980, p. 73).[27]

The polemical technique that Althusser developed, similar in many ways to that of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida, was to stigmatise various concepts attached to the parties being attacked by what Simon Clarke describes as an act of 'intellectual terrorism. Three terms, "historicism", "empiricism" and "humanism" are drafted in to sweep away all possible opposition. To be labelled by such a term is to be labelled a class enemy, an intellectual saboteur' (*ibid.*). (This technique is still being used by New Historicist and Cultural Materialist critics to stigmatise their rivals or opponents, a by now threadbare response.) Althusser took over from Lévi-Strauss the structuralist attack on historicism and its polemic against the subject, but like so many of the Paris *maîtres à penser* had to reintroduce the subject in another guise.[28] But in appropriating the structuralist polemic for his rewriting of Marx Althusser violated some of the fundamental principles of Marxism. As the contributors to a volume called *One-Dimensional Marxism. Althusser and the Politics of Culture* put it, all the terms he stigmatised are essential to the Marxist critique of capitalist society, which conceives of its eventual transformation by human agency. Humanism is the 'belief in the creative potential of human beings, . . . stunted and alienated under capitalism'; empiricism is the 'belief that there is no higher basis for knowledge than experience', especially that of an oppressed and exploited segment of society; while historicism is 'the belief that knowledge, being based on socially mediated experience and being validated through social practice, is necessarily the product of social conditions at a particular time and which can be changed by those who live under them' (Clarke *et al.* 1980, p. 5). Althusser, expressing the 'dogmatic marxism' of the French Communist Party in its attempt at de-Stalinisation, by stigmatising these concepts, tried to 'abstract marxism from the historical experience from which it derives', claiming for it 'an absolute authority as source of a knowledge of history that is inaccessible to those who live and make that history' (*ibid.*).

The detail of the Marxist critiques of Althusser, which seem to me unanswerable, can be left in good hands. But an outline of Althusser's system is needed if we are to understand the recent course of literary theory. Many emphases in his work will be familiar after my earlier discussion of Lacan and Foucault, with both of whom he had close links. He was at one time a patient of Lacan, and his essay on 'Freud and Lacan' did much to promote an alliance between Marxism and psychoanalysis (LaCapra 1982, pp. 91–5; Merquior 1986b, pp. 148–9). This essay also displays affinities with Derrida in its praise of Freud for showing that 'the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no "centre" either, except in the imaginary misrecognitions of the "ego" . . .' (*cit.* McDonnell and Robins 1980, p. 198). Althusser's masters as a philosophy student included Bachelard, from whom he took the notion of historical 'ruptures' which was to have such an influence on Foucault, and he himself taught Foucault (Crews 1986, p. 145; Merquior 1986b, pp. 147–8). Althusser's eclecticism synthesised the already generalised individual components of his models at a still higher, more abstract level of discourse.

In two books published in 1965, *Pour Marx* (English tr. 1969), and *Lire le Capital* (a composite volume; English tr. 1970), Althusser proposed a return to the text of Marx as if he were going back to the true sources, neglected by everyone else. But in fact Althusser deployed the Freudian-Lacanian trick of 'symptomatic reading', looking for significant absences in Marx's text, on which he could base a new interpretation. As Sebastiano Timpanaro, a Marxist classical philologist commented, by adopting this method Althusser licensed a 'theoreticist forcing of texts', distorting them in 'a subjectivist direction', claiming to recreate Marx but in a wholly arbitrary way (Timpanaro 1975, pp. 194, 232). The result was an almost complete distortion of the fundamental elements in Marxist thought. Althusser's strategy in denouncing historicism was, like so many of the self-interested, aggressive acts of 60s intellectuals, intended 'to establish the autonomy of theory and the authority of the theorist' (Clarke 1980, p. 14). The parallel attack on empiricism had a similar self-advancing goal, protecting theory and the theorist from any appeal to historical evidence. As the doyen of English Marxist historians, E.P. Thompson showed in a classic essay, 'The Poverty of Theory or An Orrery of Errors' (Thompson 1978, pp. 1–210), Althusser's attack on empiricism is designed to discredit the whole possibility of historical knowledge, 'since "real" history is unknowable and cannot be said to exist' (p. 2). This is a strategically important move (recalling Lacan and Derrida), for 'by asserting the unknowability of the real, he confiscates reality of its determinant properties, thus reducing the real to Theory' (pp. 22–3). But in breaking with reality, and setting up theory alone as self-verifying, Althusser forfeits the chance of entering into any dialectical or developmental process in which our conceptions can be sharpened and refined by a dialogue with reality (a process well described here from Engels: pp. 52–4; similarly Clarke 1980, pp. 40–43). As Thompson points out, 'since Theory disallows any active appropriation of the external world in the only way possible (by active engagement or dialogue with its evidence) then *this whole world must be assumed*' (pp. 35–6). Just like Freudianism, as Ernest Gellner showed, which preserved an unproblematic notion of external reality, a 'naïve realism' and 'naïve mentalism' (Gellner 1985, pp. 90–91, 99, 104–105), Althusser's programmatic goal of 'theoretical practice' is a form of idealism which, 'since it prohibits any actual empirical engagements with social reality', in fact embraces 'the most vulgar empiricism', assuming the world to be '"what everyone knows"', with all its unexamined assumptions (p. 124).

Althusser's self-enclosure within theory had damaging effects on his philosophy, and produces similar effects, I shall argue, on the literary criticism modelled on him. Several forces in Current Literary Theory, as we have seen, reject all notion of evidence, empirical appeal to the text and its meanings. In 'a mature intellectual discipline', Thompson argues, procedures exist which can evaluate facts or evidence by some external criteria. But in 'a merely-ideological formation (theology, astrology . . . orthodox Stalinist-Marxism)' — we can add Freudianism — the object of knowledge consists 'only in ideological "facts" elaborated by that discipline's own procedures', so denying the very possibility of falsification. Like so many of the systems favoured since the 1960s — Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and always already Freud — Althusser's system is 'self-confirming', his special concept of 'theoretical practice' being 'a sealed system within which concepts endlessly circulate, recognise and interrogate each other, and the intensity of its repetitious introversial life is mistaken for a "science"' (p. 12).[29] Although professedly Marxist, and therefore materialist, Althusser's system turns out to be an 'idealism', a 'self-generating conceptual universe which imposes its own ideality upon the phenomena of material and social existence, rather than engaging in continual dialogue with these. . . . The category has attained to a primacy over its material referent; the conceptual structure hangs above and dominates social being' (p. 13). Literary criticism based on Althusser has the same overpowering effect on literary texts (its users speak in terms of a 'master code', which implies that the text is its slave). Literary criticism modelled on Althusser also reproduces his emptying out of human behaviour, the denial of human agency, the reduction of men and women to mere *Träger* 'or vectors of ulterior structural determinations' — scientistic language matching Foucault (pp. 2, 122, 147). As Thompson puts it at the end of a superb paragraph describing the depersonalisation produced by theory,[30] denied access to an outer world 'theory is for ever collapsing back into ulterior theory. In disallowing empirical enquiry, the mind is confined for ever within the compound of the mind' (p. 167).

Althusser is a damaging model for literary critics in other respects, notably in his misreading of texts. Claiming that historians have entirely misunderstood Marx, Althusser asserted that 'history features in *Capital* as an object of theory, . . . as an "abstract" (conceptual) object', and that when Marx mentions 'the concrete situation in England' he does so only 'in order to "illustrate" his (abstract) theory of the capitalist mode of production' (p. 23). Anyone who can claim Marx to be an abstract social theorist has truly allowed his own 'de-socialised and de-historicised' categories (p. 95) to impose themselves on the text. Althusser's persistent 'separation of thought and reality', which transformed Marxist historical-dialectical categories into 'fixed, eternal, and so ideal, categories' (Clarke 1980, pp. 40–41), resulted in what many of his critics regard as a fatally abstract concept of ideology. In an essay called 'Marxist Cultural Theory: the Althusserian Smokescreen', two English Marxist sociologists comment on *Lire Capital*, showing that

> Althusser's concept of the whole is premised on the existence of three levels of the social formation — the economic, the political and the ideological, each having a 'relative autonomy' from the others. . . . Althusser's whole is a syncretic one, composed of parts that are defined as external to each other. The parts are theorised *before* the totality, and they take precedence over the totality. (McDonnell and Robins 1980, pp. 158–9)

— an emphasis contrary to Marx's thought.

Althusser's division of society into separate levels, the authors point out, reproduces Marx's 1859 'base/superstructure metaphor', with all its limitations, grasping surface appearances only in its presentation of economy and politics as separate entities (*ibid.*, p. 159), that 'static and mechanical analogy', as E.P. Thompson describes it (Thompson 1978, pp. 84, 157). Having singled ideology out as a separate — non-political, non-economic — factor in society, Althusser gave it a further abstract dimension in an essay in *Lénine et la philosophie* (1969; English tr. 1971), labelling a whole group of institutions — the educational system, the church, the family, political parties, trade unions and the mass media — as 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs), organs by which the state ensures its hegemony over its subjects. This thesis has been severely criticised by professional sociologists,[31] but has proved most attractive to Foucault-inspired New Historicists and Cultural Materialists, who like to believe that the subject is created by discursive systems and ideology, and is in that process subjected to forces beyond its control.

To Marxists, however, and to others who think it absurd and degrading to reduce 'men and women, in their mental life, in their determinate relationships, in their experience of these, and in their self-consciousness of this experience' to 'instances' and 'levels' (Thompson 1978, pp. 90–97), this theory is wholly unacceptable. As two Marxist critics point out, Althusser's anti-empiricism removes ideology from actual social relations, reducing it to '"the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of existence"' (McDonnell and Robins 1980, p. 165) — an event in the mind. Althusser's anti-historicism, further, makes him assert that '"ideology is eternal . . . omnipresent, transhistorical and therefore immutable in form through the extent of history"' (*ibid.*), another thesis absolutely inimical to Marx's vision of social change. Althusser's formulations, they write, are '*a priori* and deductive', not derived from the examination of any ideology at work in any historical society, but setting up 'his own abstract and inflexible theoretical principles' as an interpretation of historical and social reality (*ibid.*, p. 166). Further, by equating 'ideology with the whole symbolic or cultural order', Althusser ended up in a position strikingly close to the sociology of Comte or Durkheim, in which 'ideology is characterised as maintaining social cohesion. This functionalist conception regards ideology, like culture, as *something* to which we are passively subjected'. (Compare Foucault.) Althusser's quietist disbelief that the subject could 'transform ideological consciousness' stands in total contrast to Marxist thought, in which ideology is 'to be negated through (practical) critique' (*ibid.*). Finally, Althusser's Freudian-Lacanian bent made him claim ideology to be an unconscious process, a theory which would obviously 'make class consciousness impossible'. But the fact is that ideology does not permeate people's minds below the level of awareness: 'the working class does not find it impossible to unmask the ideological mystification of capitalist society' (*ibid.*, pp. 167–8).

Looking at Althusser's work through the eyes of his Marxist critics, with the added benefit of some distance in time from its heyday, it is something of a joke that anyone should have ever accepted his work as an informed exposition of Marxism. E.P. Thompson, writing at the high point of his celebrity, took the uncritical acceptance of Althusser's work as proof of 'a very severe and general intellectual crisis' (Thompson 1978, p. 169). Marxist historians and sociologists have by now completed the demotion of Althusser, but many literary critics still invoke him as a serious intellectual figure, as if literary criticism must always reach outside itself for some higher authority, some fully-formed system on which it can model itself, otherwise unsure of what it should be doing. (If so, then it too is in a permanent state of intellectual crisis.) Althusser's major acknowledged disciples among literary critics have been the Frenchman Pierre Macherey and the American Fredric Jameson. I shall briefly discuss one work by each.

In *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (1966; English tr. 1978), Macherey reproduced many of the attitudes shared by that generation of Paris intellectuals. He, too, wanted to wipe the slate clean of all previous work, announcing that in his 'radical departure from all the active tendencies of previous criticism, a new critical question is proposed: What are the laws of literary production?' Exuding self-confidence, like his fellow-iconoclasts, he announced that 'a large price must be paid for returning criticism to the sphere of rationality: it must be given *a new object*. Unless criticism . . . can break definitely with its past', it will merely elaborate public taste (Macherey 1978, p. 12). All criticism hitherto, he affirmed (like Derrida and Barthes), has only tried to 'reproduce and imitate' the work of art (p. 13), 'merely reproducing the work by a factitious and intrusive commentary' (p. 27). The cause of this false direction in all criticism since Aristotle, Macherey writes, echoing Althusser, is the 'fallacy of empiricism', which treats the work of literature 'as factually given' (p. 13), whereas in reality 'the objects of any rational investigation have no prior existence but are thought into being' (p. 5). This attack on empiricism, repeatedly using the formula 'not A but B', is a series of *a priori* assertions which are at best half-truths. Having denied the ontological existence of a literary work, Macherey followed the fashion of his times in attacking humanism, with its 'profoundly reactionary' belief that 'the writer or artist is a creator' (pp. 66–7). Macherey claimed that 'the various "theories" of creation all ignore the process of making; they omit any account of production' (p. 68), a statement that is so untrue about extant literary criticism, theoretical and practical, as to make one charitably suppose that he must have meant something quite idiosyncratic by 'production'. Apparently the mistaken belief in the writer as creator goes along with a belief in the unity of the literary work, which must also '*now be denounced*: the work is not *created* by an intention (objective or subjective): it is *produced* under determinate conditions' (p. 78). If you ask what a 'condition' is, Macherey explains that it 'is not . . . a cause in the empirical sense; it is the principle of rationality which makes the work accessible to thought' (p. 49), a vaguely abstract reply which tells you very little.

Despite his trenchant-seeming formulations, much of Macherey's argument is vague and confused. It is oppositional criticism, like the other 1960s products, which simply asserts the opposite of what it takes to be the tradition, in a confident take-it-or-leave-it manner. From henceforth the act of criticism will be one in which 'the critic, employing a new language, brings out a *difference* within the work by demonstrating that it is *other than it is*' (p. 7). For, 'The work is not what it appears to be' (p. 20). Original and self-assertive though these pronouncements seem, they merely apply to literary theory, categorically and without illustration, a principle in Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, which (as we saw in Chapter 1) declared that the operation of language forces the subject to signify 'something entirely different from what it says'. Continuing in the Parisian adversarial mode, Macherey asserts that criticism so far, with its 'arbitrary assumption of the unity and independence of the text, has been grounded in a radical misunderstanding of the nature of the writer's work' (p. 53). 'Interpretive criticism' — a stigmatising term — 'rests on a certain number of fallacies', presupposing 'the active presence of a single meaning around which the work is diversely articulated' (p. 76). Critics in future 'must stress that determinate insufficiency, that incompleteness which actually shapes the work'. This apparent contradiction ('incompleteness . . . shapes') is avoided by postulating the critic's task as being to generate a 'confrontation of separate meanings', which will give the work 'its actual decentred-ness' (p. 79) — as if this should be produced by the critic, not the author! All these pronouncements are obviously just as arbitrary as the fictional windmills that Macherey is attacking (who ever claimed that a literary work had 'a single meaning'?). Their roots in sixties iconoclasm are all too obvious, the parallels with Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes proving once again the homogeneity of that intellectual tradition ('the activity of the writer . . . constitutes and is constituted by a discourse, it has nothing extrinsic': p. 58; 'literary discourse [is] a contestation of language rather than a representation of reality': p. 61).

Macherey is most clearly a child of his times in coming to Marx through Freud and Lacan, that is, by developing his putatively Marxist analysis of ideology with concepts derived from psychoanalysis. The book 'is not self-sufficient', Macherey declared, 'it is necessarily accompanied by a *certain absence*', for, 'in order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said.* Freud relegated this *absence of certain words* to . . . the unconscious' (p. 85). 'Discourse implies the absence of its object, and inhabits the space vacated by the banishment of what is spoken' (p. 59). The book, again, 'circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return' (p. 80). But, we must object, if these words indeed 'make their return' then they cannot be 'absent'. The psychoanalytic analogy conveniently gives the iconoclastic critic infinite licence to evoke whatever he wishes from a text and even to ignore it, for 'speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking' (p. 86). — How does one actually investigate silence? How much of one's own speaking does one bring to it ? — To the Freudian Macherey, 'What is important in the work is what it does not say' (p. 87), for 'the work exists above all by its determinate [how does one determine them?] absences, by what it does not say, in relation to what is not'. The absent meaning is not concealed or 'buried' by the work (now seen in anthropomorphic terms), 'it is not in the work but by its side . . .' (p. 154), and so on. This tactic, like Althusser's rejection of historicism, gives the theorist both autonomy and omniscience. As Alan Sinfield wryly remarked of Macherey's conception of a contradiction between what is said and not said, it 'conveniently renders the theory unfalsifiable: if contradictions are present Macherey is right and if they are absent he is again right' (Sinfield 1981, p. 191).

In a syncretist move typifying the homogeneity of French sixties thought, Macherey blends his Foucault-Barthes theory of the indeterminacy and incompleteness of the text with the Freudian-Lacanian notion of significant absences and contradiction, and then applies the compound to the analysis of ideology. His inspiring figure here is less Marx than Lenin, in particular his critique of Tolstoy (pp. 105–35), but Althusser's influence is also acknowledged. The resulting synthesis, however, is anything but coherent. Macherey believed that 'we always eventually find, at the edge of the text, the language of ideology, momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence' (p. 60): but if you have found it, how can it be absent? Perhaps even finding it is illusory, though, because 'ideology is always *elsewhere*; consequently it cannot be totally subdued, diminished or dispelled' (p. 64). An ideology 'is always in some sense incomplete', it seems (p. 116), yet Macherey could still polarise it to achieve the desired

Foucault-Derrida self-contradiction, for 'at the same time as it establishes an ideological content the book presents the contradiction of that content: this content only exists enveloped in the form of a contestation' (p. 129). A later passage, however, contradicts this contestation model by declaring that 'In fact there is no such thing as an ideological contradiction: the inexact character of an ideology *excludes* contradiction' (pp. 193–4). Ideology, Macherey continues, is 'in its way coherent, a coherence which is indefinite if not imprecise . . .'. But it seems that 'an ideology can be *put into contradiction*: it is futile to denounce the presence of a contradiction in ideology' (p. 194), indeed 'no ideology is sufficiently consistent to survive the test of figuration' (p. 195).

It is difficult to extract any coherent sense from Macherey's thought, circling around these abstractions, quite divorced from any contact with society or literature. A later passage in this same essay on Jules Verne declares that bourgeois ideology has its limits, 'but this ideology is emphatically not internally contradictory . . .' (p. 237). Having so often said that ideology is incomplete, however, Macherey must somehow rescue this point, and does so with an almost scholastic piece of hair-splitting: in bourgeois ideology 'it is precisely its insufficiencies, its incompleteness, which guarantee its flawed coherence' (p. 238). Admirers and disciples of Macherey naturally never submit his work to an immanent critique, which would be devastating. Reading past the incoherences, so to speak, what they take from him is a model of incoherence to be found in every poem, play, or novel. 'The finished literary work . . . *reveals* the gaps in ideology' (p. 60). The unity of Verne's work, 'a unity borrowed from a certain ideological coherence, or incoherence' (either way, all eventualities are covered), 'reveals the *limits* . . . of this ideological coherence, which is necessarily built upon a discord in the historical reality . . .' (p. 238). It follows that the

> order which [a work] professes is merely an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth. (p. 155)

What is important, finally, 'is that the operation of a fictional system ultimately produces an ideological effect (confusion)'. This 'ideological surge denotes the presence of a gap, a defect in the work, a complexity which makes it *meaningful*' (p. 296). It is not, however, a single meaning, for the critic must be prepared to find a 'double explanation which establishes simultaneously two meanings and the gap between them' (pp. 296–7). Incoherence rules.

* * *

There is not much Marx in Macherey, it would seem. His theory has obvious affinities with the Freudian-Lacanian-Foucauldian-Derridian reservoir of oppositional postures, undermining and fissuring whatever totality anyone else has ever suggested (the work of literature, Macherey declared, 'is fissured, unmade even in its making': p. 155). Whether we call him a Marxist or a post-modernist is irrelevant, I suppose, provided we recognise that the kind of reading he encourages is disruptive, disintegrating, closest of all, perhaps, to French Freudianism. In the most self-consciously Marxist of Fredric Jameson's books, *The Political Unconscious* (1981), the title immediately proclaims an allegiance with psychoanalysis. Two decades after the Franco-Freudian fissures, Jameson is breaking to American readers the news that 'new' criticism should in future reject the concepts of 'organic form', or 'a work of art as an ordered whole'. Instead it should look for 'rifts and discontinuities within the work', treating 'the former "work of art" as a heterogeneous and (to use the most dramatic recent slogan) a schizophrenic text'. Thus, Jameson writes, with no apparent sense of incongruity in using the terms 'structural', or 'interpretation',

> The aim of a properly structural interpretation or exegesis thus becomes the explosion of the seemingly unified text into a host of clashing and contradictory elements. (Jameson 1981, p. 56)

This is all familiar stuff from post-structuralism, Jameson admits, as in Barthes's *S/Z*, which 'shatters a Balzac novella into a random operation of multiple codes' (or, as he puts it elsewhere, rewrites Balzac as if he were Philippe Sollers). What is different about Althusserian exegesis is that it puts all the pieces back together again — not in the same order, of course (that would be too simple), but by seeing in the disunity, or multiplicity of the text 'the objectification of the ideological by the work of aesthetic production'. In other words,

> the Althusserian / Marxist conception of culture requires this multiplicity to be reunified, *if not at the level of the work itself*, then at the level of its process of production. . . . (p. 56; my italics)

The phrase I have italicised shows that Althusserian exegesis can claim to be as radical as any other post-structuralism, adding a new 'coherent functional operation' which 'requires' (compulsion is the new critical process) 'the fragments, the incommensurable levels . . . of the text to be once again related . . .' (*ibid.*). Only, according to a new scheme of things.

Sharing the post-structuralist belief in the 'discontinuity' of the text, which licenses critics to do violence to it in order to bring out its 'heterogeneous impulses' (*ibid.*), Jameson takes the logical next step of recognising that this new 'coherent functional operation' amounts to a rewriting of the text. In this book, he tells us, 'interpretation is . . . construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code' (p. 10). Jameson envisages the creation of

> a vast interpretive allegory in which a sequence of historical events or texts and artifacts is rewritten in terms of some deeper, underlying, and more 'fundamental' narrative, . . . the allegorical key or figural content of the first sequence of empirical materials. (p. 28, similarly pp. 33, 58)

What system can best provide this allegorical key? Did we ever doubt it?

> Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past. . . . This mystery can be reenacted only if the human adventure is one. . . . These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme — for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity; only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot. . . . (pp. 19–20)

Freedom and Necessity come from *Capital*, vol. III, and the plot, outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, is the '"history of class struggles . . . — in a word, oppressor and oppressed . . ."' (p. 20). An obvious but unavoidable objection must be that to imagine that the 'cultural past', in all its multiplicity, can *only* be understood by being rewritten in terms of one story, is to be naïvely unaware that that monopoly would be totalitarian, denying all other explanations.

Jameson's reference to the Marxist 'collective struggle' may seem to open the door to historical reality, kept remote from Macherey's hermetically sealed theorising. But it is only an illusion. In fact Jameson fully reproduces all of Althusser's abstractionism, placing on the agenda of future 'Marxist cultural criticism . . . *ideological analysis*', which must become 'what Althusser has demanded of the practice of Marxist philosophy proper, namely "class struggle within theory"' (p. 12). These critics will be concerned with words not deeds, discourse, indeed 'class discourse', to be analyzed into '*ideologemes*' (p. 87), such as opinions or prejudices. For Jameson, as for Althusser, ideology implies nothing so coarse as a programme for action, being merely 'a representational structure which allows the individual subject[32] to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history' (p. 30) — history being only accessible to us 'in textual form', through its 'textualization, its narrativization' (p. 35). A critic who can empty out the notions of class struggle and historical reality, and who can invoke Althusser's most abstract concept of society in terms of levels, instances, and homology (pp. 39, 45), has no problem in reducing 'the cultural past' to a 'collective plot', a mere narrative detached from any relation to actual events. Interpretation, then, becomes a kind of abstracting or allegorising activity which 'rewrites' a literary text to show it as 'the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*' (p. 81). Since history and ideology are only texts, the most expedient way to perform this rewriting is to resort to allegory, and Jameson, publishing in the 1980s, seriously recommended the adoption of the four-fold system of allegory practiced in medieval biblical exegesis (see note 3 above), that 'striking and elaborate hermeneutic' (p. 29), that 'great patristic and medieval system', since which 'the only really new and original hermeneutic' has been psychoanalysis (p. 61).[33] As that collocation shows, Jameson overlays twentieth-century concepts on his medieval frame, the Anagogical level being now equated with 'political reading (collective "meaning" of history)', the Moral with 'psychological reading (individual subject)', the Allegorical with 'allegorical key or interpretive code', the Literal with 'historical or textual referent' (p. 31) — next to Gregory and the Victorines stand Althusser, Lacan, Barthes. But Jameson's free-flowing eclecticism was more than a magpie-like accumulation of attractive systems. It, too, like the original Paris anti-systems, was quite consciously designed to give the interpreter absolute freedom of manoeuvre to make whatever 'reductions' and 'generations' within or without the text that he or she should wish. The great advantage of four-level analysis, Jameson writes, is that it performs a 'reduction . . . which then permits the generation of two further interpretive levels, and it is precisely in these that the individual believer is able to "insert" himself or herself (to use the Althusserian formula) . . .' (p. 30 — or was it Foucault's?). Such terms as 'reduction' and 'generation' turn literary criticism into a form of chemical or mathematical activity, another version of sixties scientism.

Although Jameson proposed at one point a four-level division of the traditional Marxist theory (p. 32), he perhaps recognized that the patristic method is not naturally applicable to modern literature. At all events, when it came to discussing ideology he reverted to a two-level one, arguing that in Marxism 'the ultimate (or ideal) form of class relationship and class struggle is always dichotomous. The constitutive form of class relationships is always that between a dominant and a laboring class: and it is only in terms of this axis that class fractions (for example, the petty bourgeoisie) . . . are positioned' (pp. 83–4). Traditional though this two-part model may be in Marxist thought, it is now something of an embarrassment. A hundred and fifty years on, Marx's basic social categories — ruling class, bourgeoisie, proletariat — no longer seem adequate. The working class has merged into the bourgeoisie, capitalism is furthered by everyone who owns shares or invests in a savings bank, and a fluid social organisation has replaced Marx's rigid stratification. Jameson rejects 'the conventional sociological analysis of society into strata, subgroups, professional elites and the like' (p. 84), which is surely a more accurate theoretical model, in favour of the — idealised, mythical, antiquated — Marxist model which sees the 'values' of a class ideology as always situated

> with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant 'value system'. (*ibid.*)

This is the two-part model which, we now know, animates much of New Historicist writing on Shakespeare and will be seen (in a coarser form) in Cultural Materialism. But from the iconoclastic sixties we have now reached the eclectic eighties, so Jameson rewrites the Althusserian-Marxist-Foucauldian position by grafting on to it Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical, converted from an aesthetic into a political concept. Restated then, 'the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one', and thus 'the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code' (*ibid.*). The intellectualisation or abstractionism is now complete: instead of actual classes locked in hand-to-hand combat, as in Marx's original vision, oppressor against oppressed, we have a 'fight' between 'discourses . . . within . . . a shared code'. We have come a long way from Weimann's naïve Marxism with the proletariat as the initiator and arbiter of all good things. We have lost the sentimentalisation, but we have also lost the human beings.

This abstract model of 'a dominant versus a subordinate ideology' can then be directly applied to literature in the eclectic idiom of the eighties, drawing on decentred subjects, sites of discourse, strategies of containment, and other current notions. Literature is still reduced to language, only now depersonalised and politicised. Yet, it must be said, this two-level model is inadequate to deal with either society or literature. It places all virtue on one side, all vice on the other, whereas a more open-minded model would be able to distinguish the strengths and weaknesses of both sides, and indeed of other groups. This social model can only work with the idea of society functioning at the beck and call of a set of people having complete power, whereas many elements in the social process take place on different levels and with other forms of agency, outside the control of any interest group. The polarisation of society involved (the haves and have nots; the centre and the margin), then reifies the oppressor into a threatening but vague entity, which can be variously defined, as in Althusser's all-embracing Ideological State Apparatuses. Those critical schools who profess to find satisfaction in the notion of a state which both creates and subjects them to 'instances', ideological configurations,[34] and 'paths of discourse', will obviously identify themselves with the oppressed and marginalised. They will endorse any work of literature, or any character(s) within it, who oppose the system, attack others that seem to accept it.

IV

How does all of this affect Shakespeare? In two main ways, I think: neo-Marxist, post-Althusserian criticism either exposes the workings of ideology in Shakespeare; or it finds Shakespeare's plays, as performed and interpreted by later generations, guilty of collusion with the ISAs, aiding the hegemony of the ruling classes. It is not always easy to separate the two, but characteristically the first approach takes some neo-Marxist theoretical pronouncements and confronts them with one or more plays to show how they prove the theory. The second approach outlines a phase of history — the British Empire is favourite — and argues that Shakespeare has been used to forward the dominant ideology. This second approach is sometimes called 'reception' criticism, but in my view incorrectly, for whereas study of a play's reception by a theatre or reading public may well include a political element, Althusserian critics are only interested in ideology. It deserves to be called, like the first type, ideological criticism: the one is internal to the plays, the other external.

As an example of the first I take the essay by James H. Kavanagh, 'Shakespeare in ideology' (1985). The theoretical pronouncements here mostly come from a brief essay by two French Althusserians (in itself unexceptionably orthodox, albeit horribly jargon-ridden), which is quoted extensively, often as 'last instance', to close a discussion on a note of unimpeachable authority.[35] The historical element comes largely from two books I commented on earlier, Weimann 1978 (which shows 'excellent understanding'), bolstered by Siegel 1957 ('too frequently overlooked'), an alliance with naïve Marxism that causes Kavanagh to retail some dreadfully stale history. Shakespeare was apparently 'caught in an ideological space between modified absolutism and insurgent Puritanism' (Kavanagh 1985, p. 150). The medieval 'image of the warrior-Lord' was weakening under the impact of a 'rising bourgeoisie', whose 'proto-scientific reasoning in the form of technical innovation' gained them power, while 'the nascent, potentially egalitarian individualism of the merchants and artisans . . . took the form of Puritan and Calvinist dissidence' (*ibid.*), so prefiguring the Civil War. Shakespeare, meanwhile, had to not only 'avoid the censure of the London authorities, whose Puritanism militated against any dramatic production', but also satisfy the Queen and her court, keeping favour with his 'patron' (Southampton), while simultaneously entertaining an audience drawn from the 'mercantile, artisanal and working classes' which was 'hungry for concrete, even sensationalistic, representations that could not help but touch on politically sensitive subjects' (p. 150). Yet another 'historian' has to downgrade or stereotype the London theatre audience to make it fit his thesis. As history, this is lamentable.

Let us come to the plays, and to a play within a play, put on by the artisans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Whereas most readers and playgoers have seen these would-be actors as amusingly trapped by the elementary problems of dramatic illusion in performance (how can the audience tell a real lion from a 'pretend' one?), Kavanagh gives them a solemnly portentous political motivation. Their problem is said to be that of 'producing an *appropriate* — that is, class-appropriate, and therefore politically acceptable — dramatic representation', fulfilling 'the related exigencies of ideology, social class and political power' (p. 153). This premiss has already begged the question by introducing its own politicised criteria. Kavanagh attempts to prove his diagnosis by quoting two passages, first Bottom's desire to play the lion and so 'roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me', with Quince objecting that this might 'fright the Duchess and the ladies; and that were enough to hang us all' (1.2.66–78). On which our Althusserian comments:

> This dialogue functions as a kind of internal commentary on Shakespeare's ideological practice. The problematic of proto-professional production denied autonomous political weight in a society struggling to preserve the hegemony of an aristocratic class-ideology is here displayed in order to be ridiculed. Shakespeare's artisans pose the issue quite clearly in their discussion: for *us* to assert an effective ability to manipulate *their* sense of reality . . . would be an unacceptable usurpation of ideological power, possibly punishable by death. . . . (p. 154)

The discrepancy between the text and the critical commentary here is enormous, almost comical, taking with literal, indeed deadly seriousness the mechanicals' amusingly naïve belief in their own histrionic powers to overcome theatrical illusion. As Timpanaro said of Althusser, he had obviously lost all 'sense of the ridiculous' (Timpanaro 1975, p. 195). Here the ideological categories of Macherey and Balibar suffocate the comedy. (I shan't pause to discuss the claim that Shakespeare's society was 'struggling to preserve the hegemony of an aristocratic class-ideology'. No evidence is proposed, in any case.)

Kavanagh's second quotation is from the later scene (3.1.28–44) where Bottom advises his fellows to have the actor playing the lion announce that he is not really a lion but Snug the joiner. Kavanagh comments:

> These workers attempt to solve their problem by inventing a strategy that will break the illusion of transparency, and display the conditions of active ideological production, in a first version of the estrangement-effect. [Quotation] This strategy, of course, is actually an inversion of the Brechtian alienation aesthetic, displaying the conditions of ideological production . . . to enable this workers' troupe to *escape* the political power of a ruling class. (pp. 154–5)

The high level of abstraction, the imposing of an ideological analysis on Bottom's transparently silly and unnecessary suggestion (as if Snug weren't totally visibly himself), shows a complete lack of proportion, or decorum on the critic's part, who cannot decide whether the *Verfremdungseffekt* is made or inverted (how would that work?).

King Lear might seem more suitable to Kavanagh's approach, but his discussion turns into an uneasy melange of trivialising psychoanalysis ('Edmund's symbolic castration of Gloucester', p. 157: the glib Freudian symbolism avoids direct confrontation with the real horrors of blinding), stale thematic reading ('Lear is crushed between the two . . . opposed "Natures"': *ibid.* — J.F. Danby argued this in 1949), and a politicisation that misdefines its targets and misrepresents the play. The indiscriminate politicisation somehow identifies 'an individualist ideology . . . of calculation, self-gratification and perverse desire' (p. 156) with either 'feudal ideology' or 'a bourgeois ethic' (p. 157: the context is unclear), or both. But it does not describe either. The destructiveness of appetites that know no compunction in achieving their desires belongs equally to Goneril and Regan, two royal princesses, and Edmund, a bastard son of an earl: neither feudalism nor the bourgeoisie is responsible. Kavanagh cannot get either the issues or the play straight. This becomes very clear when he cites Lear's plea to Regan, to be allowed his complement of retainers — 'O! reason not the need; our basest beggars / Are in the poorest things superfluous' (2.4.266–72), a passage where, as everyone can see, Lear is still concerned with his own ego. In Kavanagh's cumbersome ideological terminology, this speech shows the play's 'discursive strategy of ideological reconciliation through domination', that is, preserving the 'privileges of a ruling class' instead of 'relating the aspirations of all social subjects to the given level of material and cultural development . . .' (pp. 158–9). It is regrettable that Kavanagh, emulating Macherey and wishing to indict the play as a whole for not resolving its 'opposed ideological elements', fails to quote the speech that precisely expresses those aspirations, Lear's 'Poor naked wretches . . . O, I have ta'en / Too little care of this!' (3.4.28ff). But for me to make such an objection is to be guilty of what one neo-Althusserian contemptuously dismissed as 'the positivistic conception of philological accuracy' (Jameson 1981, p. 13) — that is, reference to the text as evidence.

All forms of ideological criticism, we can now see, risk distorting the plays they deal with, since the dramatist's concern to create a unified structure which will release conflicting human desires yet bring them to a resolution inevitably creates sequences of action that do not correspond to anything in the ideology. Bold critics like Jameson can rewrite the play; others fragment it by picking out only those elements that can be squared with the ideology. Given the ubiquity of the 'dominant ideology' model, one possible approach is to concentrate on the oppressed part of society, since 'ideological commitment', as Jameson describes it, quite properly involves 'the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups' (*ibid.*, p. 290). This 'taking of sides', innocent though it may seem, can damage both the play's structure and its historical meaning. For the first failing

consider *Measure for Measure* and Jonathan Dollimore's oft-recycled argument that the 'social crisis is displaced onto the prostitutes of the play', who 'are made . . . "symbolically central" even while remaining utterly marginal'. The fact that 'not one of the prostitutes speaks', according to this critic, reveals 'their powerlessness and exploitation' (Dollimore 1990b, pp. 474–5; Dollimore 1985, pp. 85–6; Dollimore 1990a, p. 418). This is truly to imitate Macherey in reading significance out of silence, scoring points as an act of sympathy for the marginalised, perhaps, but not as literary criticism. If Shakespeare had needed the prostitutes for his conception of the play, he would have given them a voice, as he did with Doll Tearsheet.

Sympathy with the low-life characters in *Measure for Measure* is extended by David Margolies to Lucio: 'A whoremaster and liar, he has a warmth of friendship that is not elsewhere shown in the play . . .' (Margolies 1988, p. 48). This is to overlook the Duke's careful plot to vindicate Mariana and Claudio — but Margolies has nothing good to say about the Duke, whom he finds 'self-important, irresponsible and pompous' (*ibid.*, pp. 48–9). The fact that Lucio, not knowing that the Friar he is talking to is in fact the Duke in disguise, makes a series of malicious slanders of the Duke, means to Margolies that although 'in conventional terms [Lucio] is a liar', he 'may speak what is *essentially* true' (p. 49). This is a sophistic distinction to justify a prejudice against authority-figures. Margolies is happy to see the 'serious image of justice' being 'given a send-up', but his conventional liking for the subversive elements blinds him to the fact that Lucio is shown as a callous and selfish cynic, a mocker of all, a man who (in a plot-parallel to Angelo and Claudio) got 'Mistress Kate Keepdown . . . with child . . . promis'd her marriage' (3.2.194ff), but abandoned her. Margolies mentions neither point, nor the fact that at the end of the play Lucio (like Angelo) will be made to marry the woman he deceived, despite his protests — 'Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging' — 'Slandering a prince deserves it' (5.1.512ff). In any case, Lucio is a character in a play, having several different functions in the plot. To pick him out for approving comment on the grounds of him being against authority is to treat the play as if it were a plum-pie, with the critic as little Jack Horner.

The witches in *Macbeth* are even more complex figures in a dramatic structure, both natural and supernatural agents, to whom Shakespeare gave many of the destructive features attributed to such creatures, from classical antiquity and the Bible up to the witchcraft craze which reached a peak in England in the late sixteenth century. A large body of knowledge emphasised the destructiveness of witches, but it is instantly visible to anyone who sees or reads the play for the first time. In modern ideological criticism, however, 'taking sides in a struggle between embattled groups' deprives the witches of all their traditional attributes and puts them — since there are only two choices, it is easy to guess where — in the role of 'subverting the dominant ideology'. Dollimore, assigned the task of surveying recent 'Critical Developments' for a widely sold 'bibliographical guide to Shakespeare', recommends to his readers Terry Eagleton's Althusserian-Freudian-Lacanian-Derridian account of the witches in *Macbeth*. As Eagleton sees them,

> The witches are the heroines of the piece [who] . . . by releasing ambitious thoughts in Macbeth, expose [the] hierarchical social order for what it is . . . the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare. . . . Their riddling, ambiguous speech . . . promises to subvert this structure: their teasing word-play infiltrates and undermines Macbeth from within, revealing in him a lack which hollows his being into desire. (*cit.* Dollimore 1990a, p. 408)

Like a high-speed food blender, Eagleton folds into his mixture a bit more deconstruction (the witches 'signify a realm of non-meaning and poetic play which hovers at the work's margins'), a bit more Lacanised Freud (they are 'the "unconscious" of the drama, . . . exiled . . . repressed . . . return'), a touch of New Historicism (they 'inhabit an anarchic, richly ambiguous zone both in and out of official society'), crowning it all with Althusser and Derrida: 'Foulness — a political order which thrives on bloodshed — believes itself fair, whereas the witches do not so much invert this opposition as deconstruct it' (*ibid.*).

That seems to me a glib and opportunistic recycling of current clichés which just drapes itself over Shakespeare's tragedy, distorting it in its own image. In making the witches 'the heroines' of the play it destroys the distinction between good and evil on the supernatural plane, on which the action turns, as does much of Renaissance ethical and religious thought. They are not 'symbols of evil', as one critic put it, but its embodiment. By identifying the 'hierarchical social order' with Macbeth's egoistic, murderous selfishness Eagleton destroys the distinction between good and evil on the natural plane, as well as in Renaissance political thought. An 'ideological analysis' which cannot distinguish between on the one side Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, regicides and murderers who destroy not just Duncan, but also Banquo, Macduff's wife and children, and an untold number of other victims, as that affecting scene between Malcolm and Macduff tells us ('Each new morn / New widows howl, new orphans cry . . .' — 'our country sinks beneath the yoke; / It weeps, it bleeds': 4.3.1–45, 156–240) — and on the other side innocent people murdered in their beds, but has to lump them all together under the rubric of 'official society', is not so much a critical theory as a new form of illiteracy. Eagleton attacks 'official society' for presenting 'its radical "other" as chaos rather than creativity', but the terms are inappropriate (what is creative about the witches?), and the Althusserian ideology blinds him to the play, where time and again deeds, words, and spectacle associate the witches and their magic with death, destructiveness, all forms of malice, any 'deed without a name' (4.1). They are opposed not to official society but to all forms of human existence, individual *and* social. Lady Macbeth voluntarily aligns herself with their form of chaos, exchanging her real feminine creativity for 'direst cruelty', rejecting all 'compunctious visitings of nature' for her 'fell purpose' (1.5.38–53), willingly contemplating destroying 'the babe that milks me' rather than pass up a plot to murder the king so as to gain the crown (1.7.48–60). To any critic who cannot distinguish these savagely anti-human forces from 'official society' we can only say, 'get thee new spectacles'!

Dollimore, however, sees 'something rather important' in Eagleton's account, namely 'a concern with the subordinate, the marginal, and the displaced. In the new work these individuals, groups, or sub-cultures' are seen as important evidence of 'aspects of our past which literary criticism and official history have ignored or repressed'. These minorities can help us to understand the society that 'rendered them marginal (for example, the dominant is understood in terms of its deviants . . .)', and are in any case of great interest in post-Foucault-Althusser-Macherey circles as forces that 'subvert the social order which demonizes them' (Dollimore 1990a, p. 409). Once again the ideological template induces tunnel vision or partial black-out in the critic. In the play, of course, the witches subvert not the social order but the anti-social Macbeth, whose ambitions for the crown are encouraged by them — not released, as Eagleton claims, since we know that Macbeth had them before he met the witches (see 1.3). They also subvert Lady Macbeth, if we can take her invocation to 'you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts' to be addressed to them. Macbeth and his wife are perfectly capable of subverting the social order without the witches, and pay a terrible price for doing so, he a form of living death and she nightmares and madness. One powerful point demonstrated by the play (no doubt a form of moralistic deterrent in the anti-demonic literature) is that the witches may encourage the forces of chaos in human society, but only to destroy them. In the words that Shakespeare gives to Banquo: 'oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of Darkness tell us truths . . . to betray's / In deepest consequence' (1.3.122ff). This much belief we must give to the witches in the play if it is to have any meaning, that they are capable of all kinds of harm, especially to those who use their services. Far from being aspects of our past that have been 'repressed', either, a vast literature on witchcraft and demonology existed then, mostly accepting the Biblical texts which asserted not only that witches exist but that witchcraft is an abomination, to be guarded against with violence if necessary.[36] Dollimore approaches the witches in the well-meaning terms of an activist for marginalised figures in our society, but he fails to see that, being profoundly evil and destructive, they belong outside all social order. Althusserian Marxism turns out to be an all too crude instrument, unable to deal with ethical issues.[37]

When we turn, finally, from ideology in Shakespeare to Shakespeare in ideology, we experience a strange reversal. Dealing with the plays, neo-Althusserians enthuse over the characters who are 'fascinatingly deviant', as Dollimore puts it, subverting the dominant ideology. Dealing with Shakespeare's plays in history, however, since they only have the two categories to choose from, the neo-Althusserians perforce see the plays as exploited by the dominant ideology, joining other Ideological State Apparatuses. As David Margolies confidently puts it,

> Shakespeare, as a central exponent of British culture, has inevitably been incorporated into the dominant ideology and made an instrument of hegemony. The plays are used in a deeply ideological fashion, to propagate and 'naturalise' a whole social perspective. They are filtered, and sometimes quite transformed, to represent a class position that accords with an elitist notion of culture and a ruling-class view of the world. (Margolies 1988, p. 43)

The word 'hegemony' there, which frequently occurs in neo-Althusserian texts, was appropriated by Althusser from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, for whom it originally referred to '*bourgeois* hegemony over the masses', and was located within 'civil society, in contradistinction to the state' (Merquior 1966b, pp. 100–104). Most of the 'Cultural Materialists'[38] are English, and well aware that our educational system is divided between state schools and private, fee-paying ones, yet the same 'upper-class bias' is said to apply in both (Margolies 1988, p. 43). They no longer distinguish civil society from the state.

Claims such as those made by Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault, that structures of power and ideological indoctrination surround us, visible or not, are designed to negate criticism. Whoever denies them is simply described as naïvely unaware that ideology, as one feminist in this line of descent puts it, is 'unconscious, unexamined, invisible', something that 'pervades every aspect of our thought and defines our imaginative horizons — "a kind of vast membrane enveloping everything. . . ."' (Greene 1992, p. 23). That is a good example of arguments that try to put an issue beyond discussion: but they must be rejected if we are to preserve any independence of thought. The argument is obviously untrue, since — to develop a point made in my critique of Althusser — the mere fact that we can discuss ideologies in the plural means that we can submit any system of belief to rational analysis. As for our own ideology, that is not an activity of the unconscious mind but a more-or-less organised body of ideas and attitudes that we have formed over a period of time, which are subject both to reflection and self-criticism. Greene believes that to see 'ideology as unconscious is quite different from viewing it as a consciously-held belief that can be put on and put off at will' (*ibid.*). But we do not (unless we are insecure, or schizophrenic), put off our beliefs at will: we hold them consistently, and we hope, at least, that we can give a coherent account of why we hold them. I deny the claim that ideology is unconscious and invisible.

I would also deny that Shakespeare has been the property of the ruling ideology, were it not so evident that the argument is circular. None of the critics I have read has attempted to define the ideologies of the various social groups that exist in Britain at any one time, using independent, non-Althusserian criteria; none has shown how the subordinate one was formed (or should it be 'extinguished'?) by the dominant one, let alone the role played by *As You Like It* or *Richard III* in this process. These critics simply assert their claims with varying degrees of sarcasm for the school teachers or examination system involved, all lackeys of the Ideological State Apparatuses. A fairly typical example indicting the teaching of Shakespeare as a form of complicity in a system designed to advance 'capitalism and patriarchy' is Alan Sinfield's claim that Shakespeare has been used in schools to 'adjust young people to an unjust social order', having been 'made to speak mainly for the right' (Sinfield 1985, p. 135) — politically right, presumably. Despite the more socially inclusive nature of comprehensive schooling in Britain since the 1960s, the teaching in literature, he asserts, still 'privileges' some sections of the school, not in terms of innate ability, interest in literature or language, response to imaginative work (the criteria by which 'streaming' used to take place within these schools), but according to 'gender, class and ethnic origins' (p. 136). Girls are disadvantaged by being made to study texts that 'reinforce the gender stereotyping which leads girls to these texts — "women are portrayed as being passive and ineffectual, and taking action only for personal or destructive reasons"', as one feminist puts it (pp. 136–7). Shakespeare thus becomes 'a crucial stage in the justification of elitism' (p. 137), and the whole system, the author observes with distaste, 'seems perfectly adapted for the fastest-growing class fraction, the new petty bourgeoisie working in finance, advertising, the civil service, teaching, the health service, the social services and clerical occupations' (p. 142). These unfortunate people, apparently pursuing socially useful work, are in fact to be regarded with suspicion and contempt, for 'the new petty bourgeoisie (unlike the old, of artisans and small shopkeepers) is constituted not by family but through education' (p. 142).

Despite this Neo-Marxist nostalgia for a society based on family links, everyone knows that education as a means of social advance has been a constant in English life since the Middle Ages. It is a notorious fact that gentlemen's sons felt no need to acquire an education, so that the Medieval-Renaissance schools were soon occupied by a quickly-expanding middle class. (As C.S. Lewis once observed, 'the middle class has always been rising'.) In a society that rewards intellectual abilities and cognitive skills over manual labour it is inevitable that those with a better education will be given tasks carrying a greater responsibility, and may even, notwithstanding the unjust distribution of rewards in most societies, be paid according to their qualifications. Sinfield is at perfect liberty to dislike this system, but as a university teacher himself (to Althusser therefore a member of the petty bourgeoisie)[39] he has been both advanced and disadvantaged by it (compared to bankers and lawyers, say, who carry far more financial clout). He is also free to dislike the petty bourgeoisie as our 'fastest-growing class fraction' (a singularly unpleasant term), but he needs better arguments if he really wants to align Shakespeare with repressive social tendencies. Shakespeare can hardly be accused of reinforcing female stereotypes, since it is obvious to anyone who has studied the place of women in Elizabethan society that his heroines enjoy a degree of independence and a mastery of language and eloquence that are totally untypical of his age. Admittedly, the goal of these resourceful women — Rosalind, Portia, Viola, Helena, Imogen, Cleopatra — is always love and marriage, but that remains the goal of many men and women, even today, and unless heterosexual bonding is to be rejected as a stereotype it is hard to find Shakespeare guilty of unthinkingly accepting social norms. If his women act for 'personal or destructive reasons' so do his men, at times; both sexes also act out of generosity or belief in some personal ideal. Sinfield claims that a teaching emphasis on the '"continuity between past and present"' in 'classical humanism' (that post-structuralist bogey-word) is 'an approach designed to train an elite' (p. 143). But to regard history in terms of continuity rather than rupture was the norm for everyone before Bachelard and Foucault, and it remains the view of millions of people who surely constitute no elite. As for Sinfield making the schools teaching Shakespeare responsible for oppressing 'working-class children' (p. 146), it seems to me (if I may use an *ab homine* argument), having started life in a miner's cottage in South Wales and owing my entire education to the enlightened reforms of the 1944 Butler Education Act, that Shakespeare transcends class-divisions, and that a 'materialist analysis' of his work is likely to reduce it to the property of yet another self-constituted and self-righteous group.

Since my concern is with what happens to Shakespeare's plays when subjected to some current critical systems, I shall not pursue this line of argument any farther. If Cultural Materialists wish to see the School Certificate or G.C.E. examinations as part of some vast conspiracy, or indict older Shakespeare critics for expressing patriotic or Cold War attitudes (hating Germans or Communists), they may do so, and demonstrate their own political correctness by so doing. But when this form of ideological analysis in the process distorts Shakespeare, I feel more like intervening. Margolies, for instance, claims that 'the hegemonic use of Shakespeare' in schools takes such forms as 'the enumeration of anti-popular attitudes or explicit statements of reactionary sentiment in the plays, such as the bitter scorn the noble Coriolanus displays towards the populace . . .' (Margolies 1988, p. 51). Like so many of these indictments, full of righteous indignation and vague hints of responsibility, Margolies does not say who enumerates these 'anti-popular attitudes' or why. It is perfectly possible, of course, that reactionary teachers exist, and that they might appropriate aspects of the play as supporting their views, just as neo-Althusserians do for theirs, and just as naïve patriots do in times of national danger.[40] In which case, though, if my experience of class-rooms is at all typical, they are soon likely to find intelligent and independent pupils objecting that this side of Coriolanus is shown in the play itself to be highly unsympathetic. For what Margolies conveniently overlooks is the fact that Shakespeare nowhere invites us to endorse Coriolanus' scorn of the people, that this is shown to be common to the patrician class as a whole but developed in his case with an intensity that embarrasses them (a negative aspect of character), while his initial refusal to temporise on the grounds of political expediency is a sign of integrity (a positive aspect) that challenges the values of the rest of his class and cuts across family loyalties, too, since Volumnia takes it on herself to impress the patrician values on him and does so at the cost of a victory to Rome but death to her son, Rome being revealed in the process to be in a sorry state, the patricians having prestige but no power, the tribunes (representatives of the people) having power but no integrity, expressing nothing but contempt for the people, while the plebs are shown to be confused, manipulated by all parties without having a mind or voice of their own . . . and so on. The play is a far more complex structure of alliances and divisions within social classes and within the family than the crude Althusserian two-part model could ever do justice to.

Attacks on the dominant ideology, I conclude, use the plays for modern political purposes, and distort them in order to fulfil their own ideological agenda. To end with a Cultural Materialist reading of *The Tempest* (Barker and Hulme 1985) is to see an elevation of Caliban to a heroic position similar to that made by Greenblatt's New Historicism (Chapter 4 above), if more heavily ideological. Parading the usual phalanx of authorities (Balibar, Macherey, Bakhtin, Foucault), with a numbingly abstract vocabulary ('We have chosen here to concentrate specifically on the figure of usurpation as the nodal point of the play's imbrication into this discourse of colonialism': p. 198), the authors claim that literary critics have deliberately closed down the play's 'historical and political signification . . . by a continual process of occlusion' (p. 195). Critics have occluded Caliban's 'political claims', in particular, 'by installing him at the very centre of the play, but only as the ground of a nature/art confrontation' which is here exposed as one of 'the early humanizing forms of incipient bourgeois hegemony' (*ibid.*). In his 'New Arden' edition of 1954, Frank Kermode did indeed argue that 'Caliban is the core of the play', representing '(at present we must over-simplify) nature without benefit of nurture; Nature, opposed to an Art which is man's power over the created world and over himself; nature divorced from grace, or the senses without the mind'. This 'simple diagram of an exquisitely complex structure', which Kermode subsequently elaborated in a detailed reading of the play (pp. xxxiv–lix), obviously runs the risk of abstraction, but the dichotomy of art and nature was important in Renaissance thought and in Shakespeare (witness *The Winter's Tale*). I would place the emphasis differently, but it is a perfectly coherent interpretation of the play, and only an Althusserian could see this a-political, philosophico-aesthetic concept as the tool of 'incipient bourgeois hegemony'. This lumbering and pompous phrase has become an automatic reflex, a substitute for thought. In fact, a large proportion of any Cultural Materialist essay on Shakespeare is spent setting out the approved terminology, as if that in itself constituted an argument. This is another case where, as a critic of Althusser drily observed, the 'terminological acquisitions are far more numerous than actual conceptual advances' (Timpanaro 1975, p. 193).

The ideological agenda is predictable, and the play dutifully conforms to it. Prospero's laconic 'Here in this island we arrived' (1.2.171) is said to describe 'the relationship between the Europeans and the island's inhabitants' (p. 199) — that is, all two Europeans, Prospero and the infant Miranda, over and against Caliban (Ariel lives in the elements). Prospero's 'arbitrary rule . . . over the island and its inhabitants' (plural again) is an 'act of usurpation' (pp. 199–200). Not content with exploiting him, Prospero has a fiendishly clever strategy which 'reduces Caliban to a rôle in the supporting sub-plot, as instigator of a mutiny that is programmed to fail, thereby forging an equivalence between Antonio's initial *putsch* and Caliban's revolt' (p. 201). Our authors never notice that the revolt is entirely Caliban's idea, and that, far from being Prospero's doing, it surprises and angers him. Nor do they observe that the plot of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo against Prospero functions in the play as a parallel to the *new* plot of the usurping Duke Antonio and Sebastian against Sebastian's brother Alonso, King of Naples. Instead, they conclude that Shakespeare manipulated Caliban into this position so that 'the playing out of the colonialist narrative is thereby completed: Caliban's attempt — tarred with the brush of Antonio's supposedly self-evident viciousness — is produced as final and irrevocable confirmation of the natural treachery of savages' (*ibid.*). But Shakespeare nowhere makes such general affirmations, whether about savages or anyone else. Antonio's viciousness is more than 'supposedly self-evident': it is extremely evident to anyone who is actually seeing or reading the play with a clear and open mind. The fact that Barker and Hulme end by attributing to *the play* an 'anxiety' about its ending, the play itself somehow bringing about a 'comic closure' as a means of 'quelling . . . a fundamental disquiet concerning its own functions within the projects of colonialist discourse' (pp. 203–4), shows, I think, the extent to which an ideology can rewrite a play in its own image.

The strong master narrative has won again, as it always will, if we let it. The play cannot resist; we can.

Epilogue: Masters and Demons

> I wish to emphasize from the very beginning that the attitude taken here is of a very personal character. I do not believe that there is any single approach to the history of science which could not be replaced by very different methods of attack; only trivialities permit but one interpretation.
>
> Otto Neugebauer[1]

Looking back through this book, and reflecting on the very diverse range of material it has dealt with, one common element stands out, the degree to which critics pick up the ideas of a 'Modern Master' and model their accounts of literature on the patterns he provides. Whether Freud, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Althusser, whether feminist or Christian, one thought-system is taken over as setting the standards by which Shakespeare should be read. Critics derive their assumptions about language and literature, their methodology (in some cases the renunciation of method), their attitudes to life even, from a law-giving individual or system. Adoption of the system usually seems to deprive them of the power to criticise it, or even to reflect on it critically. It is to be absorbed entire, demonstrated or validated through being imposed on this or that play. On the one side the master, on the other his pupils or slaves. The destructive effects of such allegiance were clearly shown by Francis Bacon in 1605:

> And as for the overmuch credit that hath been given unto authors in sciences, in making them dictators, that their words should stand, and not counsels to give advice; the damage is infinite that sciences have received thereby, as the principal cause that hath kept them low, at a stay without growth or advancement.

In the mechanical arts, Bacon saw, a constant process of improvement and development takes place, but in philosophy all too often attention has been captured by the system of one thinker, which loyal exegetes 'have rather depraved than illustrated. For as water will not ascend higher than the level of the first spring-head from whence it descendeth, so knowledge derived from Aristotle, and exempted from the liberty of examination, will not rise again higher than the knowledge of Aristotle'. Bacon's conclusion is that 'disciples do owe unto masters only a temporary belief and a suspension of their own judgment until they be fully instructed, and not an absolute resignation or perpetual captivity . . .'.[2] All too often today, it seems to me, the 'absolute resignation' to a master system, 'exempted from