

Comparative Analysis of Marx and Shakespeare's Views

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Abstract

Marxist thinking about culture has paved the way for much research and teaching in university departments of Literature and played a crucial role in the development of recent theoretical works. Feminism, New Historicism, cultural materialism, Postcolonial theory, and queer theory all draw upon ideas about cultural production that can be traced to Marx, and significantly each also has a special relation with Renaissance literary studies. Despite this, Marx's main ideas are seldom properly explained in works about Shakespeare and it is even claimed that they have lost their relevance. This paper aims to explicate the influences of Marxism on Shakespearians, and to suggest ways in which it can play a role in the future of politically engaged literary, dramatic criticism and cultural analysis.

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Introduction

Concerning oppressed people was one of Marx's enduring legacies for twentieth-century thinking about politics and literature, although Marx frequently represented his ideas as scientific discoveries rather than components of a political morality. For Marx, capitalism was doomed to a finite lifespan because of its inherent limitations, not merely because it was unfair. For students of literature, Marx's most important work is on the relationship between creativity and economic production, leading to the assertion that "consciousness arises out of social being". Marx's model of a society's base (the way in which production is organized) and superstructure (the corresponding mental systems including jurisprudence, education, and art) looks like reductive determinism if the superstructure is thought to merely serve the needs of the base. Marx repeatedly stressed that thinking escapes the confines of material circumstances and the essence of his determinism was the notion that language, a social construct, shapes consciousness as well as being an expression of it.

Attempts to improve upon Marx's model of base and superstructure have not entirely removed the objection that the model, howsoever nuanced, is inherently reductive. One stumbling block is the multiplicity of meanings in which Marx used the notion of ideology, which remains the superstructural entity or process of prime interest. As we shall see, Marx's definition of ideology occasionally seems slightly confused and he refined it several times to remove certain contradictions that became apparent.

The survey of Marx's influence will pick out figures of particular importance for their work on Shakespeare, starting with George Bernard Shaw, as well as tracing the development of Marx's ideas by others after his death. Noting that Shakespeare's working class characters are generally unpleasant, Shaw explained this as observation, not political sentiment, and asserted that no one could have thought otherwise in Shakespeare's time. Arguing and treating the Elizabethan mind-set as essentially closed to ideas time of which had not come, Shaw displayed a limited grasp of Marx's sense of the relationship between art and economic production. The workers, for Shaw, were populace whose minds were retarded by the effects of their oppression.

Bertolt Brecht took almost precisely an opposite view and his ideas about theatre were the first major dramatic expression of Marx's ideas about ideology and can be paralleled with the Russian formalists' interest in literature as writing what disturbs everyday habits of thought. Brecht regarded the conventions of representations as superstructural and at least

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partially oriented to the needs of the current economic system. Original Elizabethan performance conditions had, for Brecht, a useful awkwardness that made apparent the means of representation. He values Shakespeare's sense of contradiction and his capturing of the dialectic of existence. Refusing to allow endings to resolve contradictions, Brecht championed the Marxist dialectic of endless self-contradiction (Brecht, 1964, p. 25).

Marxist thinking entered mainstream Shakespeare studies in the 1980s via the British cultural materialism and American new historicism. The cultural materialists rejected E.M.W. Tillyard's rigid model of Elizabethan attitudes towards order, hierarchy, social status, and historical progress. In attempting to codify what a typical educated Elizabethan might think and feel about key social and political issues, Tillyard effectively mapped what Marxists mean by ideology. The strongly negative reaction to Tillyardism in the 1980s was result of a disagreement about what exactly that Elizabethan ideology consisted of - especially regarding the space for unorthodox ideas - rather than a rejection of the general principle that one might indeed be able to map. In essence, Tillyard was guilty of a vulgar kind of Marxism; we will show that it was less vulgar than what has been claimed. The ideas examined in this paper are related to readings of seven plays: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Timon of Athens*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *All's well that ends well*, *The Comedy of errors*, and *The Winters tale*. The first two plays directly concern individual's relations with money, but paying attention to all the potentially deterministic relationship between material reality and the world of ideas is of importance. The economic imperatives at work in the *Merchant of Venice* can be understood as a tension between pre-capitalist and capitalist notions of the correct uses of money, and one that was heightened by the contemporary experience of price inflation which made hoarding has a sure way to lose it. Marxist principles of economic class antagonism shed light on Shylock's impeccable defense of his right to own Antonio's flesh, since the Venetian state upholds the principle of slavery. Shylock has an ancient ideological construct (the ownership of human flesh) in mind that capitalism disavowed in replacing the market in human flesh with a market in its derivative labor. In the *Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens*, different ways of making use of money are explored in relation to reciprocal bonds of social interaction.

The reading of *King Lear* offers here focuses on the play's exploration of the possibilities for future change. In one version of the play, the fool makes a prophecy about 'Albion' that editors since the eighteenth century have altered in ways that suggest their views on utopianism. One of Marx's most influential inheritors in the late twentieth century was the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, and the reading of *Hamlet* offers here a

critique his work on the limitations of representations (such as the play-within-the-play) as means for attaining the truth .

All's well that ends well marks a significant deviation from Shakespeare's usual depiction of war. The causes of Florentine/Sienese conflict are of no interest to the young noblemen of France who fights on either side of the country. The play can be read as a criticism of the pursuit of war for 'breathing and exploiting' by an aristocratic class whose *raison d'etre* has disappeared. In this place, they have a shocking indifference to human individuality, and this is at the heart of the lesson Helen teaches Bertram.

Reading of the *Comedy of errors* focuses on subjectivity – how we know who we are – from a Marxist perspective which insists that our sense of ourselves depends on our relations with others. In *Ephesus*, the boys from Syracuse find themselves already knew and treated as old acquaintances in a city that is entirely new to them, and the play repeatedly uses mirroring (of the twins, of husband and wife, and of a prostitute's clients) to represent the principle of exchangeability that underlies what Marx called commodity fetishism.

Shakespeare, Marx, production, and the world of ideas

In Act 2, Scene 2 of David Edgar's play *The prisoner's dilemma* (first performed 2001), Tom Rothman, an American academic, likens recent interethnic conflict in eastern Europe to 'those scenes in Shakespeare plays where guys called towns turn out to be first cousins married to each other's sisters (Edgar, 2001, p. 103). The parallel is not frivolous: the disintegration of one pole of the binary opposed armed camps of the cold war released latent tensions about ethnicity and nationhood that are like the murderous energies released by the epochal shifts dramatized in Shakespeare's history plays. But as a joke, Rothman's comment is illuminating.

The names of Shakespeare's aristocrats are confusing, and sometimes they seem to relish the confusion. In the trial-by-combat in *Richard II*, the man whose speech prefix is Bolingbroke at the start of the play answers the question 'Who are you?' with a list of places: 'Harry of Hereford, Lancaster, and Derby' (Oliver, 1955, p. 47). Bolingbroke is the son of John of Gaunt (who is Duke of Lancaster), a man with two names: the first denotes where he comes from (Ghent) and the second denotes where he rules. (Historically, no one called him John of Gaunt after he was three years old, until Shakespeare's play popularized this form of his name.) About the middle of the play Bolingbroke returns from banishment to claim his inheritance, which enrages his uncle the Duke of York. Bolingbroke's response sounds like quibbling,

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As I was banished, I was banished Hereford; But as I come, I
come for Lancaster:

BERKELEY

My lord of Hereford, my message is to you.

BOLINGBROKE

My lord, my answer is to 'Lancaster',

And I am come to seek that name in England,

And I must find that title in your tongue

Before I make reply to aught you say. (ibid, pp. 69-73)

This is no mere matter of polite address, for with Bolingbroke's
change of name comes a change in who he is. Insistence upon
the point illustrates his claim that either rights of succession are
inalienable, or they are not if the king's right to inherit from his
father is absolute, says Bolingbroke.

Under Henry's rule as king of England in the second half of the
play other names change too:

DUCHESS OF YORK

Here comes my son Aumerle.

YORK Aumerle that was;

But that is lost for being Richard's friend,

And, Madam, You must call him 'Rutland' now.

(pp. 41-3)

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Aumerle's complicity in a plot against the new king divides his parents, the
Duchess of York wanting to preserve her only son and the Duke cravenly
seeking to denounce him in order to demonstrate loyalty to the new ruler.
Although the speech prefixes for Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford
(and later Lancaster), change midway through the play to 'King Henry' ,

most play-text editions leave Aumerle as Aumerle even after he is supposed to be Rutland. Such things bother and confuse readers more than spectators in a theatre, because speech prefixes are spoken aloud; at the time of performance, characters just are whatever others call them and we recognize them by identifying the actors. However, the Duchess of York uses her son's new name, in the act of pleading for his life.

Real life, including such fundamental political change, might seem far from the abstract world of ideas, but obviously the two cannot entirely be disconnected. Social changes are made by people having ideas, clearly, but what of the reciprocal relationship? How far are ideas themselves shaped by how life is lived? Two extremist views are identifiable as follows.

The ultra-idealists hold that human beings are free to think anything without constraint. On the other hand, the ultra-materialist insists that all thought is causally dependent upon physical processes. Marx has long been thought to be near the ultra-materialist end of the spectrum because he reduces everything, including the ideas one might be able to think, to economic processes which his theories explain. Worse still, Marxism has been characterized as a set of political doctrines that actually tell people what to think and punishes those whose ideas are not 'politically correct'.

The claim that social existence (or social being, as it is sometimes translated) determines consciousness has become a central tenet of Marxism, but its precise meaning is endlessly controversial. In particular, what kind of influence does Marx mean by 'determine' and what aspects of life is one's 'social being'? Most sympathetic readers seek ways to understand the superstructure or the individual consciousness as generally shaped but not entirely constrained by economics.

This does not seem a controversial assertion, yet Marx's statement that 'consciousness arises out of social being' has been widely taken as a deeply pessimistic and mechanically deterministic view of the human mind. After all, if we are only the sum of our social circumstances there seem little chance to celebrate individual human achievements of the mind.

Obviously, no one really believes that the relationship between circumstances and consciousness is so mechanical, but perhaps surprisingly throughout Shakespeare studies, people have written as though they believe in it. As we shall see E.M.W. Tillyard's model of what he called the 'Elizabethan world picture' came close to such a mechanism, and a major branch of British Shakespeare studies has grown out of rejecting Tillyardism.

In tracing a history of Marx's position in twentieth-century Shakespeare studies, this tattle will attempt to identify the deadening hand of mechanistic views of human creativity whether coming from the political left or right.

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Marx on Production and History

Starting with an aristocratic character is not how Marx would have begun to explain his ideas, for his primary concern was the great mass of oppressed workers in the Europe of the mid-nineteenth century. Marx's ideas about production began with this fact all around him, for he believed that these people would be the engine of great historical change, throwing off their oppression and creating a world run for the benefit of all rather than a few. Marx first applied his philosophical training to a consideration of how a worker feels about her work under the prevailing conditions. Previous writings on political economy always assumed the existence of private property as a given, as though it were as natural as the land or sea, whereas for Marx the existence of private property was part of what every economic theory must account for. (This was to become a recurring interpretative move in Marxism: take a step back from a socially accepted given and show it to be contingent, not immanent.)

The more a worker works, Marx observed, the poorer she becomes and inevitably the objects she makes but cannot afford to own seem alien to her and she feels dominated by them. The assertion that workers get poorer the more they work seems odd to us, but Marx lived in a period of virtually unregulated exploitation with little state control over working hours, child labor, and safety standards, and for the most part conditions were getting worse. Moreover, in Marx's mind the proper comparison was between these conditions and those that had preceded them under late feudalism. From that point of view, the condition of the working class was a desperate descent into misery. Before capitalism, the makers of products had owned the things and hose, in Marx's terms the 'means of production'. The essence of capitalism is that the makers of things do not possess their own means of production: they have the skill and knowledge to make, but cannot do it because they have no tools or raw materials. Capitalism happens when such potential workers, possessing only their own labouring power, meet people who have the tools and raw materials; at such a meeting the owners of the means of production are at an advantage and can set the terms of the transaction.

Building on the work of the bourgeois economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, Marx adopted the 'labour theory of value', which asserts that human labour alone imbues objects with value. What does it mean to say that a certain pair of shoes is worth 40\$ and a certain piano is worth 400\$? There are few things that can be done by a piano which can also be done by shoes, let alone done ten times better. Pianos and shoes are incommensurable, yet one can exchange these items. On the open market, a

trader will in all likelihood accept ten pairs of such shoes for the piano, and another would accept the opposite exchange. In many markets one is not taken seriously unless one has vast quantities to exchange, but the principle is the same:

The assertion that labour is the underlying essence of all value in human society is a philosophical proposition that many find attractive, but for Marx, it was also a truth like the law of gravity, and it would have consequences at least as important as Isaac Newton's discovery.

Where Newton's principle linked all places – the planets circling the sun obey the same laws as a child's spinning top – Marx's labour theory of value linked all productive civilizations from our earliest tool – making ancestors to the sweatshops of Victorian England and beyond to the coming worker's paradise.

Marx's concern has a double focus, on the individual laborer being exploited, about which he clearly felt pity and anger, and on the large historical picture of a succession of epochs distinguished by the dominant mode of production (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism). A Marxist approach to Shakespeare could attend to either of these two foci, the former by looking for individual working class characters in the plays and analyzing their particular situation, and the latter by considering how Shakespeare depicts epochal change, as in the differences between the newly formed republic of fifth century Rome depicted in *Coriolanus*.

Shakespeare too is concerned with historical changes, and many of his plays depict how large effects result from the actions of individuals. One way to relate the two is the idea of ripeness, that systems of government reach a cusp at which point a relatively small intervention by the right person at the right time tips them over into a wholly new state.

Ideas and the Base/Superstructure Model

In a Marxist view, economics is the underlying force that gives shape to everything else, even consciousness. How far should we take this claim literally in everyday life?

Economic forces obviously underlie every human activity, since one cannot begin a productive working day (whether labouring, writing, raising children, or contemplatively thinking) without food and lodging. However, Marx's understanding of how economics underlies everything goes deeper than these practicalities because his model of the superstructure arising from the economic base includes the most basic institutions, practices, and habits of mind, 'the general process of social, political and intellectual life' (Marx, 1899, pp. 20-1).

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It is clear how a writer might be constrained by economics – if the book seems unlikely to sell, it probably will not reach the market – but surely that is a special case. One way it might happen is through language, theories of which were hotly contested throughout the twentieth century. A pragmatic approach to language would treat words as merely convenient tags for objects in the real world, created so that in the absence of the things themselves, their spoken representatives might be employed. This necessity is avoided by the Bal nib Arabians of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), who carry on their backs all the objects about which they might need to converse, and communicate by holding these out to one another in exchanges of mute display (Swift, 1985, p. 230).

For Marx, however, language was not principally about things but about people:

Language is as old as consciousness. Language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me as well; language, like consciousness, arises only from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 51).

The idea that language is not about our relationships with things but rather our relationships with each other was to be a powerful one in the twentieth century, starting with the linguistics taught by Ferdinand de Saussure in Geneva before the First World War (Saussure, 1960). Saussure was concerned with the rules that govern utterance and observed that a competent speaker of a language can detect and correct errors in an ungrammatical utterance even if unable to state the rules explicitly. The internalized rules common to all competent speakers of a language, Saussure called a *Langue* and a particular utterance conforming to them he called a *parole*.

Political engagements such as the animal rights movement are for many people an important part of reality and clearly that reality has already been conditioned linguistically before it is encountered politically. Although the number of examples has been distorted by the compilers of the Oxford English Dictionary having Shakespeare as their primary literary reference point, and hence more likely than others to be cited as first user (Gray, 1986), he is commonly credited with coining many English words and phrases still in use. For this reason alone, to study Shakespeare is to study the stuff with which millions of people's thoughts are made, and a Marxist approach would be to consider what kinds of things can scarcely be said, or may only be said with convoluted periphrasis, in other words, what kind of

rhetoric is made possible, and what kind made difficult, using the language we inherited from our predecessors.

Class, Consciousness, and Ideology

A person's class is sometimes spoken of as though it were a personal attribute like sexual orientation, race, or gender, but such an analogy is misleading. For Marx's work uncovered how class came about and how it might be ended in the future. Like Marxism, gay studies, postcolonial theory, and feminism indulge in utopian thinking about the ending of oppression, but unlike it they do not seek to abolish the production and be world of ideas conditions that gave rise to the subject positions they promote.

A Marxist approach to Shakespeare studies might confine itself to the study of impoverished characters such as the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* or the ordinary soldiers in *Henry V* who 'sell the pasture now to buy the horse' and need to capture French soldiers for the ransom they will pay. However, this would be a neglect of some of the most fruitful aspects of Marxist theory, for it was not merely fellow feeling for the oppressed that drove; he was uncovering fundamental historical principles.

A Marxist insight has taken hold throughout literary studies: that the origin of ideas, the 'definite forms of social consciousness' (or superstructure), can be found in the conditions that gave rise to them, the 'relations of production' that are 'the real foundation' (or base) (Marx, 1970, pp. 20-1). The base/superstructure model was Marx's first account of ideology, and it is here that Marxism lays claim to the entire world of artistic production. Unfortunately, at times Marx appears to have meant by ideology a set of untrue or distracting beliefs that prevent workers from seeing their exploitation (false consciousness, as Engels later put it), and at other times he uses it to mean the collective beliefs of the ruling class, which dominate society's intellectual life just as the ruling class's purposes hold sway in practice. These two senses are scarcely compatible with each other or with the base/superstructure model, since if consciousness arises out of social being then it is true due to that social being (so not a false consciousness), whereas if it is false it is difficult to see why the ruling class—whom no one is trying to dupe—would believe it. To add confusion, Marx also appears to use the word ideology in the sense of a scientific, or pseudo-scientific, study of superstructural processes, so that we may speak of a Marxist ideology just as easily as a fascist. The later works of Marx provided a not entirely satisfying explanation for these contradictory uses of the word by arguing that misrepresentation and distortion are structural

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effects of capitalism, so that the contradiction originates in the economic base and is projected onto the superstructure, which exhibits self-contradiction.

By the word 'ideology', Marx originally meant the investigation of where ideas come from, their specific and historical determinants (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 375-7; Eagleton, 1991, pp. 63-70).

In Marx's materialist historicism it is not how people and their social relations appear to themselves or others (the superstructure) that shapes social forms and relations, but how they really are related in production (the base). The superstructure "of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness" cannot exceed the limits set by the base, because people's ideas are "the direct efflux of their material behavior", are the "sublimates of their material life – process", so that "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 47). Marx distanced himself from the Empiricists, who make a collection of dead facts, and from the idealists, who deal in the imagined activity of imagined subjects, and he put life as it is actually lived at the centre of his historical method. In this method, philosophy loses its status as a separate activity. To make history one must eat, feed, and stay warm, so the first historical act is 'the production of material life itself' (ibid, p. 48). As soon as the basic needs are satisfied, new needs are created and satisfied and thus history begins. Form family relations develop complex social relations based on more complex production to satisfy wants, and hence history must be founded on analysis of production, how it happens, and how people organize to achieve it.

The explanation that Marx offered in *The German ideology* was that the ideology (ideas, institution, and practices) of any society is whatever is necessary to maintain its way of life, so for example maritime law was developed first by the merchants of the medieval town of Amalfi because it was the first to carry on extensive trade (p. 80). However, if ideas are simply in the service of production, it is difficult to see how societies could change, and *The German ideology* is much concerned with the different ideologies that accompanied slave-owning societies, feudalism, and capitalism. Marx knew that he was in trouble with his model of ideas coming after doing: "[Marxist history] does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice" and so "the practical overthrow of the actual social relations" is what it takes to change ideas (p. 58). Thus, "[Marxist history] shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstance" (p. 59). The process of projecting the intangible, the social, the human into material objects is reification, and this is what happens with the production of commodities: relationships between people

are mysteriously transformed into relationships between these inanimate objects.

The producer of a commodity will experience this as a severing of her bond with what she makes so that it comes to seem like a hostile and impersonal force ranged against her, because of this she feels alienated not only from the fruit of her labour but from her labour itself. These thoughts on alienated labour are first recorded in incomplete manuscripts from 1844 on the connection between economics and philosophy (Marx, 1977, pp. 61-74), and they provided Marx with a new way to think about ideology: alienation happens in production, at the economic base, and spreads into the superstructure from there. Alienation is a form of mystification, making it hard to see the human activities of labour and production, and this serves to naturalize the present way of doing things because labour and production lose their social appearance and seem merely the consequences of the way objects in the world naturally relate to one another. Thus deception is built into capitalist production, it does not have to be a separate activity that serves it, and it begins not in consciousness but in material production. Rather than ideology's being "false consciousness" (a phrase coined by Engels in a letter to Franz Mehring in 1893), or a con-trick played on the gullible workers, it is a structural effect of capitalism.

This is a serious problem for Marxism since any claim that ideas entirely follow from economic needs necessarily cost the ground out from under itself as a set of ideas. This is a version of the well-known Liar Paradox invoked by a generalizing that includes itself in its purview: the declaration 'I always lie' includes itself, so if it is true it must be false. The same paradox occurs with such popular postmodern generalizations as "there are no universal truths", which if true excludes itself as a possible universal truth, and hence the assertion is false and thus there must indeed be some universal truths.

Twentieth-century Marxists grappled with the problem that an attempt to explain social reality by economics must stand somewhat apart from reality, and yet it needs to figure itself into the reality that it seeks to change. What follow here is a condensation of Terry Eagleton's brilliant analysis of how these dilemmas were addressed by Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Louis Althusser (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 33-159). If Marxism is part of social reality, how can it possibly model the very social reality without invoking an infinite regression like someone holding a mirror up to another mirror and seeing an uncountable number of reflections? Georg Lukacs proposed a solution based on reification itself, since although this dehumanization of the worker and cripples and atrophies of his soul, yet "his humanity and his soul are not changed into

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commodities; on the contrary, the fusing of the worker with her oppression is 'subjectively' the point at which this structure [i.e. base] is raised to consciousness and where it can be breached in practice" (Lukacs, 1971, p. 172). In this quotation, Lukacs, like other Marxists, favored the term structure/ superstructure instead of base/ superstructure in order to avoid suggesting that economic production is simpler, more "basic", than the superstructure it generates. The consciousness of the proletariat, when it fully comes about, will be effectively the self - consciousness of the process that dehumanizes them, so that unlike other groups that are misled by reification, "... the proletariat [will] become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality" (ibid, p. 197).

Antonio Gramsci addressed the problem by expanding the question to consider how the ruling class elicits consent to its rule, which phenomenon includes ideology but also many other means, and for this expanded notion he employed the term hegemony. Gramsci was concerned with civil society, the institutions that mediate between the state and the economy, and decided that it is these that elicit consent while the state itself has the monopoly on coercive violence via the army, the police, and the penal system. Any ruling class, of course, has to elicit consent rather than just use coercion, but capitalism especially relies on consent since use of force would put its rule up for contestation; the marketplace principle of freely associating individuals exchanging labour and money must seem to be governing all social relations. Ideology functions at the psychological level so that each individual internalizes the social orders governing principles and lives them as though they were her own (which, being so deeply embedded, they are).

The organic intellectual, unlike the traditional one, knows that ideas come from social life, and indeed the traditional intellectual's assertion that his ideas are independent was itself an idea that suited the ruling class, or to put in another way, the claim to be free of ideology is itself ideological because it suits the ruling class. In relation to Shakespeare, two critics have recently argued that the disconnectedness of art, Oscar Wilde's principle of *gratia artis*, is one we can see coming into being in the Renaissance. Richard Wilson found that Shakespeare's drama, unlike that of his contemporaries, strives to deny its own commercial origins by imagining unfettered aristocratic patronage, even to the point of casting the Globe's yardling audience as 'gentles' in *Henry V*, but in the *Tempest* Shakespeare finally admits that aristocratic patronage is necessarily constraining (Wilson, 2001, p. 28). In the same volume of essays, Scott Cutler Shershow considered the mental back flips that were necessary to make sense of the biblical Parable of the Talents, which seems to be a justification of usury in its praise for the

servant who multiplies his five talents and condemnation of the servant who buries his own (Matthew, 25:14-29).

In particular, Shershow considered how 'talent' in our modern sense of inherent quality (as opposed to a unit of money) was invented to serve this need and brought a splitting of the temporal and spiritual domains, each having its own rules. Eventually the principle of investment-and-return was accepted in both domains, but to compensate for the capitulation the author had to be figured as the ultimate gift-giver, and hence, the modern view is that Shakespeare is infinitely abundant and Marxist criticism is narrow and partial (Shershow, 2001, pp. 87-89).

Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School argued in *Negative Dialectics* (in German, 1966) that the ideological impulse to homogenize is the effect of a hatred of the different that arose in our ancestors from biological need: to kill prey a predator needs rage and as we became human this was rationalized and sublimated, creating the unconscious 'ideology that the not-I, L'autrui ... is inferior' (Adorno, 1973, p. 23).

Bourgeois society has a central antinomy, since 'To preserve itself, to remain the same, to "be", that society must constantly expand, progress, advance its frontiers, not respect any limit, not remain the same' (ibid, p. 26), and is built upon a principle that constantly seeks to reduce heterogeneity: '... it is through barter that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total' (p. 146). What cannot be claimed for identity is expelled as other, and one of the few places this simple dichotomizing is resisted is 'Radical modern art' (p. 95). The title of Herbert Marcuse's *One-dimensional man* (1964), a key text for anti-establishment struggles in the 1960s, indicated his agreement that capitalist ideology suppresses all contradiction in its valorization of uniformity and conformity. Terry Eagleton pointed out that this Frankfurt School Marxist view of ideology's homogeneity is wrong – in fact, capitalism is quite content with liberal plurality and yet it must always contend with the social conflict it generates – but it must have seemed right to thinkers fleeing from Nazism (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 127-8).

Renaissance ideology and language in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

The historical Richard II's right to rule England was based on his familial relation to his grandfather Edward III, but he was succeeded by Henry Bolingbroke who took the throne by force to become Henry IV. Thus was broken a principle of succession by inheritance, and one of the attractions of Shakespeare's play *Richard II* is its dramatization of how this came about.

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In his famous speech about the natural state of England, John of Gaunt makes specific allegations that under *Richard's* ruling the country itself

Is now Leased out – I die pronouncing it –
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
England...
... is now bound in with shame,
with inky blots and rotten parchment bonds (Calderwood,
1971, pp. 59,64).

Editors of the play are unanimous that here Richard is accused of forming an economic arrangement with his subjects regarding the land, and that this abnegates his responsibility towards it, for a tenement farm is one rented, not owned, by the farmer who works on it. This changes the king's status from supreme ruler above the law to mere subject of it:

[JOHN OF GAUNT]
Landlord of England art thou now, not king.
Thy state of law is bond slave to the law,
(ibid, pp. 113-14)

Gaunt characterizes such contractual arrangements as rotten and a stain on England's character. Richard hastens to the dying Gaunt to seize the valuables that would otherwise pass to his son Bolingbroke,

Hence, Gaunt's attacks forms which are parts of a larger pattern of Richard's disruption of ancient practices for the transference of wealth. Willoughby follows the same economic theme in citing as a reason for rebellion against Richard his use of 'blanks' (documents promising the king unspecified amounts of money), and the play is insistently concerned with the paper form of these arrangements.

In Gaunt's reference to 'rotten parchment bonds', the stress is presumably on 'parchment', the reification of an obligation, for aristocratic culture is familiar with immaterial bonds. Indeed, the play begins with one:

KING RICHARD
Old John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster,
Hast thou according to thy oath bond
Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,
(pp. 1-3)

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Here Gaunt's oath is his bond; it needs no Lateralization in a contract, and even under extreme pressure men of this class reach not for a document but a symbol to make concrete their words. When Fitzwalter accuses Aumerle of Treason he throws down his glove, gauntlet, or hood and says 'There is my bond of faith /To tie thee to my strong correction' (quoting Longcrain, 1995, 67-8). So many men accuse Aumerle that the scene descends into a comedy generated by the way a gage (a sign) combines immaterial meaning with material presence, so that having exhausted his supply in an orgy of gage-throwing, Aumerle is forced to borrow one to continue his denials (ibid, p. 74).

Aumerle is tainted by his close association with deposed king Richard and his well-known dislike of Bolingbroke, and continuing the contrast between immaterial, eternal bonds and those realized in paper. Aumerle's involvement in the conspiracy to restore Richard is discovered by his father's noticing the seal hanging from a document Aumerle is carrying. In the document the conspirators have 'interchangeably set down their hands' to kill King Henry (p. 98). Aumerle's mother does not understand how bonds work:

DUCHESS OF YORK

What should you fear?

"Tis nothing but some bond that he is entered
into For gay apparel 'gainst the triumph day.

YORK

Bound to himself? What doth he whet a bond
That he is bound to? Wife, thou art a fool.

(pp. 64-8)

Standing in for an obligation, a bond was held by the person to whom the obligation was owed, and as a material object the capitalist bond could be dissolved by tearing the paper that embodies it- 'Take thrice thy money. Bid me tear the bond' (quoted in Calderwood, 1971, p. 231) while the older immaterial bond is more durable precisely because it is not embodied. (An analogous relation underlies the play's several meditations on the nature of a king's 'sentence' for speech is paradoxically, more permanent than writing: once uttered, spoken words cannot be destroyed.) Like the bond in *The merchant of Venice*, the bonds in *Richard II* seem to suggest a reification of obligations that corresponds to the replacement of a feudal set of values with their proto-capitalist substitutes, by which reading Richard's deposition is initiated by his own error of hastening the capitalist age in replacing immaterial ancient rights with material contracts.

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There is a problem with this reading of *Richard II*, since from a Marxist view—predicated on the forward progression of historical epochs categorized by their organization of production (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism) – we would expect to find Bolingbroke, Richard's successor, embodying the new capitalistic principle. The straightforward Marxist view is offered by David Margolis in a study of the play's representations of the disintegration of social structures:

King Richard and Bolingbroke are more than individuals in conflict; they are made to represent a struggle between hierarchical and individualistic world: The principle of the individual vanquishes the principle of hierarchy, the right of ownership defeats the right of authority.

The two sets of principles are incompatible: there is no way in which Bolingbroke's victory and his principle of ownership could be justified in the terms of the old inherited principles of the country. (Margolis, 1992, pp. 144-5)

Here 'world-views' means roughly ideologies, and Bolingbroke represents progress. If, as Margolis maintained, Bolingbroke represents progress, what are we to make of the 'inky blots' by which the old order is stained with the textual practices of the new? Frequently, Shakespeare has characters refer to personal imperfections as 'spots', and they are 'black and grained' for a self-reflecting Gertrude (*Hamlet*, 80) and indelible for a psychotic Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*, 5.1.33). Just occasionally, however, spotted-ness can be a guarantee of identity, as with Mowbray's insubordinate resistance to Richard's 'Lions make leopards tame' with 'Yea, but not change his spots' (Loncrain, 1995, pp. 74-5). The idea of a leopard's skin being the site of its unchangeable nature is in tension with our modern sense that identity is a matter of the internal and unseen, but Mowbray insists that identity is necessarily outside the body in the form of 'spotless reputation', without which 'Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay.'

The choice here is between two forms of perfected outside, an immaterial representation in the minds of others (reputation) and a merely material covering of showy gold. Much of the play hinges on Richard's spotted-ness, his failure to live up to the ideal of kingship (a perfected humanity), and characters repeatedly liken the ideal, monarch to the golden sun.

This metaphor need not draw on alchemical thinking since ordinary ideas about value and purity are sufficient to explain it. However, the alchemists' understanding of the transformative power of the sun lent the sun/king association additional weight because the sun's rays, penetrating the earth, were thought to provide 'the generative warmth to ripen such imperfect metals as iron, copper and lead into the perfect metal, gold' (Abraham, 1998, p. 351). When Richard's Welsh followers give up on his return from

Ireland, Salisbury imagines that Richard's 'sun sets weeping in the lowly west' (Calderwood, 1971, p. 21). Bolingbroke in mid of rebellion sees Richard as a 'blushing discontented sun' (ibid) about to be obscured by clouds; defeated Richard wishes Bolingbroke 'many years of sunshine days' (ibid, p. 211) before imagining himself a king of snow melting before 'the sun of Bolingbroke' (p. 251); and in his own reflection, Richard sees the face 'that like the sun did make beholders wink' (p. 274).

The sun/king rhetoric of the play has been much noted, but before it has even got off the ground it is undercut in the first act by Bolingbroke, who responds to banishment by observing that the sun will still shine on him and the 'golden beams to you here lent, shall point on me and gild my banishment' (pp. 140-1). Thus Bolingbroke invokes the sun/king association before anyone else has a chance to use it, and by linking it with Mowbray's dismissal of mere gold-plating, Bolingbroke slyly suggests that a king has only the exterior signs and golden trappings of power, which are available to everyone. For audience members who knew the ensuing history this was problematic, because Bolingbroke goes on to replace Richard and find the same danger alighting on himself: when kingship is treated as a possession not a right, the institution is fatally weakened. The point of a king being like the sun and like gold is that these things were held to be unchangeable, having reached a state of perfection seldom attained in the sublunary sphere. As the rebellion gathers headway, an alternative, unflattering, sun/king rhetoric emerges. Northumberland invokes the gold-plated trapping of kingship as he exhorts his peers to redeem the 'blemished crown' and 'wipe off the dust that hides our scepter's gilt' (pp. 295-6).

In spoken performance, there is no way of distinguishing between this kind of gilt and the guilt of Richard's wrongdoing, and indeed the first five editions of the play spelt the word 'Guilt'.

In this reading, taciturn Bolingbroke gains the upper hand not because he is a silent man of action against a wordy effeminate poet, but because he understands the rhetoric of monarchical power and is able to reinvent it for his own purposes. This personal project, however, is also a social project because it involves a new conception of the authority of kingship. Richard's view, and arguably the standard medieval view, is that the king is 'the deputy elected by the Lord' (p. 53), meaning God, so this is authority descending from above. However, Bolingbroke is able to rake throne because of the popular support deriving from his reported 'courtship to the common people' in which 'off goes his bonnet to an oyster wench' and 'a brace of draymen bid God speed him well' (pp. 30-1); while of Richard it is said by his enemies that 'the commons hath he piled with grievous taxes, and quite lost their hearts' and even his flatterers agree (pp.127, 132). One might almost

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say that Bolingbroke's victory is a democratic achievement.

Kingship is like language in its dependence on common consent and shared principles that are barely conscious: the utterance 'my liege' is not so much a willed expression as a verbal tic, and the inferiority and deference that underlie it are likewise more a matter of habit than reasoning. Just as a linguistic sign embodies immaterial meaning in a material form, so the principle of divine right of kings gave the monarch a double nature: a material body that would die and an immortal part that would instantaneously fly to the next in line, and hence the performative contradiction of 'The king is dead, long live the king' (Kantorowicz, 1957, pp. 409-18). The parallel can be extended to the material embodiment of a play in the written form encountered by readers and the immaterial 'text' that is a performance of it, although here emerges an important difference regarding nomenclature that seems to have interested Shakespeare.

Scripts and their performances are grounded in language, but a script's speech prefixes are not to be spoken. For a theatre audience there is no one called Claudius in *Hamlet* (the name is never mentioned) only 'the king' and the same is true of Duke Vincentia in *Measure for measure*. An audience is untroubled by the tricky editorial problem of fixing the precise moment when Bolingbroke's speech prefix change to king Henry and of deciding whether Richard's speech prefix changes in the same instant, but the problem itself goes to the heart of the play's concern with nomenclature and the analogy between dramatic art and politics. York describes Richard's following Bolingbroke in a public procession into London with a theatrical simile: 'As in a theatre ... after a well-graced actor leaves the stage, the spectators' eyes are idly bent on him that enters next' (ibid, pp. 23-5). Anti-theatric lists complained that drama undermined social hierarchy by implying that social identity was merely a matter of costuming. A recurring theme of Shakespeare's history plays is the related suggestion that politics is a form of role – playing, and for the actor – King Bolingbroke the naming of characters matters very much. In the trial-by-combat of 1.3, when the list of places changes, the name of the man who answered the question 'Who are you?' for last time become King Henry, a renaming that robs Richard of the title. York is caught in the middle of this epochal change:

Tone is my sovereign, whom both my oath
And duty bids defend; other again
Is my kinsman, whom the King hath wronged?
(pp. 112-14)

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If we are looking for the play's binarial choices such as backward/forward, medieval/Renaissance, feudalism /capitalism (and in purely character logical terms, wordy/taciturn, poetic/prosaic, passive/active, and effeminate / masculinist), then York might stand for an indeterminate and wavering third term that is neither one thing nor another.

A pivotal moment of the plot is York's last, and merely verbal, stand against Bolingbrook's rebellion, which is immediately followed by capitulation.

YORK

Well, well, I see the issue of these arms.
I cannot mend it, I must need confess,
Because my power is weak and all ill-left.
But if I could, by Him that gave me life,
I would attach you all, and make you stoop
Unto the sovereign mercy of the King.
But since I cannot, be it known to you
I do remain as neuter. So fare you well
Unless you pleas to enter in the castle.
And there repose you for this night.
(pp. 151-60)

The connotations of York's word 'neuter' are military (he lacks the force to compel) and sexual (he feels emasculated), but also linguistic: it is the gender of nouns that are neither masculine nor feminine; this position seems intolerable and he collapses into passive support for the party of the future. In his social being, then, York has made the transition to the new order, but his super structural linguistic practice seems to lag behind, and even after the audience has seen Richard's abdication York refers to 'the Duke, great Bolingbroke' (p. 7). However, this is part of his description of the recent past – Bolingbrook's triumphant entrance into London with Richard's following – so arguably York (like Shakespeare) is preserving the past nomenclature appropriate to the past events he describes. On the other hand, he concludes the story in the present tense ('To Bolingbroke are we sworn subjects now'), which rather suggests he simply cannot give up the old terminology. At a conscious level, though, York knows that with the new king comes a new naming practice, and he is more concerned to preserve it ('Aumerle that was ... you must call him "Rutland" now') than to preserve his own son, whose transgression readily betrays to his new master. In Marxist terms, the superstructure is here revealed as inconsistent in a way that we could map onto a Freudian distinction between the unconscious

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and the conscious, and the character of York provides a study of the personal conflicts created when a man tries to suture the ideological rift created by epochal change.

Rather than treat York's conflict and betrayal of his son as tragedy, as well he might, Shakespeare opts for comedy: York races to denounce his son to King Henry, is overtaken by the offender, and is closely followed by his wife. (For a modern audience the striking analogues are denunciations under Nazism, Stalinism, and Maoism, making the comic tone difficult to sustain.) As we have seen, the play is much concerned with the relationship between linguistic and political power, with the 'breath of kings' (p. 208) as a power to 'sentence' with a 'sentence'. Even critics hostile to Marxist readings tend to agree that Gaunt's famous speech imagining England to be a blessed island (a 'precious stone set in the silver sea', 2.1.46) can reasonably be called ideological because of its idealization and its denial of geographical reality: England is (and then was) actually only one part of an island (Great Britain) that also contains the countries of Scotland and Wales.

The proper context for this, however, is not so much England of the late fourteenth century as England of the late sixteenth century, a country still coming to terms with the loss of its last possession in France when Calais fell to Francois de Lorraine, Second duke de Guise in 1558. Shakespeare's history plays dwell on England's loss of French holdings, and Calais is the location for the originating treasons in *Richard II*: Mowbray is accused of misappropriating the Calais Garrison's pay (ibid, p. 132), and Mowbray and Aumerle are implicated in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester at Calais. With the contraction to a geographic unity (albeit one rather more internally heterogeneous than Gaunt's rhetoric acknowledges), and following the near catastrophe of the Spanish Armada, a proto-nationalism combining linguistic and ethnic realities emerges in the Shakespeare history play's collective sense of England. French is not merely a different Language but a context in which (as with 'boeuf' and 'beef') the differing distribution of signifiers can fundamentally alter the signified understood by the hearer of an utterance, as the Duchess of York finds as she pleads for her son's life:

Say 'pardon', King. Let pity teach thee how.
The word is short, but not so short as sweet;
No word like 'Pardon' for kings' mouths so meet.
YORK
Speak it in French, King: say 'Pardonnez-moi'
DUCHESS OF YORK
Dost thou teach pardon to destroy?
Ah, my sour husband, my hard-hearted lord

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That sets the word itself against the word!
Speak 'Pardon' as 'tis current in our land;
The chopping French we do not understand.
(pp. 114-22).

This is a struggle for meaning – a desperate desire to shape the king's 'sentence'- in which York counters the Duchess's plea for pardon with a French context (the phrase meaning 'Pardon me', that is, 'on I cannot') that reverses the sense. The Duchess insists on the proper context, the English one, but in saying that she does not understand French she reveals that she does, else she would not know what her husband had just proposed.

Conclusion

The Marxist concern to emphasize on contradiction (especially self-contradiction) resonates powerfully with latent concerns in Shakespeare's play, and as we shall see much recent criticism has preferred to emphasize the dramatic power of such moments of discontinuity and rupture instead of attending to the artistic smoothness and closure identified by earlier criticism.

The reading of *Richard II* offered in this paper is not exclusively a Marxist one, and similar things are said in works that tack an eclectic approach under the rubrics of historicism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction. However, at origin these approaches (and more recent schools of thought) depend on Marxist thinking whose centrality to twentieth-century Shakespeare studies is under appreciated. This paper aims to show that, at their most powerful, recent forms of Shakespeare criticism are inherently Marxist – one might say that they are among the various forms that critical Marxism has taken on – and their vigor derives from a foundational rejection of the 'givens' of bourgeois culture. Those 'givens' are part of an absurd teleology that understands all previous historical change as progression towards the virtually unfettered free market in goods and services that we see across most of the world at the start of the twenty-first century. A survey of the influence of Marx ideas on Shakespeare criticism is, at the same time, a history of reasoned rejections of such fatuity.

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