1 Language: *Macbeth*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*

I

Even those who know very little about Shakespeare might be vaguely aware that his plays value social order and stability, and that they are written with an extraordinary eloquence, one metaphor breeding another in an apparently unstaunchable flow of what modern theorists might call 'textual productivity'. The problem is that these two aspects of Shakespeare are in potential conflict with one another. For a stability of signs – each word securely in place, each signifier (mark or sound) corresponding to its signified (or meaning) – is an integral part of any social order: settled meanings, shared definitions and regularities of grammar both reflect, and help to constitute, a well-ordered political state. Yet it is all this which Shakespeare's flamboyant punning, troping and riddling threaten to put into question. His belief in social stability is jeopardized by the very language in which it is articulated. It would seem, then, that the very act of writing implies for Shakespeare an epistemology (or theory of knowledge) at odds with his political ideology. This is a deeply embarrassing dilemma, and it is not surprising that much of Shakepeare's drama is devoted to figuring out strategies for resolving it.

To any unprejudiced reader – which would seem to

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exclude Shakespeare himself, his contemporary audiences and almost all literary critics – it is surely clear that positive value in *Macbeth* lies with the three witches. The witches are the heroines of the piece, however little the play itself recognizes the fact, and however much the critics may have set out to defame them. It is they who, by releasing ambitious thoughts in Macbeth, expose a reverence for hierarchial social order for what it is, as the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare. The witches are exiles from that violent order, inhabiting their own sisterly community on its shadowy borderlands, refusing all truck with its tribal bickerings and military honours. It is their riddling, ambiguous speech (they 'palter with us in a double sense') which 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. The witches signify a realm of non-meaning and poetic play which hovers at the work's margins, one which has its own kind of truth; and their words to Macbeth catalyse this region of otherness and desire within himself, so that by the end of the play it has flooded up from within him to shatter and engulf his previously assured identity. In this sense the witches figure as the 'unconscious' of the drama, that which must be exiled and repressed as dangerous but which is always likely to return with a vengeance. That unconscious is a discourse in which meaning falters and slides, in which firm definitions are dissolved and binary oppositions eroded: fair is foul and foul is fair, nothing is but what is not. Androgynous (bearded women), multiple (three-in-one) and 'imperfect speakers', the witches strike at the stable social, sexual and linguistic forms which the society of the play needs in order to survive. They perform a 'deed without a name', and Macbeth's own actions, once influenced by them, become such that 'Tongue nor heart/ Cannot conceive nor name'. The physical fluidity of the three sisters becomes inscribed in Macbeth's own restless desire, continually pursuing the pure being of kingship but

at each step ironically unravelling that very possibility: 'To be thus is nothing,/But to be safely thus.' Macbeth ends up chasing an identity which continually eludes him; he becomes a floating signifier in ceaseless, doomed pursuit of an anchoring signified:

> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (V.v.24–8)

He is reduced to a ham actor, unable to identify with his role.

As the most fertile force in the play, the witches inhabit an anarchic, richly ambiguous zone both in and out of official society: they live in their own world but intersect with Macbeth's. They are poets, prophetesses and devotees of female cult, radical separatists who scorn male power and lay bare the hollow sound and fury at its heart. Their words and bodies mock rigorous boundaries and make sport of fixed positions, unhinging received meanings as they dance, dissolve and re-materialize. But official society can only ever imagine its radical 'other' as chaos rather than creativity, and is thus bound to define the sisters as evil. Foulness – a political order which thrives on bloodshed – believes itself fair, whereas the witches do not so much invert this opposition as deconstruct it. Macbeth himself fears the troubling of exact definitions: to be authentically human is, in his view, to be creatively constrained, fixed and framed by certain precise bonds of hierarchical allegiance. Beyond these lies the dissolute darkness of the witches into which, by murdering Duncan, he will catapult himself at a stroke. To transgress these determining bonds, for Macbeth, is to become less than human in trying to become more, a mere self-cancelling liberty:

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none. (I.vii.46–7)

Too much inverts itself into nothing at all. Later Ross will speak of 'float[ing] upon a wild and violent sea,/Each way and none', meaning that to move in all directions at once is to stand still.

Lady Macbeth holds the opposite view: transgression, the ceaseless surpassing of limits, is for her the very mark of the human:

> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man.
>
> (I.vii.49–51)

She herself crosses the strict divide of gender roles and cries out to be unsexed, flouting Angelo's paternalistic advice to Isabella in *Measure for Measure*:

> Be that you are,
> That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none. . .
>
> (II,iv.134–5)

Like most of Shakespeare's villains, in short, Lady Macbeth is a bourgeois individualist, for whom traditional ties of rank and kinship are less constitutive of personal identity than mere obstacles to be surmounted in the pursuit of one's private ends. But the witches are hardly to be blamed for this, whatever Macbeth's own jaundiced view of the matter. For one thing they live in community, not as individual entrepreneurs of the self; and unlike the Macbeths they are indifferent to political power because they have no truck with linear time, which is always, so to speak, on the side of Caesar.

The Macbeths' impulse to transgress inhabits history: it is an endless expansion of the self in a single trajectory, an unslakable thirst for some ultimate mastery which will never come. The witches' subversiveness moves within cyclical time, centred on dance, the moon, pre-vision and verbal repetition, inimical to linear history and its imperial themes of sexual reproduction.[1] It is such lineage – the question of which particular male will inherit political

power – which they garble and confound in their address to Macbeth and Banquo, as well as in their most lethal piece of double-talk of all: 'none of woman born shall harm Macbeth'. Like the unconscious, the witches know no narrative; but once the creative dissolution they signify is inflected *within* the political system, it can always take the form of a 'freedom' which remains enslaved to the imperatives of power, a desire which merely reproduces, sexually and politically, the same old story and the same oppressive law. There is a style of transgression which is play and poetic non-sense, a dark carnival in which all formal values are satirized and deranged;[2] and there is the different but related disruptiveness of bourgeois individualist appetite, which, in its ruthless drive to be all, sunders every constraint and lapses back into nothing. Such ambition is as self-undoing as the porter's drink, provoking desire but taking away the performance: unlike the fruitful darkness of the witches, it is a nothing from which nothing can come.

This ambivalence of transgression is well captured in the *Communist Manifesto*. The bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels write, cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing all social relations:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[3]

'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned': this is the positive trespassing and travestying of the witches, who dissolve into thin air and disfigure all sacred

values. Yet this liquidation of all 'fixed, fast-frozen relations' is, in the case of the bourgeoisie, finally self-destructive, breeding new forms of exploitation which in the end will undo it. Like Macbeth, the bourgeoisie will become entangled in its own excess, giving birth to its own gravedigger (the working class), dissolving away that obstacle to historical development which is itself, and dying of its own too much. The universal wolf of appetite, as Ulysses remarks in *Troilus and Cressida*, 'Must make perforce an universal prey,/And last eat up himself' (I.iii.123–4). Lady Macbeth is akin to the three sisters in celebrating female power, but in modern parlance she is a 'bourgeois' feminist who strives to outdo in domination and virility the very male system which subordinates her. Even so, it is hard to see why her bloodthirsty talk of dashing out babies' brains is any more 'unnatural' than skewering an enemy soldier's guts. Meek women, military carnage and aristocratic titles are supposed by the play to be natural; witches and regicide are not. Yet this opposition will not hold even within *Macbeth*'s own terms, since the 'unnatural' – Macbeth's lust for power – is disclosed by the witches as already lurking within the 'natural' – the routine state of cut-throat rivalry between noblemen. Nature harbours the unnatural within its bosom, and does so as one of its conditions of being: since Nature can be defined only by reference to its so-called perversions, Macbeth is right to believe that nothing is but what is not. Nature, to be normative, must already include the possibility of its own perversion, just as a sign can be roughly defined as anything which can be used for the purpose of lying.[4] A mark which did not structurally contain the capacity to be abused would not be called a sign. The fact that Macbeth's conqueror was born by caesarean section (that is, 'unnaturally') is an 'unnatural', patriarchal repression of men's dependency on women; but the witches do well to steer clear of sexual reproduction in a society where birth determines whom you may 'naturally' exploit, dispossess or defer to.

In killing Duncan, symbol of the body politic, Macbeth is, in the play's ideological terms, striking at the physical root of his own life, so that the act of regicide is also a form of bodily self-estrangement. In a graphic gesture of self-division, his hand will try to clutch a dagger bred by his own brain. Language – the equivocal enigmas of the witches – overwhelms and dismembers the body; desire inflates consciousness to the point where it dissevers itself from sensuous constraints and comes to consume itself in a void. When language is cut loose from reality, signifiers split from signifieds, the result is a radical fissure between consciousness and material life. Macbeth will end up as a bundle of broken signifiers, his body reduced to a blind automaton of battle; his sleepwalking wife disintegrates into fragments of hallucinated speech and mindless physical action. Duncan's commendation of the bleeding sergeant ('So well thy words become thee as thy wounds') suggests, by contrast, an organic unity of body and speech. The body is a duplicitous signifier, sometimes transparently expressive of an inner essence, sometimes, as with Macbeth's countenance, a cryptic text to be deciphered. As we shall see throughout this study, Shakespeare feels the need to integrate a potentially overweening conciousness within the body's sure limits, a process which is for him inseparable from the integration of individuals into the body politic. It also involves a restabilizing of the sign, restoring floating signifiers to their appropriate signifieds, for meaning is the 'spirit' of words which should find true incarnation in their material forms. The problem is how to do all this without suppressing what is productive about individual energies, and suggestive about the sliding, metaphorical word.

The Macbeths are finally torn apart in the contradiction between body and language, between the frozen bonds of traditional allegiance and the unassuageable dynamic of desire. The witches experience no such conflict because their very bodies are not static but mutable, melting as breath into the wind, ambivalently material and immaterial, and so, as 'breath' suggests, with all the protean

quality of language itself. One exit-route from the tragedy of the play, in short, would be to have a different sort of body altogether, one which had escaped from singular identity into diffusion and plurality. Shakespeare will return to this idea in his very last drama in the figure of Ariel. But *Macbeth* fears this feminine fluidity as political anarchy, viewing diffusion as disruption. One of its more creditable reasons for doing so, as we shall see later, is that it is worried by the closeness of this fruitful interchangeability of signs, roles and bodies to a certain destructive tendency in bourgeois thought which levels all differences to the same dead level, in the anarchy and arbitrariness of the market-place.[5]

II

When signs detach themselves from the material world, a curious paradox tends to result. On the one hand, such signs are now purely vacuous, dead letters emptied of all constraining content and so free to couple promiscuously with each other in an orgy of inbreeding. On the other hand, signs which have shaken themselves loose from the world now stand at an *operative* distance from it, able to reach back into reality and mould it to their own capricious designs. Shakespeare is continually struck at once by the 'nothing' of such estranged language, its lack of ground or substance, and its power to bend the world to its own will. The sign as fetish, shorn of a significant context to become an end in itself, is ironically the sign at its most materially potent, manipulating real situations until it and they seem once more inextricable. When this discourse is that of a tyrannical monarch, this particular paradox unites with another. For the king is at once impersonal symbol of the social order, expressive of its corporate meanings, yet able in his arbitrary decrees to stand free of that order and dominate it from the outside. His word is 'creative': discourse, not least royal discourse, is material power, an

active intervention into the world at least as real as a blow on the head. Yet this creativity is uneasily close to a kind of discursive imperialism, in which words determine reality rather than the other way round.

Something like this seems to happen in *Richard II*. The play opens with a linguistic impasse: Bolingbroke and Mowbray accuse each other of treason in ritualized, rhetorical form, and since the issue remains verbally unresolvable it can be decided only by an appeal to the body. The two men will try to kill each other to prove their point. 'What I speak', declares Bolingbroke, 'My body shall make good upon this earth': actions will authenticate signs, flushing them with authentic physical content. When Richard sentences Bolingbroke to exile he robs him of his native speech, rips 'breath' or language from his body, and thus leaves it a kind of inexpressive corpse:

> The language I have learnt these forty years,
> My native English, now I must forgo;
> And now my tongue's use is to me no more
> Than an unstringed viol or a harp. . .
> Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,
> Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips. . .
> (I.iii.159–64)

To be banished from the air of one's native land is to be drained of the breath of its language; in exiling Bolingbroke Richard has dissevered his body and language as effectively as death would disjoin them. Whimsically relenting, Richard then curtails Bolingbroke's sentence by four years, refashioning reality by his word as surely as one might transform it by action:

> How long a time lies in one little word!
> Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
> End in a word: such is the breath of Kings.
> (I.iii.213–15)

Language is not, however, as all-powerful as Richard's word makes it sound: it hovers on some indeterminate

borderline between nullity and omnipotence. When Gaunt tries to temper Bolingbroke's dejection by persuading him to imagine his banishment as pleasurable, his son brusquely rejects this glib appeal to metaphor:

> O, who can hold a fire in his hand
> By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
> Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
> By bare imagination of a feast?
> Or wallow naked in December snow
> By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?
>
> (I.iii.294–9)

There is a recalcitrance about the material world which trope and fiction cannot dissolve, a material limit before which the power of discourse is disarmed. Aumerle comments tartly a little later that had the word 'farewell' added years to Bolingbroke's exile he would have given him a volume of them, 'But since it would not, he had none from me'.

When the dying Gaunt puns on his own name, Richard finds this word-play profoundly irritating: 'Can sick men play so nicely with their names?' This is pretty rich, coming as it does from a king who seems unable to scratch his nose without making a symbol out of it. As a 'poet king', Richard trusts to the sway of the signifier: only by translating unpleasant political realities into decorative verbal fictions can he engage with them. While Bolingbroke's armies are invading, Richard wants to sit down and concoct narcissistic narratives about the death of kings. He survives his deposition only by rewriting it as a tragic drama, and when brought finally to execution can face death only by cobbling together a brief Metaphysical poem on the topic. Such portentous myth-making is quite at one with his ruthless political opportunism. When symbolism drifts free of political reality to become an end in itself, it leaves that reality drained of significant value and so as mere brute material to be pragmatically exploited. It is not surprising that Richard, like so many modern politicians, is both

callous and sentimental. But the signifier has divorced itself from society only to reorganize it according to its own laws. Richard has mortgaged the realm of England, so that the whole country is now 'leas'd out', held together with 'inky blots and rotten parchment bonds'. The social order is stitched together by empty words, patched up by financial discourse, which itself stands in for money, and that in turn stands in for material labour. Textual fictions determine the economic life of England, just as the king's self-regarding rhetoric dominates its politics: Richard wonders at one point whether his 'word be sterling yet in England'. Gaunt, by contrast, practises economy in his speech, backing each deathbed word to Richard with the physical labour and moral authority of his dying, and thus countering the king's own debasement of verbal currency:

> Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in
> vain;
> For they breathe true that breathe their words in pain.
> He that no more must say is listen'd more
> Than they whom youth and ease have taught to
> glose. . .
>
> (II.i.7–10)

Little, in a state of linguistic inflation, becomes more, just as all becomes nothing. Speaking too much means communicating less, whereas to say enough is to say everything. (In *Henry IV, Part I*, Henry describes the taste of sweetness as a state in which 'a little/More than a little is by much too much' (III.ii.); and in *As You Like It* Rosalind notes that wine pours out of a narrow-necked bottle either too much at once or none at all.) In Richard's England, relations between signs have come to determine relations between individuals and things: the king is a 'pelican' who sucks his own life-blood like the self-parasitical word. Gaunt's deathbed paltering seeks to undo this with a *creative* deployment of metaphor, one which illuminates rather than obscures real social conditions. To do this with as irascible a king as Richard is clearly a delicate business: Gaunt's

tongue, Richard curtly reminds him, could 'run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders', his own expiring breath succeed in decapitating him. Discourse kills as well as creates: York later points out to Northumberland, who has omitted the king's title in conversation, that:

> The time hath been,
> Would you have been so brief with him, he would
> Have been so brief with you to shorten you,
> For taking so the head, your whole head's length.
> (III.iii.12–15)

As Richard's gorgeous symbolism, the title, rhetoric and insignia of kingship, slowly disintegrates before the laconic Bolingbroke, so his identity comes gradually apart at the seams:

> . . . I have no name, no title –
> No, not that name was given me at the font –
> But 'tis usurp'd. . . .
> (IV.i.255–7)

He is conseqently brought to death – in one sense the ultimate reality, in another sense the consummation of nothingness – and finds in it his most accomplished theatrical moment. Something comes of nothing, as Richard wrests his most elaborate fiction from the process of being dismantled.

How real is the signifier is a question which *Richard II* constantly poses. Language is something less than reality, but also its very inner form; and it is difficult to distinguish this 'proper' intertwining of signs and things, in which image and symbol are the very enabling grammar of human relations, from that 'improper' commingling of the two which springs from the imperial interventions of the autonomous sign, shaping reality to its self-indulgent whims. Myth and metaphor should service rather than master society; yet they are not purely supplementary to it either, mere disposable ornaments, since they shape from within the history to which they give outward expression.

Fiction seems inherent in reality: politics works by rhetoric and mythology, power is histrionic, and since social roles appear arbitrarily interchangeable, society itself is a dramatic artefact, demanding a certain suspension of disbelief on the part of its members. Macbeth has seen through it all by the time of his death, glimpsed the vacuous theatricality of life and the random nature of all identity in that night of the witches where all cats are black. There is no social reality without its admixture of feigning, mask, performance, delusion, just as there is no sign which cannot be used to deceive. Being yourself always involves a degree of play-acting, and the most deceived actor – the one who identifies entirely with his role – is the most convincing in reality.

Actors are, so to speak, signifiers who strive to become one with the signifieds of their parts; yet however successfully they achieve this we know that such representation is a lie, that the actor is not the character, and the stage is other than the world. The more an actor 'hollows out' his individual identity to unite with his role, the more authentic a performer he becomes. This for Shakespeare is true of all individuals, not just for actors. The more Macbeth nails himself to his allocated social function, suppressing whatever guilty desires might seek to transgress it, the more real a man he is. True identity thus thrives by repression, and genuine freedom lies in bondage. The self is nothing of what it is not: it survives by banishing those forces within it which threaten to usurp its sovereignty. But since bondage, to be authentic, must spring from free consent ('I am your free dependant', the Provost of *Measure for Measure* tells the Duke), that free act can always be turned against it. The self lives an irresolvable division between its desire, which conducts it along an endless chain of inflated signifiers, and its efforts at an 'imaginary' unity with the fixed signified of its social position.[6] As far as Hamlet is concerned, such efforts are hardly worth the trouble.

If representation is a lie, then the very structure of the

theatrical sign is strangely duplicitous, asserting an identity while manifesting a division, and to this extent it resembles the structure of metaphor. For metaphor works simultaneously by difference and identity, claiming that passion *is* fire, while undermining that claim in the same breath – for how can one thing be some other thing? Nothing is but what it is not, metaphor proposes; and while this sharpens our sense of a thing's unique qualities (we now know that passion is fiery), it also threatens to equalize differences into an endlessly repeated identity, a condition in which everything comes to mirror everything else. In this sense metaphor operates rather like money, which, as Timon of Athens protests in a passage quoted with relish by Marx, can convert any distinctive quality into any other:

> Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,
> Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant. . .
> This yellow slave
> Will knit and break religions, bless th'accurs'd,
> Make the hoar leprosy ador'd, place thieves
> And give them title, knee, and approbation,
> With senators on the bench. . .
>
> (IV.iii.28–34)

The *current* is what is new, and therefore, one would expect, different; but currency is also that which exchanges at the standard rates, and so a tedious repetition of the old familiar story. Similarly, metaphor promises fresh insight by its play of signs, disrupting the self-identity of things (passion is now fire), but achieves this new knowledge only at the price of 'exchanging' its two signs as equivalent values, foisting upon them a sameness which they resist. Money is nothing in itself: like language it derives value only from its use within material forms of life. Yet when it grows autonomous of that life, fetishized to a thing in itself, it becomes a kind of double nothing. It is now not only nothing in itself, but by sucking substance from the objects it is supposed to mediate strips them of their distinctive

qualities and leaves them abstractly commutable. Its omnipotence, like Macbeth's ambition or Richard's kingly word, is a concealed form of impotence: by conflating all values ambiguously together it reduces them, and itself, to inert indifference. There is something hollow at the very heart of society, something rotten in the state, which is the very condition of its real existence.

If the self in Shakespeare is divided between desire and position, then characters who have scant regard for the latter are likely to escape a potentially tragic disunity. Sir John Falstaff of *Henry IV* is more at home with drunks than dukes, and so represents a danger to political stability apparent at once in his body and speech. His body is so grossly material that he can hardly move; his language so shifty that it resists all truth. Within the single figure of Falstaff, both body and language are pressed to a self-parodic extreme. He falls 'below' social order in being too sheerly, stubbornly himself, a brazen hedonist who refuses to conform the body's drives to social decorum. Yet he also falls 'beyond' that order in his fantastical speech, as hollow as his body is full, which can spin twelve rogues in buckram suits out of two in as many lines. Falstaff can turn the brute materiality of the body against the airy abstractions of ruling-class rhetoric:

> Can honour set a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word? Honour. What is that honour? Air.
>
> (1.V.i.130–4)

But he is himself one of Shakespeare's most shameless verbal mystifiers, divorcing word from deed in his pathological boasting, recklessly erasing distinctions in his metaphorical excess:

Falstaff . . .'Sblood, I am as melancholy as a gib cat or a lugg'd bear.
Prince Or an old lion, or a lover's lute.

Falstaff Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnshire bagpipe.
Prince What sayest thou to a hare, or the melancholy of Moor Ditch?

(1.I.ii.71–6)

If Falstaff appeals to the sensuous facts of the body to deflate ideological illusions, he also has a remarkably cavalier way with such facts:

Falstaff Give me a cup of sack; I am a rogue if I drunk today.
Prince O villain! thy lips are scarce wip'd since thou drunk'st last.
Falstaff All is one for that.

Both aspects of Falstaff – reductive materialism and verbal licence – belong to the carnivalesque, the satiric comedy of the people; but it is interesting to note their incongruity. Social order is subverted simultaneously from two opposed directions: by that which is purely and materially itself, the self-pleasuring body which refuses to be inscribed by social imperatives; and by that which is never at one with itself at all, the iconoclastic idiom of those who run verbal rings round their solemnly prosaic opponents. Unlike the consummately self-conscious Henry and Hal, Falstaff is in one sense an indifferent actor, playing only himself, at ease within his own voluminous space and incapable of deferring or dissembling his appetites; yet in the tavern drama he shifts fluently between the parts of Hal and Henry, with the infinite opportunism of one who is both all and nothing.

From this viewpoint, the character in *Henry IV, Part I* who most resembles Falstaff is, curiously, Hotspur. Hotspur is, of course, a man of action; yet his fiery imagination tends to overreach itself to the point where his rhetoric grows self-generating, as in his exchanges with Worcester and Northumberland in Act I, scene iii. Hal's words over his corpse at the end of the play capture this disparity between confining body and overriding spirit:

Ill-weav'd ambition, how much art thou shrunk!
When that this body did contain a spirit,
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
But now two paces of the vilest earth
Is room enough.

(V.iv.88–92)

Hotspur parallels Falstaff also in his scornful opposition of body to words; both man of action and man of inertia are paradoxically akin in this. Hotspur refuses the King prisoners because of the mincing accents of the 'popinjay' who comes to demand them; he points to Mortimer's wounds as 'mouths', adequately expressive without aid of speech of the man's loyalty, and is mimicked by Hal as a man whose language absurdly understates his military prowess. He also resents Northumberland's sending letters to the rebel camp rather than appearing in person, viewing this as a cowardly substitution of textual for physical presence. The difference between the two figures is that Hotspur is an old-style idealist who desires a language adequate to action and vice versa; Falstaff has not the slightest wish to integrate the two, but flourishes in the gulf between them. The organic unities of the traditional social order, the solid word coupled to the speaking deed, are now being splintered apart, as language flies off into non-meaning and the body sinks steadily into grossness. *Henry IV, Part 2* will open with the figure of Rumour, a wild polyphony of prattling half-truths, and close with a deceiving pun: Jerusalem, where prophecy assured Henry he would die, turns out to be a bedchamber in his palace. The ambiguous signifier, for Henry as for Macbeth, robs you of any final resting place.