SHAKESPEARE’S TELLING WORDS: GRAMMAR, LINGUISTIC ENCOUNTERS, AND THE RISKS OF SPEECH

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes undertheorized grammatical and linguistic details of Shakespeare’s language. Using tools derived from the fields of linguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis, I trace the ways that Shakespeare’s speakers represent themselves in language, and how they position themselves relative to their interlocutors. Grounding my study in a selection of Shakespeare’s works in which questions of self-positioning are particularly fraught, I argue that the nuances of grammar that undergird the linguistic performance of Shakespeare’s speakers encode significant clues about interaction and interpersonal relationships. I maintain that the minute details of linguistic encounters, easily overlooked words such as modal verbs (particularly shall and will) and deictic markers (words such as I, this, and now), hold important information about speakers’ perceptions of themselves, their interlocutors, and their environment. Attention to such details, and to charged moments of linguistic encounter in which speakers must negotiate their modes of self-positioning, helps to illuminate the troubled processes of self-representation and changing self-perception.

Chapter one focuses on Shakespeare’s sonnets, and suggests that these poems provide a productive model for the examination of the nuances of speech and interactive dialogue. I anchor my discussion in the particular resonance of the word shall in the sonnets, and explore the ways in which the sonnet speaker attempts to
preserve linguistic control relative to a threatening interlocutor. The second chapter extends these concerns to consider how the speakers of *Troilus and Cressida* respond to a wide network of potentially threatening interlocutors. In this chapter, I focus on linguistic encounters such as arguments and gossip to examine the risks that speakers encounter when they enter the fray of communal discourse. My third chapter turns to *Coriolanus* to consider moments of aggressive linguistic collisions, in which speakers vie for the right to speak a potent and contested word such as *shall*. The fourth and final chapter analyzes *Richard II* through the frame of deictic markers and grammatical modes of self-reference to consider the protective strategies afforded by language in moments of crisis.
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The process of writing this dissertation presented rewards and challenges both expected and unexpected. Many people helped me to ease the anxieties and celebrate the triumphs along the way.

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My initial thesis committee included Carol Percy and Alexander Leggatt, both of whom were exceptionally warm, astute, and enthusiastic readers. I thank them for helping me to shape my ideas in the early stages of this project. Through the writing stage, Carol was a perceptive and enthusiastic commentator, and I feel lucky to have had such a thoughtful and encouraging scholar reading my work. Jeremy Lopez, a later addition to the committee, gave me incredibly prompt and thorough suggestions, and invariably challenged me to think about my project in new ways. The finished version has benefited very much from his careful reading. My successful completion of the thesis is in no small part due to the efforts of these four talented readers.

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Preface

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?
O know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love, still telling what is told.

(Sonnet 76)

This project begins with Shakespeare’s sonnets, the work in which we – modern readers, audiences, critics – might have our closest encounter with commentary on the tools, processes, and risks of communication. In Sonnet 76, the poet-speaker professes anxiety about his ostensibly staid verse, his inability or reluctance to adopt the “new-found methods” and “compounds strange” of his contemporaries. Yet he locates the beauty and novelty of his verse in its relentless capacity to re-make itself from the old methods, the “same” tools that create at the same time that they reveal, so that “every word doth almost tell my name.” This notion provides a resonant touchstone for my project, which is based on the supposition that all of Shakespeare’s words, no matter how “spent,” are significant in that they are perpetually made new, unveiling in each iteration information about the subject who speaks them. Indeed, while the dominant focus in studies of Shakespeare’s language tends to remain on his proclivity for innovation and clever linguistic play, here I would like to make a case for the
importance of a special category of “small words” – the minute but telling details encoded in the seemingly banal lynchpins of grammar.

The critical framework for my dissertation is rooted in the interchange between literature and linguistics. Using tools borrowed from the fields of linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, I argue that the nuances of grammar that undergird a speaker’s linguistic performance encode significant clues about interaction and interpersonal relationships. I maintain that the minute details of linguistic exchanges between speakers, easily overlooked words such as the verbs of volition and obligation (in particular, will and shall) and elements of deixis (pronouns such as I and you as well as ‘anchor’ words such as here, this, and now) hold important information about speakers’ perceptions of themselves, their interlocutors, and their environment. The texts under consideration, the sonnets, Troilus and Cressida, Coriolanus, and Richard II, are situated on the rough edge of Shakespeare’s canon of tragedies. They have in common a preoccupation with problems of self-representation and self-situating, and acute attention to the risks of participating in the communal fray of social discourse. This type of involvement entails defending the self and its future in its encounters with the world, and the linguistic markers that I am studying reveal both perspectives on speaker subjectivity and strategies of social positioning, such as tactics of self-assertion and bids for power, which are fundamental to this experience. With some notable exceptions, prevailing practice has detached the study of literature from the study of language. This project suggests how recent developments in language criticism promote fruitful new approaches to literary texts. By mapping the tools of grammar and
linguistics onto the study of literature, my project provides a methodology that offers fresh approaches to reading dramatic language.
Introduction

We must learn to parse sentences and to analyse the grammar of our text, for, as Roman Jakobson has taught us, there is no access to the grammar of poetry, to the nerve and sinew of the poem, if one is blind to the poetry of grammar.

- George Steiner, No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995

[L]inguistic usage takes on layers of meaning which require careful unraveling, layers of self-conscious disguise but also of unselfconscious convolution or frank and unredeemed failure … Of all the areas of linguistic usage where this might be latently visible the most promising is that easily forgotten locality of grammar … Grammar has the duplicity, and sometimes the advantage, of keeping some of its best secrets to itself. Not by the perilous byways of syntax only: the inflections of single verbs can, and should, give pause for thought.

- Brian Cummings, The Literary Culture of the Reformation

At the bottom of each word / I’m a spectator at my birth.

- Alain Bosquet, Premier Poème

Shakespeare’s “Small Words”

What must the king do now? Must he submit?

The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?

The king shall be contented. Must he lose

The name of king? A God’s name let it go.

I’ll give my jewels for a set of beads,

My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,

My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,

My figured goblets for a dish of wood,

My sceptre for a palmer’s walking staff,

My subjects for a pair of carvèd saints

And my large kingdom for a little grave,

A little little grave, an obscure grave …
A passage from one of Shakespeare’s most celebrated speakers seems a fitting entry point into a study of Shakespeare’s words. These pivotal lines, delivered by Richard during the build-up to his deposition, showcase his fluent proficiency with language. Various observers have noted the rhetorical power of King Richard’s vivid images, the alliterative force of his word pairings, and the anaphoric flourish of the line-leading “my”s. In many respects, this passage provides what is, to many of Shakespeare’s spectators and readers, an exemplary instance of Shakespeare’s dramatic language. The line “My figured goblets for a dish of wood” conjures a striking visual contrast of rich ornament reduced to crude utility, a disparity that is echoed in the suggestive rhythm of the words: the polysyllabic, Latinate tones of “figured goblet” offer a jarring contrast with the Germanic staccato of “dish of wood.” Later in the passage, the repetition of “little,” paired with “grave,” invokes a host of associations about Richard’s de casibus trajectory, his sense of literal contraction at being so demoted, as well as his play for the sympathy of his audience (he claims that his grave will not be merely “little,” but “little little”; surely, this clever doubling implores, a former monarch should not be subject to such diminution). As these examples show, Richard’s careful lexical choices in this passage lay bare his linguistic charm, and suggest the potent social currency of his sprezzatura. But the significance of the less ostentatious word selections – such as the modal auxiliary verb must, the personal pronoun I, and even that most banal of English words, the definite article the – while lacking the immediate power of Richard’s weighty adjectives and nouns, have much to

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1 References to King Richard II are from the New Cambridge edition, edited by Andrew Gurr (2003).
tell us about his perspective, his motivations, and the remarkable circumstances in which he is embroiled.

This project is concerned with the easily overlooked “small words” of Shakespeare’s language, and takes a particular interest in the modal auxiliary verbs *shall* and *will*. The modal verbs – common words that also include *can, may, ought,* and their variants – function as markers of necessity, possibility, volition, and obligation, among other things. In its broadest sense, modality is defined as concerned either with questions of knowledge or belief about the truth of a proposition, or with the necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents (Lyons 823). Thus, while speakers use modals to express things like permission and prediction, these verbs also indicate a speaker’s stance toward the conditions of his or her speech; in other words, they encode speakers’ attitudes toward what they are saying and toward the audience that they are addressing. In Richard’s powerful sequence of questions and answers, then – “What *must* the king do now? *Must* he submit? / The king *shall* do it. *Must* he be deposed? / The king *shall* be contented. *Must* he lose / The name of king?” – his modals of obligation inscribe not only his intentions for future action, but also his perception of duty, duress, and coercion in his predicament. The *musts* convey Richard’s feeling that his hand is forced; the *shall* *s* suggest that he will acquiesce nonetheless. Moreover, his repeated inquiry into how the king “must” behave carries an undercurrent of mockery; it is absurd, these *musts* suggest, to imply that a self-appointed authority has the audacity to dictate to “the king.”

2 I am indebted to Sylvia Adamson for the useful category label of “small words.” Cf. her essay, “Understanding Shakespeare’s grammar: studies in small words” in *Reading Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language*.

3 These respective subcategories of modality are called *epistemic* and *deontic*. Modal classification will be discussed at greater length later in this introduction.
Just as Richard’s modal verbs are worthy of more attention than is typically given to them, his deictic markers merit closer inspection. The linguistic system of deixis, like modality, links speakers with their context as well as with the content of their utterances. Using anchor words like *I, now, here, and this*, deixis orients objects in their spatio-temporal context with reference to a given centre (typically the speaker).\(^4\) Forms of self-reference such as personal pronouns are thus important components of the deictic system, because they identify the speaker relative to others in discourse. What does it mean, then, that Richard begins this speech by repeatedly referring to himself as “the king”? This is an interesting retreat from the “I” position, the typical deictic marker of subject position claimed by a speaker. Part of the nuts-and-bolts minutiae of everyday language, personal pronouns such as “I” are deictic markers that anchor an utterance in time and space, and bind it to a particular speaking subject, the “I-here-now” that acts as an indexical “zero-point” for the utterance (Elam 142). These words ensure that the speaking subject becomes a nexus, so that everything outside of the “zero-point” hub is defined relative to the speaker. Significantly, the “I” and “you” positions have particular resonance, encoding certain traits of power and agency attributable to the speakers in a linguistic exchange. As Keir Elam explains, “it is on the ‘pronomial drama’ between the I-speaker and the you-listener/addressee that the dramatic dialectic is constructed. ‘I’ and ‘you’ are the only genuinely active roles in the

\(^4\) Stephen C. Levinson provides the standard definition: “Deixis is organized in an egocentric way. That is, if (for the purpose of semantic or pragmatic interpretation) we think of deictic expressions as anchored to specific points in the communicative event, then the unmarked anchorage points, constituting the *deictic centre*, are typically assumed to be as follows: (i) the central person is the speaker, (ii) the central time [CT] is the time at which the speaker produces the utterance, (iii) the central place is the speaker’s location at utterance time … (iv) the discourse centre is the point which the speaker is currently at in the production of his utterance, and (v) the social centre is the speaker’s social status and rank, to which the status or rank of addressees or referents is relative” (*Pragmatics* 63-64).
dramatic exchange” (142-43). These considerations suggest that Richard’s rejection of the “I” position is a type of rhetorical strategy, laden with greater significance than the simple variation or authoritarian posturing that monarchical self-reference affords. By reverting to the third-person “king,” Richard makes an interesting, and perhaps manipulative, deictic move, transforming himself into “an excluded and non-participant other presented merely as object [not subject] of the discourse” (Elam 143). Perhaps he is balking at the vulnerability of the “I” position, taking himself out of the linguistic exchange and hiding behind his esteemed title, so that the responsibility that the “I” position entails – in particular, the exposure to attack by the “you” listener – is mitigated. But he is clearly also reaping the benefits of transforming himself from subject to “object of the discourse.” Using “the king” in place of “I” renders the pronominal drama unstable; it disrupts the fundamental pattern in dramatic dialogue which dictates that the “I” and “you” positions are interchangeable, depending on whose turn it is to speak. By calling himself “the king,” Richard inhabits a specialized speaker position, one that cannot be easily occupied by his interlocutor. The lapse is brief, however, and Richard moves to reinhabit the “I” speaker position with the words “I’ll give my jewels for a set of beads,” followed by an incantatory repetition of possessive “my”s. The move from third- to first-person identification is emphatically reinforced in the scene’s telling final line, “Then I must not say no” (3.3.208), a powerful scene-ending statement that records a shift in Richard’s understanding of himself and his obligations. This final “must,” devoid of the hints of absurdity underlying “What must the king do now?”, is shorthand for Richard’s acceptance of the command that he had previously rejected, and it encodes his forced acquiescence.
While on one level the invocation of the king title suggests a wanton bid for power, it also implies a retreat from vulnerability and a covert reassertion of authority in the face of threatening external forces. In a scene that anticipates his literal ousting by the usurping Bolingbroke, these subtle clues about self-reference and self-positioning matter a great deal.

The various motives behind Richard’s speech – lamentation and plea for mercy – reflect what linguists have described as the two primary ends for which speakers use language. The first is to interpret the world by commenting on it, and the second is to effect some change in that world. The linguist John Lyons calls these respective impulses the “desiderative and instrumental function(s) of language,” with the former serving an expressive function – indicating impressions, interpretations, and desires – and the latter an active, outcome-oriented function, based on “the desire to get things done by imposing one’s will on other agents” (qtd. in Perkins 14). Despite their differences, however, both objectives reflect a drive to achieve a specific purpose. No utterance is unmotivated or neutral, for even simple statements of expression or observation are made according to the desire of the speaker (to establish a certain authority, or to make others aware of their wants, for example). The passage from Richard II offers several illustrations. Richard’s repetition of “little,” for instance, communicates his fear of obscurity and his reluctance to relinquish power, but it also contains an implicit entreaty to his enemies: do not diminish me so. What is interesting about the “small words” of his speech, the grammatical commonplaces discussed

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5 As Michael R. Perkins summarizes, various linguists have come up with similar terms to distinguish the two primary functions. These include Austin’s designation of “constative” and “performative” utterances; Halliday’s “ideational” and “interpersonal” macro-functions; and Davies’ “interpersonal” and “interpretational” meanings (12). Lyons also differentiates between “mands” (commands, requests, and demands) and “non-mands” (warnings, recommendations, and exhortations) (Perkins 15).
above, is that they unveil subtle but specific evidence about his wishes, his actual and perceived power, and his self-perception. Additionally, these words offer significant clues about the discrepancies between the desires and convictions of his inner world, and how these impulses are translated (and perhaps altered and mitigated) in social interaction. It is through these words that we may determine how speakers anchor themselves in the world, how secure they are in this stance, and the positions of power that they hold relative to their interlocutors. Moreover, these words do not simply reflect the current conditions of reality for the speaker; they also unveil the speaker in the process of enacting change, not merely describing the world but endeavouring to transform it. Many critics have speculated about this transformative power of language: J. L. Austin coined the term “felicitous performance” to describe spoken words in the process of effecting change, while Pierre Bourdieu observed that under proper social circumstances, reference and description constitute performatively “nominations” in which reality is defined, rather than merely represented (qtd. in Hanks, “Notes on Semantics” 143). Speakers thus use language to create rather than reflect the world around them: “to describe the world is to define it and therefore to set the terms on which other actors must treat it” (Hanks 143). In this project, I argue that with each linguistic encounter between speakers, we are made witnesses to these transformative moments in which the parameters of the world are defined. In Coriolanus, Volumnia famously contends that “action is eloquence” (3.2.77), and here I propose that the converse is also true; eloquence is action, and in witnessing moments of speech we are witnessing moments of dynamic change.
Ultimately, then, the details of speech matter, for to speak is to place oneself in the physical world, within a network of social relations, and to perform some sort of action in that world. It is a means of declaring affinity; no words are neutral, for the act of speaking involves agency and choice, and so to speak is “inevitably to . . . take up a position, to engage with others in a process of production, to occupy a social space” (Hanks, “Notes on Semantics” 139). In the case of Richard’s faltering kingship and subsequent deposition, an understanding of the nuances of all of his words, especially those that appear trivial or habitual, can provide a potent lens into his process of reassessment of identity and ultimate relinquishment of power. Such analysis unveils how linguistic expression works to create the identity of his character in the first place, for “if dramatic figures bring themselves into existence in speech, the resources of the linguistic medium itself are involved in their creation. Psychological interiority or disposition, usually seen as the cause of subjecthood, becomes instead the product of inferences made by interpreters” (Herman, Dramatic Discourse 45).

My project takes linguistic markers such as modal verbs and deictic tags as a locus for analysis because these words provide valuable links between the formal features of grammar and the more inscrutable zones of intersubjectivity. Words such as will and shall claim unique status not only as elements of grammar, but also as indicators of speaker and context; indeed, modal verbs and deictic markers bring together the disparate areas of grammar, the social world, and a speaker’s inner world. In her assessment of the small words “thou” and “you,” Susan Fitzmaurice claims that they are of particular interest to critics of early modern texts because they represent

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6 Important questions of what comprises dramatic character, and how we are to understand the specialized register of dramatic speech, will be addressed more thoroughly later in this introduction.
“linguistic clues” to the public and private worlds inhabited by speakers: “pronominal use provided a grammatical link between language and the social world, as well as between the social world and aspects of individuals’ mental worlds that both shape and are influenced by interaction” (Familiar Letter 46). The use of thou, then, serves to tell us something about the relationship between speaker and listener, and the perspective of the speaker himself. Similarly, a speaker’s use of shall encodes significant information not only about the social relationship between speaker and listener – often an indicator of power disparities, shall tends not to be a word used between equals – but also about the speaker’s perceptions of his utterance and the conditions in which it is spoken. Taken together, modality and deixis describe the context around a speaker and the weight that he attaches to his words. An examination of these words provides a lesson in the mechanics of language, and the interactive nature of speech in particular. Looking at how these features are exploited and even foregrounded in some of Shakespeare’s most enigmatic works – the subtly manipulative shalls of the sonnet speaker, for example, as well as the openly contested “absolute shall” of Coriolanus – offers a fresh take on reading interaction in literary and dramatic language. Knowledge of the grammatical choices available to Shakespeare, and an analysis of the various nuanced ways he exploits them, opens new windows of interpretation into many of the pertinent questions that confront us when we approach a text: How is meaning made and communicated? How should we understand characterization, motivation, and interaction in a drama? By examining easily overlooked lexical and grammatical features, this study participates in what Brian Cummings aptly calls an “archaeology of
grammar”: a close examination of the methods and patterns literary language that constitutes “an excavation of the hidden processes and recesses of discourse” (12).

The narrow paths of grammar also encode lessons about the communal nature of language, for the nuances of these types of small words – the peculiar links that they forge among speaker, grammar, and the world – point to the risk and tension that are at the heart of all communication. These words are contested and fought for in extremely interesting ways in the works under consideration in this dissertation; the effect is that the speakers represented here have a curious paradoxical faith in and disillusionment with language and communicative processes. Speakers in these texts exhibit remarkable conviction in the power of words to serve their interests, but at the same time the dangers immanent in the practices of vying over these words prompts in them a profound linguistic skepticism. The perils of social dialogue begin, as Mikhail Bakhtin notes, with the word itself; by highlighting in various ways the words that speakers seek to wield, the works under scrutiny in this project offer compelling case studies in the risks of speech.

“Reciprocal Relations” and the Risks of Speech

For what language designates and expresses is neither exclusively subjective nor exclusively objective; it effects a new mediation, a particular reciprocal relation between the two factors. Neither the mere discharge of emotion, nor the repetition of objective sound stimuli yields the characteristic meaning and form of language: language arises where the two ends are joined, so creating a new synthesis of ‘I’ and ‘world.’

- Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Vol. I

Cassirer’s assessment of language highlights its reciprocal nature, and claims that each instance of language in use involves the construction of something new, the
product of an agent coming into contact with something external. This contact zone, Cassirer suggests, is a site of transformation – it is the space between speaker and listener, or speaker and world, that initiates change. The texts that I have chosen for close study in this project – selected sonnets, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, and *Richard II* – share the burden of troubled reciprocal spaces. Each of these texts depicts an uneasy synthesis, a particularly charged border between “I” and “world.” The themes that I explore in this dissertation – particularly threats inherent in communication, and (often failed) bids to stake or reclaim power through words – seem especially resonant in these works. Collectively, the texts represent variations on the collisions between characters that bring the small words into sharp focus, and their particular utility lies in their insistence that we pay specific attention to the “telling words” that are central to my project. In the chapters that follow, I will examine linguistic collisions between speakers, with a specific focus on contested grammatical markers, to consider how some of Shakespeare’s most compelling speakers negotiate threats to their modes of self-reference, their strategies of self-positioning, and their responses to the aggressive conditions of social linguistic exchange.

While all four texts under scrutiny in this project share similar anxieties about communication and highlight the boundary between self and world, in terms of my analysis they may usefully be regarded as two sets of pairs. The sonnets and *Troilus and Cressida* demonstrate similar preoccupations with value, and with the sinister inscrutability of others, and the vulnerability of the “I” in an environment where even sensory capacity – information assimilated through eyes and ears – cannot be trusted. These works further display remarkable engagement with linguistic performance in
troubled social interactions. My first chapter will focus on Shakespeare’s sonnets, poems that I consider condensed forms of interaction, following the contention that they are “less the isolated expression of an ‘I’ than a social dialogue, albeit with only one speaker” (Magnusson, “Shakespeare’s Sonnets” 630). Because they are engaged with the details of linguistic performance in troubled interaction, the sonnets provide an effective point of entry into the fraught zone of intersubjectivity named by Cassirer, and into the strategies employed by speakers implicated in this space. This chapter introduces themes that will be consistent threads in my treatment in Chapter Two of *Troilus and Cressida*, and, indeed, throughout the rest of my study, most notably concerns of self-preservation that turn on questions of speech and interpretation, and the awareness that one’s words are always, in Bakhtin’s judgment, “half someone else’s” (*Dialogic Imagination* 293). Schalkwyk asserts that “the sonnets enact the degree to which people belong both to themselves and to others. The voice that speaks in the sonnets is neither wholly ‘solitary’ nor entirely public. It is both the centre of a singular manifold of feelings, attitudes, and passions, and at the same time continuously displaced by its necessary acknowledgement of a world of others” (*Speech and Performance* 6). This “world of others” extends from an audience of one in the sonnets to a wide network of intrusive interlocutors in *Troilus and Cressida*, a play that demonstrates the perils of immersion in a heteroglossic environment. The forms of talk that are emphasized in *Troilus and Cressida*, such as gossip and overheard conversations, provide a pertinent basis for an examination of the risks that speakers take when they participate in the system of shared language.
While the focus in the sonnets and *Troilus and Cressida* remains primarily on private and interpersonal modes of language – disrupted communication between lovers, or among small groups – in *Coriolanus* and *Richard II* this troubled language extends to very public forums. Indeed, there are compelling reasons for regarding these latter plays as complementary. Both inhabit the margins of tragedy, placing focus on a self-interested hero who has ‘quite lost the hearts’ of those he represents, and whose political ineptitude prompts public denunciation and death. When these plays have been compared in criticism, Coriolanus and Richard are often set in opposition to one another: Coriolanus the language-shunning master of action as an effective foil for Richard the able rhetorician. Yet both characters are caught up in similar battles over the right to speak, and more specifically over the right to lay claim to authoritative and designatory words. The respective discussions of these plays in the chapters that follow features substantial attention to a moment of linguistic reckoning in each text: the “absolute shall” scene in *Coriolanus*, and the deposition scene in *Richard II*. These are, in a sense, parallel scenes of public jousting over the right to speak a specific word; it might be said that the latter scene comprises a more ritualized version of the former. A close reading of the powerful words in these moments shows the mechanics of the transformative moment of power switching hands. Both Coriolanus and Richard are publicly shamed, stripped of the linguistic mastery that each sees as his birthright, and is forced into new models of self-definition. The collision of personal and political dovetails into a tension between social position and subjective identity, and the words that are fought over act as flashpoints for this intersection.
Because my project is concerned with verbal interaction, many dramatic texts might be suitable candidates for study. Crises of linguistic interaction are certainly foregrounded in other plays, and especially in the tragedies; indeed, the general conditions of tragedy – conflict between agents in a “rotten” or rapidly changing world – naturally lend themselves to disrupted or threatening linguistic encounters. A number of works stand out as possible objects of analysis: *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus* are particularly suited to an examination of antagonistic linguistic collisions; *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* are plays in which concerns about soured interaction and the threatening influence of others are central; and works such as *Measure for Measure* even put the intricacies of modal wordplay on ostentatious display. While there is rich potential in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as subjects for the type of linguistic analysis that I am employing in this project, the texts that I have chosen for study have particular resonance. Relevant to my approach, which focuses on the shared spaces between words and speakers, is the marginal nature of each of these texts, and the communication breakdowns that are prominently advertised. The language of the sonnets (a liminal half-private, half-performative type of speech) highlights the risks of communication, the loss of self that is a threat in all shared language, and the frightening possibility that another speaker can render one’s own word a lie. *Troilus and Cressida* represents a communicative experiment in ways that the other texts

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7 In emphasizing the role of the “small words” of linguistic encounters, my project builds on the important work that has already been done on other aspects of social dialogue in Shakespeare. In particular, Lynne Magnusson has focused on the social aspects and situated nature of speech and dramatic language in innovative ways. She discusses the dialogic aspects of speech in *King Lear* in her essay “Dialogue” in *Reading Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language*, and she devotes extensive discussion to *King Lear* and *Othello* in respective chapters of *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*. William Dodd considers linguistic collisions in *Measure for Measure* in his essay “Destined Livery? Character and Person in Shakespeare,” and George T. Wright offers a brief discussion of modal verbs in this play in a chapter on *Measure for Measure* in *Hearing the Measures: Shakespearean and Other Inflections*. 
(indeed, that few other works of Shakespeare) do not; thematically and linguistically unstable, it promotes its disintegrations of language at textual and metatextual levels, and features exactly the kinds of crises of interaction that throw contested words into relief. *Coriolanus* showcases the tension and antagonism of clashing speakers, and asks us to pay attention to their words in specific and interesting ways. Finally, amid the overlapping forces of tragedy and history in *Richard II*, we are offered a virtual spectacle of words, formalized linguistic encounters in which loaded words and names are openly fought for. Additionally, while I do not wish to make claims for a stylistics of tragedy, the fact that these works have an arm’s-length relationship with tragedy makes them particularly apt subjects for the examination of linguistic processes of self-positioning. These texts are unbound by the trajectory of dramas such as *Lear* or *Hamlet*, implicated in what Janet Adelman calls “the end-stopped genre of tragedy” (*Suffocating Mothers* 73), with the result that the thorny boundaries between self and world (always a focus in tragedy) are open to particular manipulation and scrutiny. Typically, “the expected conflict in a tragedy [is] that within the hero” (Doran 185); in the works that I have selected, the conflict is turned outward, so that speakers are explicitly entangled in problems of self-positioning relative to their interlocutors. The linguistic markers that form the cornerstone of my analysis are directly engaged with this negotiation between self and others, and these tend to be isolated or made acute in the works under consideration in this project.

By undertaking to explore crises of interaction through the lens of grammar, this study strives to answer a challenge issued to contemporary readers and critics by Kiernan Ryan. In a discussion of Shakespeare’s late plays, Ryan determines that “[i]t is
to the deliberate detail of their language and form that we must look.” His directive might be extended to the wider body of Shakespeare’s work: “What makes these plays still strike us as enigmatic and elusive is neither their engrossment in recondite topical allusions nor their veiled subscription to the perennial mysteries of myth and religion. It is the fact that we have not yet mastered their formal grammar and poetic idiom, and so have not yet learned how to read them” (Last Plays 18). In the introduction to his edition of Shakespeare’s sonnets, which devotes meticulous attention to words big and small, Stephen Booth wryly attempts to “forestall complaints that I am promoting accidents of language to an exalted position that they do not deserve.” He observes that the value of these “inevitiabilities and accidents” can be said to be exaggerated “only if criticism is assumed to be a scorecard for rating the artist’s ingenuity, and if poetic effects are taken to include only those that either import something . . . or call attention to their artificiality.” Moreover, Booth contends, to disregard the banal details of language is to ignore a key component of meaning-making in general:

Insignificant and/or unintentional verbal effects figure largely in casual conversation and in good and bad workaday prose; they trigger our instinct for making and hearing puns, and they are often the unsought key by which we know when a paragraph addressed to the gas company is or is not as we want it. Such non-signifying patterns and tensions also occur in great poems – as little noticed and as undeniably there as the hundreds of slightly different leaf shapes and shades of green in a middle-sized maple tree in the back yard; they contribute to a great poem’s identity just as – and just what – they contribute elsewhere. A literary effect need not be special to be.

(xi, emphasis removed)

Attention to these “unsought key[s],” the nuts and bolts of language, is always warranted. The banal details of dialogue provide us with a valuable means of access to the direct site of conflict, the uneasy synthesis between “I” and “world” that is the unique territory of language.
**Language, Literature and Historical Formalism**

My project is concerned with the interchange between literature and linguistics, a crossover that has a rich and involved history and that has yielded impressive results. In the early twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure’s seminal *Course in General Linguistics* helped to remove the scientific tether on the field of linguistics. In a series of lectures never intended for publication, Saussure suggested that linguistic forms and methods could have widespread applications in any communicative system – not only written and spoken language – and his theories became the foundation for the discipline-spanning study of semiotics. These multidisciplinary tendencies were also evident in the fusion of the work of the linguist Roman Jakobson and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss; as Nigel Fabb summarizes, a meeting between the two figureheads left Lévi-Strauss convinced that “phonology (the study of linguistic sounds) could provide a methodological basis for all the human sciences, and thus laid the path towards the French structuralism of the 1950s and 1960s, in which linguistics inspired a range of disciplines” (3). While the binary-dismantling queries of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida and the ensuing practices of post-structuralism have helped to clarify some shortcomings in structuralist frameworks, my dissertation by its very nature (as a literary study rooted in linguistic approaches) cannot help but be coloured by structuralist influence. As the epigraph from George Steiner suggests, structuralism has left its trace throughout this study; distinctions such as Saussure’s ideas of *langue* and *parole*, and Chomsky’s contiguous notions of *competence* and *performance* inform my understanding of the special characteristics of speech in
general and dramatic language in particular. Jakobson’s reading of language production as a result of the processes of selection and combination – and his wider assertions about the self-consciousness of language production, that in using language speakers draw attention to its formal structure – underscores my assumptions about sources of meaning that derive not only from lexical semantics, but also from the choices that speakers make.

While structuralist theories lurk at the periphery of this project, they are tempered by a focus on interaction. Because it considers language in use, utterances that are situated in specific contexts, my project also draws from the resources of pragmatics. Part of the legacy left to contemporary literary scholars by the structuralists and their deconstructionist successors is the ever-broadening application of linguistic methods. The abstract linguistic theory of Saussure – with its Platonic trees and “sound-images” – has given way to theories that are more grounded in actual, experiential contexts of communication. The early formalist assumption that linguistic form is distinct from the world of objective reality, governed by a unified system of symbols in which meanings are arbitrary and unhinged from their points of reference, has been steadily undercut. The criticism of the past several decades has progressively recognized and explored the interactive nature of linguistic practice: the act of communication that undergirds linguistic exchange is necessarily social, and is thus bound up in a system of relational forces and counter-forces. This means that

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8 Cf. Levinson’s definition of “pragmatics”: “just as, traditionally, syntax is taken to be the study of the combinatorial properties of words and their parts, and semantics to be the study of meaning, so pragmatics is the study of language usage” (5). Levinson refines this broad definition by invoking Chomsky’s distinction between competence and performance: “pragmatics is concerned solely with performance principles of language use” (7).

9 Grammarians, for their part, have also moved toward a more relational model of interpretation. In his sketch of the history of discourse analysis, Malcolm Coulthard points to the arguments made by Ross,
potential objects of study – such as literary texts – are part of this system of social
exchange, and a linguistic approach must acknowledge that meaning is derived
relationally. As Jonathan Culler explains in his influential *Structuralist Poetics*: “The
notion that linguistics might be useful in studying other cultural phenomena is based on
two fundamental insights; first, that social and cultural phenomena are not simply
material objects or events but objects or events with meaning, and hence signs; and
second, that they do not have essences but are defined by a network of relations, both
internal and external” (4). In terms of my study, part of the “external” network of
relations informing my approach is historical context; I argue that the peculiar
characteristics of Shakespeare’s grammar – as well as the range of grammatical choices
open to speakers of early modern English age – directly affect the meanings that we
may attach to his lexical and grammatical choices. Equally significant to meaning-
making is the “internal” network of language, in which, as Bakhtin has shown,
utterances are dialogically constructed, always contingent and interdependent.

Despite the rich possibilities for returning to questions of form newly equipped
with developments gleaned from deconstructionist and historicist approaches, in recent
decades prevailing practice has tended to detach the study of literature from the
practice of close attention to language. My project engages with what has been called
“historical formalism,” an emerging critical approach that strives to reengage important
questions of literary structure and language without jettisoning historical concerns. The
tenets of historical formalism encourage “consideration not only of what literature says,
means, and does, but of how” and insist on “attention to the shape and composition of

McCawley, and Lakoff that “one cannot in fact describe grammar in isolation from meaning, that
powerful syntactic generalizations can be achieved by making lexical insertions at an early stage in the
generation of a sentence” (2-3).
the text-as-container and the impact they may have on the meaning and function of that content” (Cohen 14-15). It seeks to reanimate form “in an age of interdisciplinarity” (Levinson, “New Formalism” 559), and so welcomes sites of contact between disparate critical arenas, recognizing the rich potential inherent in the crossover between historicist and contemporary perspectives. My analysis here grows out of the conviction that recent developments in language criticism – categories borrowed from the studies of grammar, linguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis – offer fruitful new approaches to literary texts. In developing a methodology for this project, I strive for an interdisciplinary base that combines linguistic theory with literary analysis, and that is alert to historical contexts and changes. My approach to modality is grounded in the theories of grammarians and linguists who study modal usage (as well as the broader field of modal logic) in present-day English, such as John Lyons, F. R. Palmer, and Michael Perkins. However, the methods that I develop here take into account the historical linguistic perspective provided by critics like Leslie K. Arnowick, Maurizio Gotti, and Anthony R. Warner. In this respect, my approach is in keeping with the work of scholars who have considered the interface between linguistics and literature in relation to Shakespeare, such as Lynne Magnusson, Sylvia Adamson, and Jonathan Hope. Similarly, my approach to deixis begins with the perspectives of specialists in linguistics and pragmatics, such as William F. Hanks, Stephen C. Levinson, and Lyons. My methodology combines the linguistic categories gleaned from these language

10 On the forefront of this new attention to questions of form are Levinson’s “What is New Formalism?”; Shakespeare and Historical Formalism, edited by Stephen Cohen; and Mark David Rasmussen’s Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements.

11 The work undertaken and methodologies developed by these latter critics have been strong models for my own research. Magnusson in particular has been instrumental in introducing tools borrowed from fields of linguistics and pragmatics to the study of Shakespeare, and Adamson has worked specifically on Shakespeare’s grammar.
theorists with the work of critics who apply deixis to literary texts, most notably Keir Elam, Vimala Herman, and Susan Fitzmaurice. Finally, in my treatment of the risks and processes of social dialogue, I begin with the foundational theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and V. N. Voloshinov, while at the same time I engage with the post-Bakhtinian theories offered by critics like Magnusson and Harry Berger Jr. My project strives to discover the value in applying the tools of linguistics to the study of literature, while avoiding some of the pitfalls of some older approaches, which tend to be mired in a myopic formalism. While some compelling readings emerge from the old formalist perspectives, there are also new tools and wider perspectives of which we might make very good use. My aim in this dissertation, then, is to participate in a wider movement to repair a longstanding gap in the field of early modern literature, which over recent decades has been preoccupied with critical approaches that have failed to adequately address the complex question of form.

**Shakespeare’s Words: The Unique Linguistic Code of Early Modern English**

While the small words that concern me here – the grammatical commonplaces that function to express such relevant information as speaker position and attitude – are always worthy of interest, it may be argued that many of Shakespeare’s small words, a product of the dynamic linguistic code of early modern English, are even more so. The period concurrent with Shakespeare’s lifetime (1564-1616) represents an epoch in the development of the English language. Shakespeare’s English was, in many respects, a language on the cusp: it was engaged in the process of written standardization, its
global status was on the rise (Hope 243), and it was rapidly expanding through extensive borrowing and coinage: “the period 1500-1659 saw the introduction of between 10,000 and 25,000 new words into the language, with the practice of neologism culminating in the Elizabethan period” (Blank 40). In addition, the language was transforming into what is recognized as “modern” English, gradually shedding many of its earlier syntactic and lexical forms. These factors converged to produce a fruitful and varied pool of linguistic resources, ideal fodder for writers, and particularly playwrights, whose craft thrives on the presentation of modish, “exhilaratingly modern” dialogue (Craig 32). Jonathan Hope maintains that Shakespeare’s use of an English in transition produces “an interplay between the old and the new” and he posits that Shakespeare’s active exploitation of his unique linguistic opportunities is currently “one of the least-known glories” of his plays (“Natiue English” 255).

There have been some efforts to consider Shakespeare’s grammar in its historical linguistic context, most prominently in work on the personal pronouns “you” and “thou.” Fitzmaurice notes that while “[t]he personal pronominal system has been a primary grammatical tool for expressing social distance and intimacy in English,” in early modern English the personal pronominal system “provided speakers with an additional, grammatical, means of putting people into a social hierarchy relative to themselves” (Familiar Letter 44).12 As mentioned above, Fitzmaurice’s suggestion that

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12 Fitzmaurice argues that “speakers could distinguish between an addressee they considered superior and one they considered inferior by means of their choice of the second pronoun form. The linguistic system accommodated an increasingly weak number distinction (singular (‘thou’) and plural (‘you’)), which had adapted to two social ‘semantics’ or indices: a power semantic that distinguished between superior (‘you’) and inferior (‘thou’) relative to the speaker, and a solidarity semantic that distinguished between social distance (‘you’) and proximity (‘thou’) to the speaker” (Familiar Letter 44-45). Cf. Magnusson, who has worked on “thou” and “you” in Shakespeare’s sonnets, and notes that such variation encourages an exchange of insight between literary and linguistic scholars (“Dialogue Scripts” 170). Other discussions of Shakespeare’s use of you and thou include Andrew Gurr’s “You and Thou in
these words act as bridges between disparate areas of a grammar and a speaker’s social and inner worlds is particularly resonant. It is this capacity to forge multiple connections – between individual words themselves and the social context in which they are embedded, as well as between the words and the subjective perspectives of their speakers – that invests certain small words with particular significance, and renders them especially rich resources for literary analysis.

Because the modal auxiliaries are central to the critical framework of this project, it is worthwhile to consider the historical linguistic context of this category. Exemplars of the transitional nature of English in the early modern period, the modals represent a locus of linguistic change. They constitute a distinctive category in that they were “originally main lexical verbs (preterit-present verbs)” that could occur alone in a clause (Fitzmaurice, “Tentativeness and Insistence” 10); however, they gradually became grammaticalized, moving away from their position as primary verbs to act as auxiliaries. The end of the sixteenth century in particular witnessed a significant evolution in the semantic and grammatical application of modal verbs. This transitional period saw the modals retain remnants of their lexical meanings while simultaneously fulfilling a grammatical function. As Norman Blake explains, “during the early Elizabethan period they developed their role as modals, though by Shakespeare’s time they had not entirely lost their original characteristics” (90); hence the verb *will* could

Shakespeare’s Sonnets”; Jonathan Hope’s “Second Person Singular Pronouns in Records of Early Modern ‘Spoken’ English”; and Penelope Freedman’s *Power and Passion in Shakespeare’s Pronouns*. These studies typically contrast the use of the intimate or pejorative *thou* and the more formal *you*. Gurr argues that Shakespeare manipulated the changing semantic associations of these pronouns of address, which were undergoing a shift in emphasis so that “the use of ‘thou’ became rather self-consciously a ‘literary’ usage by the 1590s” (13), to create in the sonnets the impression of gradually shifting intimacy. Such a position is markedly relevant to my endeavour, first because it acknowledges Shakespeare’s attunement to his changing linguistic resources, and second because it showcases how forms of address can act as subtle gauges of perspective and relative affinity or distance.
signify futurity, in terms of grammar, and desire, in terms of notional meaning. Similarly, *shall* retained a strong sense of obligation and insistence that distinguished it from *will*. The modals of this period, then, were more fluid than their contemporary counterparts, and their lingering “non-auxiliary features” produced distinct semantic effects (Rissanen 232).

In addition, while the modal verbs in present-day English still retain a flavour of their old semantic influence – there is a discernable difference in the degree of commitment and obligation between *he shall return tomorrow* and *he will return tomorrow*, for example – they are more readily transposable today than they were in Shakespeare’s time. Specifically, whereas in present-day English words like *shall* and *will* are essentially formal variants – in most dialects, few conditions remain under which one and not the other is appropriate\(^\text{13}\) – this was not the case in early modern usage. Rather, the modals are part of “the linguistic changes in progress in the early modern period whose alternates . . . are not regarded as interchangeable” (Hope, *Authorship* 4). Indeed, Hope points specifically to the Elizabethan stage as a site where we might witness the distinctions between *shall* and *will*, differences that provide rich linguistic raw material for creative young playwrights. These differences give way only over time, as *will* gradually grows to replace *shall* in various contexts of usage.

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\(^{13}\) One instance where the old semantic distinctions might be strongly detected in present-day English is in first person questions; compare *Shall I call you a cab?* with *Will I call you a cab?* *Shall* is “more appropriate in first person questions because its obligation sense implies external imposition of duties; thus the question can be construed as asking for confirmation from the addressee concerning the speaker’s adoption of this particular responsibility. The same question with *will* sounds odd because the older ‘desire’ sense of *will* seems to come through, suggesting that the speaker is quite inappropriately asking whether s/he wants to call a cab” (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 16).
An understanding of the nuanced differences between present-day modal auxiliaries and those employed by Shakespeare affect our interpretation of everything from “the literal sense of a passage” to “the messages that grammatical choices can also convey about the stylistic level of a scene, the tone of a dialogue, or the social status of a character” (Adamson, “Shakespeare’s Grammar” 211). As will be discussed further in the following chapters, I do not mean to suggest that every instance of shall and will in Shakespeare is strongly marked, any more than I would suggest that each time characters use the pronoun I they engage in deliberate and self-conscious subjective emphasis. Shall, will, I: these are, after all, “function” words that are common and necessary components of speech. However, they are also loaded words with the potential for a wide range of meanings, ripe for just the type of lexical exploitation so profitable for writers and playwrights. As Magnusson notes, it is imperative that we are alert to the peculiar linguistic formations of early modern English, and that we “consider the extent to which they become embedded in social, political, or religious arrangements of the time, the ways in which they are evaluated by language users and their addressees in ordinary life, and their potential for artistic expression” (“Donne’s Language” 198-99). Because shall and will are not interchangeable options in Shakespeare’s English, and because they are so closely tied to impulses vital to subjectivity, interaction, conflict, and disparate perspectives on the future (key components of intersubjective drama), they deserve our close attention.

Just as the linguistic climate of Shakespeare’s English is of increasing interest to critics, the language of Shakespeare more generally has recently been the subject of

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14 Hope contends that shall and will cannot properly be called variants until the eighteenth century (Authorship 7). Cf. Blake (93) and Fitzmaurice (11), both of whom also claim that it was not until the eighteenth century that these words could refer purely to temporality without strong semantic colouring.
renewed attention. Little more than a decade ago, Patricia Parker remarked in her landmark *Shakespeare From the Margins* that concerns of language and wordplay were subject to an enduring critical ennui, made victims of a sense of “inconsequentiality . . . not only by the influence of neoclassicism but by continuing critical assumptions about the transparency (or unimportance) of the language of the plays” (13). While prevailing practice has tended to detach the study of literature from the study of language, the years following Parker’s complaint have featured a resurgence of interest in the formal and stylistic aspects of Shakespeare. Recent innovative work includes *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts*, edited by Russ McDonald and featuring interesting language-based readings from Stephen Booth, James R. Siemon, and Helen Vendler. Magnusson’s *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* represents an important move to orient Shakespeare’s language as a social phenomenon, and to bring together close reading and socio-historical perspectives. David Schalkwyk’s *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Plays* also reshapes old formal categories such as speech act theory, so that they take into account the social and performative aspects of language. These works offer pioneering readings that more adequately address the intricate complexities of language in use, and both have deeply influenced my own approaches to reading Shakespeare’s language.

By focusing on the minutiae of grammar – and taking as a strong focus the significance of modal verbs – in analyzing literary texts, my project is in keeping with a small but growing body of work. Recent interest in the convergence of historicist and linguistic approaches has yielded some fruitful results. Hugh Craig has provided compelling evidence about the frequency of modal verbs in early modern English
drama, and Fitzmaurice has discussed the nuances of modal expressions in the letters of early modern women such as Margaret Cavendish. Recently, Magnusson has drawn attention to the neglected “monosyllables” of Donne’s poetry, sermons, and letters, arguing that words such as the modal auxiliary verbs have much to tell us about “reasoning and social negotiation” (“Donne’s Language” 193). Similarly, Brian Cummings puts modal analysis to illuminating use in his discussion of theology and grammar in The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace. Together, these studies point toward a growing recognition of the potential inherent in applying grammatical close reading to literary texts, particularly in areas that concern subjectivity and the purposeful ways in which that speakers unveil themselves linguistically.

**Shared Language, Identity, and Instability**

I have been raising several suggestions that fall under a larger assumption about the importance of language to identity-making: that the interactive and reciprocal contexts of speech must be considered; that a speaker’s drive to achieve a desired end undergirds all utterances; that even the rote words of routine conversations encode meaningful clues about a speaker’s stance. The notion that language is merely a tool to communicate or interpret human experience in the world has been significantly undermined in recent decades; as various commentators have argued, language is in fact an immanent condition of human experience, inseparable from our understanding of what it means to exist. Philosophers of identity have long claimed language as a prerequisite for personhood; in general, the necessary conditions for persons include
the capacity for verbal communication, and this form of expression reveals a particular type of consciousness – persons “are distinguished from other entities by being conscious in some special way” (Dennet 177). Some critics extend this argument to assert that consciousness itself is linguistically grounded – the point is not that persons are capable of articulating their consciousness, but that this “special” awareness grows out of articulation. Emile Benveniste’s landmark *Problems in General Linguistics* vehemently refutes the “pure fiction” which posits some primordial age in human history in which language emerged through cumulative linguistic encounters, gradually moving along a scale from rudimentary to advanced. “Language is the nature of man, and he did not fabricate it . . . We can never go back to man separated from language and we shall never see him inventing it. We shall never get back to man reduced to himself and exercising his wits to conceive of the existence of another. It is a speaking man whom we find in the world, a man speaking to another man, and language provides the very definition of man” (Benveniste 224). Language, in Benveniste’s terms, does not enable us to understand who we are, but rather determines who we are. There can be no notion of ourselves and others that is not rooted in language: “It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because language alone

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15 Philosopher Daniel Dennet summarizes the following generally accepted conditions that a being must fulfill in order to fall under the umbrella of ‘person’: they must be rational beings, to which states of consciousness are ascribed; whether someone is a person depends in some way on an attitude taken toward it; the object toward which this personal stance is taken must be capable of reciprocating in some way; persons must be capable of verbal communication; they are distinguished from other entities by being conscious in some special way; there is a way in which persons are conscious in which no other species is conscious (176-77).

16 Others theorize that this emphasis on language is simply an outgrowth from earlier ideas of subjectivity. Julia Kristeva, for example, comments on the intellectual heritage of “the linguistic revival” of recent decades, arguing that it is “based on the rehabilitation of the Cartesian conception of language as an act carried out by a subject. On close inspection, as certain linguists (from Jakobson to Kuroda) have shown in recent years, this ‘speaking subject’ turns out in fact to be that transcendental ego which, in Husserl’s view, underlies any and every predictive synthesis if we ‘put in brackets’ logical or linguistic externality” (27).
establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality” (224). Moreover, it is not only subjectivity (by which I mean the understanding of oneself as a subject with an autonomous consciousness), but also identity (that is, the recognition of oneself as a subject with unique talents and the ability to effect change outside of themselves) that originates in language.

Indeed, the potential to establish the subject is the definitive feature of a language; Benveniste pays particularly close attention to the personal pronouns, noting that their ubiquity deceptively makes them appear insignificant: “The very terms we are using here, I and you, are not to be taken as figures but as linguistic forms indicating ‘person.’ It is a remarkable fact – but who would notice it, since it is so familiar? – that the ‘personal pronouns’ are never missing from among the signs of a language, no matter what its type, epoch, or region may be. A language without expression of person cannot be imagined” (225). Some observers question whether a subject’s discursive I can or should be understood as a strict expression of identity; they posit that there is a difference between using I to designate oneself in a dialogue and conceptualizing oneself as an autonomous entity, capable of possessing and expressing various beliefs, hopes, and impressions. This line of critical thought proposes a distinction between “subjectivity in its technical linguistic sense (where it is roughly synonymous with indexicality) and subjectivity as it is more widely understood (meaning consciousness or selfhood)” (Adamson, “Emphatic Deixis” 197). However, this polarization is misleading; there is a causal progression from the “technical linguistic” form of self-reference and the notion of conscious self-hood. The I of the linguistic exchange acts as the site of origin from which identity emerges, because it establishes the self as a
distinct and independent being.\textsuperscript{17} Benveniste explores this notion in terms of the recognition of difference that is implicit in using \textit{I}: “Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use \textit{I} only when I am speaking to someone who will be \textit{you} in my address” (224).\textsuperscript{18}

While it is true that language is fundamental to the expression of identity, that it constitutes who a speaker is and establishes the position that he or she holds in the world, the system of linguistic representation is complicated by the fact that it is dynamic and collective. One of the cornerstones of linguistic pragmatics is the premise that linguistic communication is the product of an agreed-upon and predictable code that participants recognize: “in order for speakers to communicate with one another they must share the same conventional system of linguistic rules . . . semantics is the system of the ideal speaker-hearer, the system of conventions that everyone must learn in order to derive propositional content, successfully convey implicatures, and perform felicitous speech acts” (Hanks, “Notes on Semantics” 146-47). Central to this underlying system of conventions is the fact that language is a social system, in which all speakers have the opportunity to participate and to determine its boundaries and outcomes. Speakers are at the centre of this system “as makers of their own forms of representation, arising out of contingent needs which they experience in interaction” (King 291). The same features of language that enable speakers to enact real change in the world, and to establish themselves as agents of that change, acquire the peculiar

\textsuperscript{17}Cf. Roman Jakobson, who comments on the ostensible simplicity of the personal pronouns, a guise which occludes their significant contributions to notions of selfhood: “The indexical symbols, and in particular the personal pronouns, which the Humboldtian tradition conceives of as the most elementary and primitive stratum of language, are, on the contrary, a complex category where code and message overlap” (\textit{On Language} 389).

\textsuperscript{18}Jacques Lacan famously promoted the concept of identity through differentiation in his explanation of initiation into the symbolic system of language. His ideas parallel Benveniste’s in that they assert that an individual enters the social world by recognizing him- or herself as a distinct subject.
significance that comes with being shared by all speakers alike. In terms of its basic linguistic resources – the capacity for a speaker to use the word *I* and render herself a subject – language is indubitably unrestricted. While relative social power determines important advantages for interlocutors in linguistic exchanges – for example, the speaker with the upper hand may control the turn-taking sequence, or feel freer to retort without concern for the “face” of the addressee\(^\text{19}\) – it is nevertheless true that the fundamental tenets of agency and self-establishment in language are openly available to all speakers. Further, while the context of exchange heavily determines linguistic advantage, it also ensures that a speaker’s words are at least partly ungoverned and illimitable, subject to the web of internal and external relations that the context, and the shared linguistic resource base, entails. As Gunther Kress asserts, the nature of language is essentially an interactive and collaborative system, with each speaker playing a part both in using and in shaping that system:

[I]f you have a theory of representation in which you posit an autonomous, formal system, a stable system, whether it is the Saussurian notion of langue/parole or the Chomskyian one of competence/performance in which ‘the individual is a user of the system but has no real effect on the system,’ it places the individual precisely that way. There is a system which is stable, the individual uses it more or less competently, and that is the extent of the conceptualization of the action of the human subject. But if you want to imagine a different kind of subjectivity and at the same time a plausible theory of representational systems – for instance, the fact that they change over history in specific ways – you need a different account. If they change over history, either they do it by some kind of magic or an inherent dynamic which hasn’t been discovered, or they do it by some kind of kind of social action which in the end is the action of many individual social actors in the system, with the system and on the system. (qtd. in King 285)

\(^{19}\) In the terminology of discourse analysis, “face” is a double-edged concept concerning the seemingly disparate desires of interlocutors to be approved of and also to be free from the imposition of others (Brown and Levinson 61).
Kress’s model emphasizes the agency of each subject using language, and characterizes communication as a dynamic phenomenon in which each participant has transformative potential. Moreover, as theorists such as Bakhtin and V. N. Voloshinov have argued, the relational nature of language permeates all of its levels, from the macro-forms of communication to the micro-level of words themselves: “As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 293).

As Bakhtin’s appraisal of shared words suggests, the dark flipside of necessary linguistic collaboration is the impossibility of absolute control. Because the system of language is both at our disposal and out of our hands, speakers are simultaneously master and servant. Language thus offers a curious double edge, bequeathing power with the same stroke that undercuts it:

Language trips us up as much as it carries us along, since it belongs to no one and lies within no one’s power. The user of language is dealing in borrowed currency on borrowed time. Agency in language is a peculiar form of illusion in that the forms of agency are already prescribed in linguistic terms. Before I can call myself my self I have given myself away in language that is not my own even as I make my claim on it. (Cummings 13)

Instability and communality are the troubling threads that run through the system of social language, and they encumber the process of self-representation through speech. In this project, I argue that this insecurity is present even in routine exchanges; speakers are perpetually aware that even the most personal of words – those used to designate oneself and to declare one’s stance in the world – are never fully their own.
In the works under scrutiny in this dissertation, the necessary reciprocity built in to all linguistic encounters is an ongoing source of struggle.

**Speech and Dramatic Discourse**

Because this project employs tools from linguistics and discourse analysis, bringing these fields of language study to bear on literary language, it is useful to consider some differences between these modes of language, and the systems that underlie them. While an absolute division between written and spoken language is untenable, the assumption that there are qualitative differences between the two is a commonplace.\(^{20}\) Clearly, there is overlap and interdependence between written and spoken language systems, but there are also significant divergences, perhaps most obviously in the respective contexts of production of speech and writing. Speakers have at their disposal various paralinguistic cues – features such as body language (including posture, stance, and facial expression), as well as tone and volume of voice – to shape their utterances and condition their responses, resources which writers lack. However, temporal pressure is much more acute for the speaker than for the writer. Compared to writers, speakers use language in a context that demands a sort of sensory multi-tasking:

> The speaker must monitor what it is that is he has just said, and determine whether it matches his intentions, while he is uttering his current phrase and monitoring that, and simultaneously planning his next utterance and fitting that into the overall pattern of what he wants to say and monitoring, moreover, not only his own performance but its reception by his hearer. He has no permanent record of what he

\(^{20}\) Cf. Jacques Derrida’s attack on this rigid binarism: “There is a circle here, for if one rigorously distinguishes language and speech, code and message, schema and usage, etc., and if one wishes to do justice to the two postulates thus enunciated, one does not know where to begin, nor how something can begin in general, be it language or speech” (*Positions* 27).
has said earlier, and only under unusual circumstances does he have notes which remind him what he wants to say next. (Brown and Yule 5)

The most striking demands on the speaker in contrast to the writer concern the considerable number of concurrent tasks required of them – such as anticipating rejoinders and reflecting on what has already been said during the act of speaking – and the time given to complete them. As Brown and Yule suggest, writers benefit from the luxury of a temporal gap between the production of their words and their reception by a prospective audience: they may pause, reflect on what has been written, and make changes if desired. Speakers, meanwhile, must contend with the pressing awareness of time at their backs: “Whereas the speaker is under considerable pressure to keep talking during the period allotted to him, the writer is characteristically under no such pressure. Whereas the speaker knows that any words that pass his lips will be heard by his interlocutor and, if they are not what he intends, he will have to undertake active, public ‘repair,’ the writer can cross out and rewrite in the privacy of his study” (5).

While this study is attuned to the differences between written and spoken language, it is principally concerned with the special category of dramatic speech. The language of the theatre occupies a curious space between and beyond the conventions of written and spoken language, as well as between literary and non-literary language. Alan Sinfield encourages a recognition of “the peculiarity of dramatic language” and the fact that drama functions through the “direct interplay” of utterances: “[n]ot having as its final end a reading, unlike the literary text tout court, the drama is structured verbally as language that acts . . . and that refers to the situation and to the space in which it is pronounced” (124-25). As written language emulating speech, with the intention of performance, dramatic language employs strategies and acquires meanings
that are peculiar to the context of the stage. In his discussion of theatrical semiosis, Elam explains the peculiar transformational power ascribed to theatre, citing the Russian formalist Petr Bogatyrev’s thesis “that the stage radically transforms all objects and bodies defined within it, bestowing upon them an overriding signifying power which they lack – or which at least is less evident – in their normal social functions” (7). In addition to the objects and bodies of which the stage makes signs, we can include the category of language, for the signifying power of words on stage is inextricable from their theatrical context.\(^\text{21}\) The words at the centre of this project have the distinctive characteristic of being written representations of speech, so that they are undergirded by specific assumptions: they are to be understood as being spoken aloud, shared with an interlocutor, and subject to the off-the-cuff production that is a feature of time-bound dialogue. Indeed, despite the tag of ‘literariness’ ascribed to dramatic dialogue, it shares a foundation with non-literary discourse that perhaps runs deeper than its affinities to other literary modes. The conventions and characteristics of conversation are relevant to dramatic language because both exist in a context of social interaction; both are “speech exchange systems, which sets them apart from poetic genres like the ode or the lyric, or narrator language in the novel” (Herman, “Deixis and Space” 3). It is this common base – the rules and nuances of interactive and

\(^{21}\) Of course, this enhanced signification is to a certain extent symptomatic of all literary language. In a discussion of poetry, Culler offers the following distinctions between poetic language and the language of something more prosaic, such as a letter: “The poem is not related to time in the same way, nor has it the same interpersonal status. Although in the act of interpreting it we may appeal to external contexts, telling ourselves empirical stories … we are aware that such stories are fictional constructs which we employ as interpretive devices. The situation to which we appeal is not that of the actual linguistic act but that of a linguistic act which we take the poem to be imitating – directly or deviously … we are aware that our interest in the poem depends on the fact that it is something other than the record of an empirical speech act” (165). Yet the situation “to which we appeal” in making meaning of dramatic language is complicated even further by its close adherence to the patterns of “empirical speech act[s].” Dramatic language urges us to succumb its mimetic power, to erase its boundaries of artifice even as we are reminded of them at every turn.
‘realistic’ speech behaviour – that dramatic productions expose and exploit. While
dramatic speech is clearly distinct from “actual” speech, I am inclined to agree with the
observation that “[d]iscourse strategies in fictional worlds are more often than not
remarkably attuned to mechanisms in the ‘real’ world” (Erminda 842). That is, the
conventions and strategies of spoken language deployed on stage tend to be in line with
other non-literary types of speech.22

Additionally, the language of drama, like spoken language generally, is
situated; it is embedded in a unique spatio-temporal context, and involves certain
participants who are themselves anchored in a predetermined space. William Dodd
suggests that the idiosyncrasies of dramatic language throw the conventions and
conduct of relationships between participants into relief: “Stage dialogue, by its very
nature, exposes acts of verbal manipulation and violence to a kind of scrutiny not
normally possible in real life and in doing so sets up implicit norms of ‘correct’
interpersonal discourse” (157). The personages onstage are, prima facie, speakers –
their language is our foremost avenue of access to their character, and their words
comprise the foundation of our judgments. As Herman contends, dramatic figures
“have no existence that is verifiable or falsifiable except within the bounds of the
language of their construction of the text (or script) which may be variously interpreted

22 Cf. Deborah Tannen’s suggestion that dramatic dialogue “constitutes a competence model for
interaction. It is not equivalent to the dialogue spontaneously produced in interaction . . . containing
occasional rather than pervasive repetition, hesitations, slips, false starts, and so on.” Rather, “literary
dialogue distills the wheat of conversation from the chaff of hesitations, fillers, hedges, and repetitions”
(261). A thorough discussion of the differences between literary representations of speech and everyday
speech is beyond the scope of this project. For the purposes of this discussion, the mimetic qualities or
real-life analogues of dramatic speech are of less importance than its exposure of the processes of verbal
language. As Herman succinctly claims, the pertinent question is one “of mechanics, in the exploitation
by dramatists of underlying speech conventions, principles and ‘rules’ of use . . . [these] conventions of
use which underlie spontaneous communication in everyday life are precisely those which are exploited
and manipulated by dramatists in their constructions of speech types and forms in plays” (Dramatic
Discourse 6).
by interested parties” (*Dramatic Discourse* 45). It is interesting that the very root of
the word ‘person’ – *persona*, a mask through which sound travels – derives from the
terminology of the stage and has at its core the notion of communication. At a
fundamental level, a character – a “person” – is defined by and is a creation of the
speech that he or she produces.

It should be acknowledged that there are important ways in which the language
spoken by characters onstage remains distinct from the language of social interaction.
The uniqueness of dramatic speech lies in the fact that, despite its ostensible distance
from other literary genres, and its frequent appearance of an anti-literary tilt, it remains
as subject as lyric poetry or narrative fiction to the frame of literary analysis. The
language of a dramatic production, unlike that of a conversation, has the added nuance
of being intended for the stage – words in this arena are not only representations of
speech, but also of performance. Herman identifies a stratification in the definition of
verbal discourse – because it exists in both written form and as spoken speech – and
maintains that “one [form] cannot be wholly mapped onto the other.” Further, “the
dialogue in the written text inevitably addresses a context of performance, which
requires change in mode of discourse into spoken speech by actors on stage; it is not
written lines in isolation that we are considering but their transmuted role in producing
*speech events* as material *stage events* among the bodied, *dramatis personae*” (“Deixis
and Space” 271). The conditions of the stage infuse the words of a dramatic text, so

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23 Amelie Rorty suggests that our modern understanding of “person” may be traced in part to “theater, the dramatis personae of the stage … An actor dons masks, literally *per sonae*, that through which the sound comes, the many roles he acts. A person’s roles and his place in the narrative devolve from the choices that place him in a structural system, related to others. The person thus comes to stand behind his roles, to select them and to be judged by his choices and his capacities to act out his personae in a total structure that is the unfolding of his drama” (309; cf. Herman, *Dramatic Discourse* 37-39).
that the awareness of their performative potential conditions all possible associations and meanings. Another important consequence of the context of performance is that dramatic speakers do not simply address other performers; their words are also intended for the audience offstage. The effect of this doubly-intended speech disrupts typical reception patterns, for in this case there are additional interlocutors. It is not simply the ostensible addressees on stage to whom the words matter, but also the shadow addressees in the audience, who assume the role of mere eavesdroppers even as they are, of course, just as implicated in the exchange as the performers that they are observing.

Additionally, there is a close but fraught relationship between characters onstage and speakers more generally. Character criticism has become a something of a bugbear in dramatic scholarship; as Sinfield summarizes, recent theoretical trends threaten “to make character an altogether inappropriate category of analysis” (58). Yet the fact remains that “character is a palpable emotional reality on stage” (Maguire 154), and audiences and readers must be able to react to characters as something resembling speaking persons with discernable agency and decision-making capacity:

[C]haracters give the impression that they are involved in an ongoing dynamic, in which they respond to responses . . . or to other interactional phenomena emerging here and now, in the theatrical present . . . It follows that characters endowed with metadiscursive awareness implicitly ascribe intentionality to themselves and others, thereby creating the prerequisites for the representation of decision, which Peter Szondi sees as the core of intersubjective drama. (Dodd, “Destined Livery?” 148)

While it is problematic to equate ‘character’ with subjectivity and intentionality, these features are products of what Dodd calls character “effects”: “critics who reject the post-romantic view of a character as an autonomous agent endowed with a unique inner
essence, tend to treat a character’s ‘subjectivity’ not as a location or content or property but as an effect – typically (though not uniquely) an effect of friction between discourses” (150). Indeed, it is precisely this friction – the interplay of dialogue created by characters, the intersubjective space between speakers onstage – that propels the questions of this project.

**Modality and Modal Logic**

It will be helpful here to sketch a brief account of the history of modal classification, and to outline the ways in which the philosophical, phenomenological, and linguistic threads of modal theory converge. As discussed above, the field of modality is concerned with a speaker’s stance on his or her utterance – “necessity and possibility in so far as they relate to the truth or falsity of the proposition” (Traugott and Dasher 105) and on the state of things in the world; modalized statements communicate putative desires and duties, and express the speaker’s beliefs in what is actual, what is necessary, and what is possible (Lyons 787). Indeed, the ability to conceptualize the possible is a fundamental feature of a subjective consciousness. As Keir Elam explains, the qualities required of a speaking subject include “the capacity to ‘create’ non-actual worlds referred to in the course of the dialogue, expressing a set of supposed desires, wishes, hypotheses, beliefs, fantasies, etc.” (137). It is a fundamental characteristic of human beings “to think and behave as though things might be, or might have been, other than they actually are, or were” (Perkins 6). What is significant about the quintessentially human faculty to understand that things may be otherwise is that this awareness is inscribed in the minutiae of the language, expressed in the “small words” that also work to establish identity. Theorists of modality have long
acknowledged the nebulous nature of this field; because modality seeps into the
disparate arenas of opinion, identity, and assertion, it is a ubiquitous feature of speech
activity. As Palmer proposes, “Modality in language is . . . concerned with subjective
characteristics of an utterance, and it could even be further argued that subjectivity is
an essential criterion for modality” (16). A speaker’s stance necessarily underlies any
statement that he or she makes, so that “very many aspects of verbal function, perhaps
all, can then be seen as performing modal functions, structuring the relationship of the
participants and their perspective on the status of aspects of the mimetic plane. This
includes, for instance, questions, statements, commands (the traditional grammatical
category of mood); tense, deixis . . .” (Hodge and Kress 124).

Linguists such as Lyons and Palmer have provided comprehensive taxonomies
of modal expressions, but have tended to focus on discrete indicators of modality, such
as the modal auxiliary verbs. Lyons offers a particularly succinct and influential
account of the primary modal categories. Alethic modality (derived from the Greek
aletha, “truth”) concerns the necessary or contingent truth of propositions, so that
statements which are ‘necessary truths’ (true in all logically possible worlds), as well as
statements which are not necessarily false (hence, they are true in at least one logically
possible world) are classified as alethic propositions (Lyons 791).24 Epistemic
modality, which springs from the same root as “epistemology” and shares the same
associations of “knowledge,” moves from the realm of truth to that of belief: it
concerns statements which assert or imply that a particular proposition is known,

24 Philosophers of modality disagree on the actual occurrences of propositions of “necessary truths” in the
real world, since they are always hindered by the caveats of circumstance. William G. Lycan, for
example, claims that “no ordinary English sentence expresses an unrestricted alethic modality
(propositions which are true in all logically possible worlds) . . . Rather, all everyday modalities are
restricted, relative to contextually determined sets of background assumptions” (171).
believed, accepted or expected (Lyons 797). Finally, *deontic* modality encompasses notions of duty and necessity, and those statements that reveal what ought to be or what is permissible (Lyons 823). Deontic modal expressions differ from their alethic and epistemic counterparts in that they are more definitively linked to the interactive social world and are thus less reflective of individual qualities such as personal beliefs and desires. Instead, deontic modalities are defined in terms of social laws, either those “which are explicitly laid down by some legal authority or institution and which define a set of behaviour for some social group,” or those less formal and often unstated ‘rules’ pertaining to social status, “according to which one person may be said to have personal authority over another” (Perkins 11). Thus the statement *You must not tell lies* is always deontically modal, but it can be interpreted either as an assertion in line with the former definition (ie. *the moral social code requires you not to tell lies*), or as a command according to the latter (*I order you not to tell lies*) (Perkins 18).

While Lyons’ definitions have been enormously influential in the study of grammatical modality, some newer studies have called for a more comprehensive approach that recognizes the modal potential in a variety of statements and linguistic devices, not simply those that feature a specific modal term. Perkins takes issue with Lyons’ assertion that much semantic overlap exists in the world of modal expression, so that terms such as *may* and *be possible that* are synonymous stylistic variants. Perkins argues that “no two modal expressions could be said to have exactly the same meaning,” and posits that the proliferation of modal terms is a natural outgrowth of the intricately nuanced workings of modality (2-3). The web of motivators and influences

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25 The sense of obligation and commitment may be traced in this word’s Greek roots: *deon*, ‘what is binding’ (Traugott and Dasher 105).
on the stance of an individual speaker is sufficiently complex so as to require a
detailed, highly stratified system of linguistic expression. In keeping with this assertion,
Perkins proposes a revision of Lyons’ taxonomy to expand the possibilities for modal
definition. His most significant addition lies in his suggestion of *boulomaic* modalities:
those propositions which relate to desire, and are expressive of wishes, hope, fear, and
regret. Perkins’ rationale for this distinction between boulomaic and deontic modalities
is his conviction that “in English at least, there is a clear semantic distinction between
expressions such as *WANT*, *DESIRE*, *HOPE*, *YEARN FOR*, on the one hand, and *ORDER*,
*DEMAND*, *INSIST*, *OBLIGE*, on the other” (14-15). These distinctions – particularly
between expressions of desire and duty – are important to my analysis.

Of course, an exhaustive and absolute system of modal classification may be an
impossibility; if anything, the defining feature of modality is its slipperiness. The field
of modality has always been a quagmire of disparate grammatical functions and
semantic outcomes, and theorists regularly acknowledge its peculiar tendency toward
indeterminacy. Problems of ambiguity have accompanied the classification of modal
auxiliaries since the first attempts at descriptive and instructive cataloguing of English
grammar, and the earliest English grammarians struggled to classify and regulate the
modal verbs. William Lily’s seminal *Shorte Introduction of Grammar*, the humanist
textbook designed to introduce schoolboys to the “profitable language” of Latin,
attempts to fit these odd and uncooperative words to a Latin model. Words such as

26 Perkins further adds the following categories to his revised classification: *temporal* modalities, relating
to time (it is sometimes/mostly/always the case that); *evaluative* modalities (it is a good thing/bad thing);
*causal* modalities (the existing state of affairs will bring it about that/prevent); *likelihood* modalities (it is
likely/probable that) (9). Another category proposed by some theorists, *dynamic modality*, concerns the
capacity/ability of the subject of the utterance (e.g. *John can sing beautifully*) (see Nuyts, “The Modal
Confusion,” as well as Traugott and Dasher).
“mai,” Lily asserts, “stand eyther as synges before the verbe or elles they be verbes them selfe” (qtd. in Cummings 208). Lily recognizes that these are atypical verbs (indeed, he questions whether they are verbs at all), and his confusion is shared by Bulloker, whose 1586 English grammar struggles to explain the “equivocy” of words such as “will,” puzzling that this word “som tym shew[s] willingness, som tym a commaundment, som tym a wishing” (qtd. in Cummings 213). Subsequent grammarians displayed similar trouble in defining these bizarre verbs; for example, John Bird’s *Grounds of Grammar* (1639) devotes little attention to the modals, and the eighteenth-century author John White admits frustration at their unfixed nature in his *The English Verb; A Grammatical Essay* (1761). More recently, Cummings has noted the “semantic fluidity” of the modal verbs, and their curious “indeterminate signifying charge that acts as a surplus which cannot be accommodated within the available linguistic system”; he asserts that “English modality remains an open field of meaning without a clear semantic explanation” (213). Perkins, too, comments on the anomalous behaviour of modal verbs, and suggests that “the English modal system tends more to semantic anarchy than virtually any other area of the English language” (28).

Ultimately, as Klinge suggests, these are not words that can be clarified with a simple definition: “If by the meaning of a modal we understand equivalence between a modal and a natural-language paraphrase, the modals in isolation . . . have no paraphrasable meaning and rely on cotext and context for meaning” (318). The indeterminacy of the

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27 The subsequent chapter on the sonnets will address another pertinent perspective, the view of some early grammarians that the distribution of these words might be accounted for by grammatical person. These so-called “Wallis Rules” were a direct response to the resistance of the modal verbs to classification, and were part of a larger trend of prescriptivist English grammar rules throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
modals has important consequences for the type of analysis in which this project will engage. Because modal verbs are difficult to define precisely, their context of their usage acquires an especially high significance; it is the pragmatic effect of these words, the result of the way speakers and hearers together determine their value through the processes of linguistic interaction, that is of particular interest to me here.

Deixis in Language and Drama

Another similarly revealing grammatical phenomenon that is, like modality, rooted in the self-world boundary is the field of deixis. The term “deixis” is used in linguistics “to refer to the function of personal and demonstrative pronouns, of tense and a variety of other grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the act of utterance” (Lyons, *Semantics* 636). Its forms include personal deixis, which isolates participants in a speech situation in words such as pronouns; spatial deixis, which points to the speaker’s position in relation to other persons and the world of objects; and temporal deixis, which points to the time of speaking in relation to the utterance and “to the larger temporal matrix of the world to which both speech situation and what is said belong” (Ruthrof 48). Deictic terms such as *I, here,* and *now* anchor a speaker and an utterance in time and space – they are words that designate location and identity, and are thus vital in gauging external physical position and the inward attitudinal stance of the self. A linguistic system with particularly close ties to dramatic language and performance, deixis also plays an important role in my analysis. It is intertwined with modality in key ways, most notably in terms of its similar capacity to establish subjectivity by conveying the stance of the
speaking subject, and to bind the individual to the external world. In terms of linguistic categorization, Lyons again offers a productive starting point. He defines linguistic deixis as referring to “the function of personal and demonstrative pronouns, of tense and a variety of other grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatio-temporal coordinates of the act of utterance” (*Semantics* 636). Common to all deictic utterances is the capacity to ground locations and persons in a specific physical context; deixis encompasses those linguistic elements such as *I, you, this, that, here, there*, words which designate the “identity or placement in space or time of individuated objects relative to the participants in a verbal interaction” (Hanks, *Intertexts* 5). The physical aspect of deixis is vital – as its origin in the Greek term for ‘pointing’ attests – for the system of deixis is fundamentally indexical, and indexical signs are typically physically connected to their objects. 28 The relationship between speaker, space, and context that deictic terms establish – the ability to indicate the literal stance of a speaker in the world – provides a meaningful link to modal expressions. Just as modality establishes the uniqueness of a speaker’s perspective, deictic markers measure the position of speakers relative to their interlocutors, settings, and utterances. In this way, deictic terms of reference are the *origo* of expressions of identity, the very “expressions of person” that Benveniste views as fundamental to subjectivity in language. As Lyons explains, because deictic terms use the spatial position (and indeed the physical body) of the speaker as the point of origin, they are fundamentally egocentric:

[T]he speaker, by virtue of being the speaker, casts himself in the

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28 As Elam notes, deixis is related to Peirce’s concept of the index, “a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object,” or “which relates to the pointed-to object through physical contiguity” (such as a knock at the door indicating someone outside it) (21-22).
role of ego and related everything to his viewpoint. He is at the zero-point of the spatio-temporal coordinates of what we will refer to as the deictic context. Egocentricity is temporal as well as spatial, since the role of speaker is being transferred from one participant to the other as the conversation proceeds, and the participants may move around as they are conversing: the spatio-temporal zero-point (the here-and-now) is determined by the place of the speaker at the moment of utterance. (Semantics 638)

Because they are so bound up with the speaker and what Lyons calls the “situation-of-utterance,” deictic terms have particular currency in spoken language. In fact, increased frequency of deictic markers is a distinguishing and quantifiable feature of verbal interaction: “The percentage of deictic terms tends to be much higher in conversation than in literature, as one could guess: speech is egocentric, and speakers continually define their position relative to their listeners” (Furrow 366). Predictably, the ‘literary conversations’ that comprise dramatic speech display a remarkably high percentage of deictic terms. Indeed, deixis is a crucial component of the language of drama, first because of its role in establishing the speaker positions and relationships between characters, and second because it alludes to the imagined physical and temporal environment of the stage, the this and that of the immediate stage context, or the now that posits an instant of dramatic time unique to that moment on stage. Elam suggests that deixis is, in fact, “the most significant linguistic feature – both statistically and functionally – in the drama” (27).

29 Elam claims that a drama is characterized by progression, and such movement is tracked by the deictic markers that “actualize” the dramatic world: “It is evident that the possible worlds of the drama are never simple and static states of affairs but, rather, complex successions of states” (117). Similarly, Herman points to the centrality of space and time to dramatic worlds, and notes that the element of flux is particularly significant: “spatio-temporal and participant coordinates of the fictional world are open to shifts and change, whereas the wider performance centre remains ‘constant,’ within performance time and place, to a greater degree.” It is through deixis that such change is represented, and that the contrast between onstage fictional space and time and performance space and time is established: “each performance presupposes a different ‘now’, a different deictic centre” (“Deixis and Space” 30).
Particularly noteworthy in terms of my discussion is the relation of deixis to a wider social network. Although deictic reference is highly particularized and intimately linked to the speaker, it is necessarily framed by a dynamic context of interaction, and it participates in that social system. Thus the label of “egocentricity,” while not misplaced, is perhaps limiting because it closes off the interactive reality of deictic speech. As Fitzmaurice explains, “[t]he fact that deixis is centred on the speaker and the speaker’s location invites the assumption that it is both inherently subjective and egocentric. However, as a system that cannot define the subject in temporal, locative or person terms except in relation to the position of others, it might be constructed as social rather than subjective, and as empathetic rather than egocentric” (41). My project stresses this interactive aspect of deixis, and follows Hanks in regarding it as “a social construction, central to the organization of communicative practice and intelligible only in relation to a sociocultural system” (Intertexts 5). Most important is the idea that seemingly innocuous words such as I and this carry great weight in disseminating social relationships, because they are grounded on the relation between speech participants. Deictic utterances are not generically transferable across contexts; rather, their nuances vary according to the situation, and to the relationship between interlocutors. The situational frameworks in which deictic terms are employed hold sway over their execution, for speakers vary deictic reference according to factors such as the relative status of their addressee. “When speakers say ‘Here it is,’” Hanks attests, “he/she unavoidably conveys something like ‘Hey, you and I stand in a certain relation to each other and to this object and this place, right now’” (Referential Practice 7). And because the circumstances of this relation are always in flux, speakers continually
renegotiate and reestablish their position from moment to moment. Variability, then, undergirds the system of deixis, and it consequently shares the fundamental instability of identity-making of speech in general.

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The following chapter, “‘Shallowest Help’: The Authority of Shall in Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” uses the sonnets as exemplary paradigms to suggest how the nuances of grammar are not only significant, but also might be held up for deliberate scrutiny. Shakespeare’s attention to and occasional exploitation of the modal verb shall in the sonnets grounds this discussion, which examines tactics by which the speaker can recover control in the face of threat. The shalls of the sonnets work to preserve the speaker at the same time that they attack the beloved; they imply that what the speaker ultimately seeks is not the imperfect succour of his addressee but the deeper aid afforded by his own linguistic control. If a dominant undercurrent of the sonnets is the conviction that no future is secure, and that much of the determining control of the future lies elsewhere, the shalls are a way to hold onto the beloved, and to the self – they guarantee communion in a way that the beloved alone cannot or will not grant. The sonnets introduce the idea of a speaking “I” in troubled and dynamic contact with the world of shared communication. Because of their impulses toward self-analysis, and their attention to linguistic expressions of desire, the sonnets provide a pertinent frame for reading the thwarted speakers in the dramas with which the rest of this project is concerned. Indeed, the sonnets offer an effective segue into a discussion of dramatic language, for they share with the plays “a mutual investment in interaction . . .
Whether we approach them sociologically or internally via the fiction of a poetic ‘persona,’ the poet of the sonnets is clearly a player-poet” (Schalkwyk 5).

The second chapter, “Co-acting and Communal Language: The Perils of Talk in *Troilus and Cressida*” extends the consideration of troubled linguistic encounters to a broad network of competing voices. *Troilus and Cressida* is recognized for its unusual stage history, uneasy blurring of genre, and distinctive type of dialogue; some critics speculate that it may have been written for private performance rather than the public stage. I suggest that the play’s prominent puzzles, rooted in questions of language, provide a particularly fitting model for exploring issues of disrupted communication. Arguing that the play thematizes antagonistic communication, I turn to an analysis of the various forms of talk in *Troilus and Cressida*. I explore the various forms of debate, quarrel, and gossip showcased in the play, and suggest that these characteristic linguistic encounters expose methods of social negotiation and delineation and reflect the risk of participating in the shared processes of language. Using a variety of perspectives on communal language – grounded in the theories of Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and M. A. K. Halliday, as well as pragmatic approaches to conversation and politeness such as the model developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson – I suggest that moments of linguistic collision in *Troilus and Cressida* highlight the strictures of collective communication. I then turn from the broad scale of linguistic exchange to the more minute lexical level in order to examine the words shared by speakers, taking the fraught word *will* as my focus. Picking up on the discussion of *will* introduced in Chapter One, I explore the polysemy of this word as a suggestive indicator of future outcome and inclination.
The third chapter, “‘Multitudinous Tongues’ and Contested Words in Coriolanus,” combines threads from the previous chapters to place particular emphasis on linguistic encounters as sources of aggressive collision. I focus on the play’s titular protagonist as an astute speaker who seeks out mastery of linguistic encounters, and as a figure through which the dynamic between individual speaking and collective speaking can be effectively explored. The self-protective tactics of the sonnet speaker, and the perils of entering the fray of social discourse as exemplified by the speakers of Troilus and Cressida, converge in Coriolanus’s concern with upholding his own stance in the world within an environment of warring voices that consistently subverts his attempts to do so. In this chapter, I extend the discussion of the forceful modal shall that was introduced in Chapter One; as a designator of linguistic control, this word proves to be a sought-after commodity in the antagonistic dramatic world of Coriolanus. Indeed, this play contains an unusually high percentage of modal verbs (Craig 45), and it provides a fertile study in modality in use. Like the speakers in Troilus and Cressida, those in Coriolanus are wary of shared language, and questions concerning who is authorized to speak, and which words are permitted, are ongoing preoccupations. In my discussion of Coriolanus, I broaden the treatment of shall to consider the relationship that it encodes between control and future time, for the struggle to speak this potent word is here bound up with the capacity to determine future outcomes. This chapter marks a transition from bids for control in smaller-scale interpersonal relationships (between the speaker and the beloved in the sonnets, and between the defeated war- and love-weary speakers in Troilus and Cressida) to a much more public forum. In Coriolanus, the fate of those who may “speak, speak” (1.1.2) is
established in large-scale linguistic collisions. I analyze in detail the most prominent example, the “absolute shall” scene, in which Coriolanus rails against the tribunes’ impudent use of a powerful word from which they are presumably debarred.

In my final chapter, “At the Threshold: Kingship, Ritual, and Deixis in Richard II,” I supplement my study of modal verbs by shifting the focus to the small words of deixis. I argue that the unstable context of Richard II renders it an apt subject for deictic analysis, for its action takes place in a context in which the parameters of social power are being redrawn before our eyes. I maintain that the system of deixis, which works to anchor speakers in a particular setting, is a particularly fitting mode of analysis to monitor how speakers respond to such fluctuation. In the first part of the chapter, I examine deictic markers of nominal reference, such as personal pronouns and honorifics. These are a particularly revealing type of “telling word,” words that inscribe both inner state and social rank. The mundane words used for self-positioning have much to convey about the shifting social ground, and they also carry valuable information about the internal perceptions and motivations of speakers. In Richard II, a drama that insistently exposes the threshold of individual and social, these markers are highly significant, for while the play is largely preoccupied with the consequences of social upheaval, the questions at its core are profoundly and inscrutably personal. In the second part of the chapter, I turn toward questions of personal stance with a closer analysis of Richard’s language. I explore how ritualized language (so often rooted in the body, and always heavily dependent on the position – both physical and social – of the speaker) is transformed in the play, and how Richard uses it to retain some agency even as he is stripped of his modes of self-positioning. I suggest that Richard re-frames
the language of ritual in order to carve out a space where he is protected from
encroaching external influence. He succeeds, however conditionally, in creating a
revised identity through his words, discovering a new subject position between “I” and
“king.”
“Shallowest Help”: The Authority of Shall in Shakespeare’s Sonnets

In Praise of “Grammar Rules”: Tactics of Control in Astrophil and Stella

thou, desire, because thou would’st have all,
Now banished art – but yet, alas, how shall?
– Astrophil and Stella 72

The consuming and self-defeating desire decried by Astrophil is a familiar target in Elizabethan sonnets, which rely on extended and often anguished rumination. But while desire is a fundamental impulse in literature of any kind – Northrop Frye calls it “the energy that leads human society to develop its own form” (106) – the type here identified by Astrophil occupies a special category. In this case, the apostrophized desire is depicted as a devastating conqueror, one who aims to supplant the will of his victim. The heady world of Elizabethan sonnets that Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella epitomizes provides an ideal entry point for a discussion of desire, because it makes central its potential for threat and danger, reading it as a crisis of the speaker’s will and capacity for resistance. It is hardly a stretch to claim that, despite ostensible patterns of praise for a desired object that is somehow inaccessible, a figure literally or symbolically ‘elsewhere,’ the core of sonnet sequences is their speaker. It is the speaker’s own desire, the shame and danger that it presents and the processes of self-analysis that it initiates, that imbue the poems with their most potent affective force. The loss in the sonnets is ultimately one of self, not of other, so these poems offer a telling showcase for the destructive capacity of desire, and the need to guard oneself against it. The defensiveness, anxiety, and narcissism of the sonnet’s speaking “I” are natural byproducts of the solipsistic nature of desire itself. Its Latin etymon, desiderare, is, after all, ‘from the stars’: it is the longing for something set at a cruel
distance, not the thing itself, that forms the crux of desire. The pain is in the reaching, but the object is forever thwarted and deferred. From this perspective, the self-willed but hindered heroes of Shakespeare’s tragedies are not far removed from Astrophil; both the tragic protagonists and Astrophil frame their relationship to desire as adversarial, a struggle of will in which tactics of control and active resistance are tactical responses.

A sonnet sequence offers a compelling monitor for response patterns, for it features a speaker who is acutely engaged in the dynamic processes of desire, both in the sense of being agonizingly caught in its throes, but also heavily invested in reaping its rewards. This dual role on the part of the speaker – as a victim simultaneously suffering and enterprising – lends a curious double-edge to desire in a sonnet sequence; pain here is always tempered by a sort of victory. The speaker who undergoes such spiritual tests is somehow sanctified and rewarded; the stylized expressions of pain and renunciation that are mainstays of the sonnet tradition are “compromised by the fact that such expression simultaneously announces despair and also pays tribute to the poet-speaker himself.” Thus, “lamenting renunciation was not simply renunciatory, but was, in fact, an established rhetoric with its own interests and designs” (Siemon 196). Furthermore, because they feature poet figures who identify themselves as authors heavily invested in the power of their verse, sonnets provide a unique window into the strategies of speakers shrewdly adept at self-representation and self-analysis. My aim here is to mine the potential of these sonnets as forums for self-expression, to provide virtual charts of desire and exemplary models for linguistic play. Indeed, the sonnet’s rigid form provides a fertile medium for self-oriented questioning, since the closed
structure invites intensive but pithy exploration: “It is certainly too short for narration: a sonnet can present a narrated event, but it must be highly compressed if anything at all is to be said about it. The proportionality of the sonnet . . . compels some kind of development or analysis. The voice that speaks in this room, the I of the sonnet, almost has to ‘make a point’, to go beyond merely declaring a feeling” (Spiller 4). Further, the form offers an insularity well-suited to concentrated personal meditation: “the sonnet is a highly self-focused message. Because it is complete in fourteen lines, and because of its high degree of internal organization, the tendency of the form is to close in upon itself and constitute its own little word-world” (Hedley, Power in Verse 77). In this chapter, I will examine the remarkable subtlety of the “word-worlds” of Shakespeare’s sonnets, with a specific focus on shall and its quiet resonance in these poems. Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella serves as the introduction for this discussion, for this sequence features a speaker whose explicit engagement with grammar provides an apt paradigm for the more subtle maneuvers of Shakespeare’s speaker.

Astrophil and Stella offers a consummate illustration of a speaker in tune with his own experience and the processes by which he articulates it; the professed pain is consistently undercut by a critical eye turned inward to analyze the nuances of his own responses. Recognized for its tardiness (appearing in 1591, it was well behind the crest of the Elizabethan sonnet wave), its inventiveness (as the first English sonnet sequence composed in the Petrarchan style), and for its popular reception (Nashe famously used its “golden procession” as grounds to christen Sidney the “English Petrarke”), Astrophil and Stella not only reframes the Petrarchan tradition, but it also distorts the dynamic between the speaking subject and the admired object, skewing the focus so that the
reader’s gaze rests squarely on the speaker. And the speaking subject that emerges in *Astrophil and Stella* is slippery: evasive, self-aware, and alert to the rewards of inhabiting the role of rebuffed and sacrificing admirer. My concern here is with a specialized aspect of Astrophil’s self-awareness: broadly, with the patterns of self-monitoring and negotiation that emerge when Astrophil’s desire is threatened or thwarted, and more specifically with linguistic indicators that chart these patterns. For the symptoms of Astrophil’s desire reveal a force much more convoluted than the simple pangs of romantic entanglement and rejection would suggest. It is engaged in processes of exchange and reciprocity, wherein the speaker assesses the pressures of his admired object, of his social world, and of his own fractured wishes; the result is that these sonnets monitor the processes of personal desire, its influences and fluctuations. The desire that is unveiled exposes the detritus of betrayal and loss, but these are more closely aligned with the compromised actions of the speaker himself than with those of his rejecting mistress.

Sonnet speakers are nothing if not cunning wordsmiths, attuned to the nuances of language and to the power that linguistic exploitation affords them. Astrophil’s — and, by extension, Sidney’s — linguistic mastery is on ostentatious display throughout *Astrophil and Stella*, and his particular attention to rhetorical figures helped to establish

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30 Here the question of author-character conflation arises: what type of bond between Astrophil and Sidney should be assumed? My reading emphasizes the distinction between Astrophil as the speaker of the sonnets and Sidney as the pen behind this speaker, although the boundaries between poet/creator and poet/speaker are undeniably muddy. Elements of Sidney’s biography have always encroached on critical approaches to *Astrophil and Stella*, so that details about the relationship between Sidney and Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich (the presumed model for Stella) have been regularly employed in explications of these sonnets. Heather Dubrow, for one, argues convincingly for the blurred speaker status in *Astrophil and Stella*, evident in the Eighth Song’s collapsing of the third- and first-person pronouns in which Sidney’s “attempts to distinguish himself from his speaker are at best limited” (*Echoes of Desire* 101). Whatever the affinities between Astrophil and Sidney, I am here treating Astrophil as a constructed conscious subject, represented in these poems as capable of emotional responses, linguistic expression, and artistic manipulation.
some of the characteristic lexical play now associated with the late English sonnet tradition. In addition to these broad linguistic flourishes, Astrophil demonstrates remarkable attention to the particulars of grammar. Sonnet 63 offers a particularly memorable credo for this oft-neglected realm:

O grammar rules, O now your virtues show:
So children still read you with awful eyes,
As my young dove may in your precepts wise,
Her grant to me, by her own virtue, know.
For late, with heart most high, with eyes most low,
I craved the thing, which ever she denies:
She, lightning love, displaying Venus’ skies,
Lest once should not be heard, twice said, ‘No, no.’
Sing then, my muse, now Io Pen sing;
Heavens, envy not at my high triumphing,
But grammar’s force with sweet success confirm.
For grammar says (O this, dear Stella, weigh),
For grammar says (to grammar who says nay?)
That in one speech two negatives affirm.

The poem’s arresting wit risks obfuscating its underlying earnest plea: if there is order to be had in the fraught arena of romantic exchange, it is to be found in the logical and rule-bound avenues of grammar (Latin, in this case, rather than English). Astrophil’s appeal here is for control; he petitions the authority of a familiar schema, one that, menacingly, held the focus of his “awful eyes” in childhood. The apostrophized idol of grammar represents the indomitable enforcer of order and compliance, and what is

31 Some of the most prominent displays of rhetorical figures include the antanaclasis of 9, “Of touch they are that without touch doth touch”; the anadiplosis of 44, “My words, I know, do well set forth my mind; / My mind bemoans his sense of inward smart”; and the epanalepsis of 20, “Fly, fly, my friends, I have my death wound, fly.” Of course, the effects of these rhetorical tactics dovetail nicely with the demands of expressing romantic entanglement; as Jane Hedley notes, “[a]naphora and other figures of repetition convey obsession,” while “anadiplosis conveys the interdependence of successive stages in an escalating or circular process” (*Power in Verse* 87).

32 All quotations from *Astrophil and Stella* are taken from the Oxford edition, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (1989). In this and all subsequent citations of primary material, I use the modernized spelling employed by respective editors.
particularly compelling is that it is here explicitly figured as advocate and arbiter of Astrophil’s desire. It is through the force of grammar’s unassailable pronouncements, to which no canny pupil says “nay,” that Astrophil will be possessed of the denied “thing” of his craving.  

The large-scale grammar system, then, offers a putative salve for Astrophil’s helplessness. At this macro level, grammar – with its entrenched and universal rules – boasts an authority that Astrophil lacks. Sonnet’s 63 exhortation for its aid, however droll, points to a form of desire at the core of this sonnet sequence. It is a complex desire that gains its caustic force not simply through yearning to possess the absent object, but rather through an additional layer of longing – the wish to exert control over this object’s effects on the self. In other words, it is a desire to mitigate the fallout of erotic longing, and the patterns of grammar provide a productive gauge to map these threats and the concomitant attempts at self-preservation. Sonnet 63 showcases the broad appeal of grammar’s rigid parameters, but the capacity of grammar to adjudicate control and order is also apparent in its more minute capillaries. Consider Sonnet 47, a poem engaged in dissecting desire’s consequences and which offers succinct expression of the anguished process of self-loss and reassessment:

What, have I thus betrayed my liberty?
Can those black beams such burning marks engrave
In my free side? or am I born a slave,

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63 Sixty-two of Astrophil and Stella’s one hundred and two sonnets contain an apostrophe, “a far higher proportion that in any other British sonneteer” (Spiller 109). The tendency is perhaps modelled on Petrarch’s Rime Sparse; in both texts, these appeals are very often to people or concepts that have power in the speaker’s life – Love, Death, patrons, the beloved (and indeed even Desire itself, in Sonnet 72, from which this chapter’s epigraph is taken). As has often been noted, apostrophe creates a shadow interlocutor, so that the reader of the sonnets is implicated in the poems as a sort of addressee-by-proxy. But the tactic also isolates feared or powerful forces, and so Astrophil’s inclusion of “grammar rules” in the company of other apostrophized subjects – Grief, Love, Hope, Stella herself – is telling.
Whose neck becomes such yoke of tyranny?
Or want I sense to feel my misery?
Or spirit, disdain of such disdain to have,
Who for long faith, though daily help I crave,
May get no alms, but scorn of beggary?
Virtue, awake: beauty but beauty is;
I may, I must, I can, I will, I do
Leave following that, which it is gain to miss.
Let her go. Soft, but here she comes. Go to,
Unkind, I love you not: Oh me, that eye
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.

The palpable disgust of the opening question, and the repeated self-reference, makes clear that the object of Astrophil’s despair is not his rejection but his own complicity. It is no mistake that the first explicit reference to desire – the “crav[ing]” of line seven – points not to the object of desire but to “help” from its oppressive yoke. This yearning for release comes to a head in line ten’s catalogue of monosyllables: “I may, I must, I can, I will, I do.” The series of desperate vows exemplifies the speaker’s “continual state of restless excitement, always poised on the brink of some new movement” (Spiller 115), but it also draws attention to his successively failing attempts to will himself out of his fettered state. Moreover, this declaration reads like an excerpt from a grammar textbook, and it provides an excellent primer for a lesson in modal verbs. The modals codify a system that allows speakers to articulate the actions of “promising,

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34 This “crav[ing]” for daily help echoes line six of Sonnet 63: “I craved the thing, which ever she denies.” ‘Crave’ has particular resonance within the context of this discussion. Its etymological roots may be traced to the Old Norse krefja, “to demand, require, exact,” a provenance that colours its accompanying connotation with begging or asking earnestly (OED). ‘Crave’ shares an etymon with the verb ‘craft’ which imbues this latter word its sense of “to force, to exact.” Both examples showcase the agency and compulsion that underlie its more general associations with longing, and therefore the conflict encoded by ‘crave’ (passive ‘begging’ coupled with active ‘demanding’) highlight the peculiar nature of Astrophil’s dilemma of desire in these sonnets. He is simultaneously empowered by the force of his own demand and helplessly subject the response to that demand, which lies beyond his control, by his wish for Stella’s love.
threatening, commanding, predicting, and questioning” (Arnovick 1), and Astrophil’s vacillations here run the gamut from despairing acknowledgement to stoic resolve.

Indeed, this sequence of modal expressions has much to tell us about how will and desire are articulated and enacted. The modal verbs here display a wish to control behaviour and outcomes, and also demonstrate a tension between what Astrophil would like to do and what he feels compelled to do: they depict a choice between self-preservation and self-immolation.

In focalizing this discussion through *Astrophil and Stella*, I would like to suggest that the specialized, “newly invigorated” version of the English sonnet tradition that Sidney’s work inaugurates (Siemon 196) – specifically, its deliberate and extended self-analysis, and particularly the ways in which desire is linguistically monitored and regulated – provides a pertinent frame for reading the self-willed protagonists in the drama that emerges in its wake. Siemon suggests that English sonnets of the 1590s bled into and complicated other genres, including elegy and complaint, by opening the way for “ironic examination of [the] assumed relation between truthfulness and tonalities of pain, an examination pursued by plays like *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*” (196).

David Schalkwyk, writing about Shakespeare, focuses on his dual role as a poet-dramatist and proposes that we treat the sonnets as the product of a dramatist struggling for acceptance, so that his poems have palpable “shape and force as situated forms of social action” (*Speech and Performance* 2). The sonnets are, according to Schalkwyk, “embodied texts” that are “closely imbricated, in both sociological and aesthetic terms, with their poet’s work in the newly commodified space of the theatre” (*Speech and Performance* 3). 35

35 The territory of modality, because it involves the loaded acts of promise, threat, and command, necessarily overlaps with and is informed by speech act theory. For further discussion of the illocutionary tendencies of modal verbs, see Arnovick (1990).
Performance 3). Moreover, the faddish status of the sonnet form, coupled with its veneer of frivolity – appearing on the surface to be “only the idle amusement of literate courtiers” (Henderson 17) – rendered it a medium ripe for experimentation. It offered a covert means to explore courtly culture under the guise of conventional love verse; in Elizabethan courtly culture, “lyric poetry was multiply significant, rendering formal, courtly, and political messages through verse ‘play’” (Henderson 171). The various messages and motivators at work in the sonnets themselves, as well as in their conditions of production, necessarily complicate my position here. The assertion that the ‘desire’ of the sonnets is informed by self-interested bids for control must be qualified by the well-established claim that desire in this type of lyric is never simple. The articulated erotic longing of the sonnets is always undergirded by more covert – and decidedly less romantic – motivators. As Arthur F. Marotti has shown, the social aspirations of sonneteers cannot be divorced from the conventional amorous expressions that suffuse their work:

From the time of the troubadours, courtly authors in particular used love poetry as a way of metaphorizing their rivalry with social, economic and political competitors, converting . . . self-esteem and ambition into love. Their verse reflects courtly striving for the rewards available in hierarchical societies that functioned according to systems of patronage and that allowed (at least limited) forms of social mobility. (“Love is not Love” 398)

Marotti’s claim that Sidney’s initial coterie audience would have recognized him as “a politically, economically, and socially disappointed young man” (400) unlocks an additional dimension to my argument about Astrophil’s bids for control over the threats posed by desire. If we accept Marotti’s portrait of Sidney as a striving but failed courtier, and that Astrophil’s words act as agents for Sidney’s own ambition, then
Astrophil’s appeals to whatever forms of authority he can grasp – grammatical and otherwise – become imbued with an added layer of bitterness and urgency.

While I acknowledge the complex problem of desire in these sonnets, a dynamic that has been comprehensively explored, the discussion at hand shifts the focus to the details of the language. For while social mobility and romantic conquest are tempting prizes for the ambitious and desiring voice, prior to these is the projection of the self – with all of its accompanying desires, demands and expectations for the future – into the world. The risk that accompanies this move, and its manifestations in language, are the central concerns of my project. Although the primary focus of this project is dramatic dialogue, with its specialized set of conditions and considerations, both dramatic language and the language of the sonnets share this focus on risk-filled interaction. In a general sense, the sonnets interact with the larger social world of which they are part; hardly “self-enclosed soliloquies,” the sonnets are in constant dialogue with their context, “using deictic words and metaphors with unstated tenors to refer to a social world beyond the poems themselves” (Hedley, “Narcissism” 9). More narrowly, the sonnets themselves act as response-oriented dialogues between speaker and addressee. As Schalkwyk maintains, “[h]owever Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets may be united or differentiated in poetic terms, they share a mutual investment in interaction: in provoking a response, and themselves responding to provocation,

36 Marotti’s “‘Love is Not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” and Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass’ “The Politics of Astrophil and Stella” provide compelling analyses of social and political factors informing the writing of sonnets.
through the negotiation of relationships that are erotic, political, filial and ideological” (Speech and Performance 5). 37

The threatened self provoked to response is a central concern of Astrophil and Stella, and it finds expression in some of the sequence’s most memorable lines: “Then think, my dear, that you in me do read / Of lover’s ruin some sad tragedy: / I am not I, pity the tale of me” (45.12-14). This passage has often been read as a furtive assertion of self-created identity, dissembling words that use the tropes of lamentation to encode an assertive self who is firmly in control of his own persona. 38 While Astrophil’s cunning self-assessment and linguistic manipulation are clearly operative, the message that is here laid bare – that the “I” can no longer recognize itself – is rather chilling. And whereas the plea for Stella’s “pity” indeed taps into the conventional topoi of lamentation and gratification, the insistence that “I am not I” invokes the familiar crux of another literary convention, one that is explicitly named: tragedy. The unrecognizable self, transformed by an alien and even ‘rotten’ world, comprises the heart of tragedy. In Astrophil and Stella, the danger of articulating desire by externalizing wants – the de facto presentation of self at its most visible and vulnerable – is that its thwarting destabilizes the speaker-protagonist, who is no longer able to discern his own identity or to determine how he fits into his world. My discussion takes

37 Patricia Parker paints the interactive relationship in even more forceful terms, asserting that the consistent mood of the sonnets is imperative, and that readers should “consider Shakespeare’s sonnets as other than statements . . . The heart of eloquence is not assertion, the expression of fact, but demand, the expression of will in such a way that the person addressed responds, or at least feels guilty about not responding” (331).

38 Stephen Greenblatt popularized this perspective in Renaissance Self-Fashioning, and many others have reiterated the claim. Greenblatt argues that Astrophil’s tactic for garnering Stella’s pity is to narrativize himself, thereby suggesting that “one can win pity for oneself only by becoming a tale of oneself, and hence by ceasing to be oneself” (238); Spiller reads the line as Astrophil’s attempt to depersonalize himself: “To soften the heart of the tyrant Stella, the lover must convert himself from a real person into a text” (114); Siemon contends that Astrophil’s words “signal no real self-loss or painful self-denial” but rather “constitute elements in a highly self-conscious attempt to gain that which the desiring Astrophil hopes to achieve through his manipulative, self-interested fiction making” (197).
up the problem of threatened identity by focusing on the ways that these protagonists respond to the threat, and how they attempt to win back some control over the self through subtle linguistic strategies. Self-preservation is necessarily grounded in the minutiae of language, because it offers the speaker the most direct course to renewed self-mastery, a means to “build in sonnets pretty rooms” – that is, to mitigate the conditions of the alien world by reconstructing that world from one’s own centre. With his desire stymied and his self made foreign – “turned Turk” in the characteristic mode of the tragic hero – Astrophil’s sole assurance is his words. The muse of grammar offers a promise to override Stella’s injurious negatives, highlighting the mediatory and interactive nature of language in practice. It is not just the system of language that offers comfort, however; Astrophil further revels in his own private manipulation of its finer details. The bitter contention of the Fifth Song – “But I in me am changed” (76) – is softened by the mastery demonstrated in the Fourth Song, wherein Stella’s reiterated refusals – “No, no, no, no, my dear, let be” – are ultimately turned against her with the final twist of “Soon with my death I will please thee” (53). The trick here is that Astrophil’s words shift the target of Stella’s refusal; ultimately she denies not Astrophil’s entreaties but his death.\(^{39}\) Like Lear’s “never”s, Stella’s “no”s here draw back the veil on despair and oblivion, and it is only Astrophil’s linguistic ingenuity that can snatch him back from the brink.

\(^{39}\) Cf. Heather Dubrow’s contention that the Fourth Song’s central conflict converges on Astrophil and Stella’s warring bids for linguistic mastery, as each endeavours to claim the literal last word: “the poem plays the power – and the impotence – of the two voices against each other and in doing so demonstrates, as Petrarchanism and its counterdiscourses so often do, the variety of forms that power may assume. [Stella’s] repetitiveness at once signals the limitations of her speech (a new avatar of Echo, she is condemned to rehearse her own words) and also its unyielding firmness” (Echoes of Desire 116). Dubrow’s reading additionally supports claims for the thematic interplay between proximal sonnets and songs in Astrophil and Stella; she notes that “it is hard to believe that in a sequence as carefully written as this one, other signs…would not be manifest in some form, however coded, in adjoining poems” (116).
“Rich in Will”: Grammar on Display in Shakespeare’s Sonnets

If literary history deems *Astrophil and Stella* a transformative force in the English sonnet tradition, then it has tended to hold up the sonnets of Shakespeare as evidence for a rupture of that tradition. Many commentators have read Shakespeare’s sonnets as a tangible point of departure, poems that mark a retreat from everything from a depleted Petrarchanism to traditional formulations of selfhood and identity. The “I” position occupied by the speaker of Shakespeare’s sonnets has invited exhaustive speculation, particularly from those critics eager to make claims about a newly individuated early modern consciousness. Joel Fineman famously asserts that Shakespeare reworks the Petrarchan tradition of praise, showcasing a speaker emblematic of a radically different type of persona, a “new first-person poetic posture” that reflects an emergent, inherently divided type of poetic subject (2). Katherine Duncan-Jones, who likens the speaker’s dark musings to those of Donne, calls the sonnets “salt, satiric, and bitter,” distancing them from their Elizabethan precursors and aligning them instead with a subdued and cynical Jacobean ethos. As a whole, she argues, this sequence takes its place “thematically, as well as chronologically, alongside such painfully adult, sexually cynical works as *All’s Well, Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, Triolus* and *Timon*” (102). The speaker of these poems shares with Astrophil an inventive linguistic skill, a keen grasp of the power of his craft, and a sly if tempered wit. Furthermore, like Astrophil, his attention to the nuances of language is on display, and as in Sidney’s poems, the aim of showcasing his linguistic virtuosity in the manner of any good self-promoting poet is only part of the endeavour.
Shakespeare’s speaker also demonstrates an attunement to the “grammar rules” lauded by Astrophil, but in Shakespeare’s sonnets this knowledge is presented in a way that is at once more ostentatious and less apparent. Sonnets 135 and 136 are particularly conspicuous platforms from which the speaker promotes his linguistic aptitude, notoriously unfolding around the possibilities for droll wordplay offered by the various denotative meanings of “will.” Editors of the sonnets have often treated them, with varying degrees of prudery, as the playful puzzles which in a large sense they are. Stephen Booth calls them “festivals of verbal ingenuity in which much of the fun derives from the grotesque lengths the speaker goes to for a maximum number and concentration of puns on will” (466), an assessment that highlights their carnivalesque leanings; A. L. Rowse demurs from explicating them at all since, “It is difficult, with any decency, to be more explicit about all those wills: they must be left, and how they fit in, to the intelligence of the reader” (283); Duncan-Jones sees them as elaborations on “the idea of the woman’s sexual voracity” and “the speaker’s claims for sexual acceptance” (384-85).

Just as the wit of Astrophil and Stella’s Sonnet 47 distracts its audience from its underlying distressing plea for help, the lewd wordplay of Shakespeare’s 135 and 136 performs a similar sleight of hand. Those critics who have looked beyond the punning to offer non-bawdy readings of the “Will” sonnets often concentrate on the onomastic

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40 Most editors cite up to six different senses of will being played upon. Kerrigan summarizes as follows: 1) what is wanted; 2) lust, carnal desire; 3) shall; 4) penis; 5) vagina; 6) William (365).
41 Elaborating on what he sees as the “straightforward eroticism of the ‘Will’ sonnets,” Fineman suggests that readers become virtual voyeurs through their participation in this wordplay; in other words, they become active in their very recognition of the language game. “Recognizing the pun, the sexual denotations of which are elaborately teased out, we might say that the poet’s richly resonating name here linguistically performs the copulation that the poet speaks about” (293). Fineman does, however, move beyond the bawdiness in his analysis, seeing the ‘Will’ sonnets as central to his thesis of fractured subjectivity. Cf. John Kerrigan on the sonnet’s performance of “lecherously unfolding” words as though undressing them (367 n.4).
effects of a poet-speaker offering a persona for an author who shares that name. In *Reading Shakespeare’s Will*, Lisa Freinkel argues that because the word is “simultaneously an authorial signature, proper name, and common noun . . . the propriety, autonomy, and singularity of the author’s name is never secure” (xv). Helen Vendler shifts the focus from the lewd and the self-fracturing to address the bitter crisis at the core of these sonnets: “The conspicuous urbanity of this sonnet can be appreciated only when measured against the humiliation of its putative occasion: the lover is refused access by his mistress, though she is freely receiving at least one other sexual partner” (575). And it is true that lines such as “Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy Will” (136.2) provide a plaintive echo of the bitterness that will eventually be borne out when the lover and the speaker are both “forsworn”; the past tense here – with its bare implication that the speaker is no longer in any sense the “will” of the beloved – encodes a bitter mourning. But something else besides ecstatic antanaclasis and conventional lamentation is at work here. By holding up a word so rich in possibility, Shakespeare’s speaker “engrafts it new”: *will* unfolds in its expected senses as well as unexpected ones. In using a word that can signal both desire and intention, and that provides one of the standard means of articulating and conceptualizing future time, this speaker, like Astrophil, subtly appeals to the rules of grammar. While the speaker toys most openly with the modal potential of *will*, its forceful mate, *shall*, is similarly held up for attention in the sonnets, albeit more covertly. Like *will*, *shall* speaks to a hoped-for future, but *shall*’s unique accent of duty and compulsion grants it

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42 Vendler’s appeal to read the pain in these sonnets is evident in her notes on 136: “Surely there is a way to read it that makes it heartbreaking, for all its playfulness” (579).
particular resonance in a sequence so preoccupied with the dynamic of obligation between its interlocutors. *Shall*’s distinctive force is the focus of this chapter.

**Will and Shall: Fluid Meanings and Distinct Futures**

The “Will” sonnets highlight the speaker’s attention to a particular version of the future, one which is desired and sought but is by no means assured. This marking of the future returns us to questions suggested by Astrophil’s modal manifesto “I may, I must, I can, I will, I do”: the function and significance of the modal verbs, and the ways in which they are ripe for exploitation by the rhetorically shrewd speaker. For the differences between modal representations of the future – what *may* be done rather than what *must* be done, for example – are rooted in distinct notions of what the future looks like. As Arновик maintains, there is no such thing as an unmarked utterance, and those that concern the always-unknown future are especially subject to speaker bias:

A discrimination between a purely ‘colorless’ temporal future construction devoid of speaker attitude and a future construction ‘colored’ by speaker attitude is ultimately a fallacious distinction. In fact the difference between the two main types of futures centers around modality: both futures reflect and manifest speaker attitude. These underlying modalities differ qualitatively. A speaker makes a promise or related declaration of volition when he expresses his will for the realization of a future event. Thus, the essential difference in future constructions centers around the attitude a speaker assumes towards his proposition. (91)

In other words, the expression of the future and the impulses of the modal field of language are intertwined – one cannot be neutral in one’s attitude toward (and hence articulation of) future events; they are always unavoidably marked by one’s desires and expectations. Similarly, all future events are marked by a degree of uncertainty; the future as projected from the present moment remains a prediction, no matter how
assured. As Dubrow argues, expressions of future time – limited in this discussion to the verbs that colour the conditions of that future – are implicated in competing claims of fear, desire, and control:

[E]ven the most disturbed and disturbing narratives about the future involve some assertion of control: announcing that one can predict treachery and betrayal, that one will not be surprised by them, suggests at least a measure of mastery . . . narratives about the future, designed in no small part to assure the agency of their teller, may mark the threats to that agency.

(Echoes of Desire 128-29)

In addition to clues about speaker agency and control, modal verbs offer evidence for the interactive nature of language; because they include social factors such as relative power, affinity, affection, and other intangible elements, they are significant in understanding the nature of the speakers themselves. Leech suggests that it is these pragmatic elements that have traditionally given grammarians pause: “What makes it so difficult to account for the use of these words . . . is that their meaning has both a logical and a practical (or pragmatic) element. We can talk about them in terms of such logical notions as ‘permission’ and ‘necessity’, but this done, we still have to consider ways in which these notions become remoulded by the psychological pressures of everyday communication between human beings: factors such as condescension, politeness, tact, and irony” (English Verb 71). Yet the subtleties that render the modals unwieldy for grammarians are the very features that make these words so illuminating for literary critics. Modal expressions are by their very nature ambiguous and even dissembling – condescension may sound like praise, while praise may be buried beneath abruptness. Such nuance, particularly that relating to the self one presents to the world, is central to the close reading of literary language.
Shall and will, then, are powder-keg words which encode powerful impulses and have much to communicate about the perspective of their speaker. And their complexity extends to their linguistic history; as Cummings notes, the words shall and will “are among the most disarmingly complex in the language” (428). English grammarians since William Lily – who puzzles over whether to define these curious specimens, unknown in Latin, as ‘sygnes before the verbe’ or as verbs in their own right (Cummings 208) – have faced enormous difficulty in categorizing these words. While many attempts have been made to codify their meanings and usage, consensus has proven difficult to reach.\(^43\) Despite the confusion, it is useful here to sketch a summary of typical perspectives on the relationship between shall and will. In present-day English (PDE), it may be said that they offer analogous but distinct means for speakers to conceptualize and articulate future time, and the choice between one and the other depends on conditions such as relative necessity and certainty. Michael R. Perkins effectively delineates this stance with his observation that “it is clearly reasonable to argue . . . that will and shall are contextually determined formal variants which realize a common core meaning” (47). However, while these verbs are essentially “formal variants” in today’s English – especially in a linguistic climate where shall usage is increasingly rare\(^44\) – they were considerably less interchangeable in the early modern English (EME) of Shakespeare’s age. The semantic distinctions between shall and will were much more resonant in this period, and so the modal choices in the works of Shakespeare are especially provocative. Originally main lexical

\(^{43}\) For detailed accounts of the history of categorization for shall and will, see Arnovick, Jennifer Coates, Brian Cummings, and Roberta Facchinetti.

\(^{44}\) Cf. Leech, who suggests that “the use of shall seems to be declining, especially in AE [American English]. In fact, shall occurs nowadays only in a few rather restricted linguistic contexts” (English Verb 87).
verbs that could occur alone in a clause, the modal verbs were during the late sixteenth century undergoing to process of grammaticalization, moving away from their position as primary verbs to act as auxiliaries. The period concurrent with Shakespeare’s lifetime saw the modals retain remnants of their lexical meanings while simultaneously fulfilling a grammatical function. As Norman Blake explains, “during the early Elizabethan period they developed their role as modals, though by Shakespeare’s time they had not entirely lost their original characteristics” (Shakespeare’s Language 90). Therefore, the modals of this period were more fluid than their contemporary counterparts, with lingering non-auxiliary features that gave them the potential for a wider range of meaning than they have today (Rissanen 232; 201). These non-auxiliary features brought much to bear on a speaker’s choice between shall and will in linguistic expressions of the future, for the original lexical associations – will with Old English willan, meaning ‘wish’ or ‘desire’, shall with Old English sceal, denoting obligation – strongly informed will and shall even in their auxiliary roles. The functions and meanings of these early forms of these modal verbs “consistently overlapped to a considerable extent” so that “the distinction between them has tended to be blurred” (Plank 324). This blurring extended well into the early modern period, during which each term “retained the potential to take on its original semantic colouring of volition or obligation” (Hope, Grammar 146). Fitzmaurice maintains that will’s lexical sense of

45 The change in the modal verbs was symptomatic of a larger endemic transformation of the language toward a more regulated state – stemming in large part from the development of a written standard in late Middle English – so that inflectional endings were reduced and syntax reorganized (Rissanen 187). The most pivotal linguistic changes to take place in the early modern period are as follows: “A syntactical development in early New English (1450-1750) was its improved co-ordination and subordination of clauses. Transitions within paragraphs were eased by the use of relative pronouns derived from the interrogatives who and which, as well as by a variety of new prepositions and conjunctions. Prepositional phrases took the place of the inflected cases and adverbs. Add to these changes the increased use of auxiliaries . . . and the employment of the primaries be, do, and have in the formulation of moods and tenses (A. C. Partridge 19).
wishing or desiring remained at least until 1700. Therefore, the usage of will in early modern English “rarely simply refers to future time…[it] may be used to express a state of affairs or an event as hoped or wished for … rather than as stated as actual fact in the future (“Tentativeness and Insistence” 12). Similarly, it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that shall “was able to convey purely temporal reference to future time” (Fitzmaurice, “Tentativeness and Insistence” 11; Hope, Grammar 146).

The result of the modal instability in EME is that the pragmatic effect of Shakespeare’s shalls and wills is not equivalent to the effect of those verbs in PDE. Consider two similar lines in Shakespeare’s sonnets: “Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye” (42.5), and “But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade” (51.12). While the core meaning of these lines might be maintained even if the modal verbs were transposed, a key set of associations would be lost. The will in the former line bears shades of willingness and yearning not present in the shall of the latter, which denotes a more forcefully mandated vision of the future. In a work as invested in the subtle power of the poet/speaker’s words as Shakespeare’s sonnets, the nuances that these verbs afford are of considerable interest.

The respective associations of shall and will with obligation and volition during their initial transition to a modal auxiliary function forced many early grammarians into a rather shaky prescriptivist framework. Hypothesizing that volition was less easily projected to other people than obligation and necessity – and, conversely, that a true expression of volition can be made only by the agent of that will – seventeenth-century grammarians such as Bishop John Wallis (1653) proposed a set of rules whereby shall

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46 All quotations from Shakespeare’s sonnets are from the Arden edition, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (1997).
in the first person simply indicates a prediction, whereas will is used for promising or threatening. In the second and third persons the reverse is true (based on the supposition that it is less common for a speaker to state his or her own obligation) so that shall signals a promise or a threat while will serves simply to predict (Arnovick 2; Rissanen 202). While evidence from actual usage does not always bear out these patterns, the very existence of the so-called Wallis Rules highlights several important elements of these modal expressions. First, their puzzling nature has provoked an anxious reaction in language pundits from the very beginning; they are renegade words that do not fit neatly into an orderly system, and they are perhaps all the more troubling because they encode the socially loaded issues of desire and obligation. Second, their semantic weight has substantial currency in their usage; shall and will are not simply alternate indicators of future time, but significant choices which express a speaker’s stance. As Maurizio Gotti notes in a comparative study of shall and will in a corpus of early modern English texts, in this period especially these verbs “are used in different ways to perform various pragmatic functions. SHALL is mainly used to express prediction and order . . . [and] is also used to perform other pragmatic functions; some, such as prophecy and permission, are only expressed by that modal verb; others, instead, are also expressed by WILL, although SHALL-forms are prevalent in the expression of promise, proposal, and threat” (“Pragmatic Uses” 167-68). As this assessment shows, and as the existence of the Wallis rules demonstrate, the pragmatic intentions of the speaker matter a great deal to the meaning of the chosen modal verb. The Wallis system “poses the future auxiliary in relation to the speaker of the utterance rather than the grammatical subject of the sentence” (Arnovick 9), thereby making
central the experience of the speaker to the force the utterance. The indistinct boundary
between the grammatical field of future time and the conceptual realm of modality,
which deals in desire and possibility, provides ripe terrain for analysis of speakers’
envisioned futures, and indeed of their wider worlds, both private and social.

The history of shall unveils its deep ties to social status; its lineage is steeped in
relative power and obligation, for its etymological predecessors were anchored in
notions of wrongdoing and repayment:

he sceal . . . may have been some thing like he has done something
(probably committed an offense or a crime) in consequence of which he
now (OE) is scyldig . . . The meaning of beon scyldig developed to agan to
gieldanne, to be liable for a debt, to be bound by an obligation . . . When
he sceal came to be combined with an infinitive . . . it expressed what the
person denoted by the subject had to do, owed to do, was obliged to do.
(Arnovick 10, emphasis in original)

The implication that a person “was liable of debt, [and] had to pay” (Fachinetti 117)
was how the association of modern shall with futurity first came about; in order to
repay the debt, the person at whom this verb was directed had to carry out a future
action. As these origins suggest, shall is a forceful word which harnesses a specialized
semantic legacy, one shadowed by disparate power and required action. The
deployment of shall amounts to an illocutionary act that serves as a sort of social
grenade, exposing the dynamics of power between speakers and demanding that some
action be effected. By using a modal expression such as shall, thereby suggesting or
insisting that one is obliged to do something, a speaker impinges on another’s wish for
autonomy and suggests that his or her power supercedes that of the interlocutor.47

47 It is not surprising that shall is the modal of choice for prophecy and God’s commands in the first
translations of the vulgate bible. As Cummings observes, it is difficult to see this divine shall as a benign
or impartial predictor: “God’s foreknowledge and God’s predestination merge in the obligatory syntax of
The Force of *Shall* in the Sonnets

If *shall* may sometimes be seen as a telling choice by a speaker, and if its use reveals certain conditions about the speaker’s view of his utterance or his addressee, then what can its various permutations in Shakespeare’s sonnets tell us about their enigmatic speaker? Because *shall* embodies socially contentious forces and exposes the control demanded by an author/speaker, it is revealing to track its various occurrences in the sonnets. The analysis that follows will consider the primary usages of *shall*, including its expression of prediction; speaker volition; speaker intention; speaker obligation; addressee volition; as well as the frequent instances when two or more of these functions overlap. An analysis of the sonnets’ *shall* reveals compelling details about the speaker’s vision of the future and his efforts to garner control over it; further, it offers clues about the speaker’s notions of desire and necessity, providing a showcase for his inclinations and insecurities. In many ways, *shall* signals assuredness; as Sylvia Adamson suggests, an important distinction between *shall* and *will* often exploited by Shakespeare is that *shall* alone, with its connotation of the compulsory, can signal “that the future event is one that is, in some sense, bound to happen” ("Shakespeare’s Grammar" 223). *Shall* speaks to necessity and to insistence, and its commanding force in the sonnets – “His beauty shall in these black lines be seen / And they shall live, and he in them still green” (63.13-14) – amounts to more than a speculative suggestion: it is a bold assertion of power. However, as this analysis will

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his modal auxiliaries” (430). Rissanen notes that differences between *shall* and *will* were inscribed in the Wylifftite Bible translation, so that instances of “will” were marked with volition (211).

48 The theories and data that I will use derive both from studies of EME and PDE. Perkins and Coates have focused on the present-day usage patterns of *shall*; my analysis will adapt these perspectives to include the implications of the specialized conditions of *shall* during the early modern period as noted by Arnovick, Rissanen, Blake and others.
show, *shall* is also a response to threat, a way of claiming linguistic power and a bid to regain control over an uncertain future.

It would be useful here, before discussing the specific *shall* of the sonnets – from predictions to promises to threats – to review the various types of modality at play in *shall* usage. The introductory chapter reviewed the primary categories for classifying modality: epistemic modality concerns a speaker’s degree of knowledge or certainty of a statement, and so applies to expressions that assert or imply that a proposition is known, believed, accepted or expected (Lyons, *Semantics* 797), while deontic modality encompasses notions of duty and necessity, and thus concerns those statements that reveal what ought to be or what is permissible (Lyons 823). Deontically modal expressions differ from their epistemic counterparts in that they are rooted in the interactive social world and are thus less reflective of individual qualities such as personal beliefs and desires. Instead, deontic modalities are defined in terms of social laws, either those “which are explicitly laid down by some legal authority or institution and which define a set of behaviour for some social group,” or those less formal and often unstated ‘rules’ pertaining to social status, “according to which one person may be said to have personal authority over another” (Perkins 11). These distinctions are important in analyzing a word like *shall*, which encodes both speech-act-type deontic force and at the same time gauges the internal world of the speaker. Given its legacy of debt and obligation, it is not surprising that *shall* is a word loaded with deontic possibility, with markedly less evidence of epistemic function. Coates maintains that in present-day English, *shall* is virtually restricted to first person subjects, and it has only meaning that functions epistemically: the weak ‘futurity’ sense of prediction, as in “I
shall end up alone,” and which has been in many dialects completely supplanted by will (185-6; 192). However, during the period of modal evolution in the early modern period, shall’s epistemic capacity to act as a predictor was much more pronounced, so that even second and third person shall could predict (Arnovick 163).49

Shakespeare’s sonnets offer many examples of this tendency toward predictive shall in the second and third persons, often in reference to a type of time-out-of-mind future that is frequently figured as threatening or moribund: “When forty winters shall besiege thy brow” (2.1); “When that churl death my bones with dust shall cover” (32.2); “Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell” (71.2); “Without all bail shall carry me away” (74.2); “When thou shalt be disposed to set me light” (88.1).50 It is interesting that shall as a foreteller seems sufficiently weak in these examples that it must be contextually reinforced with a temporal conjunction; “when” and “then” firmly establish the temporal status of the statements and thus doubly emphasize shall’s predictive function. The other contextual features of these passages are also telling; images of wintry decay and terse chimes ensure that the future depicted in these predictions is neither inviting nor welcomed, and suggest that the speaker embarks on the path to such a future not of his own will but due to the inexorable force of time, the “bloody tyrant” (16.2) whose devouring and debilitating force is a recurring target in the sonnets. Such a colouring of future time hints at an important feature of shall in the sonnets: the boundaries of this verb, consistently hazy even in contemporary usage, are

49 Rissanen suggests that this tendency can be attributed “to the model set by the Wycliffite Bible translation, which used shall for unmarked and will for volitionally marked future” (211). Cf. Gotti, “Pragmatic Uses,” which provides analysis of a corpus of early modern English texts and finds that “for the expression of this pragmatic use [prediction],” will is very seldom used and shall is employed almost exclusively (131).
50 Shalt is a variant of shall restricted to second person singular usage. Terttu Nevalainen notes that the “-(t)” second-person singular suffix was still regularly attached to auxiliary verbs in early modern English, a signal of their history as full verbs (89).
even more uncertain in the transitional English of Shakespeare’s time. Despite its status as a predictor, *shall* in these sonnets has not shaken its semantic legacy of obligation. Even syntactically, the structure of these lines suggests an overlap between predictive and prescriptive functions. Coates observes that instances of obligation-*shall* typically occur with “a third person inanimate subject,” often negated, as in *The road shall not be used as a public thoroughfare*, a statement which implies that the speaker has the authority to enforce such a declaration (191). The same impulse is at work in the line “My glass shall not persuade me I am old” (22.1), a sonnet-opening pronouncement which is less about prediction (indeed, the line following, “So long as youth and thou are of one date,” contains an inbuilt condition which undercuts the likelihood of the statement ever being actualized) and more about a wished-for authority. But while it aspires to control and distort the workings of time, it also acts as a type of self-command – the shadow addressee here is the speaker himself, exhorting himself to be free of the oppression of age. The distinction between an accent of obligation and one of volition is apparent in the juxtaposition of *shall* and *will* in sonnet 123’s couplet: “This I do vow, and this shall ever be, / I will be true despite thy scythe and thee” (123.13-14). The speaker’s avowed version of the future is distinguished from his claim for fidelity by the different verbs. The unknown and unwieldy future is coloured with a strong bid for control, a declaration of how it *shall* be, while his faithfulness – an agentive object more within his control that the debilitating forces of time – is marked with a less forceful intention.

Even instances that appear to be more straightforward examples of epistemic, predictive *shall*, as in Sonnet 14, show evidence of the semantic legacy of obligation:
Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck;
And yet, methinks, I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons’ quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain, and wind;
Or say with princes if it shall go well
By aught predict that I in heaven find;
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And, constant stars, in them I read such art
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,
If from thyself, to store thou wouldst convert;
   Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
   Thy end is truth’s and beauty’s doom and date.

If any sonnet were to contain purely epistemic modal references to the future, this one
would be a likely candidate; with its conceit of astronomy and methods of divining the
future, it is candidly about prediction in a way that the other poems are not. Largely
comprising catalogues of fortune-telling tools and conventions, it seems designed to
draw attention to the nuances of prediction. Booth notes that “By oft predict that I in
heaven find” (8) provides an unusual, if awkward, instance of “predict” as a noun,
with the result that the term itself is held up for scrutiny, rendered alien both by its
functional shift and its awkward syntactical arrangement. Unlike the predictive shalls
discussed above, those in this sonnet are less preoccupied by the burden of a death-
promising future – “Or say with princes if it shall go well” (7); “As truth and beauty
shall together thrive” (11) – and ostensibly fulfill their functions as relatively unmarked
indicators of some future time. But even here other factors are in play, for the speaker’s
desire to distinguish his own specialized divining skills from those of more prosaic
fortune-tellers eclipses the entire sonnet. This newly championed form of “astronomy,"

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51 This line presents a critical crux: Duncan-Jones reads it as “By aught predict” and contends that Q’s
“oft” may be a compositor’s error (138 n.8).
based not on celestial bodies but rather the “constant stars” of the beloved’s eyes, is carefully set up as a distinct and novel form of prediction; as Vendler notes, while the traditional fortune-tellers search the stars, the speaker “gazes at his beloved’s eyes; while they foretell particulars, he foretells the metaphysical future of the universe” (105). That such truths are represented in his verse is implied through language that celebrates the graphic and the tangible – the “knowledge” and “art” that is “read” in the eyes of the beloved are set down for his audience to read in turn, and the couplet’s “this I prognosticate” leaves ambiguous the question of whether “this” refers to the prediction itself or to the written legacy of the sonnet’s closing lines. The speaker’s shalls absorb the authority of this self-appointed prophesier, one who trusts in the immutability of his verse and his words, and in them we can distinguish the force of his volition. No longer simple indicators of future time, they mark a future that is determined in a new way, as dependent upon the vitality of the beloved and the speaker’s skill at interpreting it as on the autonomous and indifferent march of time. The verbs thus inhabit an ambiguous territory between epistemic and deontic modality; they hover between prediction, prophecy, and volition, hinting at a future that is inevitable and independent of the speaker, but that is at the same time causally linked to his own will and ability.

Just as shalls of straightforward epistemic prediction are difficult to come by in these sonnets, unqualified shalls of intention are scarce. Typically, these two usages are distinguished from one another by the verb modified by shall; while the verbs in statements of prediction refer to actions beyond the control of the speaker, those in statements of intention are agentive, referring to actions that can be controlled and
enacted by the speaker. The nature of the agentive verb determines whether the intention is interpreted as menacing or benign; as Coates summarizes, “[d]epending on whether the action referred to in the verb is regarded as pleasant or unpleasant, the statement of intention will be interpreted as a promise or a threat” (186). Moreover, the felicity conditions of an effective statement of intention require a first person subject and authentic control on the part of that speaker: “the agentivity of the verb is crucial, since one can only intend to do what one is able to do” (Coates 187). Perhaps it is not surprising that Shakespeare’s sonnets have virtually no explicit shall-formulations of promises or threats; this is, after all, a highly controlled rhetorical environment ostensibly based on praise and deference. The agency and the desire of the speaker is – in appearance at least – superceded by that of the object of praise. As I will discuss, expressions of the speaker’s will seep out in more covert ways, but bald statements of intention (which, in the lexicon of politeness theory, constitute a strong “face threatening action”) are understandably improbable.52

In fact, there are only two examples of “I shall” statements in the entire text of the sonnets, and both modify verbs that are, at best, only provisionally agentive. Sonnet 49, a self-consoling balm against the threat of possible rejection, opens with the lines

52 I am drawing on the terms of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson’s politeness model detailed in Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage (1987). In their description of face threatening actions (FTAs), Brown and Levinson identify “face” as a double-edged concept concerning the seemingly disparate desires to be approved of and also to be free from the imposition of others (61). FTAs, which imperil the face wants of either the speaker or addressee, warrant various ‘politeness strategies’ to mitigate the potential risks of the act. This model acquires a particular relevance when it is applied to the deployment of modal expressions, for modal verbs by their very nature are highly-charged words that encode a potential threat; as Brown and Levinson assert, “verbs that intrinsically might threaten face include modals of obligation and verbs of wanting and desiring” (192).
“Against that time, if ever that time come / When I shall see thee frown on my defects” (1-2). The verb “see” here may be interpreted as independent of the speaker’s control, a reading supported by the poem’s theme of unwillingness to face a future of love repudiated, “converted from the thing it was” (7). Yet “seeing” in Shakespeare’s sonnets is always a fraught action, and the speaker is demonstrably attuned to its double-edged qualities of willed vision (if skewed or painful) and the concomitant choice to be deliberately blind. The action depicted by the thorny verb “see” in one sense necessarily lies within the realm of speaker agency: what can a subject really control if not the sensory actions of his or her own body? In another way, though, it is vulnerable to the force of other agents who are capable of instigating a change in perspective; in the case of Sonnet 49, the capriciousness of the lover’s affection will impel a sight that must be observed regardless of the agency or will of the speaker. Although it may be counterintuitive to read “When I shall see thee frown on my defects” as a statement of intention, the structure of this line, and the message of those following, suggest that it is in fact acting as a promise of sorts. The sonnet works, as Vendler notes, as a type of “apotropaic charm, meant, by mentioning the unspeakable, to prevent it from happening” (245). In support of this endeavour, it provides a catalogue of the forms of affection turned to indifference that this dismaying future will consist of — and culminates in the speaker’s self-immolating vow. Couched in its position between the qualifying “when” and this portrait of envisioned events, the shall here encodes the promise of self-preservation in the poem itself, a place for the speaker

53 The other instance occurs in Sonnet 81: “Or I shall live, your epitaph to make; / Or you survive, when I in earth am rotten” (1-2). “I shall” here suggests a vow to memorialize the beloved, a strong fear that the speaker will not live long enough to perform it, and, as Vendler observes, a sly boast in its “recognition that he has already provided a monument in his sonnets” (363).
to be safely entrenched, a world comprised of his own fruitfully imagined “vision,” however bleak. “Against that time,” he declares, “do I ensconce me here” (9), the “sconce” a brief haven of comfort and the deictic “here” providing an inbuilt ambiguity; he may as plausibly be referring to the text currently being read, the product of his own hand, as to the present moment. This casts a different type of shadow on the time that the speaker “shall see,” and suggests that the speaker’s modal choice is a kind of promise according to the sonnet’s ‘if...then’ logic. Should the beloved become a turncoat, then the speaker will react accordingly, and the sonnet itself provides a record – and a declaration – of this intent. In a description of the usage patterns of intention-

shall, Alex Klinge claims that “SHALL rather than WILL is traditionally used with first-person subjects . . . because in forming our assumptions about the future world we generally take ourselves to be agents of our own future, and therefore we think of our own future as AGENT-EVENTS over which we have control” (350). By using “I shall” to stake out the conditions of a future that may be forced upon him, the speaker in Sonnet 49 reclaims some of the agency stripped away by the beloved’s projected spurning. The sonnet thus acts as a kind of preemptive strike, a means for the speaker to gain some control, however provisional, over his envisioned future.

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54 Klinge uses terminology from the field of modal logic: an “agent event,” defined as “a result of an activity of an intentional agent” is distinct from a “world event,” a result of “the course of the world” and not attributable to an agent’s intention (328). These distinctions loosely follow the distinctions between deontic and epistemic types of modality. Categories borrowed from modal logic and modal philosophy will be discussed more extensively in Chapter Three, which deals with Coriolanus.

55 A similar quasi-intentional quality – also involving a verb of vision – is on display in Hamlet’s initial troubled statements about his father. Speaking of his father, Hamlet declares “I shall not look upon his like again” (1.2.188). The duty-bound implication of shall transforms this statement from a simple lament (that Hamlet will not find another man of his father’s calibre) to a determined promise – Hamlet’s filial deference will not permit him to “look upon,” or respect, another man. Even before he is aware of Claudius’s guilt, Hamlet has made the decision that to respect Claudius is to dishonour his father, so he refuses to do so.
The prediction- and intention- *shall* s under discussion demonstrate that even in the sonnets’ putatively neutral statements about the future, there exists a discernable watermark of the speaker’s influence and control. These utterances point to a future that is in some sense causally linked to the speaker’s actions – his sight, his writing – so that *shall*’s semantic flavour of consequential obligation, of something that is bound to happen as the result of an earlier action, is subtly retained. This semantic blurring is evident even in instances of *shall* that more overtly indicate obligation or speaker volition, so that many of these statements merge the functions of prediction, intention, and necessity. The result is that these lines carry a peculiar force that is both understated (in their guise as neutral propositions) and brimming with revelations about the speaker’s aspirations and anxieties.

To this point, the *shall* s under consideration have pointed to a future predicted or desired by the sonnet speaker. While modal expressions for the most part work in this way to establish the speaker’s perspective, there are rarer instances in which the modal verb of an utterance comments on the stance of other participants in a dialogue. In particular, the volition of the person being addressed may be expressed by the interrogative use of *shall*, so that that the construction *shall I* followed by an agentive verb “has the effect of consulting the addressee’s wishes” (Coates 188). Thus the question *Shall I make the appointment for tomorrow?* encodes a series of inquiries, conditions, and assertions amounting to the implicit meaning of *Do you want me to? Because if you do, I will.*

In fact, unlike other *shall* usages which have grown

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56Cf. Arnovick, who discusses the distinction between factual and deliberative questions. Deliberative questions, under which umbrella the *shall I* construction falls, have “the desire for information, for a directive, as one of their sincerity conditions” (40). Lyons explains that “When a speaker poses or asks a deliberative question (*What am I to do? Shall I open the door?*, etc.), he expressly withholding his
uncommon in contemporary English, this use of *shall* is still relatively prevalent, in part because of its efficacy in formal or polite dialogue: “Questions beginning *Shall I* or *Shall we*, which are a normal way of offering help or giving an invitation to another person . . . consult the wish of the listener, not that of the speaker . . . [in PDE] volitional *shall* is more common in questions than in statements, because it is favoured by politeness: it is more polite to consult the wishes of the listener, than to assert one’s own wishes as a speaker” (Leech, *English Verb* 89).

It is not surprising that the *shall* of addressee volition is almost nonexistent in these sonnets, poems which are largely concerned with the impressions and reactions of the speaker. More remarkable is that the most recognizable line from Shakespeare’s sonnets – Sonnet 18’s “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day” – features this rare construction. This unusual and poem-opening instance of *shall* is noteworthy first because it emphasizes the dialogic nature of the sonnet form – here, the addressee is not just perfunctorily apostrophized, but appealed to, and so begins to participate as an interlocutor rather than simply providing an audience to the speaker’s voice. Further, this *shall* implicitly comments on the nature of the relationship between the speaker and his addressee, hinting at the conflicts that inform their relationship. On one level, the speaker, eager for the beloved’s approval and conscious of his own relative social rank, obeys the rules of epideixis and decorum by deferring to the wishes of the addressee. In this sense, it is a cloyingly cordial opening: not only is the hyperbole of praise immediately deployed, but the speaker first seeks the permission of the addressee to perform this praise. At the same time, though, it draws attention to the

commitment to the desirability or the necessity if the course of action which would make [his proposition] true” (qtd. in Arnovick 40).
speaker’s own virtuosity; Anne Ferry notes that “[t]he opening question insists almost impudently that we attend to, and ultimately applaud, the speaker’s verbal performance” (All in War 11). The remainder of the sonnet bears out the double-edged egotism of the speaker’s presumed deference, effectively quashing any pretense of appeal to addressee volition by the poem’s end. The shall I question is immediately followed by the potent assertion of line two (“Thou art more lovely and more temperate”), which maintains the tenor of exaggerated praise but abruptly shifts the tone. The polite inquiry of the sonnet’s opening line becomes, in the wake of its successor, decorous lip-service. Its demand for a directive is overridden by the force and assuredness (and indeed the haste) of its follow-up, a statement which effectively disregards the wishes of the addressee. As Stephen Orgel maintains, “The beloved youth, the object of passion, all but disappears in the most assertive of these poems. ‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?’ turns almost at once from praise of the young man to vaunting instead the power of the poet, power even over death” (21). Some critics have read this odd opening as evidence of playfulness; Vendler suggests that the speaker “begins with a trifle – a youth and a day and an apparent whim of the inventive mind” (120). But the veneer of insouciance belies the dynamics at work within the statement, and it is this relationship of apparent insignificance masking a more nuanced meaning that is at the heart of my larger discussion of modal expressions in general and shall in particular. The speaker here acknowledges the codes of deference and praise and obeys them to the letter, but then undercuts them at every turn. The speaker appeals to the addressee’s wishes only to obscure them with his own overpowering will, a move which is more slyly undermining than a failure to address
the beloved in the first place. The shall here thus encodes the slipperiness of social language; even when addressee’s wishes are being consulted, the speaker poses a challenge.

Consider, as well, the bitter opening of Sonnet 93, whose beginning offers a warped echo of Sonnet 18: “So shall I live, supposing thou art true, / Like a deceived husband; so love’s face/ May still seem love to me, though altered new” (1-3). Here, the inverted syntax mimics the interrogative shall, suggestive of the dark flipside to the shall I construction, a challenge and even a threat that amounts to an incredulous Is that what you really want? But the inversion emphasizes the bitter directive of shall; it acknowledges that the youth does hold the power to command a certain type of blinkered existence for the speaker. Indeed, the ambiguity of the other modal featured in these opening lines – “so love’s face / May still seem love to me” – plays on this tension between the addressee’s power and the speaker’s knowledge and perspective. As Booth explains, may’s potential meanings of “can” or “might perhaps” (in other words, the tension between may’s deontic and epistemic effects) plays up the question of “whether the beloved’s defection is a fact or a fear . . . the reader’s semantic uncertainty is similar to the lover’s uncertainty about the beloved” (303 n.3). The shall encodes a similar ambiguity which in the same breath condemns the beloved and pleads for his succor. Ultimately – and true to the wider pattern of the sonnets – the speaker’s power prevails. The pseudo question that opens this sonnet is trumped by a resounding couplet which reasserts the speaker’s own conviction and condemnation:

57 Consider Shall I call the police now? a threat whose meaning may be boiled down to You don’t want that, do you? (Cf. Arnovick 77).
“How like Eve’s apple doth thy beauty grow, / If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show” (13-14).

The speaker’s bids for control of his future are also evident in the frequent references to his own written legacy, many of which use shall-constructions. The sense of fervent conviction attached to shall lends an extra dimension of boastfulness to the posturing of a poet who believes in his own monumental and immutable verse. For example, consider the closing lines of Sonnet 60, a poem which centres on the conventional tension between encroaching decay and the inherent vitality of verse:

“And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand, / Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand” (13-14). This couplet adheres to a sonnet convention passionately endorsed by Shakespeare’s speaker: the trope of immortality, for himself and his beloved, through his verse.\(^{58}\) The shall in this line plays into the boastful and authoritative persona of the speaker-poet; it displays the characteristics of what Coates identifies as obligation-shall, a form largely restricted in present-day usage to legal discourse and religious injunction (such as The loan shall be repaid in total), and which takes as its subject a third person inanimate subject (191). It is typical, then, for obligation-shall to be deployed only by those speakers who possess the authority to enforce it – God and the

\(^{58}\) This conventional aim of immortality through verse, so powerfully asserted in Shakespeare’s sonnets, offers an interesting point of comparison to Astrophil and Stella. In the latter work, the trope is notably downplayed; “Sidney dissociates himself from the project that became closely associated with the sonnet . . . the project of giving his homage to the beloved a lasting poetic monument” (Hedley, Power in Verse 90). This is not to say, however, that Sidney is not aware of and invested in the power of his verse. Self-flattering tributes, while they may lack the brazen verve of Shakespeare’s “My love shall in my verse ever live young” (19.14), appear in more covert forms in Astrophil and Stella. Cf. Dubrow’s account of “‘Fool,’ said my Muse to me, ‘look in thy heart and write’” (1.14), which considers the wordplay between ‘heart’ and ‘art’ supported by the sometimes silent h of Elizabethan English, and that produces a reading in which Sidney expresses awareness and pride of his own skill.
court of law easily fit the bill, but the status of the sonnet speaker is more tenuous. It is therefore a bold move by the speaker to lay claim to the power of obligation-\textit{shall}, to insist, in a line that mimics ecclesiastical rhetoric, that his verse “shall live.” Further, it underscores the potency of the immortal-verse convention; the speaker’s testament to his own verse is one of the few arenas in which he is permitted to engage in unabashed self-promotion, and so it is not surprising that these forceful claims recur throughout the sequence. Thus we see recycled – often in the closing force of the couplet – the same familiar boasts depicting verse victorious over time, and the toils of writing rewarded: “Yet do thy worst, old Time, despite thy wrong, / My love shall in my verse ever live young” (19.13-14); “If my slight Muse do please these curious days, / The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise” (38.13-14); “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme; / But you shall shine more bright in these contents / Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time” (55.1-4).

Yet the bravado of the speaker is always subject to deflation; just as instances of apparent praise often disguise subtle appeals for control, the speaker’s boastful proclamations also hint at cracks in his swaggering persona. As Dubrow notes, the speaker alternates between “asserting the immortalizing power of his own verse and denying that power may well manifest his ambivalence about the object of praise,” vacillations that “show his uncertainty over his own agency” (124-25). Statements about future time must be read in terms of the conditions of the present, so it is understood that fears about the present bleed into fears for the future. Sonnets that depict a vaunted written legacy in which the speaker’s work ultimately triumphs over

\footnote{Obligation-\textit{shall} has affinities with the \textit{shall} of prophecy, which differs because it is beyond the speaker’s power to control the fulfillment of his or her statement. Rather, the speaker vows on behalf of a more powerful guarantor (such is the case in the statement ‘The dead shall be raised’) (Hermeren 105).}
obstacles such as death and the beloved implicate those obstacles as sources of threat and uncertainty in the present moment. The catalogue of shalls thus offers evidence of the speaker protesting rather too much, a display of alarm rather than unwavering arrogance. Perhaps, just as “two negatives affirm” according to the grammar rules so mockingly revered by Astrophil, two (or more) shalls amount to a surreptitious admission of fear that the future will not actualize according to the command of these verbs. The shalls are, finally, good evidence for the artifice behind what Stephen Orgel calls the Prospero-esque “megalomania” of the speaker. As Orgel observes, what stands out in the speaker’s proud claims is the stark insecurity that underscores them:

… given all the boasting about the defeat of Time and the conferral of immortality, it is the abjectness of this poet that is striking, the repeated insistence that the beloved, even as he betrays the poet with a mistress or prefers a rival poet, is too good for him, that the poet-lover deserves the neglect he suffers, and that the love, however compelling, however much the source of a poetry more lasting than monuments, is nothing but a flattering dream. Prospero’s megalomania is in the Sonnets recognised as a fantasy about mental power, about the absolute control the poet can only dream of exercising over his subject through his poetry. (21)

**Shakespeare’s “Shallowest Help”: Refracted Shall**s in Sonnet 80

I have so far been exploring patterns of usage for early modern shalls to demonstrate the rich range of meanings available to its speakers. Using this frame, I have considered how Shakespeare exploits the ambiguous semantic status of shall to achieve various aims – boastful prophecy and grammatical bullying among them – in his sonnets. I would now like to extend the discussion to consider an instance where shall is merely suggested rather than explicitly invoked, in order to explore further my initial suggestion that Shakespeare’s speaker holds up “grammar rules” for the scrutiny
of his readers, exhorting them to appreciate its nuances and the subtle plays for control that his clever manipulation affords. Sonnet 80, one of a series of commentaries on a rival poet (and possibly competing lover), does not contain a single *shall*, but the force of this modal is nevertheless discernable:

O how I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue-tied speaking of your fame.
But since your worth, wide as the ocean is,
The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,
My saucy bark, inferior far to his,
On your broad main doth wilfully appear.
Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat,
Whilst he upon your soundless deep doth ride;
Or, being wracked, I am a worthless boat,
He of tall building and goodly pride.

Then if he thrive and I be cast away,
The worst was this: my love was my decay.

This sonnet depicts the speaker in a highly defensive stance; it is the first to isolate the rival as a specific individual, and the threat from this “better spirit” clearly rankles. The warring pronouns of this poem enact the triangulated relationship; Vendler notes that the *I* and *he* are set in unusually “emphatic contrast,” so that they are structurally foregrounded (358). The poem’s dominant image is unnerving, and incongruous in the sonnets: the vast sea upon which two disparate vessels float evokes both hopelessness (the beloved is unfathomable, and indifferent as anything in the natural world) and detachment (the tableau suggests that these players are set as a distance, and the reader becomes a far-off observer). These details suggest a type of dissonance; what is on one hand a frank admission of jealousy and fear of rejection is on the other a sly attack. The dual edge of passive resentment and offensive attack is exposed in several dark hints about sexual propriety. In contrast to the rival’s “proudest sail” (6) the speaker
identifies himself as a “saucy bark” (7), and this sauciness may be read as simple
impertinence, but it can also signal something more serious: “a strong sense of
indecorous respect for social rank” (Burrow 540 n. 7), or an even more potent
lasciviousness. Indeed, the sexual undertones in this sonnet prove to be much more
sinister than the playful bawdiness of the “Will” sonnets. As Booth notes, many words
with sexual connotations deployed to humorous effect in other sonnets – *use, will,
pride, all* – are here highly concentrated (273). The effect is that many words seem
tinged with sexual meaning – even the “better spirit,” which echoes “th’expense of
spirit” in Sonnet 129, becomes a cruder tag. Indeed, in many key phrases this semantic
blurring makes disparate readings equally possible, where one interpretation renders
the line a lament while another makes it a slur. Booth points to the odd syntax of “To
make me tongue-tied,” a phrase that is self-deprecating because it emphasizes the
speaker’s own affliction (one which, for a poet, holds particular shame), but also
succeeds in suggesting that the rival is “a petty and malicious creature whose main
concern is to make the speaker tongue-tied” (274). The couplet, too, with its insistence
that “my love was my decay,” may be read either as supreme self-condemnation or as
sour blame, the raw flipside of hyperbolic praise. Ultimately, the sonnet’s many
ambiguities point to a question at its core: who is to blame? Is it the rival or the speaker
who is proud, or petty? Is the suffering of the speaker the fault of the beloved or of his
own troubled affection? Certainly one effect of such vagueness, set among so many
repeated personal pronouns, is the suggestion that the blame is endemic to all players.
But I would like to suggest that the uncertainty comes to a head in a sequence of
modalized or modal-mimicking constructions that decidedly shift the fault away from the speaker and place responsibility in the hands of the beloved.

“My saucy bark, inferior far to his, / On your broad main doth wilfully appear. / Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat . . .”: in terms of grammar, these lines provide an interesting study. The sequence of curt monosyllables in the second line provides a compelling syntactic lead-up to the charged words “wilfully appear.”

Indeed, “wilfully” is perhaps the most strikingly ambiguous word in the poem, situated at its centre and resonating with competing meanings. One reading renders this word relatively passive – ‘at will, freely’ – an interpretation that acknowledges the speaker’s volition but does not dwell on it. Contrast this to another possible reading, one which suggests a more stubborn desire represented by “wilfully”: “in a self-willed manner, perversely, obstinately” (Burrow 540 n. 8). Of course, the will that reverberates throughout the sequence is also a nod to its author, and Booth notes that if the word is a nominal pun, the effect is apt: “the saucy bark is full of Will” (274). And the signature is not subtle; it is inevitable that we pause on this word, for its function as a surplus modifier and its polysyllabic cadence among a string of short prosaic words ensure that it has our attention. What is particularly interesting is that, despite the various potential meanings attached to this word, the one that is ultimately stressed is the modal sense of volition. For this invocation of a variant of will, a familiar source of linguistic play in

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60 The most notable of these lead-up words is doth, an example of periphrastic do. This formulation first appears in written English only in the early modern period (Warner, “Reworking” 539; Rissanen 239), and even then it is rare (more generally, the movement toward periphrasis (the use of discrete words rather than inflections to express a grammatical relationship) is evidence of a broader trend of English to move from being an inflected to an analytic language. Cf. Millward 417). In this case, doth draws particular attention to itself as an auxiliary – supplementing and emphasizing the main verb, “appear” – in part because it is coupled with a variant of another auxiliary, will. It works to bolster the agency already connoted by “wilfully,” so that the speaker’s own power and wish to obtrusively “appear” is underscored.
the sonnets, is abruptly followed by another reworking of a modal in the equally striking adjective “shallowest.”61 Few editors comment on this juxtaposition, but Booth suggests that this pairing produces an “ideational pun,” something that he characterizes as an “interplay between an idea and a word that could – but does not – express or relate to that idea” (465 n. 9). He comments on the “incidental wit” produced by parallels between the component parts of these words: “the first syllables of the two words are potentially synonymous in senses that those two syllables do not have or pertain to here . . . the ‘full’ of wilfully pertains casually to shallow.” (274 n. 8-9).

While this cogent assessment underscores the subtlety behind much linguistic play in the sonnets, there is more to be said about the pertinence of will and shall within the context of Sonnet 80.

Indeed, the modal meanings of will and shall (which are not in fact synonymous, as I have argued) bring much to bear on a thorough reading of this sonnet. That the speaker identifies himself with will is clear: it is his “saucy bark” that “wilfully” appears. The emphasis is therefore on his volition going into “Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat,” a pivotal line that merits a detailed syntactical breakdown. Having just aligned himself with will, the speaker moves to link the beloved to shall with “Your shallowest help”: the “help” clearly belongs to the addressee, as does the modifying “shallowest.” This is the first and most explicit slight: while the speaker identifies himself with the forceful and evocative will, he labels the beloved with the pejorative “shallow” and deepens the cut by adding the superlative “est.” The addressee is thus doubly condemned, tainted by the association with

61 Booth notes that shallowest is dissyllabic by syncopation: ‘shall’west’ or ‘shallow’st’ (274 n.9). When the former pronunciation is used, the modal suggestiveness of the word is redoubled.
“shallow,” as well as by the suggestion of pettiness; even the least intrusive of actions – the “shallowest help” imaginable – is beyond the beloved’s capacity. In addition, the associations of the second-person shall – unlike those of will – are of compulsion and necessity, similar to the voice of prophecy in Sonnet 123. The derogatory implications of shallowest/shall are further – and more covertly – manifested when we consider that “your shallowest” is reminiscent of another you shall construction, one expressly used to communicate the volition and power of the speaker over against the addressee.

Leech characterizes this as the shall of “granting favours,” as in you shall be rewarded if you are patient: “The meaning is ‘I am willing . . .’ and the implication is that the speaker is conferring a favour on another. For this reason, this use has a connotation of condescension, and is typically used in reference to pets or young children” (English Verb 88). The fact that “Your shallowest help” is promptly followed by will only strengthens the case for condescension shall here. Bakhtinian analysis reminds us to pay attention to the ways that words play off one another in a discourse, and the juxtaposition of shall and will is especially rich in dialogic potential. As Ewbank asserts, “The relations between words are as important as the semantic meaning of individual words. Shakespeare can change that meaning by repetition, juxtaposition or combination . . . he is forever defying the limits of available vocabulary” (5).

The speaker returns the focus to himself with the quick echo of “wilfully” – he will not let us forget that his is the dominant will of the sonnet – and maneuvers to claim control over the actions of the beloved.62 With the fell swoop of will, then, he trumps the

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62 Another interesting juxtaposition occurs in 135: “Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious, / Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine? / Shall will in others seem right gracious, / And in my will no fair acceptance shine?” (135.5-8, emphasis added). The successive wry questions each refer to a hypothetical future in which the addressed lover has refused the speaker’s advances, with both the “Wilt”
wishes and actions of the beloved with his own volition, and according to the logic of
the phrase he in fact impels the beloved’s “help” to save him by keeping him afloat.
The line thus reverses the power in much the same way as does Astrophil’s Song Four
in the trickery of “No, no, no, no, my dear, let be”; it linguistically manipulates the
unwitting addressee into taking the side of, and relinquishing control to, the speaker.

In some sense, the suggestive phrase “shallowest help” captures the force of shall throughout Shakespeare’s sonnets. The shalls of this sequence simultaneously
elevate the speaker and denigrate the beloved; they imply that what the speaker
ultimately seeks is not the imperfect succour of his addressee but the deeper aid
afforded by his own linguistic control. Consider the sentiment captured in the bleak
admission of defeat, “Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing . . . / My bonds in
thee are all determinate. / For how do I hold thee but by thy granting . . .” (87.1, 4-5). If
a dominant undercurrent of the sonnets is the conviction that no future is secure, and
that much of the control of that future lies elsewhere, the shalls are a way to hold onto
the beloved, and to the self – they guarantee communion in a way that the beloved
alone cannot or will not grant. They are a self-protective strategy against external
modal impulses, “someone or something outside the subject [that] decides what the
subject is obliged or permitted to do or be” (Hermeren 95-96). The epigraph to this
chapter culminates in Astrophil’s troubled query about the elusive means for banishing
destructive desire: “but yet, alas, how shall?” The resonant and polysemous shalls of
Shakespeare’s sonnets offer a plausible answer, for they offer retaliatory recourse, a

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and the “Shall” stressing the lover’s choice to bequeath or withhold “fair acceptance.” But the
dominance of will in this sonnet ensures that will itself is earmarked as belonging to the speaker, with the
effect that the will of the addressee is mingled with that of the speaker.
powerful counter-modality that issues from the speaker’s fear and hope for an uncertain future.
Co-acting and Communal Language: The Perils of Talk in *Troilus and Cressida*

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions . . . Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.

- Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*

[I]n studying the grammar of the clause as exchange we are actually studying *how interpersonal meanings get made*.

- Suzanne Eggins, *Linguistics* (emphasis in original)

Who is it that can tell me who I am?
- *King Lear* (1.4.221)

Unsteady Bridge: The Cynicism of Shared Language

Lear’s famous plea for identification seems a fitting introduction to the thorny world of *Troilus and Cressida*, for the play’s puzzles – rooted in problems of identity and communication – are aptly framed by Lear’s blunt utterance, spoken in the wake of Goneril’s impudence. His words may easily be read as the angry assertion of an offended monarch, a command for respect that requires no rejoinder save for the honour that he believes is his due. However, if interpreted as an authentic question in search of an answer, Lear’s appeal is telling in its implicit assessment of how identity is formed. He turns the question of identity outward and demands that others name him, an instinct that expresses the social nature of identity-making. As Lear recognizes, his identity as king is established and maintained by others, dependent upon a sort of social consensus. When this agreement is subtly challenged, its conditions no longer obeyed, he becomes vulnerable and in danger of becoming someone else altogether: “This is

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63 Quotations from *King Lear* are taken from the Arden edition, edited by R. A. Foakes (1997).
not Lear” (1.4.191).\(^4\) Indeed, it is invariably other people who can tell us who we are, and they do so anew in every linguistic interaction in which we participate. One of my concerns in this study is to explore how relationships are created, tested, and reinforced in each linguistic encounter, even those that seem neutral or innocuous. As Suzanne Eggins observes, the tools of grammar have much to teach us about meaning that reaches beyond the simple sense of an utterance to touch on wider-reaching implications: “By looking at the grammatical choices speakers make, the role they play in discourse, we have a way of uncovering and studying the social creation and maintenance of hierarchic, socio-cultural roles” (187). Thus, it is not only identity that is at stake for participants in communication: interpersonal relationships, degrees of power, and social roles are all determined collaboratively through interactive linguistic encounters. These sites of contact are the focus of this chapter. And the hallmark linguistic behaviours of Troilus and Cressida – including exhortation, insult-trading, gossip, and flattery – expose methods of social negotiation and delineation and reflect the risk of participating in the shared processes of language. Talk in this play strains against the shared processes of language, and expresses resistance to entering the communal fray of discourse.

This chapter will approach the problem of communal language in Troilus and Cressida from a few different perspectives. First, drawing on the work of critics such as Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and Halliday, I will provide an overview of some theories of social communication, from the shared language encountered in dialogue between speakers to the collaborative potential at the level of the word itself. Next, I consider

\(^4\) For a thorough analysis of how the relationships of King Lear are negotiated and maintained through conversation, see Lynne Magnusson’s “The Pragmatics of Repair in King Lear and Much Ado About Nothing” in Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters, 141-62.
how the play’s curious textual and performance history contributes to its peculiar brand of disrupted language. I then turn to a review of forms of talk in *Troilus and Cressida*, showcasing fraught linguistic interactions such as gossip and name-calling, to suggest that the collectivity of communication is a disturbing reality in *Troilus and Cressida*. Finally, I address the question of what is at stake in these ‘shared words’ in the play by considering the word *will*, particularly as it used by Cressida, as a key example of a word that is (in Voloshinov’s terminology) a “bridge” that is mutually constructed by speaker and hearer, and that depends on both parties for its meaning.

The burden of communality is a guiding concern in *Troilus and Cressida*. In a world where love affairs are matters of public debate and grounds for war, and where the influence of meddlesome relatives and disgruntled comrades is always in play, the disappearance of agency is a predictable cost. Too much, it seems, depends upon others, and everyone is eager to stake a claim. The play has become a pet case for critics interested in identity, many of whom have promoted arguments about characters who (fruitlessly) seek to create or recreate themselves and one another.65 *Troilus and Cressida’s* insistent suggestion that identity itself is dependent on others is captured in Achilles’ famous words on reciprocal observation and appraisal: “. . . nor doth the eye itself, / That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself, / Not going from itself, but eye to eye opposed, / Salutes each other with each other’s form, / For speculation turns not to itself / Till it hath travelled and is mirrored there / Where it may see itself” (3.3.105-65).

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65 Linda Charnes, for one, contends that the characters of *Troilus and Cressida* are crippled by the spectres of famous personas that they can never truly inhabit, arguing that subjectivity — “the unstable heterogeneity that simultaneously constitutes and unfixes even the most ‘fixed’ of names” — is in *Troilus* “posited as the disruptive effect of simultaneous resistance, and subjection to, the determining force of famous names” (*Notorious Identity* 74).
A subject cannot see himself, cannot be himself, except in interaction with another. This inevitable collaboration may be a universal condition of being human, but it provides a basis for interaction that is mired in mistrust. Ulysses clearly voices these anxieties in his much-discussed hierarchy speech—“O, when degree is shaked, / Which is the ladder of all high designs, / The enterprise is sick” (1.3.101-3)—and in his incisive recognition that worth is derived from without, in the perceptions of other people: “. . . no man is the lord of anything, /Though in and of him there be much consisting, /Till he communicate his parts to others” (3.3.115-17). The idea that value is realized only when it is affirmed by others is the same sentiment that underlies Lear’s plea to be told who he is, and it is in both cases a source of profound unease. The result of this troubled dependence is a deep cynicism about human communication. Speakers in *Troilus and Cressida* are disillusioned not only with their circumstances and with each other, but also with language itself, the primary interface by means of which they interact with their world. Linguistic propriety, always under threat, becomes a valuable goal, and speakers are willing to go to great lengths to preserve it. In some sense, *Troilus and Cressida* may be read as a monitory linguistic tale, detailing in lurid fashion the threats that speakers face when they enter the conflict-filled world of discourse.

Bakhtin and Voloshinov extend the relational model of consciousness and identity to language itself, positing that it is a social phenomenon that is always created in collaboration with others. This relational process permeates all levels of language, from the macro-forms of communication to the micro-level of words themselves: “As a

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living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 293).

Voloshinov refines this argument by tracing an entire network of influences linked to each speaker, which form a unified “word” only when they are combined:

In point of fact, word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other.’ I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor. (86, emphasis removed)

Voloshinov sees the Janus-like word looking forward to the person to whom it is spoken and anticipating the network of associations that he or she brings to it, while also looking backward to the experiences of the speaker, so that personal history, community, and position all play their part in the “bridge” of meaning that is constructed with each utterance.67

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67 Cf. Bakhtin’s similar claim that each word already anticipates an “answering word” at the moment of its utterance: “On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction . . . The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that
Voloshinov’s account of the birth of a word is particularly compelling because it emphasizes the act of bridging, the joining of disparate forces. This bridging is also characteristic of language in use, in the linguistic encounters of conversation, argument, and gossip that this chapter will explore. As M. A. K. Halliday contends, every instance of discourse, or “text,” is intrinsically relational: “A text is a process of sharing: the shared creation of meaning. Those who share in this process are the ‘you’ and the ‘me’ of the text. Our status as co-actants is made explicit in the text itself – in the grammar” (Text and Discourse 228). The substance of the “text” created by these co-actants is in turn part of a dynamic network of influences. In Bakhtin’s memorable terminology, it exemplifies the “living interaction” of language in use, and each word contained within it carries social, historical, and linguistic weight. But the phenomenon of the living utterance, which suggests wondrous saturation and possibility, also has less sanguine implications for its participating co-actants. The consequence of this word-sharing is unwitting complicity in the worlds of others: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word . . . exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own” (Dialogic Imagination 293-94). The problem is not only that words are “half someone
else’s”; speakers are oppressed by the more alarming fear that those words belong more fully to someone else than to themselves, that “[l]anguage is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others” (294). Bakhtin’s assessment hints at a sinister take on heteroglossia, where interaction involves competition and proprietary bids for control. The noxious living utterances that populate *Troilus and Cressida* demonstrate the problems of being cognizant that the word always belongs in some way to someone else.

From its outset, the play presents a case for the dark underbelly of heteroglossia, where even the most banal conversations show speakers attempting to harness words to serve their own meanings, their own intentions. The insouciance of the Prologue, who proclaims his indifference to his audience by suggesting that their reactions are of little consequence – “Like, or find fault, do as you pleasures are” (30) – is quickly replaced with a strong tenor of competition in the talk between Troilus and Pandarus that opens the first act. This initial linguistic encounter shows each speaker striving to make claims on specific words, corralling his interlocutor to speak according to the conditions determined by him. Pandarus’s mock vow to “meddle nor make no further” is followed by a pronouncement bound to provoke Troilus into a prescribed response: “he that will have a cake out of the wheat must tarry the grinding” (1.1.13-14). Troilus, rising to the bait, meets each of Pandarus’s retorts with the same answer in a relentless attempt to wrench agreement from him:

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TROILUS Have I not tarried?
PANDARUS Ay, the grinding, but you must tarry the bolting.
TROILUS Have I not tarried?
PANDARUS Ay, the bolting, but you must tarry the leavening.
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TROILUS Still have I tarried.
PANDARUS Ay, to the leavening; but here’s yet in the word hereafter the kneading, the making of the cake, the heating of the oven, and the baking; nay, you must stay the cooling too or you may chance burn your lips. (1.3.16-24)

In the face of Pandarus’s unwillingness to provide the answer that he seeks, Troilus provides it for himself – “Still I have tarried” – while the undaunted Pandarus persists with his own thread of conversation, even recanting the conditional “Ay”s he has conceded with a final dismissive “nay.” Pandarus thus fails to obey a basic tenet of conversation; in Gricean terms, the “co-operative principle” by which speakers contribute according to the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange is violated. In one sense, this exchange shows how conversations can be competitive operations, as each speaker vies for a measure of control: “[B]y taking the discourse further, by initiating new topical aspects, he or she tries to govern the contributions to follow. Hence, there is a basic asymmetry involved in this dialectic between being controlled and being in control, which is part and parcel of the ‘power’ of basic dialogue mechanisms” (Linell and Luckmann 7). In this case, though, the competitive nature of the interaction is exaggerated; Troilus and Pandarus each attempt not only to govern the response of his addressee, but in fact strive to dictate it. Indeed, as Pandarus continues to goad Troilus with his sly appraisal of Cressida – “An her hair were not somewhat darker than Helen’s” (39) – Troilus calls on the rules of cooperative conversation and accuses Pandarus of playing false: “I tell thee Pandarus, / When I do tell thee there my hopes lie drowned / Reply not in how many fathoms deep / They lie indrenched. I tell thee I am mad / In Cressid’s love, thou answer’st she is fair . . .” (44-69)

Yet this protest, too, illustrates the problem of cooperation; however much he would like to, Troilus cannot prescribe how Pandarus will “reply.” The following lines effectively summarize the conundrum:

PANDARUS  I speak no more than truth.
TROILUS  Thou dost not speak so much. (60-61)

The disagreed-upon substance of “truth,” the stuff of dialogue that these speakers share, represents the differences between them, and the dangers to which they are subjected in the realm of speech. Troilus’s complaint about the slipperiness of words – “Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart / Th’effect doth operate another way” (5.3.107-8) – captures the core of this problem; linguistic meaning is the sum of many parts, with ‘mouth’ and ‘heart’ only two of many contributors at work in the production of meaning. Features of performance produce semantic effects, just as the “network of assumptions and inferences permeating even the simplest of conversations” (Werth 9) inform all aspects of the speech event. This network is laid bare in the exchange above, as Pandarus exploits several factors – including his understanding of Troilus’s lovesickness and their shared community in which Helen is a remarkably powerful symbol – in order to goad Troilus. In this instance, and indeed in all speech encounters, simply parsing the words that are uttered will not produce a nuanced understanding of talk.

70 I am taking the principles of ‘conversation’ to be generalized to other aspects of speech, based on the suggestion by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson that “conversation should be considered the basic form of speech-exchange system . . . In this light [more formal types such as] debate or ceremony would not be an independent polar type, but rather the most extreme transformation of conversation” (47).

71 Analysts of talk posit a major distinction between what is actually said and what is implied. Cf. Grice (1975) and Wilson and Sperber (1981).
Beyond Talk: Language, Performance and Textual History

This chapter argues that talk is peculiarly troubled in *Troilus and Cressida* – speakers seem to resist the communal nature of language and insistently try to disrupt its collaborative processes. Yet the question of the relationship between *Troilus and Cressida* and Shakespeare’s other plays must be addressed. It might be argued that many of Shakespeare’s plays engage with the question of thorny communication, and indeed that the representation of troubled interaction forms the crux of dramatic action.

In tragedy, especially (a genre on whose border *Troilus and Cressida* lingers), there are several viable candidates for this type of analysis: *King Lear* has its share of thwarted interaction, linguistic encounters where the bridge of meaning fails to be constructed; *Othello* uses the processes of scurrility and gossip, and the impulse to ‘use the word for one’s own intention’, to great dramatic effect. The methods of analysis that I have been applying to *Troilus* could certainly be applied to these and other texts with fruitful results. I would like to suggest, however, that the communication breakdowns in *Troilus and Cressida* have a singular quality that makes them particularly amenable to the linguistic framework that I am using. First, its generic instability lends its experimentation with language an added edge, even a sense of alarm. In plays such as *King Lear* and *Othello*, the trajectory is one of gratified expectation; we dread but expect that the broken linguistic exchanges in *Lear* and the gossip-based plotting of *Othello* will lead to the destructive outcomes that ensue. A form is fulfilled, however grippingly. The arc of *Troilus and Cressida* develops very differently. Hector’s ignominious death provokes a sort of mortification, and this discomfiting reaction is
distinct from the outrage that greets the mute Cordelia, robbed of breath. Rather, the event sits uneasily with the narrative lead-up that the play has given us; it seems fraudulent that the buffoon Achilles could have killed this valorized Trojan soldier, only to turn his death into an item of gossip.\footnote{As I will discuss further in the following section, gossip is the standard communicative mode of the Greek generals. Their reaction to Hector’s death reflects this tendency – “Achilles! Achilles! Hector’s slain! Achilles!” (5.10.3) – and Ajax instructs them that some things must not be talked about: “If it be so, yet bragless let it be: / Great Hector was as good a man as he” (5-6).} In short, the problems of talk in \textit{Troilus and Cressida} unfold in unexpected directions, and moments of linguistic collision that in one sense appear comic – such as the churlish talk of the Greek generals – in another sense prove to be irredeemably grim. And unlike a tragedy such as \textit{King Lear}, \textit{Troilus and Cressida} lacks a focal monarch around whom social power (and the accompanying conflict that stems from struggles to maintain or usurp that power) is centralized. In \textit{Troilus}, Troy’s King Priam is reduced to a token regent whose word carries clout with no one, while other ostensibly more powerful figures – such as Achilles and Ajax – are lampooned as preening blowhards.

In addition, \textit{Troilus and Cressida} reads like a linguistic experiment in ways that other plays do not. In one sense, this distinctiveness is evident in the jumble of speakers that populate the play, and which provide an exceptional commentary on the plight of various discrete subjects negotiating the border between self and world. As Frank Kermode suggests, “\textit{Troilus}, so distinctive in other ways also, is unique in the degree to which its language is saturated by ‘opinion,’ and by the network of notions of which it is the centre” (130). Moreover, the play’s unconventional problems of communication extend beyond its diegetic boundaries. Like its dialogue, \textit{Troilus and Cressida}’s history of performance, reception, and interpretation is also vexed by questions of language.
The play tests the limits of its medium, defying the expectations of its audience and seeming to retreat from conventional storytelling modes in order to use the conditions of performance to explore social ideas and types. Several critics have suggested that the tendency toward experimentation and disruption is manifest in the play’s verbal style; David Bevington writes that “[s]tylistically and verbally, Troilus and Cressida revels in linguistic demystification and discontinuity” (79), pointing to the play’s often overwrought vocabulary, especially in scenes of public debate. In Dawson’s assessment, one cannot fail to take note of the difficulty of the language: “[w]hether because of unusual vocabulary, tortuous syntax, rarefied abstraction, or unusual, even perverse, metaphor, almost every line seems to demand careful attention” (22).

These idiosyncrasies raise questions about a different sort of “shared” language, not between speakers, but between literary modes and tradition. Troilus and Cressida seems a quintessential bricolage text, binding elements of popular drama, genteel debate, and epic poetry (itself filtered through a well-established English tradition).

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73 Harry Berger Jr. expresses it nicely, arguing that Troilus presents “the conditions of life in the fictional world on the model of the conditions of theatrical life … when a set of beliefs, assumptions or attitudes can no longer be taken for granted, they must be argued and revised, if they are not to be given up … They must therefore be staged, played out, and tested by the mind” (“Basilisk” 135). Paul Yachnin, too, sees Troilus as certain type of dramaturgical experiment, a response to “the fashion of satirical ranting … the kind of dramatic design based on the display of social types rather than narrative” (“Problem Plays” 54).

74 More recently, the very problems that rendered the play unpalatable to its early audiences have been celebrated by critics who praise the play for its prescient modernity, many of whom have been drawn to the peculiarity of the play’s language. Cf. Kiernan Ryan, who argues that the play has more significance to our current age than it could ever have had in the past: “The poverty of the current historicist approaches is exposed by the precocious modernity of Troilus and Cressida. The incomprehension and neglect from which the play suffered for three hundred years was not the result of historical ignorance. It was the result of the play’s being not merely out of sync with its time, but so far ahead of its time that it took three centuries for the theatre and for critics to catch up with it” (“Presentism” 170).

75 The play’s inconsistencies are also bound up in its troubled print history. First published in quarto in 1609, it was later reissued that same year with added introductory material. The publishers of the 1623 folio faced legal problems when setting Troilus, with the result that it was interrupted during typesetting and was eventually such a late inclusion that “it has no page numbers and is not mentioned in the ‘catalogue of the severall Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume’ at the start of the folio” (Stern 120). The generic classification of the play is similarly unsettled: the 1609 Q as “The
Given the collision of these registers, it is not surprising that the play has been seen as linguistically incongruous and excessive. Parker suggests that the play’s surplus of language ensures that its characters are defined through their speech (often at the expense of action): “Words . . . consume deeds, as its amplified speeches and debates replace action on the battlefield” (221). Related to problems of words and action is the question of audience: who exactly, to borrow Voloshinov’s phrase, is at the other end of the bridge? If the epistle appended to the 1609 quarto is to be believed, *Troilus* was “a new play, never stal’d with the Stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar.” Many take this assertion, along with the play’s impediments to performance, as evidence that *Troilus and Cressida* was designed for a private audience such as the Inns of Court. Yet, as several observers have argued, if it is true that the audience for this play was a private and genteel crowd rather than the public stage, then its odd language might be viewed through the lens of satiric commentary or intellectual sport. W. R. Elton, for one, protests that the play has been traditionally been interpreted as a grim tragedy rather than the satire (in line with Inns of Court revels) that it was meant to be: “Through a Victorian glass darkly, the so-called problem plays were discerned from the viewpoint of Shakespeare’s ‘mythical sorrows’” (3). In this view, *Troilus and Cressida* (as well as other difficult-to-classify works such as *Measure for Measure*) has been read too earnestly by critics, its satiric edge lost.

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76 There is conflicting evidence for this, however. The title page of the 1609 Q noted that the play “was acted by the King’s Majesties servants at the Globe,” while an entry in the Stationers’ Register for 28 January 1609 makes note of “The book of Troilus and Cressida as it is acted by my lord Chamberlains Men” (cf. Honigmann 44; Elton 1).
It is not difficult to find opportunities for satire (as well as an explanation for awkward linguistic interaction) in some of the play’s overwrought dialogue. The circuitous speeches of the Greek generals in particular lend themselves to ridicule. Surely, however, it is shortsighted to ascribe all of the play’s linguistic difficulties to satiric undercutting. Dawson notes that “[m]any performances have, all too easily, delighted in mocking the rhetorical pretensions of the various Greek speakers,” and reminds us that these speeches, while extravagant, “also express important political positions” (95 n.1). While the play may not be as impossibly dark as some critics would have it, there are still real concerns with problems of interaction (and, specifically, linguistic encounters) on display that cannot be fully accounted for by either a coterie crowd or the effects of transmuted epic poetry. One consideration in support of the claim that Troilus and Cressida’s language is self-consciously fractured is its relationship to Shakespeare’s sonnets. The play provides an apt follow-up to my preceding chapter both for the transition between (read) poetry and (performed) drama that it represents, and for its language that is suggestively analogous to that of the sonnets. The first Quarto of Troilus and Cressida was printed in the same year and by the same publisher as the sonnets, and there is some evidence for at least a glancing relationship between the works.  

Dawson writes that the language of Troilus and Cressida “in many ways . . . resembles that of the sonnets. The pervasive sense of self-division and intense scrutiny of personal motive characteristic of the ‘I’ of the sonnets carries over into the play, as do the obsession with time and decay, with betrayal, with

77 Honigmann speculates that the two texts may have been transcribed for the same patron, someone who would be able to appreciate the “special piquancy” shared by both works (54).
sexual dissatisfaction” (26). Indeed, the “eye” / “I” variations so exploited in the sonnets also have currency in *Troilus*, recurring with remarkable frequency (Laroque 224) and extending the relentless language of the visual that characterizes the sonnets. Even the sonnet speaker’s deepest fears, including the anxiety that his written word will be exposed as a lie, are refracted through Cressida’s worries about self-betrayal, her conviction that “I shall surely speak / The thing I shall repent” (3.2.111-12). It might be said that *Troilus and Cressida* extends the shaky and mutable relationships at the core of Shakespeare’s sonnets to a much broader scale. Both works demonstrate the risks of speech in interaction, but whereas the voice at the centre of the sonnets speaks out against the threat of a few powerful interlocutors (including himself, to a certain extent, as evidenced when he rails against his own ‘untruthful’ voice), speakers in *Troilus and Cressida* are immersed in a network of intersecting words. Even the most private of exchanges is saturated by the influence of various competing voices. Thus the defensive stance assumed by the speaker of the sonnets is also an evident strategy of the speakers in this play, who consistently demonstrate resistance to shared language.

Exaggerated Talk: Praise, Insults, and Gossip

One of the most obvious strategies for combating the influence of others is to disrupt the tacit conditions of communication. These conditions are undermined in intriguing ways in the play, for speakers tend to resist the unwritten rules governing spoken language by engaging in self-consciously hyperbolic practices of talk, thereby

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78 For an interesting treatment of formal and linguistic similarities between the sonnets and *Troilus*, see David Schalkwyk’s *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Plays* (especially pages 161-180). Schalkwyk observes that the texts share a concern with “the burden of the proper name” (161), and each records a similar trajectory of de-idealisation of an object of desire.
throwing these typically shrouded rules into harsher relief.\textsuperscript{79} In a particularly striking example, the bombastic council scene between the Greek commanders opens up for scrutiny the conventions of rhetoric and politeness. These conventional behaviours include nominal adherence to Grice’s co-operative principle, and observance of what Leech identifies as the “politeness principle,” which serves to “maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” (\textit{Principles} 82). The Greek generals prove to be keenly aware of these principles; Ulysses provides the ideal mouthpiece, extending the convention of praising the contributions of previous speakers to new heights: “Besides th’applause and approbation . . . I give to both your speeches, which were such / As Agamemnon and the hand of Greece / Should hold up high in brass, and such again / As venerable Nestor, hatched in silver, / Should, with a bond of air strong as the axle-tree / On which heaven rides, knit all the Greekish ears / To his experienced tongue …” (1.3.62–68). Ulysses’ tactics adhere to what Brown and Levinson identify as “positive politeness” which are directed toward an addressee’s “positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions / acquisitions / values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable” (101). By exaggerating the rhetorical merits of Agamemnon and Nestor, Ulysses reinforces a sort of intimacy with them; he publicly demonstrates his willingness to acknowledge and satisfy their “want” to be admired (Brown and Levinson 101-102). A similar charged exchange between sworn adversaries Hector and Ajax demonstrates remarkable adherence to self-serving politeness strategies. Their

\textsuperscript{79} This exposure resembles something close to Bakhtin’s definition of carnival, a period wherein the “usual, legalized and consecrated furrows” of “the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers” are briefly overturned, with the effect that the barriers become acutely visible (\textit{Rabelais} 89).
excessive terms of flattery and deference – “Let me embrace thee, Ajax; By him that thunders, thou hast lusty arms!” (4.5.135-6); “Thou are too gentle and too free a man” (4.5.138) – while maintaining an appearance of forthright congeniality, also encode a subtle threat because they suggest that the speaker is seeking something from his addressee (that is, he covets the very traits that he praises, or desires reciprocal praise) (Brown and Levinson 66). However threatening the subtext of flattery, it often gives way in the play to more overt challenges to practices designed to maintain social equilibrium. A few critics have recently supplemented the now-established tradition of applied politeness theory with explorations of what might be called strategies of impoliteness, those tactics “intentionally designed to cause disharmony and to disrupt social relations” (Rudanko, “Epithets” 12). Such strategies are abundant in *Troilus and Cressida*, and they emphasize the inherent distance between speakers, despite their necessary collaboration through speech – what Herman calls “the fundamental and mutual otherness of those in contact through dialogue” (*Dramatic Discourse* 135).

The hyperbolic praise that characterizes the Greek council scene becomes all the more pronounced when it is jarringly replaced by an eruption of malice at the beginning of the next scene. The scrap between Ajax and Thersites that opens Act Two is one of the most heated dialogues in the play. Ajax bolsters his litany of insults with physical aggression – “Thou bitch-wolf’s son, canst thou not hear? Feel then” (2.1.8) –

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80 Brown and Levinson note that the paying of compliments is particularly threatening and potentially rude in social environments “where envy is very strong,” a condition which seems quite appropriate to the Greek and Trojan factions (247).

81 Studies include those by Juhani Rudanko and Jonathan Culpeper. Rudanko proposes the addition of “nastiness” to Brown and Levinson’s politeness model, arguing that it is “not necessarily merely the absence of politeness nor the result of the nonapplication of the . . . strategies of politeness,” but rather a strategy in its own right: “[n]astiness consists in adding something gratuitously to offend the hearer” (*Pragmatic Approaches* 167).
while Thersites remains undaunted: “The plague of Greece upon thee, thou mongrel, beef-witted lord” (9-10). As a counter-force to the courtesy of the previous scene, this display of nastiness calls attention to the extreme (and almost parodic) forms of linguistic engagement highlighted by the play, part of its self-reflexive commentary on its tendencies toward communicative failure. Indeed, both extremes – elevated praise as well as spiteful belligerence – can be viewed as expected responses to the fraught power differentials in the play. Each antagonistic linguistic encounter, a reminder of the permeable border between the self and others, represents a site of conflict which mimics the prolonged and fruitless wars that act as backdrop to the dramatic action.

Rudanko argues that abusive language is a sign of “vulnerability and insecurity and represents an attempt, at the level of language, to combat the weakness by transforming it into extreme aggression” (“Epithets” 13), and his reasoning may be extended to argue that superfluous praise is a similar attempt to garner social strength. Insults are particularly interesting because they suggest that their target inhabit a specific identity that the speaker has determined. In Bourdieu’s terms, the act of insulting harnesses a power similar to that accessed in the act of naming: “Insults, like naming, belong to a class of more or less socially based acts of institution and destitution through which an individual, acting in his own name or in the name of a group that is more or less important in terms of its size or social significance, indicates to someone that he possesses such and such property, and indicates to him at the time that he must conduct himself in accordance with the social essence which is thereby assigned to him” (Symbolic Power 105-6).
Thersites is an agent both of the text’s tendencies to theorize itself and its engagement with processes of ineffectual communication. Like Pandarus, he is a potent symbol of Troilus’s communication deficiencies, and may be read as a type of carnivalized interlocutor. An omnipresent listener who is unfailingly (and unnervingly) responsive – always saying too much for others’ comfort – he is the model conversation partner turned grotesque. His unyielding compulsion toward narrativizing captures Troilus and Cressida’s ambivalence toward communication. The play’s most prescient commentator, he is also its most damaging critic, roles which highlight once again the double edge of words; half someone else’s, and destructive and creative in equal parts. He also seems to recognize the play’s communication breakdowns for what they are, a clear-sightedness that aligns him with the traditions of Shakespeare’s fools. Thersites’ recurring role as spy and commentator places him in a dramatic no-man’s-land between the world of onstage action and the realm of its observers; as Berger notes, “Thersites’ soliloquies have very much the effect of addresses to the audience; therefore they work to extend the logic of the play from the relations among characters to the relations between characters and the audience” (“Basilisk” 131). Even his most wry and profane observations tend to resonate beyond their apparent targets. His churlish remark to Patroclus – “Prithee be silent, boy, I profit not by thy talk” (5.1.14) – is both withering and accurate, a pithy acknowledgement that talk in this play is rarely profitable. Similarly, Thersites summarizes the futility of war over Helen with notable acuity: “Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery: all the

82 Parker posits that Thersites’ speeches bring into focus the curious tension between talk that is too meager and talk that is excessive. They invoke the tendencies of “courtiers as men of words, associated with the effeminacy of Parolles and the wordy new man, [and] also to institutions like the Inns of Court with the need to cure language of its excesses” (Margins 227).
argument is a whore and a cuckold – a good quarrel to draw emulous factions and bleed to death upon. Now the dry serpigo on the subject, and war and lechery confound all!” (2.3.63-66). We cannot help but transpose his comment to many of the play’s other ineffectual “arguments”: the squabble between Ajax and Achilles over his service, the querulous interaction between the Greek commanders in general, and even more broadly the self-serving and abusive tactics that inform much of the communication in the play.\textsuperscript{83} The “patchery” and “juggling” of a character like Pandarus, always angling to ingratiate himself, and the “knavery” of characters like the insolent Ajax, render talk (like the twinned themes of the play, war and love) a shambled and messy affair.

In fact, Thersites’ comment is virtually enacted shortly after it is uttered. The scene progresses toward the sort of “juggling” and “knavery” inherent in antagonistic and gossip-ridden communication. Amidst Achilles’ refusal to speak to his fellow commanders and Ajax’s macho posturing, the other Greek lords whisper mockingly behind his back:

AJAX A paltry, insolent fellow.
NESTOR [Aside] How he describes himself.
AJAX Can he not be sociable?
AJAX I’ll let his humour blood.
AGAMEMNON [Aside] He will be the physician that should be the patient.
AJAX An all men were o’my mind –
ULYSSES [Aside] Wit would be out of fashion.
AJAX ’A should not bear it so, ’a should eat swords first; shall pride carry it?
NESTOR [Aside] An ’twould, you’d carry half.
ULYSSES [Aside] ’A would have ten shares. (2.3.192-204)

\textsuperscript{83} Dawson observes that the semantic scope of “argument” as used by Thersites is particularly wide; recognized by early modern audiences as the sort of term “bandied about by witty undergraduates and young Inns of Court men,” it carries the sense of “theme” or “subject matter” as well as its current meaning of quarrel (“Introduction” 131, n. 85). Cf. the Prologue’s reference to being “suited / In like conditions to our argument” (25).
Here, the gossip of the Greek commanders creates a surreptitious sub-conversation with the shared goal of deflating Ajax and undercutting his position in their social group. Their conspiratorial behaviour is evidence of another striking discourse strategy at work in the play, one that has the parallel effect of both boosting and eroding social bonds. It is part of a process of defining the insiders – and, by implication, the outsiders – of a text or speech community, a natural and fundamental impulse of the participants involved in producing the discourse. Halliday explains such boundary-making in terms of the grammatical building blocks of language, which automatically delimit the participants in a text:

Every text defines its insiders and its outsiders. In principle the outsiders have no access to the text. In practice, they may overhear it; but the role of eavesdropper is problematic, because the grammar does not admit the role of ‘third party to a text’. The ‘third person’ comes in as a participant in its experiential structures. . . . this ‘something or something else’ is simply a non-person. (Linguistic Studies 228-29)

Even given the fact that every unit of discourse is restricted to its insiders in some sense, in Troilus and Cressida the boundaries between insiders and outsiders are consistently exaggerated. Indeed, there seems to be a perverse glee in emphasizing to characters and audience alike that all are outsiders in some way, beginning with the Prologue’s first line: “In Troy there lies the scene” (1). This perfunctory opening, coupled with a hasty summary – “and that’s the quarrel” (10) – ensures that spectators,
while ostensibly invited to observe the action, remain at a distance. “There” and “that,” distal demonstrative pronouns which may be exploited as markers not only of physical separation but also of emotional distance, provide a linguistic means of holding the audience at arm’s length. The Prologue’s stiff language – his references to “princes orgulous” (2) and “warlike freightage” (13) self-consciously archaic and overblown – reinforces a division between stage and audience by demarcating a distinct linguistic zone separate from that of its audience. A solitary onstage presence, delivering his brief and stilted lines, the Prologue is a symbol of disconnection.

“Brusque, impersonal, and indifferent, the Prologue comes forward simply to expedite the performance,” Berger observes. “Beyond his expository function, he and the audience have nothing to do with each other” (“Basilisk” 125). The distancing cements their status as outsiders, and reaffirms them as eavesdroppers of sorts.

characterized by judgment rather than bald statement of fact. It is through gossip that speakers confirm their allies by testing the rules that govern their group, thus

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84 While the Prologue was likely written for an early performance, it does not appear in either 1609 printing of Q, but only in F. Tiffany Stern notes that we must be attuned to the ephemeral nature of prologues, and be careful in making claims about their part in a “unified text” (120), a caveat that I acknowledge here.

85 Cf. Stephen C. Levinson, who explains that these words are key to what he names empathetic deixis: “The demonstrative pronouns are perhaps more clearly organized in a straightforward proximal-distal dimension, whereby this can mean ‘the object in a pragmatically given area close to the speaker’s location at CT’ [time of speaking],’ and that ‘the object beyond the pragmatically given area close to the speaker’s location at CT’ … But the facts are complicated here by the shift from that to this to show empathy, and from this to that to show emotional distance” (Pragmatics 81).

86 Halliday characterizes eavesdroppers as any hearers who are outside the ‘you-me’ diad of the text, and notes that their presence is not only unavoidable, but also essential “since society cannot function if all discourse is private” (Text and Discourse 230).

87 Suzanne Eggins and Diana Slade define gossip as “talk which involves pejorative judgement of an absent other . . . which is meant to be confidential (or at least not reported back to the third party).” This aspect of judgement is what distinguishes gossip from simply reporting facts about another. John just moved in next door, a statement in which opinions and judgements are not elaborated, therefore does not fall under the umbrella of gossip (278).
performing “a powerful social regulating role – it reinforces, enacts and modifies social attitudes and values. By sharing and negotiating opinions about other people, members of a group demarcate the bounds of acceptable behaviour and implicitly situate themselves within these bounds. Through this mutual construction of shared values, gossip maintains and reinforces group unity and solidarity” (Thornbury and Slade 171-72). Thus when Nestor whispers his sarcastic appraisal to Diomedes – “O this is well – he rubs the vein of him” (2.3.183) – who responds in kind with a matching slight: “And how his silence drinks up this applause!” (184), they implicitly condemn Ajax’s perceived vice of arrogance and confirm that neither one of them will condone such a trait in themselves or any other members of their group. In fact, it is in the act of gossiping that such rules are made, as privately held beliefs are externalized and fixed. Therefore gossip serves the double purpose of forming social bonds while establishing the parameters for behaviour within that bonded community:

Through gossip social bonds are formed and cemented. It achieves this in two ways: by establishing a them and us polarity, gossip confers group membership on the gossipers – anyone not participating is reneging on their ‘duty to gossip’ and one way of excluding a member of a group is to gossip about someone that that person doesn’t know. Moreover, gossip, by labeling behaviours acceptable or non-acceptable, asserts collective values and thereby exerts a subtle form of social control. (Thornbury and Slade 179)

88 For a sociological perspective on the functions and implications of gossip, see Robin Dunbar. Dunbar argues that the primary “use” of gossip is reputation management: talking to other people about people allows speakers to monitor and influence their own social standing as well as that of others (123).
Of course, a dominant effect of the Greek generals’ gossip is parody: Ajax is exposed as a ridiculous figure whose self-importance is undermined by the unmistakable contempt of his peers. To be sure, this collective denunciation is one of gossip’s productive functions in terms of maintaining social order. As the Greek commanders clearly understand, one way to expose and weed out bad leaders is to commiserate with others about their faults. But there are other subtle implications concealed in the gossip behaviour of the play’s characters. First, the fear of exclusion prompted by the suspicion of gossip is a powerful social motivator. Pandarbus’s opportunistic drive to be an insider is what prompts him to demand entry into the dialogue between Cressida and Alexander in the scene discussed above – “What’s that, what’s that? . . . What were you talking of when I came?” (1.2.36,41). If Thersites is Troilus and Cressida’s token eavesdropper, then Pandarus is the personified symbol of thwarted communication, the “syphilitic go-between” (Berger, “Basilisk” 131) through whom all interactions are soured. Pandarbus’s fixation on becoming an insider is often played to humorous effect, as when he dampens the encounter between Troilus and Cressida with his interjections and even insists on a group hug: “Let me embrace, too” (4.4.13). In addition, the frailty of the Greek forces is both rooted in and disseminated through their gossiping factions. Ulysses identifies the “fever” afflicting the Greek camp as internal weakness as opposed to Trojan strength (1.3.138), and, when urged by Agamemnon to provide a “remedy,” his prompt suggestion is an anti-gossip initiative. He sketches a vivid picture of the regular gossip behaviour of Achilles and Patroclus, complaining that the former “Grows dainty of his worth and in his tent / Lies mocking
our designs; with him Patroclus / Upon a lazy bed the livelong day / Breaks scurril
jests, / And with ridiculous and silly action – / Which, slanderer, he imitation calls – / He pageants us . . .” (1.3.146-52). Here, Ulysses points to the destructiveness inherent
not just in the humiliating charades, but in the injurious talk itself – the “slander” that
comes from “mocking” the military strategies of the Greeks. Such talk epitomizes
insider discourse, and the bonding of Achilles and Patroclus achieved by their
commiserative mirth is reinforced by their physical separation from the other generals;
much is made of their separate “tent,” a tangible space that acts as a clear boundary
between insiders and outsiders.\footnote{Indeed, a tent offers a fitting symbol for insider gossip always under threat of being discovered; its soft
walls provide a barrier substantial enough to be divisive, but permeable enough to be penetrated by the
outsiders (such as, in this case, Ulysses or his informants). Cf. Nestor’s follow-up comment about Ajax’s
similarity to Achilles: “Ajax is grown self-willed and bears his head / In such a rein, in full as proud a
place, / As broad Achilles, keeps his tent like him / Makes facetious feasts, rails on our state of war . . .”
(1.3.189-92).} According to Ulysses’ extended speech, the gossip
shared by Achilles and Patroclus is the foremost cause of the weakness of the Greek
side, and the mocked “plots, orders, preventions” (1.3.182) confirm that this divide is
firmly rooted in talk. The nature of this talk forms the crux of Ulysses’ complaint, for
the fallout of their criticism translates to delayed and ineffective action: “They tax our
policy and call it cowardice, / Count wisdom as no member of the war, / Forestall
prescience . . .” (1.3.198-200). Of course, Ulysses’ speech is itself a form of gossip,
propelled by the shared lambasting of delinquent members of the community, and
exhorting others to join in the condemnation (and Nestor complies in his own
supplement to the speech at line 186). Gossip has the capacity to incur serious
consequences, as Ulysses and the others recognize.\footnote{Ulysses’ commentary here taints the apparently more lighthearted gossip directed at Achilles in Act
Two, scene three. The audience, themselves now ‘insiders’ of Ulysses and Nestor’s community in the}
Agamemnon, challenged by Aeneas in the wake of Ulysses’ diatribe, is quick to affirm the unity of his side using a metaphor of speech: “With surety stronger than Achilles’ arm / ‘Fore all the Greekish heads which with one voice / Call Agamemnon head and general” (1.3.221-23). Agamemnon’s assertion comes off as a naive wish, for the Greeks speaking in “one voice” is an utterly untenable goal. As Bakhtin argues, this type of unity is antithetical to the dynamic, interactive, and “tension-filled” context of verbal discourse (Dialogic Imagination 279), and as Troilus and Cressida demonstrates, such dialogic tension can be pushed to a divisive extreme.

The strange and discordant systems of language in Troilus achieve particular prominence in the play’s unsettling fifth act. The second scene, “a carefully structured scene of multiple observation” (Dawson 19), acts as a convergence point for the tendencies toward fractured communication. Here, the processes and effects of insider/outsider discourse are exaggerated and dissected. This is due in large part to the visual emphasis on separation that is evident on stage; just as the separate tents of the Greeks physically demarcate their partitioned forces, so the factions of spectators in this scene underscore their disconnectedness. The central linguistic event of the scene is the conversation between Cressida and Diomedes, which is partially overheard and reacted to by Troilus and Ulysses, who are themselves observed and scrutinized by the gleefully scopophilic Thersites. The audience, too, is complicit in the chain of covert observation; in fact, they occupy the panoptic place of privilege as the perspective with the widest scope. The disadvantage to such a position, however, is relegation to the widest circle of outsiders; although they are privy to a wider sample of insider

wake of Ulysses’ complaints, are likely to interpret the subsequent behaviour of these characters as a form of ‘revenge gossip’ against Achilles.
information than any of the participants, audience members are also the most distanced from it

It is like trying to see [Cressida] through a crowd, and the number and length of the commentators’ asides make them a constant distraction. Her scene with Diomedes comes to us in fragments, and includes a couple of moments when she whispers to him, leaving us further excluded. The whispering licenses the commentators to fill in the blanks, though in doing so they may be, like Ulysses in the kissing scene, not just interpreting but imposing. (Leggatt, Tragedies 107)

Only partly included, unsure about what is being said, the audience is continuously alert to its outsider status. But it is the very liminality of being an outsider who overhears that is intoxicating. Halliday asserts that there is “a high social value to discourse that is overheard” (Linguistic Studies 230), and this reward is recognized by the shrewd Thersites. His voyeuristic, in-the-moment excitement – “Now the pledge, now, now, now!” (5.2.64) – reflects the pleasure that accompanies illicit access to something withheld, stemming from the power that such access affords. After Cressida has soliloquized her shifting loyalties and farewell to Troilus, Thersites offers his own gloss on her words: “A proof of strength she could not publish more, / Unless she said, ‘My mind is now turned whore’” (5.2.112-13). He claims the last word for himself, trumping Cressida’s take on her situation with his own. In a play that pays considerable attention to the processes of interpretive glossing – recall Hector’s approval of Paris’s “gloz[ing]” of “the cause and question now in hand” (2.2.164-65) – great value is attached to the position of critical interpreter and commentator.

Moreover, there is a peculiar type of immunity granted to eavesdroppers; they may

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91 Cf. another of Shakespeare’s virulent eavesdroppers, Iago, who uses a similar phrase to provoke Brabantio: “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe” (Othello 1.1.85-86). In both case, the urgent emphasis on the present “now” moment encourages a virtual transformation from outsider into insider, as the listener effectively experiences the act along with the participants.
witness and, in some sense, participate in the dialogue, but are shielded from any direct fallout. Even Ulysses, despite his guise as sympathetic ally to Troilus, appears to enjoy his doubly-removed spectator role. He is privy both to Cressida’s betrayal and to Troilus’s anguished reaction, and seems, Iago-like, to encourage Troilus’s outrage. His urging of Troilus to turn away – “You are moved, prince, let us depart, I pray, / Lest your displeasure should enlarge itself / To wrathful terms” (5.2.36-38) – reflects a reluctance to relinquish the enforced detachment of the eavesdropper, while at the same time it works as a sort of exhortation by drawing attention to Troilus’s anger.

The pitfalls of communication are also evident in the formal details of this scene. The collectivity on which communication is necessarily based is here tainted, so that moments of linguistic exchange become evidence for suspicion and betrayal. The shared nature of language is ironically stressed during a quarrel between Diomedes and Cressida, when Troilus’s shadow voice completes the verse line:

| DIOMEDES       | And so good night. |
| CRESSIDA       | Nay, but you part in anger. |
| TROILUS        | Doth that grieve thee? |
|                | O withered truth! |
| ULYSSES        | How now, my lord? |
| TROILUS        | By Jove, |
|                | I will be patient. |
| CRESSIDA       | Guardian, why Greek – |
| DIOMEDES       | Fo, fo, adieu, you palter. (5.2.44-48) |

Here the love triangle is literalized in the act of speaking, a trick that stresses not only the contest between Troilus and Diomedes to claim the position as Cressida’s interlocutor/lover, but also the danger and insecurity inherent in anything that must be shared, words and lovers alike. Troilus’s reaction to witnessing Cressida’s betrayal has frequently been read in terms of the instability of personal identity; Wells argues that
“the outcome in Troilus is an anguished philosophical examination of the instability of the human personality” (220). But it may also be read as a commentary on the instability of human interaction, an articulation of the fear attached to anything that is partly dependent on others, relationships included:

This is and is not Cressid.
Within my soul there doth conduct a fight
Of this strange nature: that a thing inseparate
Divides more wider than the sky and earth,
And yet the spacious breadth of this division
Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
As Ariachne’s broken woof to enter.
Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto’s gates,
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven.
Instance, O instance, strong as heaven itself,
The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved, and loosed,
And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
The fragments of her faith, orts of her love,
The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy relics
Of her o’er-eaten faith, are given to Diomed. (5.2.145-59)

Even the strength of heaven cannot guarantee the “bonds” which bind Cressida to Troilus – they are far too easily loosened and tied to another. Like Bakhtin’s shared threads of discourse, the ties between people interact in a tension-filled and fluctuating environment that individual participants cannot control. Troilus’s realization of this truth prompts a cynicism worthy of Thersites; his characterization of the dissolution of Cressida’s “faith” – fractions, orts, fragments, scraps, bits, greasy relics – as byproducts of consumption reveals the pitfalls of feasting at a communal table. Such is the outcome of sharing, when too many players compete for the same scraps. Stanley Cavell has argued that Coriolanus is a “starver” or “hungerer” whose responses are filtered through his “condition of insatiability” (Disowning Knowledge 148); by analogy, Troilus may be characterized as similarly unsatisfied, but he is disgusted by
the fallout of this unfed desire. Moreover, he recognizes that he is not alone in being
left with scraps, for no matter which parts of Cressida are claimed by Diomedes, this
new substitute lover is also permitted only fragments. “Diomed’s Cressida” (5.2.136) is
as partial as Troilus’s Cressida; she may grant him her whispers, reluctantly relinquish
Troilus’s sleeve, but there are some things that even Diomedes is denied. Leggatt
describes the “one thing” that Cressida clings to as “her old lover’s name. She is
keeping something to herself, something Diomedes cannot have, and the way she keeps
it is through silence” (Tragedies 108). The fissure lamented by Troilus, then, extends to
Diomedes as well, who is also kept at a distance of his own. Viewed this way,
Cressida’s actions seem less an individualized betrayal and more a general move
toward isolation, a severing of the push toward communality that seems to plague each
character in this play. She unmoors herself from any collective undertaking, and denies
everyone – even her new lover – unmitigated access.

“Do you think I will?”: Grammar Play and Shades of Will

I have been considering how Troilus and Cressida demonstrates resistance
against communal processes of language, and how the troubled awareness of
dependence on others informs the linguistic encounters in the play. As Voloshinov
notes, however, the features of language at the level of utterance and social interaction
are also present, perhaps even more acutely, at the minute level of the word itself.
Taking his assertion that “a word is the purest and most sensitive medium of social
intercourse” (14) as a starting point, with an understanding that words themselves are
“bridges” of sorts, I would like to return to the realm of small words to explore how
these concerns unfold at the lexical level: What is at stake in the words that speakers share? How do these shared words work to corrode interaction? I explore these questions through the frame of will, a word that was touched on briefly in the chapter on the sonnets. Here I would like to pick up on and extend that discussion for, like the evocative will of the sonnets, will in Troilus and Cressida has a diffuse, pervasive, and even self-conscious resonance. As suggested in the previous chapter on the sonnets, will is a word unusually rich with semantic potential – a proper name and authorial signature, a polysemous noun, and a suggestive and diverse verb (with the added wrinkle of working either as a main verb and a modal auxiliary). Jonathan Hope observes that “it is characteristic of Shakespeare to play with the ‘same’ word in different grammatical roles” (“Natiue English” 245), and Troilus and Cressida, like the sonnets, provides a fertile context for Shakespeare to probe will’s polysemic force. Ulysses (who, with Thersites, serves as the play’s resident commentator on language and its nuances) suggests will’s nominal intricacies in his indictment of disproportionate ambition: “Power into will, will into appetite, / And appetite, an universal wolf, / So doubly seconded with will and power / Must make perforce an universal prey / And last eat himself up” (1.3.121-25). Ulysses’ patterns of causative logic depend on semantic differences between power, will, and appetite; the implication is that these characteristics are similar but distinct. The sense is difficult to pin down, but Ulysses seems to present an ascending scale of barbarism, so that the intermediate step between “power” and animalistic “appetite” is “will,” a word that walks the tightrope between authority and blindly self-serving desire.92 Will is

92 The implication of will as a dangerous intermediate stage between control and indulgence is evident in Nestor’s warning that “Ajax is grown self-willed” (1.3.189). Indeed, in Thersites’ estimation, Ajax
presented as a loaded word rife with suggestive potential. This potential is reinforced later in the play in an exchange between Troilus and Hector, when Hector, in response to Troilus’s query “What’s aught but as ’tis valued?” asserts that “value dwells not in particular will” (2.2.53-54). Troilus’s somewhat muddled retort shows him getting lost in the foggy byways of will’s various meanings:

I take today a wife, and my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will,
My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
Two traded pilots ’twixt the dangerous shores
Of will and judgement: how may I avoid,
Although my will distaste what it elected,
The will I chose? (2.2.61-67)

Troilus uses will as a nominal indicator of desire – “my will” – and as an agent of choice and decision-making (“will and judgement”). Both incarnations dovetail with the modal meanings of will: desire in the present moment leads to choices that determine future outcomes. Interestingly, Troilus opposes “judgement” to “will.” While his speech clouds the precise differences between the two, it might be presumed given the particular resonance of will in the rest of the passage that “judgement” operates more objectively than “will,” which is always coloured by the misleading taint of mutable desire.

While the noun will carries significant semantic weight, its verb incarnations are similarly slippery and compelling. In modal usage, will’s various associations – like those of its forceful counterpart, shall – shade into one another. Its function as a modal expression of future time is shaded with markers of intention, willingness, and desire, a semantic overlap that is regularly exploited in the play. For example, when Aeneas

makes the full transition to barbaric creature: “He’s grown a very land-fish, language-less, a monster” (3.3.260-61).
interrupts the morning banter of the new lovers with the alarming news that Cressida is to be taken to the Greek camp, Troilus’s response of “I will go meet them” (4.2.70) is set in marked contrast to Cressida’s subsequent, adamant “I will not go from Troy” (4.2.106). Cressida’s striking obstinacy aside, Troilus’s words are worth pausing on. While clearly frustrated by the turn of events – “How my achievements mock me!” (4.2.69) – he complies with a ready willingness that Cressida cannot fathom, and indeed will not heed until Troilus insists (CRESSIDA: I must then to the Grecians? / TROILUS: No remedy [4.2.53-4]).93 This difference between their respective intentions and desires characterizes this pivotal scene and, as I will discuss further, perhaps their entire relationship. It is pertinent, then, that will in early modern English was semantically linked to volition even in its modal sense.94 Despite later pronouncements by some prescriptivist grammarians, the early modern modal will did not tend to correlate to whether the statement was in the first, second, of third person, but rather to the volitional quality of the statement itself: “whenever the addressee’s volition is strongly asserted, the auxiliary is will” (Gotti 141).95 It may be said, in short, that the use of will was never purely temporal (cf. Lyons 677; Hoye 113), and that the present-

93 This exchange is reminiscent of one between Angelo and Isabella in Measure for Measure that hinges on the distinctions between modal verbs:
  ISABELLA: Must he needs die?
  ANGELO: Maiden, no remedy.
  ISABELLA: Yes, I do think that you might pardon him, And neither heaven nor man grieve at the mercy.
  ANGELO: I will not do’t.
  ISABELLA: But can you if you would? (2.2.48-51)
In this case, Isabella calls out the influence of Angelo’s “will” on his assessment that there is “no remedy,” suggesting with a candour not shared by Cressida that his fatalist conclusion is more a matter of active choice than he will acknowledge.
94 The category of ‘volition’ is broad, encompassing shades of desire, intention, and willingness (cf. Coates 173).
95 Gotti’s corpus-based study concludes that “there is no evidence for the preference of shall in the first person and will in the second and third” (106), and determines that volition is the primary governing element in the choice of will.
day tendencies of *will* – in Palmer’s words, that it is “used where there is reference to a general envisaged, planned, intended, hoped for, etc. state of affairs, as opposed to a statement that a specific event or specific events will in fact take place” (115) – were in Shakespeare’s English even more pronounced.

I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare approaches *will* as a grammarian would, keen to demonstrate and exemplify all of its possible usages. However, as a playwright attuned to the possibilities contained in individual words, he is alert to the resonance of *will*, and often brings together its disparate forms in suggestive ways. This wordplay (perhaps more suitably called ‘grammar play’) is particularly evident in the dialogue between Troilus and Cressida. Their relationship acts as a looming reminder of misunderstanding and troubled interaction in the play, and a primary source of confusion is their failure to understand one another, even at the most basic level of a common understanding of words. In the tense moments following the discovery that Cressida is to be handed over to the Greeks, *will* is the symbol of this failure of consensus:

TROILUS

But I can tell that in each grace of these
There lurks a still and dumb-discursive devil
That tempts most cunningly. But be not tempted.

CRESSIDA

Do you think I will?

TROILUS

No,
But something may be done that we will not,
And sometimes we are devils to ourselves. (4.4.88-94)

The *wills* of this passage are interesting because they expose the potential for different pragmatic intents; Cressida’s use of *will* is different from Troilus’s, a difference that has significant implications for their interaction, and for the respective parameters that each draws for their relationship. Cressida’s *will* here emphasizes its
modal function, denoting intention and future action, a meaning that sets her will at odds with Troilus’s. His will, in contrast, denotes desire, the dangerously misleading agent that he opposed to judgement in his discussion with Hector. His interpretation is evident in his use of will as a main (non-auxiliary) verb, thus fully engaging its semantic associations. He has apparently understood Cressida’s question in the same way; that is, as if she has also used will as a lexical verb rather than as a modal auxiliary in order to ask Do you think I want to? Troilus questions whether she wants to do it; Cressida wonders if he thinks that she actually will. In this case, the “two-sided act” of shaping a word is obstructed. The bridge constructed between Troilus and Cressida is faulty because they are working toward different aims – Troilus trying to read Cressida’s desire, and Cressida trying to determine how the future will unfold. What is intriguing is that Troilus’s reaction to Cressida’s will calls out its volitional aspects, and the discrepancies between the wills engages the tension between these characters. Troilus insists that Cressida is not as inscrutable as she claims to be, a suspicion that is borne out by the competing wills. Even if Cressida is merely trying to discern the future, as she seems to claim,96 her desire unavoidably informs the shape of that future. Troilus’s use of will insists that Cressida claim a sort of culpability that she resists.

Cressida’s use of will is also interesting because it is quite unusual; she utters the phrase “I will” rarely, and invariably at a charged moment in the play.97 Cressida’s

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96 In other parts of the exchange, as well, Cressida is concerned with what will unfold in the wake of these abrupt new developments – “When shall we see again” (4.4.56); “When shall I see you?” (70) – while Troilus remains preoccupied with mandating Cressida’s fidelity, sidestepping her questions with commands for faithfulness: “Be thou true of heart…” (58); “But yet be true!” (73).
97 Cressida uses the I will construction only eight times in the play; contrast this to Troilus, who uses it almost twice as often, and Thersites, who uses I will more than twenty times.
reticence seems to contribute to the relative lack of attention given to her side of the story by critics. While much attention is justifiably paid to Troilus’ disillusionment, less tends to be said about Cressida. Yet in the pivotal betrayal scene, Troilus offers an open and extended commentary on what he has beheld, while Cressida slips, troublingly, into offstage silence. As Leggatt observes, “whatever feeling she now claims for Troilus is beyond interpretation, in a letter we never hear” (Tragedies 111). This gap means that Cressida is often read as a cipher, frustratingly withheld from us “at exactly the moment at which we most need to understand what [she] is doing” (Adelman, “Cressid” 128).98 A primary reason that Cressida is obscured from us is her tendency to resist modal assertions; instead, she deflects attention from her own volition by demanding such information from others.99 In her first interactions with Troilus, for example, her wills are oriented exclusively toward him in her repeated invitation, “Will you walk in my lord?” (3.2.52, 84). This will is in fact Cressida’s first word in this scene, and it is telling that it is spoken in reference to the intention of Troilus. Subsequent lines fail to offer any reciprocal declarations of her own will; instead, she maintains the focus on Troilus’ intention: “you will play the tyrant” (3.2.100).

98 Adelman claims that Cressida’s character becomes a cipher in the play, gradually moving from openness to opacity. Adelman suggests that the voyeuristic distance aligns the audience and Troilus, so that Cressida becomes equally unreacha2ble to both: “we take our places as the furthest removed of the spectators as we watch Thersites watching Ulysses watching Troilus watching Cressida. That is, Cressida seems to betray us at the same time she betrays Troilus; our relationship with her is broken off as sharply as hers with Troilus” (“Cressid” 128).

99 Her resistance is interesting in the context of Halliday’s assessment of modality as the territory of “insiders.” By refusing to grant access to her inner world, Cressida seems to fashion herself as a deliberate outsider. Also worth considering here is the problem of pre-determined identity – with an extra-diegetic persona as the representative for “all false women” (3.3.182) to live up to, perhaps Cressida’s ability to make choices and assert desires is necessarily circumscribed.
Because Cressida so rarely shares her will, the instances when it is conveyed—invariably forcefully—acquire particular significance. The first vehement instances occur during the scene mentioned above, when she learns that she must decamp to the Greeks: “O you immortal gods, I will not go” (4.2.91); “I will not uncle” (4.2.93); “I will not go from Troy” (4.2.106). The second set of asserted wills occurs with Diomedes, with Troilus looking on: “I will not meet with you tomorrow night” (5.2.72); “I will not tell you whose” (5.2.92); and the final, fateful “I will not keep my word” (5.2.98). These expressions of will share a sense of strong intention and defiant willfulness, examples of how will can veer close to the territory of ‘obligation’ by expressing ‘resolve’ (Traugott, Regularity 223; Perkins 43). Indeed, Visser suggests that the I will not usage extends so far into the territory of subjective resolve that it tends to “express a present state of mind” rather than a reference to the future” (1679).

For Cressida, will means resolve and resistance, a stance against conditions that are being forced upon her. The fervent expression of resolve I will not is her sole defense against the order to move to the Greek camp, or to comply with Diomedes’ aggressive methods of courting.

Given the context of Cressida’s wills in the play, the puzzle of her final “I will not keep my word” might be brought into new focus. Let us return for a moment to the enigmatic scene of multiple observation in Act Five, in which we witness the moment of Cressida’s shifted loyalty with this uttered betrayal. In one sense, the back-and-forth banter between Cressida and Diomedes – which turns on her teasing refusals to give up the sleeve and playful name-calling: “O false wench! Give’t me again!” (5.2.70) –

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100 Cressida here sounds remarkably similar to one of Shakespeare’s most resolutely defiant heroines, Cleopatra, who refuses instructions not to follow Antony onto the battlefield: “Speak not against it. / I will not stay behind” (3.7.18-19).
reflects the coy art of courting. But her words carry suggestions of a self-contained resentment behind their archness, and the dialogue between Cressida and Diomedes recalls her earlier exchanges with Troilus in several key ways. In what sounds very much like a reprisal of the pivotal “do you think I will?” moment in Act Four, the differences between will as desire (as supposed by Troilus and Diomedes) and will as intention (as supposed by Cressida) are again emphasized: DIOMEDES: Will you then? / CRESSIDA: In faith, I will, la, never trust me else (5.2.57-58). Shortly following this exchange, as she ceases to fight for the sleeve, Cressida seems to articulate her decision in the moment that it is being made: “Well, well, ‘tis done, ‘tis past – and yet it is not. / I will not keep my word” (97-98). This exchange recalls a parallel encounter between Cressida and Troilus in Act Four, when Troilus’s words reflect a growing rejection of her: he refuses to satisfy Cressida’s queries about what “will” happen, focuses on her projected failure of fidelity, and demonstrates his willingness to hand her over to the Greeks.\textsuperscript{101} The failure of their “wills” to meet in this scene initiates a fracture that, by the time of Cressida’s encounter with Diomedes, plausibly leads to a resistance in Cressida that is now oriented toward Troilus himself. He has rebuffed her, and (in keeping with her expressions of resolve against leaving Troy, and against telling Diomedes the name of her lover) she now resolves herself to a sort of retribution against him. Her move toward estrangement may be seen as “an act of self-preservation” (Schalkwyk 165), and will provides the fulcrum.

In \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, the polysemous will (and the functional and semantic differences in its usage that cause communicative disruptions between characters) is a

\textsuperscript{101} Indeed, the first waking moments following the consummation of the relationship are characterized by hints that Troilus wants to distance himself from Cressida. He tries repeatedly to send her back to bed, a suggestion that Cressida presciently reads as rejection: “Are you a-weary of me?” (4.2.9).
paradigm case of the risks of shared language. The boundary between the self and the rest of the world is thrown into relief with each competing word that is spoken, with each failed attempt to build a “bridge” between speakers, and this border becomes a site of conflict.

"Co-acting and the Words of Others

In this chapter, I have been looking at the details of linguistic encounters to explore the effects of shared language on its participants. I have treated moments of praise and abuse, conversations – even the single word will – as intrinsically relational units of discourse (what Halliday might call “texts”):

A text is a process of sharing: the shared creation of meaning. Those who share in this process are the ‘you’ and the ‘me’ of the text. Our status as co-actants is made explicit in the text itself – in the grammar, which distinguishes between the speech roles (me and you) on the one hand, and everyone and everything else (him, her, it, them) on the other. Thus ‘you’ and ‘me’ are not only the creators of the text; we are also created by it. ‘You’ and ‘me’ are brought into being by language

(Halliday, *Linguistic Studies* 228)

Participants in linguistic exchanges collaborate to create a text, and are in turn remade by it. In this dynamic linguistic process, contributor roles are always in flux, constantly being redefined by the details of the exchange itself: “Our status as creators and creations of the text is institutionalized by the grammar, and constantly reiterated throughout its proceedings” (Halliday, *Linguistic Studies* 229). Much is at stake,

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102 Magnusson identifies an important qualification by noting that relationships are reinforced as well as created in linguistic encounters. Citing Bourdieu’s argument “that ‘interpersonal’ relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction,” Magnusson asserts that it is “misleading to suggest that the individual speakers . . . are continuously producing, through their own independent initiatives, the coordinated practices of self-maintenance,” and directs attention toward “the inscription in the conversational organization of the characters’ relative social positions” (*Social Dialogue* 147).
then, for the “co-actants” of communication. In Halliday’s vision of exchange between speakers, each takes their turn inhabiting the ‘you’ and ‘me’ roles, and they determine and redetermine the features of these roles as the interaction moves forward. Halliday’s perspective provides an intriguing window through which to view the climactic moment of fracture for Troilus in the wake of Cressida’s betrayal. When Ulysses demands “Why stay we then?” (5.2.114), Troilus paints the disenchanting events that have unfolded as a disconnect between words and vision:

To make a recordation to my soul
Of every syllable that here was spoke.
But if I tell how these two did co-act,
Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?
Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert th’ attest of eyes and ears,
As if those organs had deceptive functions,
Created only to calumniate.
Was Cressid here? (5.2.115-24)

Pointing to the “co-acting” between Cressida and Diomedes, Troilus provides a remarkably apt account of Halliday’s theory. He further identifies the risks of such an interactive model. If the ‘you’ and ‘me’ roles of the exchange are perpetually being remade and even substituted, then what stands as truth between one set of co-actants (or indeed between a momentary incarnation of the ‘you’-‘me’ pairing) can just as easily be a lie between a new set. Cressida’s words to Diomedes do not repudiate the ones that she spoke to Troilus, but the conviction remains that he “shall lie in publishing a truth” (118). This is the rub of co-acting; it is not just the participants that change, but the substance of each encounter is created anew. The cynical assessment of profitless talk made by Troilus in the play’s first act – PANDARUS: I speak no more than truth. / TROILUS: Thou dost not speak so much (1.1.60-61) – is illustrated many times
over during the course of the play: truth, or even consensus, in interaction is an illusion, as mutable situations of encounter, and variable co-actants, will prove.

In rejecting the evidence of his senses, and in his bitter awakening of the “lie” turned destructively inward, Troilus echoes with remarkable likeness the speaker of the sonnets at the apex of his shattered recognition:

> For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,  
> Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy,  
> And to enlighten thee gave eyes to blindness,  
> Or made them swear against the thing they see.  
> For I have sworn thee fair – more perjured eye  
> To swear against the truth so fair a lie.  

(152.10-14)

The disillusionment of Troilus and the sonnet speaker, co-actants forced to share a language whose truth conditions are not stable, is an expected outgrowth of what Bakhtin characterizes as the inherently difficult processes of talk, as words are passed between speakers and uneasily transformed: “many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker” (Dialogic Imagination 294). As Troilus’s cynical gloss on the divided Cressida advertises, this entire betrayal scene is provisional and unsettling, a feeling of incompletion captured by Thersites’ scene-closing words: “Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion. A burning devil take them!” (5.2.193-94). The self-appointed chorus falters here, his words an unsatisfactory summary of the discomfiting events that have enfolded. While the reduction of the radical communication failures just witnessed to
an accusation of lechery seems insufficient, it is curiously fitting in the context of

*Troilus and Cressida*, where such failures are relentlessly promoted.
“Multitudinous Tongues” and Contested Words in Coriolanus

For this Martius’ natural wit and great heart did marvellously stir up his courage to do and attempt notable acts. But on the other side for lack of education, he was so choleric and impatient, that he would yield to no living creature: which made him churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man’s conversation.

- Thomas North, Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans

An event . . . is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it.

- Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

Peculiar Tragedy and Anomalous Language

Critics and audiences have long been unsettled by Coriolanus, Shakespeare’s final tragedy (dated approximately at 1608). From the moment the play opens on a scene of mutinous violence, we are aware of the antagonism of this dramatic world. The play’s bullying protagonist first appears onstage with the fighting words of a despot: “Hang ’em!”; “Go get you home, you fragments!”; “What’s the matter, you dissentious rogues?” (1.1.173, 206, 147). Coriolanus’s hero has often been accused of lacking the linguistic verve, introspective querying, and desperate personal turmoil so fundamental to other figures of early modern tragedy. This final deficiency, with its accompanying sense that Coriolanus himself is somehow removed from typical human limits and responses, has prompted several commentators to suggest that the

103 All passages from Coriolanus are taken from the Cambridge edition, edited by Lee Bliss (2000). The edition is based on the First Folio of 1623, the sole authority for the text.

104 Several studies have called attention to Coriolanus’s apparent problems with language. Maurice Charney argues for his “antipathy to eloquence” and suggests that he is “emphatically no orator” (34-35); Burton Hatlen asserts that “Coriolanus seems deeply suspicious of language. Unlike virtually all of Shakespeare’s other tragic protagonists, he never uses language to explore inward emotional states” (411); John Porter Houston calls him “the only central character in Shakespeare who is an inadequate speaker” (163); Jarrett Walker suggests that his preference for action over words “is utterly unrelated to Volumnia’s life of speech” (182). West and Silberstein offer a cogent summary of various critical perspectives on Coriolanus and language, and they argue that assumptions about his supposed inadequacy in this area “predominate among recent rhetorically oriented critics of the play” (308 n. 5).
play somehow misses the mark of tragic pathos. Like *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus* is a generically incongruous play that resists easy categorization. Some critics have attempted to account for this peculiarity by arguing that the play masquerades behind tragic frameworks but is in fact a sort of satire. James Holstun suggests that *Coriolanus* “satirizes tragedy and the tragic affiliations of the body politic by placing a tragic king-figure within a satiric plot as its gull” (504), while Zvi Jagendorf claims that “the thematics of politics overshadows those of tragedy” (468). A. C. Bradley famously isolates the play’s apparent inability to conjure the passion and doom that underlies human experience: “No doubt the story has a universal meaning, since the contending forces are permanent constituents of human nature; but that peculiar imaginative effect or atmosphere is hardly felt” (*Miscellany* 75). Stanley Fish bases his dispute of the generic claims of *Coriolanus* on its structure: “So rigorous is the play’s movement, so lacking in accident, coincidence, and contingency, that it is questionable whether or not it is a true tragedy” (1024).

Related to critical misgivings about the play’s tragic pedigree is its spare and paratactic style – with its mob scenes, clipped speeches, and dearth of soliloquies, *Coriolanus* does not sound like a tragedy. Its stylistic barrenness has been ardently noted, with a particular focus on the speech behaviour of its taciturn protagonist: Anne Barton provides ample evidence of Coriolanus’s contempt for words; Fish argues for his refusal to act as a complicit member of a speech community; and Stanley Cavell traces Coriolanus’s disgust for language to his military training and martial instincts.  

Lawrence Danson proposes an exaggerated distinction between individuality and

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105 Other critics who have explored problems of language in *Coriolanus* include Janet Adelman (*Suffocating Mothers*), James Calderwood (“Wordless Meanings”), and Carol M. Sicherman (“Failure of Words”).
collectivity in the play, a dynamic that is given linguistic expression through the unusual prominence of metonymy and synecdoche, figures of “parts representing the whole and of the whole representing the parts” that are exactly suited to the contrary but intertwined needs of the individual and the community (124). Danson effectively summarizes decades of style-based analysis of Coriolanus with his assertion that the play seems to “turn away from the imaginative use of language in almost any form,” and that the “apparently bare style of Coriolanus is . . . the fitting language for its quite different action” (123). Prevailing opinion has painted the play’s reticent hero as a haughty and self-styled outcast. Perhaps most notably, Fish has characterized Coriolanus as a deliberate exile, one who “declares himself outside (or, more properly, above) the system of rules by which society fixes its values” (985). According to Fish, this desire for autonomy provides the primary motive for Coriolanus’s actions, including his hostile linguistic tendencies: “This is always his desire, to stand alone … He wants to be independent of society and of the language with which it constitutes itself and its values” (988). Leonard Tennenhouse takes a similar view, asserting that Coriolanus strives to live “in a world of private signification” and “to speak without conversing, without partaking in conversation” (277). Cavell, for his part, sees Coriolanus’s peculiar remoteness as a response to a terror of being human, a compulsion to be free of the corporeal constraints of dependence, hunger, and desire: “what he incessantly hungers for is . . . not to hunger, not to desire, that is, not to be mortal” (149). For these observers, the key to illuminating the opacity of Coriolanus

106 Commentators on Shakespeare’s so-called ‘late style’ often take the seemingly stripped-down language of the late plays as a point of departure. In a discussion of The Tempest, Anne Barton suggests that words “seem to be driving towards some ultimate reduction of language, a mode of expression more meaningful in its very bareness than anything a more elaborate and conventional rhetoric could devise” (qtd. in McDonald, “Reading The Tempest,” 217-18).
lies in the understanding that Coriolanus himself demands complete severance from kin and peers alike; he seeks a “world elsewhere” where he is able “to declare a society of his own, to nominate his own conventions, to stipulate his own obligations” (Schalkwyk 39). According to this branch of criticism, Coriolanus becomes a radical solipsist whose drive is always toward separation rather than integration.

Other readings of *Coriolanus* dispense with stylistic concerns altogether. Some historicist interpretations have considered the context of the corn crisis and fears of famine in the Midlands during the time of its composition, while other criticism has explored psychoanalytic or political aspects of the play, approaches that have tended to uphold a focus on Coriolanus’s autonomy and singularity. Janet Adelman has suggested that Coriolanus’s abhorrence of dependence and vulnerability stems from his inviolable if dysfunctional link with his mother. Scholars such as Jagendorf, Gail Kern Paster, and Cathy Shrank have explored the political and civic strife in which *Coriolanus* is embedded “in order to provide useful analyses of the conflict between the needs of the community and the heroic individual” (Shrank 408) and to expose the workings of “a play that is hugely, indeed grotesquely, political” (Jagendorf 457). James Kuzner has taken up the question of autonomy to argue against Coriolanus’s ideal of bounded selfhood, hypothesizing that he is in fact “a figure who represents practices of self-undoing” (175); according to Kuzner, rather than act to preserve an “aggrandized existence,” Coriolanus “says and does whatever will accelerate his unraveling. This, above all, is why he acts” (191). There have also been stirrings of a revived interest in language-based readings of the play. Juhani Rudanko has explored

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107 Cf. Arthur Riss’s claim that Shakespeare “deliberately altered his sources in order to foreground the similarities between the rebellion of the Roman plebs and of the English peasants” (55). See, as well, E. C. Pettet (“Midlands Insurrection”) and Nicholas Visser (“Oppression of the Mighty”).
the function of derogatory epithets in *Coriolanus*, and recent work by Russ McDonald retrained a critical eye on the language of the late plays. McDonald seeks to recuperate Coriolanus’s stature as a tragic hero despite his apparent linguistic shortcomings, but his catalogue of evidence for Coriolanus’s “linguistic absolutism” – McDonald points to his “passionate solipsism,” “hubris,” “contempt for flattery,” and “discomfort with spoken praise” (*Late Style* 52) – sounds rather like a redux of Fish and Cavell. Applied to *Coriolanus*, it suggests a protagonist who is able only to “promise or curse with gusto, who abhors asking or promising, and who scarcely ever communicates within his solipsistic universe of discourse” (West and Silberstein 312).

In this chapter, I explore how the language of *Coriolanus* inscribes not only singular and antisocial tendencies, but also social delineation, the moments of collision between the individual and collective voices in the play. In this respect, *Coriolanus* represents a point of convergence between the sonnets and *Troilus and Cressida*. In the figure of Coriolanus, the resistance of the speaking “I” and the problems of immersion in systems of shared language collide. It has been suggested that the pared-down speech of Coriolanus “constitutes the grammatical equivalent of his famous desire for freedom from familial or other kinds of relation” (McDonald, *Late Style* 57); this reading may be extended to consider the features of social interaction – such as power, coercion, and compliance – in addition to antisocial objectives. While Coriolanus’s speech suggests inclinations toward autonomy, it just as strongly demonstrates his entanglement in linguistic systems, his desire to speak and be heard, and his acute awareness of the social currency of language. Perhaps it is not so much membership in a community that he resists, but the fact of his circumscribed power within that
community. His driving desire may in fact be a naive wish to be the controller of the group, the de facto monarch whose dictates become law. Coriolanus’s vision of living as a “lonely dragon” (4.1.30) is spurious, for his *modus vivendi* is to be embroiled in interaction, however antagonistic.

In many ways, Coriolanus’s misanthropic leanings are endemic to all of the play’s characters. The climate of war extends to battles over language, where questions of who is permitted to speak, and what each speaker may say, predominate. The words at stake in *Coriolanus* – surrounded by proprietary anxiety, held up and fought for – are ‘words with victims’ that enact the struggle for social control. As I discussed with respect to *shall* in the sonnets, and in terms of *will* in *Troilus and Cressida*, the modal auxiliary verbs act as a (frequently contested) site of contact between the self and the world, and so they offer productive tools for a grammatical unveiling of social positions. Because they project the attitudes, opinions, and desires into the realm of social discourse, modals create an intersubjective space in which the various wants, and expectations of speakers compete and sometimes clash, and hence must be carefully negotiated. The framework of modal analysis puts one of the defining moments of *Coriolanus*, Menenius’s recitation of the fable of the belly, into new focus. Drawing on the common metaphor of a citizenry as part of one larger body – in this infamous and poorly-received account, the patricians are the belly and the plebeians the “great toe” (1.1.138) – Menenius speaks of the community as an organic whole, each member a cell in the larger functioning organism with a mandate to “mutually participate . . . minister / Unto the appetite and affection common / Of the whole body” (1.1.86-87). The concept of modality runs counter to such a self-denying ideal, for by definition it
gives voice to self-interest.\textsuperscript{108} While the interests of the group are compelling (as the citizens recognize), they are no match for the interests of the self, formalized in language. Modal verbs represent one of the few ways that the self is grammaticalized, a means by which the self is integrated into the very structure of the language. Because it “refers to the range of different ways in which speakers can temper or qualify their messages” (Eggins and Slade, \textit{Analysing} 98) modality exposes how a speaker thinks, indicating his stance toward his own words and to the context in which he utters them. In Arnovick’s words, what the system of modal verbs shows us “is the way that the speaker’s attitude of volition and expectation is formally represented” (6). Despite Menenius’s vision of unity, grammatical modality ensures that the discrete self is inserted into the world, each member a “mutinous part” (1.1.94) with desires all his own.

Tracing the modals in the play, then, provides evidence for the desires of the speaker who uses them, and for how power is disseminated. I suggested in the introduction to this project that while there are limited ways to articulate future action in the linguistic code of early modern English – with \textit{will} and \textit{shall} being staple components – these options are not identical. An ongoing aim of my study is to read Shakespeare’s \textit{shall}s and \textit{will}s with an eye toward the historical linguistic context, and specifically with an acknowledgement of the potential for a “wider range of meanings” in Shakespeare’s modal verbs (Blake 81; Rissanen 210). The chapter on the sonnets focused on the semantic territory of \textit{shall}, and suggested that the choice of \textit{shall} over \textit{will} can represent a deliberate and artful choice that exploits the strong roots in

\textsuperscript{108} Others have pointed out the inherent weakness of Menenius’s analogy; Andrew Gurr (“Body Politic”) and James Holstun (“Tragic Superfluity”) each identify the irony of pitching an image of an ailing body to the starving plebeians.
obligation and necessity. Through the self-conscious use of a modal such as *shall*, thereby suggesting or insisting that one is obliged to do something, speakers demand control over both their addressees and the future action dictated by *shall*. This chapter will extend the branch of analysis developed in the sonnets chapter to suggest how *shall* is held up for scrutiny in *Coriolanus*, and how this attention is related to the clashes that permeate the dramatic action as well as the language of the play. For in addition to encoding a stance specific to each speaker, modals tell us something about control, particularly over fraught future time. Rissanen notes that all modal verbs inscribe an attitude about human control vis-à-vis the future: “they indicate either ‘some kind of human control over events’ (‘permission,’ ‘obligation,’ ‘volition’), or ‘human judgement of what is or is not likely to happen’ (‘possibility,’ ‘necessity,’ ‘prediction’)” (231). Therefore, speakers’ modal expressions convey their perceptions about what is required, expected, or possible in the future. In the formal lexicon of modal theory – rooted in philosophical notions about actual and possible worlds – modal verbs such as *shall* represent a speaker’s conscious attempt to transform a “situation representation” (that is, a possible outcome in the future) into a “world representation” (an actual, verifiable future outcome) (cf. Perkins 14; Klinge 325-53). The effect of *shall* is that “the situation representation turns out to be a true description of a world situation because the world situation is brought about by an agent” (Klinge 350). In other words, the defining feature of *shall* usage is the belief that one’s own actions can bring about a future outcome: it is not merely hoped for, but actively sought.  

109 This is the reason, Klinge suggests, that “*shall* rather than *will* is traditionally used with first-person subjects in some English dialects because in forming our assumptions about the future world we
The discussion of the sonnets suggested that the words and rules of grammar were put slyly on display in these poems, and a similar spectacle of grammar is at work in Coriolanus. Of particular note is the high percentage of modal verbs in this play. In a quantitative study of grammatical modality in early modern English drama, Hugh Craig notes the elevated proportion of modal verbs in the tragedies, and observes that “the highest count of all is in [Shakespeare’s] last tragedy, Coriolanus” (45). Craig speculates that the increasing modal count in later tragedies corresponds to a wider cultural shift in a newly awakened (and articulated) brand of subjectivity, an argument that has been justifiably critiqued in recent years. What is most pertinent in terms of my discussion is Craig’s suggestion that Coriolanus is rife with “tussles of will” and “the applying and resisting of social leverage” (45), the intersubjective jousting that the modals tend to enact. “The difficult relations between the individual will and the world, the tragic misfit between the two, are the special territory of Coriolanus, and the modals play a considerable part in articulating this struggle” (47). The curious abundance of these words in the play, and their capacity to offer insight into a speaker’s subjective perspective as well as interactive relationships, make them a compelling object of study. Furthermore, an appraisal of the modal choices at work in the play – with a particular focus on the dialogue’s contested shalls, weighted with the sense of obligation as well as the contested potential to control future outcomes – offers a commentary on the nuances of modality in practice. This discussion aims to show that a reconsidered language-based approach to Coriolanus, grounded in close readings of the play’s striking linguistic collisions between characters, exposes how modal generally take ourselves to be agents of our own future, and therefore we think of our own future as agent-events over which we have control” (350).
expressions such as *shall* can sharpen our understanding of power and compliance in the play, and can unveil the transformative moment when the future is determined.

**Dictating Words and Diverse Voices**

Language is very much ‘at stake’ in *Coriolanus*, most apparently in the play’s engagements with public forms of language, social communication and negotiation, and with various linguistic registers and communities. Coriolanus himself is a key figure in a language-based analysis of the play as an active participant in and manipulator of its broad linguistic networks. He purports to stand alone and declares his mistrust of words, fashioning himself as a soldier whose skill on the battlefield does not extend to the world of communication: “Where blows have made me stay I fled from words” (2.2.66). At the same time, however, he establishes himself as an astute reader of the systems of linguistic circulation in the play, and the skill that he consistently demonstrates in a wide array of speech situations suggests that he is neither as reticent nor as inscrutable as has sometimes been suggested. Beyond the understated skills of its protagonist, the wider text of *Coriolanus* demonstrates a concern with the intricacies of pragmatic language use. Language is placed in the spotlight, both at the large-scale level of competing language systems and registers, and on the smaller scale of grammatical play and manipulation.

The first scene of *Coriolanus* provides a fitting initiation into a dramatic environment that is preoccupied with language and saturated with competing linguistic systems. It is renowned for its boisterous energy, where the clamour and defiance of “a company of mutinous Citizens” is captured in a pivotal moment of solidarity, as they
collectively abandon the fruitless tactic of “talking” in favour of the more effective avenue of directed action:

FIRST CITIZEN  Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.
ALL  Speak, speak.
FIRST CITIZEN  You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?
ALL  Resolved, resolved.
FIRST CITIZEN  First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people.
ALL  We know’t, we know’t.
FIRST CITIZEN  Let us kill him, and we’ll have corn at our own price. Is’t a verdict?
ALL  No more talking on’t. Let it be done. Away, away! (1.1.1-10)

With this demonstration, a disparity between linguistic registers that will be maintained and exploited over the course of the play is powerfully introduced. On one hand, the dominant noise belongs to the starving and querulous mob, whose chanted words seem unhinged from their typical interactive and communicative functions. The doubled words, all clipped vowels and hard terminal consonants, spoken in unison, acquire an incantatory quality more in line with extra-linguistic sounds than with units of dialogue. Yet even in the midst of this collective howl, a counter force emerges. Out of the din rises the articulate and enlivening voice of the First Citizen, clarifying and directing the sound of the multitude.\(^{110}\) The result is a curious confluence of verbal styles; the mob’s chanting is offset by a discrete voice, so that two systems of language – the excited babble of a group, and the exhortative voice of an orator – collide. The pattern of competing voices that is established here is repeated throughout the play, and indeed, the various implications of “voice” provide a potent subtext. The mob’s racket

\(^{110}\) Shrank notes that even the name granted to this individual speaker is an indicator of respect: “Unlike Julius Caesar, where class and vocation are used as labels, in Coriolanus the people are known as citizens, a title that confers a degree of political power and responsibility, as well as status and an honourable literary tradition” (413). Cf. Michael Warren, who has drawn attention to the common editorial practice of reassigning the speeches of the First and Second Citizens according to their respective personas, one apparently belligerent and the other a peace-maker. As Warren notes (129), Bliss’s New Cambridge edition is a rare exception that follows the Folio text.
provides a visceral signal of the warring voices that will populate the play, and the words of the individual citizens that emerge from the clamour reinforce the point.

There is an early, marked emphasis on the conflict between command and resistance, especially in regard to permitted speech. Almost immediately, one citizen instructs another about what he can and cannot say about Caius Martius:

SECOND CITIZEN   Nay, but speak not maliciously . . . What he cannot help in his nature you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous.
FIRST CITIZEN   If I must not, I need not be barren of accusations. He hath faults, with surplus, to tire in repetition. (1.1.26-34)

As this first scene establishes, what is spoken and what is not said are of paramount importance, subject to the dictates of the commanding must. The point is cemented soon afterwards as the tribunes isolate what they deem the most telling aspect of Caius Martius’ behaviour:

BRUTUS   Marked you his lip and eyes?
SICINIUS   Nay, but his taunts. (1.1.238-39)

In Coriolanus, we are taught to pay attention to words above all else. The first scene demonstrates the range and impact of different “voices” that are variously discrete, collective, commanding, and resistant. And what is highlighted about the nature of language is its communal – and hence contested – status. Instructions governing its appropriate use are rampant, its content cannot be agreed upon, and it is understood to be at once vital and maddeningly ineffectual: the prevailing compulsion

\[111\] Note, as well, that Coriolanus’ first lines show derisive scorn for the words of the people. To Menenius’s explanation that they demand “corn at their own rates, whereof they say / The city is well stored” (1.1.171-2), he ridicules both their words and the fact that Menenius grants credence to what “they say”: “Hang ’em! ‘They say’?” (1.1.173). Such attention to the nuances of uttered statements will again be demonstrated in Act Three’s “absolute shall” scene and its aftermath, when the tribunes dub Coriolanus “a traitor to the people”: “How? ‘Traitor’? . . . Call me their ‘traitor’, thou injurious tribune?” (3.3.71-74).

\[112\] Caius Martius is bestowed the honorific ‘Coriolanus’ by Cominius at the end of Act One; this discussion will subsequently refer to him as ‘Coriolanus.’
to “speak, speak” is countered by the suspicion that all of this talk only gets in the way of any real action. The First Citizen’s protest of “why stay we prating here?” (1.1.35) seems the natural response to a milieu in which so many voices – the “multitudinous tongue” so loathed by Coriolanus (3.1.157) – are forced to coexist. And the confused and desirous cry to “speak” resonates through all of the action that unfolds over the next five acts. The sparring voices that open the play stay with us. Their primal noises seem to stave off linguistic rejoinders even as they articulate a literal call to arms; using language to silence language, the mob’s “voice” paradoxically suggests that immediate action, not further talk, is the only appropriate response.113

The unsettling possibility that talk is futile haunts the play, but in spite of this risk the speakers of Coriolanus take their “voices” very seriously. They demonstrate a keen awareness of the power of their voices both as an individual force and as capable of collective impact.114 As they debate Coriolanus’s suitability for the consulship and their own role in granting him the position, the citizens acknowledge the discrepancy between individual and collective wants:

FIRST CITIZEN  Once if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him.
SECOND CITIZEN  We may, sir, if we will. (2.3.1-3)

This heavily modalized sequence illustrates the tension between social duty – ought not – and personal desire: we may if we will. Ought occupies specialized modal territory in

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113 The plebeians’ predicament of reluctant dependence (between the individual and the collective; between words and action) is articulated by Menenius as he chastises the tribunes: “I know you can do very little alone, for your helps are many, or else your actions would grow wondrous single. Your abilities are too infant-like for doing much alone” (2.1.29-31).

114 McDonald points out that the noun “voice” in Coriolanus owes something to the Latin vox as well as to “contemporary Jacobean political procedures, specifically the customary method of parliamentary election”; he further suggests that the Folio’s consistent capitalization of “Voice” and “Voices” “would seem to imply authorial intention” (Late Style 53). Regardless of whether or not this emphasis is deliberate, “voice” has a particular diffusive impact in the play, forging associations as various as cacophonous sound, political clout, and the potential for individual or collective power.
that it denotes obligation and logical necessity, but is “less categorical” than must (Quirk 102); it effectively leaves room for doubt, the possibility of doing otherwise (perhaps according to the mandates of personal will).\textsuperscript{115} Indeed, the Second Citizen’s reply captures this ambivalence, and it illustrates the nuances of modal ambiguity, suggesting how modal verbs can support a broad network of interpretation. May is particularly open to various readings because it can signal motives as varied as simple probability to strong inclination, permission, or ability. Here, “we may” could carry the epistemic meaning of possibility (expressing the potential for two future outcomes that it is within the citizens’ ability to carry out: Coriolanus might be denied, or might not be), but it could also have the deontic force of permission or authority to carry out, a connotation that is reinforced by the volitional will that follows.\textsuperscript{116} The exchange illustrates how Coriolanus demands attention to the conditions governing the use of modal expressions, and monitors the resounding implications of deploying them in dialogue. In this case, may acts as a rebuttal to the dictating ought, and the exchange reiterates the familiar dilemma of the plebeian voices; they possess the free choice to follow their own wills, but each expression of will must contend with other individual expressions of will, and, failing to reach consensus, they risk cancelling one another out. The Third Citizen frames this fear in terms of topographical distance, a metaphor that underscores the notion of individuals that are separate in every sense, from their goals for the future to their physical location: “... our wits are so diversely coloured.

\textsuperscript{115} Cf. Parker, who discusses ought (as well as should) as “a straightforward statement about the established rules of behavior. Borrowing from Kant, we can term it a hypothetical imperative, suggesting as it does complicated justifications there is no time to detail. It is analogous to the ‘value words’ of the philosophers, in that it appears to belong to simple factual statement, but actually prescribes behavior” (333).

\textsuperscript{116} Cummings treats a similarly ambiguous statement in the theological writing of Thomas More (“yf we must / we may”) as “a pun between epistemic and deontic modalities” (218).
And truly I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, north, south, and their consent of one direct way should be at once to all the points o’th’compass” (2.3.16-20).

One “voice” given particular privilege in the play is that of Coriolanus, and paying close attention to the details of his speech allows for some compelling insights. While some critics have found fault with the rhetorical quality of Coriolanus’s words – Coppélia Kahn has called him “Shakespeare’s least inward hero: he has little if any self-knowledge, and only one soliloquy” (218) – few could quibble on the point of their sheer quantity. Coriolanus is one of Shakespeare’s most verbose figures, speaking “one quarter of the play’s 3200 lines, a part larger than any in the tragedies except for Hamlet, Iago, and Othello” (McDonald, *Late Style* 52). Additionally, although he – the confessed war-bred man who is “ill-schooled / In bolted language” (3.1.326-27) – rarely speaks alone onstage, and tends not to engage in the self-revealing rhetoric of some of Shakespeare’s more renowned soliloquists, the conclusion that these absences indicate a deficient inner life seems flawed. The bulk of his words are spoken in interactive dialogue, using the seemingly mundane lynchpins of common communication. Yet these easily overlooked words also encode clues about a speaker’s self-positioning, and they provide proof that there are many means of tracing linguistic subjectivity in drama. Alan Sinfield asserts that these revealing aspects of dialogue include “self-reference and self-questioning (including soliloquy), indecision, lying,” and he isolates the representation of a character making a decision as the “nucleus of intersubjective drama” (59). Decisions, projections, questions: such processes are

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117 Kahn’s larger argument is that tragic interiority is in *Coriolanus* subordinated to “the fusion of emotionally resonant imagery with highly charged, often brutal action” (218), a perspective that recalls Barton’s claims about the stylistic tendencies of Shakespeare’s late plays.
enacted in the ordinary function words of the language. Moreover, Coriolanus is depicted as an astute critic of communication who pays vigilant attention to the nuances of dialogue, railing against any perceived violation. Words deemed by him to be bold or defiant – “shall” (3.1.91); “traitor” (3.3.71); “boy” (5.6.106) – are subject to his public scorn and scrutiny. These censorious lessons serve to tell us something important about Coriolanus: he knows how social language works, and is sensitive to the power contained in single words. Furthermore, he is eager to inform his listeners of his attunement to these details; his status as arbiter of communication is evidently very important to him. It is this kind of pragmatic language-in-use that is held up in this play, and that augments the potency of the linguistic collisions that are of particular interest to me here.

The Force of Shall in Coriolanus

Of the many compelling and illuminating instances of modal usage in Coriolanus, shall, the commanding modal marker of obligation, is given the most vocal attention within the play. The verb against which Coriolanus rails in Act Three is, as the chapter on the sonnets discussed, intrinsically burdened with power and antagonism. But whereas the dominant linguistic interaction in the sonnets involves intimate binary or triangulated relationships – between various combinations of the speaker, the addressee(s), the rival, as well as the shadow reading audience – the focus in Coriolanus extends to many different types of linguistic relationships, from personal disputes to social negotiation and political polemic. In the sonnets, shall largely indicated the subtle ways in which the speaker attempted to retain power within an
intimate relationship; in Coriolanus, shall is a potent indicator of social positioning. As a word with victims, it linguistically inscribes power relations, traces speaker expectations, and illuminates and insists on specific rules of social interaction. Such a word carries particular resonance in the conflict-focused milieu of drama, and especially in a play such as Coriolanus, which showcases the tension between civic duty, familial authority and responsibility, and personal ambition: “Shall expresses aspects of obligation and desire, and therefore showcases the boundary between the demands of a speaker’s public world and the wishes of his private one” (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 262). Its double function as both indicator of resistant desire and marker of the social order lends shall a distinctive and even calculated force in this play, and tracking its use uncovers compelling patterns of coercion and insistence. Moreover, as a word that designates a speaker’s capacity to bring about some future action (Klinge 350), shall is held up in certain encounters as a prize to be claimed. In these heated contests, the “victor” who lays claim to shall sees his or her intention for the future fulfilled.

While shall is isolated for self-conscious attention at certain key moments, in many cases Shakespeare’s shalls display predictable usage patterns. Social power and positioning are central to the successful application of modal expressions; those who possess relative power are apt to be less inhibited in their expressions of obligation and desire, and less likely to frame these threatening words with redressive strategies. Conversely, those with relatively little power are more prone to compliance and the concealment of their own desires. Shall naturally tends to recur in the dialogue of powerful characters; it scarcely needs noting that Shakespeare’s kings employ
obligation-\textit{shall} quite liberally. Indeed, “English \textit{shall} . . . had a sense of predestination throughout Old, Middle, and Early Modern English” (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 262), so the meaning of \textit{shall} in Shakespeare’s time still bore strong traces of infallible decree. “The result of this lingering association is that \textit{shall} taps into the appearance of a force greater than one’s own will, a specialized type of authority afforded gods, monarchs, and (in the case of \textit{Coriolanus}), overbearing mothers: \textit{shall}’s “strong obligation compels one to follow the social or moral course set by a belief system or social norms” (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 264). It thus seems the natural modal choice for the domineering Volumnia, the “devouring dark center of the play” (Adelman 158) who can frequently be heard telling others what they \textit{shall} do. In an early exchange, a familiar battle of wills between mother and daughter-in-law, which embodies the tension between personal desire and social obligation, turns on their modal choices:

\begin{verbatim}
VALERIA  Come, lay aside your stitchery. I \textit{must} have you play the idle huswife with me this afternoon.
VIRGILIA  No, good madam, I \textit{will} not out of doors.
VALERIA  Not out of doors?
VOLUMNIA  She \textit{shall}, she \textit{shall}.
VIRGILIA  Indeed, no, by your patience. I’ll not over the threshold till my lord return from the wars.
VALERIA  Fie, you confine yourself most unreasonably. Come, you \textit{must} go visit the good lady that lies in.
VIRGILIA  I \textit{will} wish her speedy strength, and visit her with my prayers, but I \textit{cannot} go thither.
VOLUMNIA  Why, I pray you?
VIRGILIA  ’Tis not to save labour, not that I want love.
VALERIA  You \textit{would} be another Penelope. Yet they say all the yarn she spun in Ulysses’ absence did but fill Ithaca full of moths. Come, I \textit{would} your cambric were sensible as your finger, that you \textit{might} leave pricking it for pity. Come, you \textit{shall} go with us.
\end{verbatim}

(1.3.62–78, emphasis added)
Virgilia couches her refusal in deferential modal language; she places the emphasis on her own volition and even inability, repeating that she “will not out of doors” and “cannot go thither” to which Volumnia responds with churlish insistence: “she shall, she shall.” This passage shows how modality inscribes boundaries of relationships and relative social power. Volumnia capitalizes on her rank as Coriolanus’s mother and Virgilia’s elder in her conviction that her wishes take precedence; her modals of obligation stand in sharp contrast to Virgilia’s more tentative choices. Virgilia is sufficiently shrewd to recognize that deploying a shall of her own against Volumnia could be too inflammatory to be effective, and she chooses instead simply to stand resolute. There is, however, a subdued escalation in the force of Virgilia’s modal verbs from the weaker “I will not,” which emphasizes her own volition, to “I cannot,” which suggests less agency and accountability; Virgilia appeals to the illusion that she is not only unwilling but in fact unable to leave. She closes the discussion with the strongest statement in her arsenal – “indeed I must not” (1.3.109). Her modal choices here effectively show a movement from the personal desire to social obligation; the emphasis is shifted from the impetus of her own desire to more nebulous dicta – she “must” not leave according the mandates for a decorous wife, which here trump Volumnia’s power as dictatorial and insistent mother-in-law. Versions of Volumnia’s “She shall, she shall” echo throughout the play, and this enduring battle of shall pivots on who is permitted to impose this command and who is compelled to heed it.

Volumnia’s commanding language, devoid of niceties and peppered with imperatives, consistently lays bare her understanding of her own social position. Her modal expressions are the understated engines of this dictatorial language, asserting her
rank and insinuating control over future outcomes. Even at the nadir of her influence, after Coriolanus has been banished, she retains the potential to vanquish with a word. Confronted with her wailing presence, Brutus and Sicinius appear fearful—“Let’s not meet her . . . They say she’s mad” (4.2.9-11)–and Menenius implores her to “be not so loud” (4.2.14). Volumnia’s response to the enemy tribunes is telling: “If I could for weeping, you should hear – Nay, and you shall hear some” (4.2.15-16). The discussion of the sonnets suggested how the use of shall by a speaker impinges on the addressee’s wish for autonomy and implies that the speaker’s power supercedes that of his interlocutor. Here, Volumnia pushes the face-threatening potential of shall to its limits; she does not simply impinge on the tribunes’ autonomy, but instead openly declares her own goal to quash that very freedom, revising her tempered aim that they “should hear” – like ought, should is a “less categorical” marker of necessity – to the stronger “shall.” Cummings argues that while shall necessarily signifies action taking place in the future, “in practice it is often difficult to distinguish this from an obligation or an undertaking (215). Volumnia exploits this ambiguity, and coming from her lips, the word acquires the flavour of divine edict – less a statement about what is going to transpire than a fierce guarantee.

The discussion of the sonnets elaborated on the specialized meanings of I shall statements, which tend to act as threats or promises according to the verb that

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118 The following line, ascribed by Bliss to Virgilia, seems uncharacteristically officious: “You shall stay too” (17). Several editors have reassigned this statement to Volumnia, since its aggressive tone (anchored by shall) seems better suited to her speech profile than to Virgilia’s typical reticence. 119 I am employing the terminology of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson’s politeness model, particularly their description of “face threatening actions” (FTAs). Brown and Levinson identify “face” as a double-edged concept concerning the seemingly disparate desires to be approved of and also to be free from the imposition of others (61). FTAs, which imperil the face wants of either the speaker or addressee, warrant various ‘politeness strategies’ to mitigate the potential risks of the act. 120 See also Cummings’ comments on the specialized use of shall in medieval and early modern religious texts. He notes that the absolute knowledge and power of the divine complicates modal usage (130-35).
accompanies them. The *I* or *we shall* construction is thus one of the most contentious and highly-charged assertions that a speaker can make; in terms of politeness theory, “verbs that intrinsically might threaten face include modals of obligation and verbs of wanting and desiring” (Brown and Levinson 192), and *I shall* carries the double force of obligation and unyielding personal intention, regardless of the wishes of the addressee. Unsurprisingly, this grammatical construction appears infrequently in the sonnets (a context in which the speaker aims to curtail explicit conflict), but it has a notable presence in *Coriolanus*, where open discord is rife. It is a regular occurrence for Coriolanus to threaten: “Hence, rotten thing, or I shall shake thy bones / Out of thy garments” (3.1.180-81); “He that retires, I’ll take him for a Volsce, / And he shall feel mine edge” (1.4.29-30), or for his rival Aufidius to relish the promise of continued battles: “‘Tis sworn between us we shall ever strike / Till one can do no more” (1.2.35-36). Because they stake out the conditions of the future according to the strong intention of the speaker, *I* and *we shall* statements are an effective rhetorical tactic for an intimidating foe. Yet in the milieu of *Coriolanus*, where so many voices freely and antagonistically declare their intentions, speakers often find themselves corralled in the public arena of warring threats and promises. Ironically, then, the *I shall* usage can also point to a sort of declaration of circumscribed agency, an appeal that one’s hands are tied. A mild example may be found in the first words spoken by Cominius in the

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121 Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, an analogue for Coriolanus in many ways, also recognizes the power of modal declaration, and demonstrates a similar attunement to the effects of modals deployed in dialogue. After hearing his ally Theridimas boast of his skill, “More mighty than the Turkish emperor, / Shall rouse him out of Europe, and pursue / His scattered army till they yield or die” (3.3.37-39), Tamburlaine expresses his approval for his spokesman’s modal choices: “Well said, Theridimas! speak in that mood; / For Will and Shall best fitteth Tamburlaine” (3.4.40-41). Tamburlaine and Coriolanus share an understanding that the associations encoded in these words – confident emphasis on expected future action, and the accompanying clout of such assurance – are part of the required arsenal of a threatening rival.
play, as he is called upon to narrativize Coriolanus’s achievements: “I shall lack voice” (2.2.76). His promise that he will be unable to communicate adequately Coriolanus’s feats (a fear that resonates with the play’s concerns about the relative power of “voices”) admits a sort of helplessness, albeit a trivial sort that taps in to the conventional topos of praise for a valiant leader. A more serious expression of powerlessness occurs shortly after Cominius’s admission, as Coriolanus reluctantly concedes to show his wounds to the people as he appeals for their votes: “It is a part / That I shall blush in acting, and might well / Be taken from the people” (2.2.139-41). Like Virgilia in her refusal of Volumnia, Coriolanus makes it clear that his intentions are not a matter of choice – just as Virgilia “cannot” leave her home, Coriolanus couches his shame in the language of obligation. The I shall conveys a sense of necessity, and confirms Coriolanus agrees to it not as a matter of will, but of compliance. The requirements of others ensure that his back is against the wall, with no exit in sight. As Sicinius asserts in equally insistent modal terms, “Sir, the people / Must have their voices” (2.2.135-36).

Coriolanus’s grudging “I shall” inscribes one of this drama’s enduring concerns: the clashing desires and obligations of the assortment of characters – citizens, tribunes, Roman soldiers, Volscians, patricians – who populate the play. These competing directives produce evident friction in the modal expressions that convey the respective impulses of duty and desire. Often the effect is subtle, as when characters alternate between shall and will and thus showcase the distinctions between the two. The private exchanges between Brutus and Sicinius, discussions that tend to focus on bids for power, frequently convey this tension:
SICINIUS I wish no better
Than have him hold that purpose and to put it
In execution.

BRUTUS 'Tis most like he will.

SICINIUS It shall be to him then as our good wills,
A sure destruction.

(2.1.213-17)

The modals of this passage are discreetly emphasized; in terms of form, the line breaks place stress on will (as well as the juxtaposed, line-opening shall), while the dialogue indulges Shakespeare’s familiar trick of will antanaclasis, playing on various senses of the word and highlighting its status as both a verb of intention and a noun of volition. Indeed, “our good wills” comes off as ambiguous – it resonates with the positive association of the noun ‘goodwill,’ but more prominently will enacts a modal function as the verb modifying “good.” The meaning thus becomes as our advantage (‘good’) requires (‘wills’), thereby attributing intention and necessity to the “good” or “benefit” of the tribunes, an anthropomorphizing verbal trick that strengthens their claim against Coriolanus. The shall inserted closely between the two instances of will further underscores the word’s modal function. The effect of this sequence is that the hostile “will” of Coriolanus is first pitted against the self-styled “good wills” of the tribunes, then virtually dismissed by the requirement (“will”) of that collective “good,” and further cancelled out by the powerful shall of the tribunes that follows it. The shall thus encodes the perceived capacity of Brutus and Sicinius to subdue the antagonistic “will” of Coriolanus.

A similar scenario unfolds in the crucial scene when Volumnia chastises her son for railing against the people, and goads him to defer to the wishes of the tribunes and plebeians. Coriolanus’s verbs depict his reluctant stance as a product of inability rather
than will; when urged to “[r]epent what you have spoke” (3.2.37), he retreats – like Virgilia in her own face-off with Volumnia – to an expression of ability and permission rather than volition: “For them? I cannot do it to the gods; / Must I then do’t to them?” (38-39). Volumnia’s remonstration is sly and methodical. She first attempts to sway him by emphasizing that this deferral of will is exactly the point, proposing that he disregard volition in favour of basic ability: “Because that now it lies you on to speak / To th’people, not by your own instruction, / Nor by th’matter which your heart prompts you, / But with such words that are but roted in / Your tongue, though bastards and syllables / Of no allowance to your bosom’s truth” (3.2.53-58). By denouncing words as meaningless “syllables,” Volumnia makes it easy for Coriolanus to submit to her prescription for his speech. As Cominius and Menenius prod Coriolanus, Volumnia effectively speaks for him: “He must, and will. / Prithee now, say you will, and go about it” (3.2.98-99). It is interesting that the forceful must is buttressed by will rather than shall, the typical modal of choice in a bid for obedience. Indeed, Volumnia’s statement suggests how significant mere “syllables” can be; her use of “will” hints that personal volition is more important to her endeavour than she had led her son to believe. She attempts to change Coriolanus’s “bosom’s truth,” resetting his own will to acknowledge the greater prize that lies beyond the simple act of deference. Her goal appears to be consensus rather than acquiescence; despite her claims that the tongue trumps the heart, Volumnia demands evidence that Coriolanus’s intentions match her

122 Like all modal verbs, can is polysemous, and its various meanings often shade into one another. Besides the connotation of ‘ability,’ can may also represent, among other things, deontic possibility and permission (see Perkins 29-35). The significance that I would like to isolate here is that Coriolanus moves away from values associated with his subjective state (such as his volition) in order to emphasize a lack of agency. According to his modal choices – “cannot”; “must” – his capacity to “repent” is largely attributable to an external source apart from his realm of control.
own, if not the citizens’. Indeed, this volitional coercion is Volumnia’s calling card, her enduring tactic for realizing her power over others. As Herman argues, such a strategy maps the processes by which power is disseminated: “Power in action is power to control consequences of speech, to control the sequels to one’s illocutionary acts, and to bend other’s actions to one’s word and will” (Dramatic Discourse 216). Volumnia is typically successful, and the outcome here marks another triumph for her, for Coriolanus’s response mimics his mother’s calculated modal choices: “Must I go show them my unbarbed sconce? Must I / With my base tongue give to my noble heart / A lie that it must bear? Well, I will do’t” (3.2.100-102).123 In many ways, a speaker is the sum of his wants, so an expression of will is tantamount to an expression of self. The articulation of personal desire is one of the most direct means available to a speaker to position and expose himself in the world. Volumnia seems attuned to this reality, aware that changing Coriolanus’s will amounts to changing him. And Coriolanus, on a wider scale, seems to be preoccupied with the process of this change. It is in many ways a play about confounded wills; desires are unabashedly expressed, intentions are regularly insisted upon, but they are relentlessly challenged and thwarted. Perhaps the strongest expression of confounded will comes from the Third Citizen in the aftermath of Coriolanus’s expulsion: “and though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will” (4.6.165). This apparent paradox captures the dilemma at the

123 Coriolanus’s protest shares an interesting resonance with an abiding lament of the sonnet speakers discussed earlier in this project, who disparage the “lies” of the tongue as betrayals to the heart (“Oh me, that eye / Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie” (Astrophil and Stella 47.13-14); “... more perjured eye / To swear against the truth so foul a lie” (Sonnet 152.13-14)). The conviction that even one’s own self will turn alien in its encounters with an invasive external world is part of the larger pattern of troubled shared communication that I am tracing in this project.
heart of *Coriolanus*: in a world awash with “voices,” it is difficult to retain any control over one’s own will.

**“Mark you / His absolute ‘shall’?”**

In Act Three, the presumed rules governing modal choices are laid bare in an open clash over the right to speak a commanding modal. By exposing the conditions by which a speaker is permitted to employ a future-altering word such as *shall*, the scene makes explicit the transformative processes in which these rules are defined and violated. It further alerts us to Coriolanus’s insightfulness: he is aware of the workings of language in action, and of the ways that individual words may be exploited to his benefit or to his disadvantage. Reading this scene with an eye trained on the “small words” of the exchange and an understanding of the unique grammatical force of *shall* shows how the nuances of grammar are put on display in *Coriolanus*, and demonstrates how a modal such as *shall* is central to the tussles for control that are of such importance in the play. Visually, the scene suggests the tense anticipation of conflict – it opens on a public Roman street on market day, with the entourage of proud patricians set to encounter the scheming tribunes.  

There is a certain accent placed on acts of social speech, both in the undercurrent of impending confrontation – the suspense of observing the colliding factions who are bound to argue – and in the patterns of the dialogue itself. The scene opens with a question posed by Coriolanus – “Tullus Aufidius then had made new head?” (3.1.1) – and continues as an interrogation-style dialogue featuring Coriolanus as the sole questioner. He attempts to pry details about

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124 As Bliss remarks, Shakespeare tinkers with the source material so that the tribunes have, when they meet Coriolanus’s party in the street, “already instigated the decision to refuse Coriolanus the consulship, thus creating an ironic, un-Plutarchan, context for the patricians’ confident entry procession” (180).
Aufidius from Lartius, and displays a particular interest in what Aufidius has said:

“Saw you Aufidius? . . . Spoke he of me?” / LARTIUS: “He did, my lord. / CORIOLANUS: How? What?” (3.1.8, 12-14). The types of questions posed by Coriolanus, used to elicit information, are classified in the lexicon of discourse analysis as “wh-interrogatives.” They are typical of speakers wishing to take “an initiatory role” since they serve the various authoritative functions of interrogation, challenging prior talk, and achieving commands (Eggins and Slade, Analysing 87). The pattern unveiled by these questions is that of a firmly-established, rule-bound speech community of the order of a present-day adolescent clique. Coriolanus is its leader, organizing the parameters of the interaction, constraining the responses of others, and demanding and receiving information in a manner reminiscent of breathless gossip. It sets up Coriolanus not simply as an active participant, but as the primary controller of a linguistic exchange that highlights the significance of words themselves, the “how” and “what” of speech.

Given this dictatorial display, it is unsurprising that Coriolanus attempts to extend his position as regulator of discourse even when he encounters the antagonistic tribunes. To Sicinius’s impertinent imperative – “Pass no further” – he retorts in disgusted surprise with further questions: “Ha? What is that? . . . “What makes this change?” (3.1.25-28). The situation escalates as the tribunes refuse to “give way,” and even Coriolanus’s supporters beg him to speak “not in this heat, sir, now . . . No more

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125 Eggins and Slade point to repeated questions – which “will make the speaker sound like an interrogator” (87) – as particularly controlling (see also Herman, Dramatic Discourse 134-36). Coriolanus consistently places himself in the role of questioner, and his tactic of repeated questioning is one way to ensure that he is eventually granted his desired response. Consider the encounter between Coriolanus and Cominius at 1.6, when Coriolanus repeats his question of “Come I too late?”, disregarding Cominius’s equivocating answers until he is given one which satisfies him (1.6.23-28). Herman calls this strategy a “questioning repeat,” a way of highlighting a problem and encouraging the addressee to set it right by changing his response (Dramatic Discourse 85). Such speech behaviour is typical of Shakespeare’s overweening leaders; cf. Lear’s injunction to “fetch me a better answer” (2.2.279).
words, we beseech you” (3.1.64,76). The apex comes after Coriolanus again offers
evidence that “[h]is heart’s his mouth” (3.1.259) by indignantly claiming that all of his
words – whether spoken in “choler” or “patience” – are indicative not of passing whims
but of enduring convictions. Sicinius responds by threatening to subdue that “mind”
which communicates its unfiltered thoughts without pause; in so doing, he effectively
vows to terminate Coriolanus’s power of speech:

SICINIUS  It is a mind
        That shall remain a poison where it is,
        Not poison any further.
CORIOLANUS  ‘Shall remain’?
        Hear you this Triton of the minnows? Mark you
        His absolute ‘shall’?
COMINIUS  ’Twas from the canon.
CORIOLANUS  ‘Shall’?
        O good but most unwise patricians! Why,
        You grave but reckless senators, have you thus
        Given Hydra here to choose an officer
        That, with his peremptory ‘shall’, being but
        The horn and noise o’th’monster’s, wants not spirit
        To say he’ll turn your current in a ditch
        And make your channel his? If he have power,
        Then vail your ignorance; if none, awake
        Your dangerous lenity. If you are learned,
        Be not as common fools; if you are not,
        Let them have cushions by you. You are plebeians,
        If they be senators; and they are no less
        When, both your voices blended, the great’st taste
        Most palates theirs. They choose their magistrate,
        And such a one as he, who puts his ‘shall’,
        His popular ‘shall’, against a graver bench
        Than ever frowned in Greece. By Jove himself,
        It makes the consuls base, and my soul aches
        To know, when two authorities are up,
        Neither supreme, how soon confusion
        May enter ’twixt the gap of both and take
        The one by th’other. (3.1.88-113)
Coriolanus’s extended retort is the product of a speaker familiar and comfortable with powerful words, and who is able to shape them to serve his interests. West and Silberstein make note of the tirade’s sound technical structure, a result of the little-heralded skills of its speaker: “The orator is carried forward by the logic of his argument, reinforced by syntactic parallelism and almost invariable enjambment. Punctuated by imperatives and selfanswered questions, the speech is urgent and powerful” (319). Skillfully constructed, withering and defiant, the speech in every aspect shows Coriolanus’s bids for linguistic mastery. Indeed, this response demonstrates his resolute unwillingness to participate in the newly revised linguistic framework aggressively put forth by Sicinius; part of his strategy of rebuffing Sicinius’s “absolute shall” is denying him the privilege of being an interlocutor, for he directs his invective toward the “grave but reckless senators” rather than the tribunes. By refusing to address or to name them even as he upbraids them, Coriolanus struggles to retain his position as the commandant of the speech exchange. The act of naming – even with the general honorific you – is central to the constitution of the subject; to name a person is to grant him or her a type of existence, and to unfold a kind of reality. “There is no social agent,” Bourdieu maintains, “who does not aspire, as far as his circumstances permit, to have the power to name and to create the world through naming,” who does not want to engage in “the solemn and collective acts of naming, be they celebrations or condemnation, which are performed by generally recognized authorities” (Symbolic Power 105).\(^{126}\) Naming, then, may be seen as an act of power in

\(^{126}\) Cf. Louis Althusser, who in his definition of interpellation – an act that “transforms” … individuals into subjects” – isolates naming as a central condition of being established as a subject in language: “The fact of calling you by your name, the fact of knowing, even if I do not know what it is, that you ‘have’ a name of your own … means that you are recognized as a unique subject” (173).
which patterns of domination and subjugation are established. As Judith Butler explains, “to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to ‘exist’ by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other” (Excitable Speech 5). Coriolanus’s refusal to use his power as addressee to confer acknowledgement, and thus any type of existence at all, on his antagonists – rendering them “a kind of nothing, titleless” (5.1.13) – is the first strategy by which he attempts to retain linguistic control. As his subsequent speech shows, however, he is ultimately aware that even unacknowledged entities have the distressing capacity to impinge on his agency.

It is this double edge – indignation coupled with the suspicion of futility – that makes Coriolanus’s attack both brazen as well as curiously poignant and vulnerable. His ire is readily apparent, especially as he condemns Sicinius for his presumptive authority in using shall, suggesting that he – a delegate of the mere “minnows” in the social pond – is in fact impotent to execute it. His interrogation of the authority behind this word invokes the familiar critical terrain of Austin, Searle, and Fish; in speech act terms, Coriolanus objects that Sicinius’s shall cannot perform as a shall because he does not have the requisite influence to speak it. He further takes offence at

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127 Naming is given special attention elsewhere in the play. Caius Martius assumes both an uneasy alignment with his accomplishments and a debt to the Roman people when he allows himself to be rechristened with the “stol’n name / Coriolanus” (5.6.91-92), and his striking namelessness after his banishment underscores the significance of this nominal bond: “Coriolanus / He would not answer to; forbade all names: / He was a kind of nothing, titleless, / Till he forged himself a name o’th fire / Of burning Rome” (5.1.11-15). Consider, too, Coriolanus’s evident regret when he cannot remember the name of the poor man of Corioles whom he wants to spare from violence – “By Jupiter, forgot! / I am weary” (1.9.89-90), an incident that suggests that Coriolanus is well aware of the potency of his power to name.

128 According to Austin’s logic, Sicinius’ shall violates the felicity conditions of a successful speech act. Austin’s theory suggests that “the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be
Sicinius’s use of *shall* in such a public denunciatory fashion, demanding that fellow listeners “mark” his temerity. His invective virtually parses the future-altering, hierarchy-determining modal verb, and his outrage offers an intriguing commentary on social language systems in the play. One of the driving concerns of *Coriolanus* – who is permitted to say what to whom – is here laid bare.

There is, however, evidence for a palpable fear beneath the fury. Coriolanus’s *shall* in this speech are successively modified by three striking adjectives: “absolute”; “peremptory”; and “popular.” Interestingly, his first target is Sicinius’s “absolute” *shall*; the initial sting, it seems, lies less in the insolence of Sicinius’ utterance than in its unequivocal force. His outrage seems natural given that it is typically Coriolanus who is aligned with the absolute – Volumnia’s rebuke that he is “too absolute” (3.2.40) is one of many similar observations throughout the play – and his reaction suggests a puerile propriety toward this territory. Yet his objection also gives voice to fears about the very scenario that is being enacted before us: Coriolanus the vocal leader is here stopped short by a usurper seeking the position of privilege in a speech event. As Coriolanus knows, there can be only one determiner of the “absolute”; the word’s very definition precludes plurality. Sicinius appropriates the very word that denotes the linguistic sovereign, the commanding *shall* that singles him out as one who “speak[s] o’th’people / As if you were a god to punish” (3.1.81-82). By robbing him of this word, Sicinius assumes the sovereign position and ensures that Coriolanus take his place as the “man of . . . infirmity” that the people believe him to be (3.1.83). The fear of being subjected to the destructive control of others is further evident in Coriolanus’s

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appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked” (15); otherwise, the speech act fails and is classified as a “misapplication” (18). Coriolanus attempts to show that Sicinius does not constitute an “appropriate” speaker, and his position forms the crux of their tussle over *shall.*
assessment of “peremptory shall.” It is worth recalling that “peremptory” has its etymological roots in the Latin *perimere*, meaning ‘to thoroughly destroy,’ and that this meaning has in a legal sense been transmuted to ‘put a decisive end to.’ In one sense, Coriolanus’s use of this modifier intensifies his argument for the preposterousness of Sicinius’s position: it is absurd that Sicinius’s self-appointed authority, nothing but the “horn and noise o’th’monster,” should carry any type of delimiting power. But the flip side of this semblance of absurdity is that it veers, terrifyingly, into the realm of reality. In this way, the absolute and peremptory *shall* here deployed by Sicinius provide a grammatical prelude to the pivotal moment when Coriolanus is forced to stave off his own banishment with the counter-declaration to Rome and its inhabitants, “I banish you” (3.3.131). What at first appears to be simply the railing of a petulant bully against losing his privilege to speak is in fact also a cry for self-preservation. Despite his aggressive claims for the invalid authority of the tribune, Coriolanus recognizes that this “Triton of the minnows” represents an increasingly absolute threat, for the word that Sicinius wields with such insouciance has the power to put an end to, to destroy, and (as Coriolanus will soon discover) to send elsewhere. This scene acts as a pivot point – an unraveling begins, as Coriolanus begins to be victimized by the very modes of language that he once used against others. The reversal that has taken place in the language inscribes the potent dictates of those who rule and those who are ruled: “The illocutionary gulf between commanding and entreating is also the sociopolitical gulf between ruling and being deposed. What words do or fail to do effects who [the] characters are or fail to be” (Petrey 88, emphasis in original).

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129 See Skeat, who notes that the noun *peremptor* means ‘a destroyer’ (434). The roots of *peremptory* lie both in Latin *perimere* (‘to take thoroughly’) and *peremptorius* (‘destructive, decisive, final’) (E. Partridge 191).
In the light of this dawning threat, the ending of Coriolanus’s diatribe is particularly interesting. He closes with an appeal to social order, noting that when competing authorities collide, the result is confusion: “when two authorities are up, / Neither supreme, how soon confusion/ May enter ‘twixt the gap of both and take / The one by th’other” (3.1.109-112). Coriolanus here offers perhaps the best testament against claims that he strives to stand apart from linguistic communities, for he asserts that language – and specifically ordered, governed language – is necessary to determine where one stands in the world. It is when agitators begin speaking out of turn – “and such a one as he, who puts his ‘shall’, / His popular ‘shall’, against a graver bench” (3.1.106-7) – that chaos ensues. Particularly noteworthy is that Coriolanus subtly conflates the social and personal implications of such bids for linguistic control. He first couches his disapproval in an argument for the retention of social distinction, so that senators and patricians may be prevented from being reduced to “common fools.” For this reason, the “popular shall” – quite literally, the shall of the people – is an oxymoron to Coriolanus; it is not only threatening, but untenable, for the language of the people cannot reduplicate that of the patricians. The result of such laxity, according to Coriolanus, is a dangerous linguistic miscenegenation, wherein “when, both your voices blended, the great’st taste / Most palates theirs” (3.1.104-5); in other words, the resulting mingled voice will always favour the people. Coriolanus’s fixed opinions on the need for effective leadership are evident; he “believes that the state does not run itself, like the body of Menenius’s fable; it needs to be ordered, and by a ruling class” (Leggatt, *English Drama* 78). However, this general political ideology is necessarily

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130 This assessment recalls Ulysses’ famous speech in support of hierarchical structure in *Troilus and Cressida*: “take but degree away, untune that string, and see what discord follows” (1.3.109-10).
bound up with an awareness of what is at stake for Coriolanus personally, so that collective concerns, such as fear of tainted language, bleed into fears about individual self-protection. The speech begins with the tone of an outraged but still distanced orator; the subject is the derided “he,” the audience the collective “you,” and Coriolanus’s own “I” perspective is withheld.

Yet this impersonal mask begins to crack as the speech continues; after appealing to “Jove himself” (3.1.108), aligning himself with a difficult-to-topple authority, Coriolanus refers for the first time to his own pained state: “My soul aches” (3.1.109). Further, as Cominius and Menenius attempt to halt his increasingly inflammatory rant and shunt him away – “Well, on to th’market place” (3.1.113) – the more of himself Coriolanus injects into his comments. When Menenius urges, “Well, well, no more of that” (3.1.117), Coriolanus (ever in the guise of linguistic controller), proceeds as if his ally had not spoken with a strong proclamation of his own: “Though there the people had more absolute power – / I say they nourished disobedience” (3.1.118-19); he follows up with the equally assertive intention that “I’ll give my reasons, / More worthier than their voices” (3.1.120-21). The increasing frequency of personal pronouns suggests a burgeoning awareness of the implications of the citizens’ seditious behaviour not only for the community at large, but for Coriolanus himself. More subtly, however, this self-reference represents a strategy for asserting control over the exchange. By the same token that Coriolanus, in refusing to address Sicinius, is capable of withholding the power of a conferred name, he is able to validate his own subject position – in effect, to call himself into existence – by naming himself.

Benveniste posits that such self-naming is what enables consciousness of self: “It is in
and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone established the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being . . .

Each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse” (224-25, emphasis in original). By positioning himself as a real force, an *I* that cannot be disregarded, Coriolanus accelerates the conflict and renders it explicitly personal: the situation is transformed to him versus them, and he pits himself against precisely what they strive to expropriate (the “absolute power” of their “voices”). What began as a pundit’s speech on the Roman political process has revealed itself as a vicious personal battle, and Coriolanus’s defensive stance is a means of protecting his most valued attribute: his understanding of his own place in the world. Identity is shaped by the very conditions on which Coriolanus comments: who may speak, and from what context and perspective. If it is true that “Coriolanus fears not being himself more than anything” (Leggatt, *Political Drama* 194), then this fear is rooted in the act of speaking. As Hanks explains, it is inherently connected to one’s stance in the world: “To speak is inevitably to situate one’s self in the world, to take up a position, to engage with others in a process of production and exchange, to occupy a social space” (“Notes on Semantics” 139). Furthermore, as William Dodd notes, personal identity “is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon in which I am capable of taking a stand” (151). And it is largely through grammatical modality, a substantial contact site between “I” and “world,” that such a stand – the very fabric by which identity is created – is established. Coriolanus envisions himself one way, but
is not permitted to realize this vision; the stand that he wants to take is not available to him. He reacts against the attempt to shake him from the stance through which he identifies himself, and is distressed because such an attack means relinquishing the self that is familiar to him, being forced to “a part / That [he] shall blush in acting” (2.2.141).

Moreover, not only is Coriolanus forced to relinquish his customary modes of self-positioning, he must also succumb to a new version of the future, renegotiated by others. Evidence for this reframed future is apparent as Coriolanus’s rant is brought to an end, not by the pleas of his cohort, but rather by the pithy and brutal directive of the tribunes:

    BRUTUS  He’s said enough.
    SICINIUS  He’s spoken like a traitor and shall answer
             As traitors do. (3.1.163-65)

With these words, the tribunes lay down thundering proof of the power that Coriolanus fears that they hold. Brutus’s terminating words are definitively peremptory, putting a decisive end to the possibility of speech, while Sicinius’s vow that he “shall answer” acts as the trump card. This *shall*, hardly as impotent as Coriolanus had initially tried to categorize it, is confirmation that they have won, for it represents the “absolute shall” that has now categorically changed hands from one set of rule-makers to another. Recall that the first verbal conflict in the scene occurs when the tribunes demand that Coriolanus and his party “stop,” even as the senators insist “Tribunes, give way. He *shall* to th’market-place” (3.1.32). Sicinius’s *shall* at the end of the scene confirms how the dispute over Coriolanus’s immediate future is ultimately resolved, for it is the tribunes’ version of the future that will be carried out: Coriolanus shall not go to the
market place; he shall be punished as a traitor. The deontic force of *shall* has been cemented: “someone or something outside the subject decides what the subject is obliged or permitted to be” (Hermeren 95-96). Herein lies the ignominy for Coriolanus; it is not merely that he has been defeated so publicly in a verbal sparring-match, but that he has lost authority over all parties, including himself. The outcome of the “absolute shall” scene shows that the victim-making capacity of *shall* has effectively claimed Coriolanus. Indeed, it is only after Brutus and Sicinius utter these final condemning words that Coriolanus finally addresses his prosecutors, in the taunting, defensive language appropriate to the angry prisoner that he now is: “Thou wretch, despite o’erwhelm thee!”; “Hence, old goat!” (3.1.164, 178). The progression that we have witnessed over the course of this scene – a trajectory beginning with Coriolanus’s incredulous protests and ending with his forced position of passive defensiveness – grants us at least partial access to his inner world, and the ways that he perceives himself. Dodd observes that it is during moments of verbal conflict, in which social power switches hands and identity is reappraised, that questions of selfhood are addressed:

Some of the clearest traces of this confrontation are, I believe, to be found at those junctures where Shakespeare allows his ‘given’ characters to place their selves at risk by embracing (or willfully shying away from) the openness of dialogue as they negotiate rights and obligations that were formerly part and parcel of their social standing. Our sense of their personhood, our impression that at such moments they are ‘unified subjects meaningfully acting in the world,’ surely owed much to the way that transactional dialogue offers characters a *point d’appui* from which they can objectify, at one and the same time, their old, static, ‘given’ selves and their new, dynamic, negotiated selves. (“Destined Livery?” 158)

The details of Coriolanus’s speech unveil the machinations behind his self-appraisal and self-positioning; they permit us to observe his fear, rebellion, and intimidation. At
the end of the “absolute shall” scene, we are witnessing the aftermath of a self renegotiated, forced to acknowledge “the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it” (Foucault 155).

The change in speech tendencies is not restricted to Coriolanus; also noteworthy is the new momentum that the word *shall* acquires for those who have been pitted against Coriolanus up to this point. In the aftermath of the “absolute shall” conflict, the tribunes and the citizens begin to use the word with abandon, offering support for Craig’s claim that *Coriolanus* makes more use of modal verbs than any other play of Shakespeare. *Shall* has been held up by Coriolanus as a powerful word that designates control, a word worth sparring over so that its winner may wield it like a prize. Having publicly won the right to claim “absolute shall,” the tribunes treat the word as a taboo profanity that they repeat with relish. It carries the intoxicating weight of something formerly inaccessible, but newly discovered to be within their grasp.

MENENIUS You worthy tribunes –
SICINIUS He shall be thrown down the Tarpeian rock
With rigorous hands. He hath resisted law,
And therefore law shall scorn him further trial
Than the severity of the public power
Which he so sets at naught.
FIRST CITIZEN He shall well know
The noble tribunes are the people’s mouths,
And we their hands.
ALL PLEBEIANS He shall, sure on’t. (3.1.268-75)

Sicinius seems to take particular delight in interrupting Menenius’s feeble plea with his new injunction. The references to “scorn” and “the people’s mouths” uphold the focus on the power and legitimacy of speech, and underscore the fact that the tribunes have
won a decisive victory in this contested realm. Even the rhythm of the lines emphasizes the word; the repeated “law” holds semantic properties that recall _shall_, and the lines “He shall well know” and “He shall, sure on it” carry alliterative and epanaleptic force. In subsequent scenes, the new currency bestowed on _shall_ ensures that the word imparts a weightier blow when it is used against Coriolanus. Indeed, it becomes a byword of sorts in Sicinius’ proceedings against him; in his plotting with Brutus, Sicinius isolates _shall_ as a literal call to arms: “Assemble presently the people hither, / And when they hear me say ‘It shall be so’ / I’th’right and strength o’th’commons’, be it either / For death, for fine, or banishment, then let them, / If I say ‘Fine’, cry ‘Fine!’, if ‘Death’, cry ‘Death!’” (3.3.13-17). True to his word, in his hortatory address to the citizens, Sicinius transforms this modal phrase into a rallying cry: “I’th’ people’s name / I say it shall be so” (3.3.111-12); “There’s no more to be said, but he is banished / As enemy to the people and his country. / It shall be so” (3.3.124-26). The plebeians’ response to the jingoism is fervent, even ecstatic: “It shall be so, it shall be so! Let him away! / He’s banished, and it shall be so!” (3.3.113-14). The desperate mob of the play’s opening scene has come a long way; newly articulate, capable of backing their words with achieved power, they are in a sense answering their earlier call to “speak, speak.”\(^{131}\) This type of victory is the predetermined goal of a communal system of language where resources are limited, and hence must be fought for. Part of what is at stake for these speakers is the right to speak the “legitimate language” with requisite

\(^{131}\) Indeed, further evidence for the reversal is that it is now Coriolanus who resorts to this plaintiff position. Facing his prosecutors, he says “First, hear me speak” (3.3.43), and his interrogative _shall_ (which appeals to the authority of the addressee rather than the speaker) confirms the transfer of power: “Shall I be charged no further than this present? / Must all determine here?” (3.3.46).
authority (Bourdieu, *Symbolic Power* 62). In declaring that “it shall be so,” the plebeians appropriate the legitimate language and all of the power that it entails: the assurance that their words can felicitously determine a future event. This relationship between lawful access to language and actual power is not lost on Brutus, who boastfully declares, “Now we have shown our power” (4.2.3).

**Transformative Dialogue: Words in Conflict**

The confrontation between Coriolanus and the tribunes exemplifies Coriolanus’s preferred method of expressing convictions about himself and the state of his world: not through the self-reflective musings of soliloquy, but rather during the skirmishes in which he seems so at home. Bliss suggests that his reluctance to question himself renders him inaccessible: “Unlike the protagonists of most of the other major tragedies, he never asks ‘Who am I?’ or ‘What have I become?’ . . . when not absorbed with his sword and its work, he is usually seen waging verbal battle against not only the common people, both as citizens and soldiers, and the tribunes, but against senators and patricians as well” (40-41). But the details of Coriolanus’s verbal performance offer a revealing linguistic profile, for it is through this verbal battle that he makes himself known to us. As Dodd notes, dialogue provides a valuable store of information by showcasing the speaker in the process of self-positioning and negotiation: “interactional dialogue can become a site for the production of self as agency – self as

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132 Bourdieu resists the notion that language is a universal resource, freely available to all. Rather, he envisions speakers as embroiled in a struggle for access to contested and withheld linguistic capital (*Symbolic Power* 57-65). Bourdieu sees in language “signs of wealth, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and signs of authority, intended to be believed and obeyed.” Its market operates according to “the unequal distribution of linguistic capital” and the competitive struggle for social “distinction” through language (qtd. in Blank 33).
aware of and responding to transpersonal ‘discourses,’ as opposed to being simply voiced or subjugated by them” (156). Given this lens, some of the play’s most prominent and affecting lines may be read slightly differently. Consider Coriolanus’s famous declaration as he is confronted with the pleading presence of his wife and mother: “I’ll never / Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin” (5.3.34-37). This *cri de coeur*, often cited as a resounding appeal to autonomy and detachment, may alternatively be read as a testament to linguistic mastery. Coriolanus’s desire to be “author of himself” – as the one who originates, who causes an action or event to come into being – perhaps speaks less to a desire for severed intimacy than to a wish for control over uncertain future events. It is, in a sense, a wish to return to his acknowledged role as “god to punish” rather than man of infirmity, capable of falling prey to instinct. Coriolanus is well aware that language is built on mutual exchange, and his consistent goal in linguistic encounters is mastery; he relishes these reciprocal situations when they allow him to affirm his dominance. This is why the “absolute shall” scene represents such a resounding defeat. By calling prominent attention to the impinging *shalls* of the tribunes, Coriolanus discloses his deep fear of being outstripped as the regulator of discourse. And as the repercussions of the “absolute shall” scene show, the very words to which Coriolanus feels exclusively entitled are ultimately turned against him. Specifically, he is stripped of his capacity to speak the word that determines the “world situations” yet to come, the future-determining *shall*.

133 Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, who famously points to this phrase as evidence of a “will to self-fashioning.” Greenblatt applies Coriolanus’s words to the struggle of Marlowe’s heroes to invent themselves, citing their “willful courting of disaster” as “ironically motivated by the “will to self-fashioning” (see *Self-Fashioning* 200-13).
Part of Coriolanus’s ultimate defeat, then, is the reversal of his wished-for status as “author” of himself and his future by the end of the play. Allied with Aufidius, estranged from the city and his family, Coriolanus appears to face down the approach of his mother and wife with typical steeliness: “Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow / In the same time ’tis made? I will not” (5.3.20-21). Yet the progression of his modals is telling; in the shift from the shall to will, Coriolanus slides the emphasis from resolute obligation to the more vulnerable area of personal volition, and thus foreshadows the capitulation to which he is about to yield. Coriolanus’s words, while putatively addressed to Aufidius, sound more like a soliloquy, a plaintive bargain with the universe. But in launching his “will” so nakedly into the world, Coriolanus places himself on shaky ground; as the play has consistently demonstrated, the world is no safe place for ephemeral individual will. It will be caught up and assimilated by various competing wills, particularly those with the powerful tug of maternal propriety. Volumnia has altered Coriolanus’s will in the past, and his statement covertly suggests his recognition that she can do it again. Even before she has spoken, his words begin to fail him – “I prate” (5.3.48). True to form, Volumnia’s maneuver is subtle and lethal. She begins with uncharacteristically soft persuasion: “Yet we will ask, / That if you fail in our request the blame / May hang upon your hardness” (5.3.89-91). Her statement carries a whiff of deference, but is actually damning as well as damaging; the underhanded words place the initial emphasis on her own volition – “we will ask” – but use the slippery “may” to solicit his permission to blame himself. Coriolanus answers in a way reminiscent of his response to the tribunes in the “absolute shall” scene,
refusing to grant his persecutor the privilege of personal address: “Aufidius, and you
Volsces, mark, for we’ll / Hear nought from Rome in private” (5.3.92-93).

Volumnia is undaunted, and her rejoinder demonstrates a more insistent type of
bullying, confirming that she knows well enough how to sting her son:

...We must find
An evident calamity, though we had
Our wish which side should win. For either thou
Must as a foreign recreant be led
With manacles through our streets, or else
Triumphantly tread on thy country’s ruin
And bear the palm for having bravely shed
Thy wife and children’s blood. For myself, son,
I purpose not to wait on fortune till
These wars determine. If I cannot persuade thee
Rather to show a noble grace to both parts
Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner
March to assault thy country than to tread –
Trust to’ t, thou shalt not – on thy mother’s womb
That brought thee to this world. (5.3.111-124)

Volumnia depicts herself as sole determiner of the future, dictating what “must”
happen and reducing Coriolanus’s agency to the mere capacity to choose between
options that have been predetermined by her: “For either thou / Must . . . or else.”

While heavy-handed, these tactics are a part of Volumnia’s familiar arsenal, and they
mimic the pattern of many a dictating mother speaking to her “boy” (5.3.156). Her
closing blow, however, is truly nasty: “thou shalt no sooner . . . Trust to’ t, thou shalt
not.” 134 Here, Volumnina deploys the authentic “absolute shall” that she knows will
vanquish her son. Her emphatic repetition of the commandment-like “thou shalt not”
ensures that Coriolanus cannot mistake the meaning behind her words. Her injunction

134 Compare North’s account of this scene, in which the commanding “shalt[s]” are arranged differently:
“thou shalt see, my son, and trust to unto it, thou shalt no sooner march forward to assault thy country,
but thy foot shall tread upon thy mother’s womb, that brought thee first into this world” (Lives 141).
North’s syntax is clearer, as Bliss notes, and it is only in Shakespeare’s version that the commandment
“thou shalt not” is syntactically emphasized.
shows remarkable effrontery in deploying a word that has so publicly victimized Coriolanus. After stripping Coriolanus of agency over his own future, Volumnia’s final triumph comes as she, again, compels him to alter his own will to conform with her own: “Say my request’s unjust, /And spurn me back. But if it be not so, / Thou art not honest” (5.3.164-66).

Coriolanus’s moment of surrender in the wake of his mother’s rhetorical bullying features an unusual and poignant stage direction: *He holds her by the hand, silent*. Volumnia’s words prove to be genuinely peremptory, finally severing any illusion of control through speech that Coriolanus may have retained up to this point. The tableau is a visual representation of Volumnia’s resonant “thou shalt not” commandment; it confirms that while Coriolanus consistently yearns to be the rule-making monarch of linguistic interaction, it is Volumnia whose voice comes closest to the authoritative “breath of kings” (*Richard II* 1.3.208) in the play. Indeed, after this moment, the voluble Coriolanus is effectively silenced. He humbly seeks Aufidius’ approval – “Now, good Aufidius, / Were you in my stead, would you have heard / A mother less? Or granted less, Aufidius?” (5.3.192-94) – and acknowledges his renegotiated future: “I’ll not to Rome; I’ll back with you” (5.3.199). Shortly afterwards, upon his prescribed return to Rome, the fatal confrontation with Aufidius features threats so impotent that they are almost comical. Coriolanus’s last articulation of the future, dictated for Aufidius, is in fact the fate that he himself suffers in short order: “Your judgements, my grave lords, / Must give this cur the lie; and his own notion – / Who wears my stripes impressed upon him, that / Must bear my beating to his grave – shall join / To thrust the lie unto him” (5.6.108-12).
In fact, an unsettling hint of parody infuses the final moments of the play, a feature that aligns *Coriolanus* with the tendencies toward “nihilistic satire” that characterize *Troilus and Cressida* (Neill 27). In *Troilus*, the hasty summarizing glosses of Thersites and Pandarus are unsatisfying, incommensurate with the discomfiting action that has taken place; similarly, in *Coriolanus*, Aufidius’s eulogizing words are provisional and ironically tinged: “Though in this city he / Hath widowed and unchilded many a one, / Which to this hour bewail the injury, / Yet he shall have a noble memory” (5.6.153-56). Unlike Horatio promising to deliver Hamlet’s dying voice to the unknowing world, Aufidius here emphasizes the voices of others, the common people who “bewail” the hurts inflicted by Coriolanus. Aufidius’s tribute to them is a final confirmation of the injunction spoken by Sicinius, which seems to act as a motto for the play: “Sir, the people / Must have their voices” (2.2.135-36). The last *shall* of the play marks a future determined by Aufidius, and it too is vaguely damning. “Yet he shall have a noble memory” recalls one of the sarcastic insults directed by Menenius to the tribunes: “A pair of tribunes that have wracked for Rome / To make coals cheap – a noble memory!” (5.1.16-17). That it is reiterated here undermines any promise for Coriolanus’s legacy: he is not the sacrificial victim whose vision will live on, but rather the dupe whose enemies have succeeded in turning the tables on him. The vanquishing of Coriolanus proves to be deeply unsatisfactory in many ways. Even the pivotal tableau scene is characteristically provisional: “O mother, mother! / What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope, / The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O! / You have won a happy victory to Rome; / But for your son – believe it, O believe it – / Most dangerously you have with
him prevailed, / If not most mortal to him. But let it come” (5.3.183-90). This final lament recalls the stoic Hamlet readying himself for death, and the reference to the distant and mocking gods seems lifted from the pages of King Lear. The passage’s genuine despair – “O my mother, mother! O!” – is undercut by its near-parodic tragic conventions.

Yet the experience of tragedy is also bound up with loss and self-fracturing, and in Coriolanus these crises are enacted not in the private musings of soliloquy or intimate conversations, but rather in prominent moments of interaction. It has been claimed that if Shakespeare’s tragedies are linked by any distinctive feature, it is “the structuring of events to mark the limits of the hero’s power by moving him from his sphere of established mastery into a situation demanding another, perhaps diametrically opposed, kind of effectiveness” (Snyder 87). In Coriolanus, the movement from mastery to impotence is captured in a series of prominent collisions between characters. As the examples discussed in this chapter suggest, a pattern is repeated throughout the play in which strong initial conviction is powerfully undermined in encounters in which we witness power publicly changing hands. In fact, even Coriolanus’s single soliloquy, with its dearth of personal pronouns, eschews self-reference and lingers instead on the nuances of interaction and the power of a transformative moment:

O world, thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,  
Whose double bosoms seems to wear one heart,  
Whose hours, whose bed, whose meal and exercise  
Are still together, who twin, as ’twere, in love  
Unseparable, shall within this hour  
On a dissention of a doit, break out  
To bitterest enmity. . . (4.4.12-18)
The possibility for dissention and destruction in a single “hour” is a theme that is emphasized in the transformative encounters in dialogue in which Coriolanus’s future is forcefully re-determined. The parameters of his battle to speak his place in the world, and the details of the loss of this fight, are inscribed in the telling words of the “absolute shall” scene and the final moment of capitulation. The words that Coriolanus fights for with such ferocity are held up as keys to interactional control. Unlike Volumnia’s “Trust to’t, thou shalt not,” Coriolanus’s words are ultimately binding to no one, and to no future. It is this utter impotence, so publicly bestowed, that is a source of tragic experience – it is less noble sacrifice and more the thwarting of a would-be leader whose adversaries are always granted the last word that he so covets.
At the Threshold: Kingship, Deixis, and Ritual in *Richard II*

**A Play of Thresholds**

Somewhere near the midpoint of *Richard II*, the party accompanying the newly returned exile, Bolingbroke, engages in a telling exchange. As the group approaches Flint Castle, Bolingbroke requests an update on the whereabouts of his cousin the king:

NORTHUMBERLAND The news is very fair and good, my lord. Richard not far from hence hath hid his head.

YORK It would beseem the Lord Northumberland To say King Richard. Alack the heavy day When such a sacred king should hide his head.

NORTHUMBERLAND Your grace mistakes. Only to be brief Left I his title out.

(3.3.5-11)

Northumberland’s retort against York’s charge of impertinence seems disingenuous; the feeble appeal to brevity hardly holds up. Yet his defensiveness suggests that he has touched a nerve, and the title of “king” that he omits holds the weight of many of this play’s central themes: concerns about propriety and legitimacy, as well as questions of obedience and sedition. Like the clamoring voices of *Coriolanus*, the subjects in *Richard II* are driven to “speak, speak,” and with their speech they strive to stake or deny claims to names, land, power. In this climate, the words that signify these contested goals – and the unstable names that are tenuous but significant markers of identity – are crucial, as Northumberland well knows. What is so compelling in *Richard II* is how neatly questions of political legitimacy and social power dovetail

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136 The play’s date of composition is thought to be 1595 (a timeline which aligns *Richard II* with *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as well as some sonnets). I quote from Andrew Gurr’s 2003 New Cambridge edition, which follows Q1 (1597) with some additional matter – including the deposition scene – from F. I diverge from Gurr’s text in the spelling of some names: where Gurr employs “Bullingbrook,” I follow the Oxford editors in using “Bolingbroke,” just as I replace Gurr’s “Herford” with “Hereford.”
with symptoms of personal turmoil. In *Richard II*, the political is always the personal, especially for the claimants to the name “king” that Northumberland withholds. In the introduction to this study, I linked my examination of the risks of speech to Cassirer’s claim that “language arises where the two ends are joined, so creating a new synthesis of ‘I’ and ‘world’” (93), a theme that is realized in various interesting ways in the texts under consideration. Yet *Richard II* may be seen as the work that most comprehensively explores the re-synthesized boundary of the self: the play shines a light on the mechanisms of a reconstructed ‘I,’ threatened by hostile external forces. It is equally concerned, however, with the implications of the re-synthesized ‘world.’ The result is that the consequences of troubled linguistic interaction are particularly far-reaching. In this chapter, I first consider the unstable context of the play’s action, and argue that the linguistic system of deixis is an effective tool to monitor how a speaker reacts to a mutable environment. Next, I trace the “telling words” by which Richard attempts to position himself, and I argue that these markers offer interesting insights into strategies of resistance against threat and fear. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to a close reading of the deposition scene in order to suggest that Richard’s reworking of the language of ritual demonstrates his best tactic of resistance against the encroaching world; he longs for an identity outside the margins, separate from what he “must be now,” and he turns to his language to create it for him.

The overlap of personal and political in *Richard II* is just one intersection among many in the play. Situated at the border between history and tragedy, past and present, and patriotic duty and individual destiny, *Richard II* might be characterized as a play of thresholds, consistently bringing into focus points of contact between
disparate forces. This sense of convergence is reinforced in the elegiac representation of an England that is at once historically familiar while at the same time an oneiric site of fantasy. Decay is pervasive; England is invariably marked with adjectives such as “declining” (2.1.240) and “withered” (2.4.8), a tendency that seems a natural outgrowth of the play’s dependence on “the structure of a nostalgic before” (Parker, *Margins* 253). The underpinnings of nostalgia, born of a longing for impossible return, ensure that the yearned-for “time before” never truly existed. John of Gaunt’s famous speech, the product of “a prophet new inspired,” epitomizes this fantasy: “This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden, demi-paradise . . .” (2.1.31, 40-42). Gaunt’s catalogue of praise is often read as the angry lament of a subject who has seen his land corrupted, but its hyperbole suggests the extent to which no monarch can preserve such a fantasy. The play’s backdrop is an indeterminate England that exists “not in the past, not in history, not in time at all, but in a timeless realm of the imagination” (Leggatt, *Political Drama* 55).

The peculiar genre of *Richard II* further reinforces the in-between nature of the play. It uses the frame of history to tell a story that looks very much like a tragedy, and

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137 For a discussion of the thorny relation between the historical past and the present, and the strange chronology of Shakespeare’s history plays, see Parker’s account in *Shakespeare From the Margins*. Parker argues that *Richard II* recasts the timeline of history in the “the preposterously ordered tetralogies, in which *Richard III* leads directly (and achronologically) into the beginning of the history of discord in *Richard II*” (110).

138 In a recent essay on nostalgia in *Henry V*, Linda Charnes points to seventeenth-century definitions of nostalgia that are specifically linked to pathological longing for one’s home country. She cites the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer, who in 1688 described the symptoms as follows: “Quite continuous vibration of the animal spirits through those fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling . . . These traces are actually impressed more vigorously by frequent contemplations of the Fatherland” (“Reading” par. 8). Interesting in terms of Gaunt’s assessment here is Charnes’s observation that nostalgic longing is “triggered by a spatial rather than a temporal dislocation” (par. 9). Gaunt’s deictic markers – the repeated “this” – encode a close relationship, marking the idealized England as spatially proximal, as well as emotionally close, to him. They hint that the same forces that inspire his newfound ‘prophecy’ also draw him closer, in some sense, to the object of his longing. The distinctions between *this* and *that* will be explored more fully later in this chapter.
Richard’s anguished inner life has often been seen to prefigure those of Shakespeare’s later tragic heroes. In addition, the dramatic action of *Richard II* distinguishes it from Shakespeare’s other histories. With its absence of battles, and its perpetual sense that strife is encroaching but not immediate, the play lends itself at least as much to the exploration of inner turmoil, to focus on “states of mind and a many-sided tragedy” (Bolam 149), as it does to the portrayal of medieval history. The overlap between personal tragedy and chronicled history was brought to the fore in twentieth-century criticism of *Richard II* with Ernst Kantorowicz’s 1957 study *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Kantorowicz points to the *Reports* of Elizabethan lawyer Edmund Plowden (1571), a document that claims that the monarch’s “Body natural” (subject to “all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident”) is indivisible from his “Body politic,” the ageless and enduring manifestation of royal power and governance. This perspective tidily encapsulates Richard’s plight, for he seems to perceive his human elements as indivisible from his kingship, and when the latter is revoked, he can no longer locate an “unkinged” self. A more fitting clash of personal tragedy and political history can scarcely be imagined; but the play invited questions about the intersection of human frailty and regal power long before the emergence of Kantorowicz. Indeed, labels of ‘tragedy’ and ‘history,’

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139 One recent account of Richard as progenitor of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes suggests that Richard shares with these later protagonists a raw awareness, and even fantasy, of his own death: “An early prototype of Hamlet, Richard is fascinated by the prospect of his own death, not so much because he suffers from melancholia, as because he resentfully identifies with the omnipotent power of death itself” (van Oort 331). Another posits that there are “strong links between *Richard II* and another tragedy of King swayed by flatterers, who talks himself into an abdication,” but notes that “Lear’s is the greater tragedy because his self-knowledge is more completely and more painfully achieved” (Bolam 156).

140 Some critics have questioned the legitimacy of using Kantorowicz’s theory as a hermeneutical frame for early modern drama. David Norbrook has recently suggested that “[t]he theory of the king’s two bodies has arguably gained more widespread currency in recent decades than it ever enjoyed in the 1590s” (“Emperor’s New Body” 350).
always questionable, are here more fraught than ever, as the play’s tenuous generic history attests.\footnote{The play’s earliest quartos list its title as “The Tragedie of King Richard the Second” while the 1623 Folio edition presents it as a history: “The Life and Death of King Richard the Second.” Yet the category of “history” is notoriously slippery: “There has always been uncertainty about what we call Shakespeare’s ‘histories.’ The genre (if it is a genre) seems inherently unstable under critical scrutiny, always threatening to become something else, to slide over into other generic modes about which there is firmer agreement” (MacDonald 22). \textit{Richard II} has often been seen to share a particularly permeable border with tragedy. Northrop Frye, for one, proposes that \textit{Richard II} and \textit{Richard III} be doubly categorized; they are “tragedies insofar as they resolve on those defeated kings; they are histories insofar as they resolve on Bolingbroke and Richmond” (284).}

The distinctive language of \textit{Richard II} further promotes an exploration of the personal in the vast spread of history, and lends itself to eloquent self-questioning. One of Shakespeare’s most lyrical plays, it is written entirely in verse and has “more rhymes, more declamation and more formally structured speeches such as oaths, curses, lamentations and proclamations than any of the tragedies” (Gurr, “Analysis” 192). It has often been claimed that the play is “‘about’ language and language use,” and it features powerful thematic concerns “with social dimensions of meaning and especially with problems of subject construction and verbal interaction amid constraints” (Siemon 5).\footnote{Siemon’s \textit{Word Against Word} uses \textit{Richard II} as “an organizing center” for exploring issues raised by Bakhtin and his circle (including those concerning utterance, power, and laughter) (2). Siemon suggests that while other texts would provide fitting models, \textit{Richard II} represents a particularly useful paradigm, due in part to its overt attention to language: “Twentieth-century practices of close reading would take off from attempts to deal with the ambiguities and ironies of lyrical poetry. Arguably among the first English dramas to demand and reward such an intense attentiveness to form, \textit{Richard II} deploys formal means to render historical matter – the downfall of Richard II – and familiar poetic tonality – grieving lament – as surprisingly unfamiliar, as unpredictable in import and value” (208-9). I follow Siemon in viewing \textit{Richard II} as a fertile text for close readings. For my discussion, the play’s persistent attention to modes of self-reference and to other forms of deixis is especially pertinent.}

Marjorie Garber traces its linguistic distinctiveness to decay, claiming that “all around Richard in the opening scenes of the play language itself seems to be dying” (25), while Joseph Porter argues for its self-conscious formality: “the language of \textit{Richard II} is medieval, ceremonial” (52). The language insistently celebrates and comments on various communicative practices: “In \textit{Richard II} what is unsaid is often
as significant as the poetic language which plays off visually on-stage against the languages of action, gesture, spectacle, and symbolic representation to create a drama that is also *about* language – its power and weakness” (Bolam 141). In this chapter, I extend the interactionist approach to language – grounded in the notion that all language is social – that I have been exploring in my larger project. According to the model disseminated by Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and others, language is a social phenomenon because it is always contingent, a continuous generative process that unfolds in verbal interaction between speakers. As I have argued elsewhere, particularly in the discussion of *Troilus and Cressida*, this necessary element of reciprocity in all linguistic encounters is an ongoing source of struggle, both open and covert. Even more generally, though, language is not merely “a system of abstract grammatical categories”; rather, it is “conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view” (Bakhtin 271). This saturation ensures that there is no such thing as language that is absolutely private or individualized: “The word comes to its user already marked by history, bearing the traces of its previous uses, which any speaker must either continue, deflect, or contest. There is no neutral language; the word does not speak its own meanings, but can only be alluded to by means of a socially marked language” (Dentith 27). Thus, as Schalkwyk observes, “[e]ven the most private or interior of discourses . . . is informed by the social world, which is in turn central to each of us” (*Speech and Performance* 16). The centrality of the social world to the private individual is given particular emphasis in *Richard II*, both in the struggle of its endangered king and in its persistent focus on public spectacle; the language of this play is consistently aware of its audience and attuned to its performative quality.
While significant attention is given to visual forms of language, verbal communication is also emphasized; language-related words proliferate in *Richard II*, especially terms concerning spoken communication such as “speak,” “speech,” “name,” “tongue” and “mouth.”\(^{143}\) This preoccupation with signifiers of language, as well as with various forms of permitted speech, align *Richard II* in interesting ways with *Coriolanus*. There are good reasons for linking the plays, as has been done occasionally: both occupy a space along the periphery of tragedy, and feature a hero whose arrogance towards those he represents, and whose unwillingness to accommodate due political process, prompts a public unraveling of power. One distinction regularly made between Coriolanus and Richard is their relative abilities with language, with Coriolanus perceived as the self-undermining anti-rhetorician and Richard as the virtuoso communicator.\(^{144}\) Anne Barton neatly summarizes these perspectives with her contention that “Richard is the lonely champion of words, whereas *Coriolanus* presents a Roman world of rhetoric and persuasion in which the hero alone resists the value placed on verbal formulations” (27). My previous chapter suggested shortcomings in the claim that Coriolanus resists rhetoric; in this chapter, I would like to suggest that Richard in fact provides an intriguing complement to

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\(^{143}\) For a detailed discussion of the significance of these key words, see Jane Donawerth. Also worth noting is the recurring image of a tongue as an instrument, often damaged or corrupted: “And now my tongue’s use is to me no more / Than an unstringed viol or harp, / Or like a cunning instrument cased up” (1.3.155-57); “…all is said. / His tongue is now a stringless instrument” (2.1.149-50).

\(^{144}\) With his reputation for eloquence and self-awareness, the character of Richard is a perennial favourite of critics, particularly those with romantic leanings. Walter Pater lauded Richard as the most “sweet-tongued” of Shakespeare’s kings, a figure whose sensitivity to language lends lyrical dignity to even the play’s most tragic events: “…an exquisite poet if he is nothing else, from first to last, in light and gloom alike, able to see all things poetically, to give a poetic turn to his conduct in them” (*Appreciations* 194). Yeats also shows his affection for the character with his reluctance to endorse the view of Richard as a villain: “I cannot believe that Shakespeare looked on his Richard II with any but sympathetic eyes” (qtd. in Schoenbaum 103).
Coriolanus. Both characters ‘quite lose the hearts’ of those under their leadership, and both are forced to renounce, very publicly, the language on which they feel they have proprietary claims, the very words by which they situate and define themselves. In the chapters on the sonnets and Troilus and Cressida, I argued that the act of entering the arena of social communication is fraught because the communal nature of language is inherently threatening to speakers. These works throw the self-world boundary into relief and depict the conflict of individuals always thwarted by the inevitable and often unwelcome influence of others. In Coriolanus and Richard II, the encroaching world is more acutely threatening, and the active role of the individual in negotiating the boundary between self and world is given more prominence. The result is that the conditions of relational identity that trouble characters such as Troilus are pushed to an acute crisis point for Coriolanus and Richard, and both are forced to relinquish their modes of self-positioning. Yet Richard does not capitulate in quite the same way as Coriolanus; in fact, in the context of my study, he represents the speaker who most actively attempts to subvert the processes of relational identity in order to create something entirely new. With his “own tongue” (4.1.208), Richard works to redefine himself apart from the impinging influence of others; and unlike Coriolanus, he partially succeeds.

145 The notion of Coriolanus and Richard as complementary roles was recently put into action by director Jonathan Kent at London’s Almeida Theatre Company. The 2000 season featured Ralph Fiennes in both title roles, while Linus Roache played respective adversaries Aufidius and Bolingbroke (see Michael Dobson’s review in Shakespeare Survey 54, and Heidi Holder’s review in Theatre Journal 53.2). Publicity for the performances highlighted the potential for correspondence between the dramas. Gurr notes that “Fiennes played Richard as a self-regarding and posturing neurotic, aware that his role is only to act the part of a king, and always finely sensitive to the power game he plays with his opposite” (“Introduction” 60).
Deixis, Names, and the King

The Bakhtinian notion of socially marked language, inevitably saturated by a network of influences, offers an effective entry point into the territory of names and acts of naming in Richard II. The title of ‘king’ certainly bears a conspicuously heavy burden of social signification, and in this play it is marked to an even greater degree by the fact that it changes hands – or, more fittingly, heads; the king who wears the crown as the play opens is not the king of the play’s final act. Moreover, the word ‘king’ perfectly encodes the threshold between self and world; it is a specialized name to which only one individual can justly lay claim, while at the same time it is a social signifier of the highest order. Voloshinov asserts that “the meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context . . . [and] there are as many meanings of a word as there are contexts in usage” (86). But contexts themselves are as variable as the words that they produce, and Voloshinov’s claim may be further refined by an understanding that contexts themselves are “crosscut by conflicting subcontexts for the same words, so that not all example usages can be explained by the same semantic representation” (Hanks, Communicative Practice 83). Richard II demonstrates the extent to which a specialized context can destabilize semantic representation. ‘King’ to Richard is not simply a name, nor merely an inhabitable persona, but rather an absolute identity. Deprived of it, he has “no name, no title, / No, not that name was given me at the font / But ‘tis usurped. Alack the heavy day, / That I have worn so many winters out / And know not now what name to call myself” (4.1.254-58).\footnote{Early modern English drama features several kings who believe in – or at least publicly espouse – the idea that ‘king’ denotes an identity indivisible from the person. However, Richard does not treat the identity of ‘king’ with insouciance, nor does he toy with the notion of its interchangeability, as some other on-stage monarchs do. In 2 Henry IV, the former Bolingbroke, now king, talks of ascending the throne as a matter of “necessity” (2 Henry IV 3.1.67) and reminisces fondly about his pre-monarch days.
Because it narrativizes a world where the ground is always shifting, the play invites an examination of grammatical details that are heavily context-focused, linguistic interfaces that mark a speaker’s position in and relationship to the world. As a site of contact between the self and the shifting world, modality acts as a flashpoint for change; expressions of desire and compulsion gain particular currency in an environment so charged and unsettled. My first chapter on the sonnets explored how modality reveals the stance of the self, and showed how monitoring it (particularly during the moments of conflict and threat) can yield rich clues about character attitudes and motivations. Another similarly revealing grammatical system rooted in the self-world boundary is the field of deixis. As discussed in the introduction, the term “deixis” is used in linguistics “to refer to the function of personal and demonstrative pronouns, of tense and a variety of other grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the act of utterance” (Lyons, *Semantics* 636). Deictic terms such as *I*, *here*, and *now* anchor a speaker and an utterance in time and space – they are words that designate location and identity, and are thus vital in gauging external physical position and the inward attitudinal stance of the self. As Keir Elam contends, deictic indicators position the speaker as a “zero-point” from which the context (the spatio-temporal site of *I-you-here-now*) is determined (142). Thus the value of deixis in analyzing language is the information it

when he was simply “cousin Bolingbroke” (3.1.66). Prince Hal notoriously plays with the idea that kingship is a guise that can be worn and then shucked off, taking the crown off his sleeping father’s head as a sort of game of dress-up (*2 Henry IV* 4.3.170), and going to war disguised as king with an army of fellow decoys at his side (5.2). Marlowe’s *Edward II*, a play with many parallels to *Richard II*, features a king who believes as strongly as Richard does in the authority of kingship – “I’ll have my will . . . Beseems it thee to contradict thy king?” (*Edward II* 1.1.77, 91). Unlike Richard, however, Edward displays a ready willingness to abandon this identity according to circumstance; in one striking instance, he explicitly instructs Gaveston to treat him as a man decidedly separate from the king: “Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowest thou not who I am? / Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston” (1.1.141-42).
offers about this context-of-utterance: “Deictics ground the discourse in which they occur in the broader context of its production, connecting texts to participants, circumstances, and the actual conditions of interaction” (Hanks, *Intertexts* 8). The framework of deixis is particularly relevant for *Richard II* because the context of production of much of the play’s language is so discordant and mutable. Moreover, the spectacle of self-reference represented by things like gesture, naming, and ritual that have such resonance in the dramatic world of *Richard II* falls under the umbrella of deixis. Vimala Herman emphasizes the close ties between deixis and the physical body, noting that this linguistic system “relies on the physical body as the primary reference point . . . [it] is therefore a bodied field since deeply corporeal and perceptual” (“Discourse and Time” 146; “Deixis and Space” 273).147 Thus gestural deictic moments like a touch of the crown or a knee to the ground make tangible the point of contact between self and world. Finally, lexical deictic elements, like modal expressions, hold important information about speaker subjectivity; to consider the construction of the *I, here*, and *now* is “to ask how the subject places himself or herself in the physical world” (Hanks, *Intertexts* 6) and to apprehend “the extent to which the presence of the speaker is inscribed in the text” (Fitzmaurice, *Familiar Letter* 48).

Deixis, then, is a key part of linguistic self-representation, and it demonstrates how language can transcend a descriptive function to establish a speaker’s stance in and attitude toward the world. A return to questions of titles and naming uncovers some

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147 The idea of bodied consciousness is related to the tenets of phenomenology, particularly Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the *schema corporel*, developed as a way of asserting that there is knowledge in the body. The *schema corporel* is “the concrete, always changing self-awareness that actors have of their own bodily position in space” (Hanks, *Intertexts* 20). This model shows how speakers “do not participate in communication as neatly bounded subjects but rather as parts of interactive frameworks, temporary occupants of relationally defined roles” (22).
productive methods of applying deixis to show the linguistic representation of the subject. In *Richard II*, names – their meanings, proper use, and social significance – are the objects of much explicit attention, as well as surreptitious linguistic play.

Characters repeatedly insist on titles and pun on nominal associations, but at the same time the abundance of names in the dialogue and the recurrent manipulation of honorifics affirm an attention to names that pervades different levels of language from the obvious to the covert.\(^{148}\) It is evident from the play’s opening lines that names will be a vital theme. Flanked by nobles and attendants, Richard offers a virtual catalogue of names to initiate the dramatic action:

> Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster, Hast thou according to thy oath and band Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son, Here to make good the boisterous late appeal, Which then our leisure would not let us hear, Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray? (1.1.1-6)

Berger suggests that the compendium of names and titles registers “faint sarcasm,” so that named subjects such as John of Gaunt are subtly attacked: “By pushing on the tonal difference between personal and ritual address, Richard turns apposition into opposition, makes the second epithet sound like a euphemistic or mystified equivalent of the first” (*Audition* 53). Yet apposition also works here to create a sense of volume and authority: Richard piles on names because he can. As king, he exercises his right as

\(^{148}\) “Different levels of language” here refers to Harry Berger Jr.’s distinction between interlocutory and intralocutory levels of language, which he defines, respectively, as “what speakers do with their language from what their language does on its own . . . The former consists in what speakers mean to say or do with their language as they speak to each other and to themselves. The latter consists in what goes on within speech rather than between speakers” (*Utterances* 497). It is in intralocutory language that this more covert and ambiguous information is transmitted. Berger posits that intralocutory speech is “the level at which Shakespeare’s language suggests the motives, desires, and anxieties speakers hide from others, those that they hide from themselves, and also, those that hide from them” (498).
the master of titles, the utterer of all names. He is as capable of familiarity – “Old John of Gaunt” – as he is of bestowing an official title: “the Duke of Norfolk.” And as his addressees here will come to know, these names can be withheld just as easily as they are conferred. It is an apt initiation into a world where names have the paradoxical quality of being superfluous, easily dispensed and exchanged, while also curiously vital, worth the risks of sedition.

In addition to Richard, who frequently invokes his monarchical name and the presumed power that it represents – “Is not the king’s name twenty thousand names? / Arm, arm, my name!” (3.2.85-86) – other characters regularly comment on and play with the significance of their names. John of Gaunt exhausts the pun in a chiastic speech responding to Richard’s perfunctory inquiry into the health of “aged Gaunt”: “Oh, how that name befits my composition! / Old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old . . . Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as grave, / Whose hollow womb inherits naught but bones” (2.1.73-83). Bolingbroke, for his part, is a nominal “shape-shifter” (Garber 248), variously assuming “Hereford,” “Bolingbroke,” “Derby,” “Lancaster,” and ultimately “King Henry, of that name the fourth” (4.1.112). Moreover, he is attuned to the significance of specific names – for him, they are not interchangeable labels but rather entire identities: “As I was banished, I was banished Hereford; / But as I come, I come for Lancaster” (2.3.112-13).149 York displays a similar sensitivity, chiding

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149 There is a long critical tradition of ascribing the significance of names in Richard II to some sort of “pre-fallen” linguistic order in which names correspond directly to the concepts that they signify. Wolfgang Iser provides a cogent summary of this type of “linguistic realism”: “With his use of language, Richard still bears the traits of a typical medieval ruler. When he names something, he believes that he has also produced it. Certainly at the beginning of the play he is still caught up in the notion that the word and the object are the same” (90). Norbrook notes the dependence of the ‘king’s two bodies’ doctrine on this theory of representation in which the name is equal to the signified concept: “This doctrine has often been seen as a keystone of Elizabethan theories of language and representation, which sought to establish a natural unity of sign and thing signified, though such unity was becoming
Bolingbroke for using a name to signify what he deems to be a corrupted identity: “Tut, tut! Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle. / I am no traitor’s uncle . . .” (2.3.86-87). These examples suggest an intriguing feature of naming that also applies to deictic phenomena on a wider scale: its orientation is both egocentric and social. At the same time that names register a highly individual significance – identity and current position – they also inscribe the contingent nature of social relationships. “Variations in forms of address, notably titles and names, are conventionally used to designate social relationships on the one hand and to capture social attitudes towards and social consideration for addressees on the other”; nominal signifiers are significant indicators of matters of “relative social status and power, or interpersonal intimacy or distance between actors” (Fitzmaurice, *Familiar Letter* 43). So when York refuses the title of “uncle” to Bolingbroke, he resists the identity for himself while at the same time he reframes his relationship with Bolingbroke. The category of honorifics, or titles of address, fall under the rubric of social deixis, which marks the conditions of the social situation in which the utterance occurs. Markers of social deixis grammaticalize social distinctions so that the parameters of the relationship are encoded in the words themselves (Levinson, *Pragmatics* 89).150

The manipulation of honorifics is a common practice in *Richard II*, and as the exchange between York and Northumberland suggests, the strategy gains special

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150 One example of this tendency is in the category of what Levinson calls referent honorifics, pronouns of address such as *tu* and *vous*, as well as the *you/thou* dichotomy that has garnered some attention in Shakespeare studies (cf. my brief discussion in the introduction to this study). Fitzmaurice observes that “personal pronominal system has been a primary grammatical tool for expressing social distance and intimacy in English, though its precise significance and connotations vary from time to time and from culture to culture (*Familiar Letter* 44).
significance when applied to competitors for the kingship. Tracking the usage of names in moments of particular tension, such as the mutedly antagonistic encounter between Bolingbroke and Richard at Flint Castle, yields compelling information about how these adversaries position themselves and view one another. Upon learning that Richard is inside the castle, Bolingbroke directs his men in the frank and potent language that is his hallmark: “Go to the rude ribs of that ancient castle. / Through brazen trumpet send the breath of parley / Into his ruined ears, and thus deliver: / Henry Bolingbroke / Upon his knees doth kiss King Richard’s hand / And sends allegiance and true faith of heart / To his most royal person . . .” (3.3.32-38). Bolingbroke’s words carry an understated rhetorical force grounded in his exploitation of honorifics. The line breaks here emphasize the full name “Henry Bolingbroke,” bare of any title but authoritatively commanding. Moreover, the inversion of “thus deliver” immediately preceding the name produces an interesting syntactic effect. The line is rather awkwardly end-stopped by the transitive verb “deliver,” thereby creating an expectation of a direct object to complete its meaning. The name “Henry Bolingbroke” serves as a phantom object for this verb, so that while the meaning according to the syntactical logic of the lines is that the nobles “deliver” this message, the effect is that it is Bolingbroke himself – the authority behind the name – who will be forcefully 151 Stephen Booth has noted that the pared-down nature of Bolingbroke’s speech – especially when set against Richard’s windy rhetoric – may be traced to its syntax. Bolingbroke tends to adhere to straightforward syntactic construction that follows a close subject-verb-object pattern with little modification, such as “I am come to seek that name” (2.3.70). Richard’s syntax, in contrast, is characteristically convoluted (“Farewell, my blood, which if today thou shed, / Lament we may, but not revenge thee dead” (1.3.57-58). Booth argues that “Richard does everything he can to separate any grammatical subject from its verb” (“Syntax as Rhetoric” 96), and concludes that these contortions constitute a “syntactic palimpsest [that] is the stuff of Shakespeare’s grandest, most typically Shakespearean effects . . . The waste and chaos of civil war is less impressive than the wastefulness and chaos of Richard’s sentence” (93).
“delivered” into the castle’s “ruined” ears, an apt warning of what is to come. The stark, untitled name is further highlighted by the invocation of “King Richard” in the subsequent line, and indeed four additional times in the span of the thirty lines following. As it is repeated, the honorific “King Richard” begins to resemble an exaggerated incantation, and its progression – “King Richard’s hand” (36); “King Richard’s land” (47); “Methinks King Richard and myself should meet” (54); “mark King Richard, how he looks” (61); “See, see, King Richard doth himself appear” (62) – works as a virtual chart of what Bolingbroke desires from Richard and stands poised to take: his reigning body, his land, the exchange of power, the commanding presence of his “blushing . . . sun” (63). The relationship of respectful deference between subject and monarch that is encoded in the use of the honorific “King” is thus undercut. Bolingbroke’s excessive repetition, paired with the audacious presentation of his own untitled name in the guise of an authoritative honorific, serves to hollow out the title of “King,” and renders its pairing with the name “Richard” mere pretense, a kind of mocking joke.

While Bolingbroke’s language in this scene works to undo the relationship between monarch and subject encoded in the title of “King,” Richard’s upholds the monarchical precedent. It is apparent that Richard himself has not yet reached the point where his title seems jarring or unnatural. When he begins to speak, Richard sounds like the quintessential king: “We are amazed, and thus long have we stood / To watch the fearful bending of thy knee / Because we thought ourself thy lawful king” (3.3.72-73). The force of Richard’s kingly authority may be located in his deictic indicators, and chiefly his pronouns. From his first word, the royal plural “we,” he exercises the
monarch’s right to a specialized mode of self-reference. As king, he lays claim to a singular deictic code, as evidenced in his specialized reflexive pronoun “ourself.” This word – one “self” made double through the plural possessive “our” – grammatically captures the notion of the king’s two bodies perfectly. Employing such pronouns is a privilege unique to the king; not only does such a marker give the impression of a delegation of power that extends beyond one man, it also echoes the self-assured language that Richard uses at the beginning of the play, before his kingship is in imminent jeopardy. His first appearances in the play show him as every inch a king, flanked by supporters (as of yet ostensibly compliant) and skillfully performing of the part of monarch, a role which provides visual clout even in the increasing absence of actual influence. Yet in those early scenes, Richard stands more firmly in his “kinged” self; here, he begins to waver, his words offering a virtual monitor of his crumbling self-perception. After maintaining the plural pronouns for a few lines – “For well we know no hand of blood and bone / Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre . . .” (3.3.79-80) – he becomes more agitated, spits out the aggressive verbs “profane, steal or usurp” (81), and slips for a moment: “Yet know: my master, God omnipotent, / Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf / Armies of pestilence . . .” (85-86). This is a salient departure: although Richard recovers the royal “our” quickly, he has spoken of God as “my master.” Richard’s appeal to divine preservation is his best defense; if he is ruler by divine right, then his redemption from Bolingbroke’s threat hinges on God’s power alone. That he uses a universal mode of self-reference, the singular pronoun “my,” to appeal to this power (even as he issues threats of biblical proportions) may be

152 From the outset of the play, there are chinks in Richard’s kingly persona. While his language is commanding, it is not always heeded or respected; witness the mediation scene between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, where both accused parties reject Richard’s attempts to dictate.
read as a mark of alarm or desperation. The fear only becomes more pronounced, as Richard ratchets up both his threats and the references to himself as utterly human and solitary:

. . . they shall strike
Your children yet unborn and unbegot
That lift your vassal hands against my head
And threat the glory of my precious crown.
Tell Bolingbroke, for yon methinks he stands,
That every stride he makes upon my land
Is dangerous treason.

(3.3.86-92)

These are thrilling lines, ringing with combative energy, yet they harbour an unsteadiness that belies their monitory tone. The extended departure from the kingly plural here registers the extent to which Richard feels threatened; the features that are most endangered – his land, crown, and head – are those which have been ostentatiously marked by Bolingbroke as belonging to “King Richard,” and are here marked with the more proprietary but less authoritative “my.” In one sense, Richard’s shift in pronouns may be a countering retort to the mockery of Bolingbroke’s repeated “King Richard.” By using “my,” Richard signals that the title of “King” is not as hollow as Bolingbroke hopes; there is a tangible person inhabiting the role, one with proprietary claims on the rights of kingship. His reference to “my land” suggests a defensive territoriality not conveyed by earlier expressions of patriotic ownership such as “our England” (1.4.35).153 As Richard’s pronouns show, the stakes in this battle have grown personal: it is not a showdown simply between king and subject, but between men. At the same time, though, this usage registers Richard’s fearful rage; as his threats

153 England and Englishness are subject to many claims of propriety in Richard II, from Richard’s “my land” and “our England,” to Bolingbroke’s “my English breath” (3.1.20), Mowbray’s “[m]y native English” (1.3.160), the gardener’s “our sea-walled garden” (3.4.43), and Gaunt’s “this other Eden . . . this dear dear land” (2.1.42, 57).
grow more spectacular, his self-reference grows more personal, as if he has glimpsed the “unkinged” self that Bolingbroke’s sedition threatens to uncover. Jonathan Hope maintains that “choice of pronoun . . . mark[s] not only social relationship (which is stable), but also emotional attitude (which can change rapidly), and writers can vary their choice of form to communicate changes of register and emotion” (“Natiue English” 247). This passage from Richard II illustrates how social relationships, like emotional states, are also prone to variation, and Richard’s toggling pronouns expose his growing fear at the same time that they expose a shift in his social standing and power. Even more compelling is the information that these pronouns provide about Richard’s self-perception. Deictic indicators are oriented around a speaker, and markers such as pronouns are what a speaker uses to identify and situate himself in the world; they are the most primordial expression of the self. Benveniste isolates the personal pronouns as the progenitors of subjectivity in language; they are so embedded that they can go unnoticed, but they are foundational: “a language without the expression of person cannot be imagined” (225). And the expression of person is always marked; Levinson asserts that “there is no such thing as a socially neutral form of address” (Pragmatics 92), a claim that may be extended to forms of self-address. A change in self-reference is a primary indicator that the ground has shifted; it indicates a movement toward a new “zero-point” based on the redefined perspective and position of the subject.\footnote{Cf. Jonathan Culler’s comments on how the manipulation of self-reference works in contemporary poetry to draw attention to a troubled subject or a fragmented world: “Play with personal pronouns and obscure deictic references which prevent the reader from constructing a coherent enunciative act is one of the principal ways of questioning the ordered world which the ordinary communicative circuit assumes” (Structuralist Poetics 168-69).}
It must be acknowledged, however, that ‘King’ is hardly a universal subject position. The changing nature of Richard’s social standing is necessarily complicated by his position as king. Questions of kingship propel *Richard II*, from concerns about the legitimate scope of monarchical power to the nature of the burden endured by the man who occupies this vaunted position. Indeed, Richard’s words betray an urge to play it both ways: while he refuses to mitigate his regal power, he also professes a desire to be understood as feebly human. Despite his masterful and timely pleas to be regarded as a simple citizen – “For you have but mistook me all this while. / I live with bread like you, feel want, / Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus, / How can you say to me I am a king?” (3.2.174-77) – there is no mistaking that he is not a “subject” in any ordinary sense. The theory of the king’s two bodies is rooted in some powerful perceptions about the rarefied position of the monarch in the social structure. The metaphysical concept propounded by Plowden of the king’s mutable “body Natural” and the enduring “body Politic” grows out of an older metaphor of the kingdom as a human body, with the citizens as the parts and the monarch as the head. This analogy had implications for perspectives on social order throughout early modern England, where “the most common metaphor for social interdependence was that of the human body” (Beier 55). In keeping with this image, “sickness” to the head of the body translated to a diseased commonwealth. As a lone being whose relative health informs the health of an entire nation, the king has a unique type of power. As Brown

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155 Cf. Norbrook’s assertion that “As a model of political coherence, the body had a long tradition of association with hierarchy and opposition to democracy, and it often played that role in the early modern period” (315)
156 The sixteenth century featured increasing fearful depictions of illness that trickled down from the head to the body. In fact, Beier suggests that the ideal of a functioning body had decayed by the late Tudor period, so that “the body metaphor was rarely employed after 1560 as a positive, prescriptivist statement. Instead it was used as a warning and sometimes as a protest” (56).
and Levinson explain in the terms of their pragmatics-based politeness theory, the dimension of social power is heavily context-driven. On one hand, it may appear to be a fixed value determined by the power that an individual has relative to all others in terms of freedom to insist upon one’s own wishes, “the degree to which H [the speaker] can impose his own plans and self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S [the addressee]’s plans and self-evaluation” (77). Richard’s overt disregard for civil law demonstrates the extent to which he exploits this privilege. Furthermore, he depends on it to protect him, for as the Bishop of Carlisle demands, “What subject can give sentence on his king, / And who sits here that is not Richard’s subject?” (4.1.121-22).

The position of king relative to his subjects is a heightened example of what Brown and Levinson identify as role-sets, such as “manager / employee” or “parent / child,” where “asymmetrical power is built in” (78). According to these terms, the role-set of “king / subject” represents the apotheosis of asymmetrical power, for the king represents the highest pole on the scale of relative social power. In a system where he is the “head,” all designations of power are determined relative to him. But as Brown and Levinson point out, role-sets are not inviolable; in their examples, “when the worker pulls a gun, or sits on a jury trying the manager, or represents his union, the power may be reversed” (78). Such reversals are at the heart of Richard II, and they capture the dilemma of Richard as well as those responsible for overturning the typical role-set, the insurgents who destabilize an entire network of social power. Though Richard and his supporters may trust in the rigidity of this model of power, the play persists in exposing

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157 As he prepares to claim Bolingbroke’s assets, Richard remarks “Think what you will, we seize into our hands / His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands” (2.1.209-10), explicitly overturning the “will” of others so that he may fill his own “hands.”
their faith as naïve. Richard II details not only the effects of a reversal of power, but also the process by which even seemingly sacrosanct social power is undermined. In this scenario, all players are caught in a liminal zone where the king occupies a peculiar and transient social space, and the absolute determiners of power no longer hold currency. Near the end of the play, when Aumerle – searching for Bolingbroke – asks “Where is the king?” (5.3.23), we cannot help but hear it as a pointed question without any clear answer. The dubious kings of Richard II represent another site of threshold in the play. Spuriously empowered, Richard inhabits a role that is increasingly shown to be mutable: “Richard may prattle about Divine Right, but in his world power is wielded not divinely, but by men; those men in whose presence Richard goes through the rhetoric of public gestures” (Schoenbaum 103). The play charts Richard’s encounter with this threatening external force – the “world” that challenges the position that Richard claims for himself as a subject – and the nuances of this collision are found in the telling words by which he struggles to reclaim agency.

“With mine own tongue”: Richard and the Language of Ritual

Richard’s “small words” can easily be obscured by his overwrought speech, as in a characteristic utterance when he frames a very personal threat in imagistic and quasi-religious terms: “So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke, / Who all this while hath revelled in the night / Whilst we were wandering with the antipodes / Shall see us rising in our throne the east / His treasons will sit blushing on his face . . . Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king. / The breath

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158 This faith prompts the misguided words of reassurance offered by the Bishop of Carlisle: “Fear not, my lord. That power that made you king / Hath power to keep you king in spite of all” (3.2.27-28). Even divine power, presumably the apex of the scale of relative power, proves hollow in this case.
of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord” (3.2.47-57). Richard’s prediction that Bolingbroke “[s]hall see us rising in our throne” carries the conviction of a king who is accustomed to having his version of the future fulfilled; his assertion that no water “[c]an wash the balm from an anointed king,” that he “cannot” be deposed, harnesses the notion of a power greater than his own control. As *can* denotes, such a thing is not capable of happening; it is beyond the ability of any human or natural force. Such assurance is to be expected from Richard. If, as Herman argues “[p]ower in action is power to control consequences of speech, to control the sequels to one’s illocutionary acts, and to bend others’ actions to one’s word and will” (*Discourse* 216), then the future-determining power represented by *shall* seems an inherent privilege of kingship. Richard’s small words here and elsewhere may easily be overlooked as simple nuts-and-bolts components of his large sweeps of rhetoric, but it is interesting to track their fluctuation during the moments when his crown, and his identity as monarch, are in jeopardy. Here, I would like to pause on the details of his formal, ritualized language; indeed, the linguistic conditions of ritual offer a meaningful bridge between Richard’s characteristic grand language and the banal details of his speech that reveal the defensive processes of a self in crisis. Like the naming rights coveted by the speakers in this play, acts of ritual engage the border between individual and social that is given such prominence in *Richard II*. The denotative and connotative values of names cut in various directions, pointing to a highly personal identity while at the same time representing the social relationship between the namer and the named. The language of ritual has a similarly dual nature; in one sense, it is the most public of discourses, embedded in social commentary and
spectacle. Anthropologist Victor Turner asserts that rituals comment on the cultural configurations from which they emerge: “by breaking off and doing something special, set apart, the ‘discontinuum’ of action among the same collection of people, culturally made possible by setting aside times and places for cultural performances, is equally part of the ongoing social process” (22). Yet while ritual is inextricably tied to the social, it is also highly personal, for the speaker in ritual occupies a central and separate role. The language of ritual, anchored in the body, emphasizes the speaker as a discrete individual. Set apart from but intimately related to the quotidian social world, ritual is a site of assessment and interpretation, but it is also a source of solace; as Bourdieu suggests, ritual practice generates comfort in the face of “metaphysical anxiety” (Theory of Practice 115).

Richard regularly turns to the comforting framework of ritual as a source of control in the face of failing efficacy, as witnessed in the early conflict between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. During the initial dispute, Richard attempts to channel the power of monarchical command: “Wrath-kindled gentleman, be ruled by me. / Let’s purge this choler without letting blood. / This we prescribe, though no physician” (1.1.152-54). His directive is summarily ignored as Mowbray and Bolingbroke reject Richard’s conditions of arbitration. It is hardly surprising, for Richard’s attempts at commanding language falter: he demands that his subjects submit to his “rule,” but then employs the leniently inclusive “let’s”; he claims the power to “prescribe,” but

Turner identifies rituals as “cultural performances,” acts as diverse as “prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, [and] festivals” (23). He argues that ritual is enacted at the border of the social world; it “is not unidirectional and ‘positive’ in the sense that the performative genre merely ‘reflects’ or ‘expresses’ expresses’ the social system or the cultural configuration . . . it is reciprocal and reflective in the sense that the performance is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, and evaluation (with lively possibilities of rejection) of the way society handles history” (22).
with the same breath – “though no physician” – undermines his authority to do so. His subsequent “We were not born to sue, but to command, / Which, since we cannot do to make you friends . . .” (1.1.196-97) is an exemplary self-immolating statement: “cannot” admits that it is not within his ability nor his control to accomplish what he was ostensibly “born” to do. Armed with this failure of command, Richard orders a subsequent meeting in which action, not words, will be the focus: “At Coventry upon Saint Lambert’s day. / There shall your swords and lances arbitrate” (1.1.199-200). Yet in the midst of the exhilarating pre-battle moments at Coventry – combatants prepared and trumpets sounding – Richard throws down his warder, severing the anticipatory tension and proving himself a masterful scene-stealer. In one sense, it is a childishly divertive bid for control; his interference “shows that he accepts the feudal order when it suits him, and jettisons it when he is in danger of losing control over events” (Iser 72). Because it preempts any defiant response from Bolingbroke and Mowbray, the disruption is an effective way of ensuring that these “wrath-kindled gentlemen” are, after all, “ruled” by him. Some commentators have suggested that this display demonstrates the extent to which Richard degrades the office of kingship, the profound violation that is implied when “the King, the custodian of order, has himself broken the order of formal occasion” (Leggatt, Political Drama 61). But there is more at stake here than Richard’s stubborn insistence on his own way, for the means by which he attempts to regain control seem calculatedly apt. First, by insisting on a ritual that he subsequently breaks, Richard in fact continues the pattern of self-undoing that is

160 Cf. Garber, who suggests that “with this broken ceremony Richard symbolizes, to the audience in the theatre as well as that on the stage, the vulnerability of his idea of kingship. In Hamlet broken ceremonies of this kind will be termed ‘maimed rites,’ and this is indeed a maimed rite, the failure of an idea” (243).
evident in his speech. Here, the undermining is more spectacular, and more effective. The interruption of ceremony repositions Richard as the master namer, in control of communicative practices even as his verbal strategies fail him.

Herman argues that, with this move, Richard’s objective is cunning redirection rather than straightforward disruption: “the point of Richard’s maneuver is to re-define, re-reference, the proceedings in such a way as to turn the public and constitutional issue of treason into something more trivial and domestic” (Dramatic Discourse 216). Richard’s urge to “re-define” the ceremony is worth closer examination. We have already seen that Richard, as king, lays claim to an individualized type of language (typified by the king-specific pronoun “ourself”), and that this language often fails to serve him adequately. The signified “king” that stands as the authority behind these words has already begun to unhinge; it no longer holds airtight currency in the context of social dialogue, a setting wherein speakers are only as effective as their immediate contexts and their addressees enable them to be. Given this framework of failing verbal efficacy, Richard’s re-definition of ceremony offers a substitute, a type of individualized language that rooted in the more polysemous language of the body. “The language of the body, whether articulated in gestures or . . . in what psychosomatic medicine calls ‘the language of the organs,’ is incomparably more ambiguous and more overdetermined than the most overdetermined uses of ordinary language” (Bourdieu, Theory of Practice 120). Richard’s act here is not a straightforward violation of

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161 We observe Richard incorporating the “language of the body” elsewhere in the play. One notable instance occurs when he calls out Bolingbroke on his sedition: “Up, cousin, up. Your heart is up, I know, / Thus high at least, although your knee be low” (3.3.193-94). The word “thus” prescribes the gesture of touching the sought-after crown, a visual effect that harshly exposes Bolingbroke’s ambition and prepares us for the discomfiting spectacle of the deposition scene, when the crown will be suspended between Richard and Bolingbroke.
ceremony; rather, it is a re-creation of the ritual according to his own laws. The scene retains key components of ritual, the “breaking off and doing something special, set apart, the ‘discontinuum’ of action” that Turner points to as ritual’s defining feature (22). Richard’s act of disruption may in fact heighten the ritualistic aspect of the scene, since it thwarts the expected course of events, creating an event that is even more marked and “set apart.” Moreover, Richard’s actions here rely on the physical objects that are universal to ritual, providing the heady visual impact of the warder striking the ground.162 Understood through the frame of deixis, the act of throwing the warder is especially significant. For just as the physical body is instrumental in ritual – as Hanks notes, “an important part of occupying the ritual frame is to be corporeally located within it” (Intertexts 232) – it is also the grounding zero-point of deictic reference. The throwing of the staff not only places Richard in the centre of the action, the hub of his own redefined ritual; it is also a means of expanding corporeal space. The warder extends the limits of Richard’s physical body so that he literally spreads himself out, inhabiting a wider deictic centre and laying claim to an influence that is both physically and symbolically larger.

Richard regularly demonstrates his tactic of “re-defining” and “re-referencing” ritual at moments when he is threatened. Throwing down the warder before the fight between Mowbray and Bolingbroke provides him an alternative means to expand his monarchical presence and to guarantee that he will “rule” by one means or another. In this case, the authority of the visual compensates for the gap left by failing verbal

162 Hanks observes that performance-based rituals across cultures are “accompanied by some paraphernalia” (Intertexts 232). Here, the king’s warder serves as the central ritual object, a visual sign of the king’s commanding and peremptory voice.
power,\textsuperscript{163} but there are several other instances when Richard also exploits the rigid and specialized conditions of ritual language. Just as the act of ritual is at once derived from and embedded in ordinary social life, the language of ritual bears an interesting reciprocal relationship to ‘ordinary’ language. In one sense, ritualized language features inbuilt limitations; as Berger suggests, it “establishes ground rules that limit the range of possible responses, conspicuously mask ‘real’ feelings and motives beneath sanctioned artificial replacements, and transfer authority from the speakers themselves to their ceremonial roles” (\textit{Audition} 54). But such limitations are apparent (albeit in a less prescribed way) in all forms of social language. As my larger project strives to demonstrate, all verbal exchange is marked by ground rules whereby interlocutors attempt variously, among other things, to stake their ground, bid for control, and declare their intentions. Brown and Levinson suggest that the language of high cultural ritual displays the “same minutiae of symbolic expression that we find in verbal politeness,” and propose that ritualized linguistic interaction exists on a continuum of sorts, so that there is “a natural continuum from the prototype familial interpersonal rituals, through the elaborate interpersonal rituals of adult life to the highly cathected sacred rites” (44). Moreover, Brown and Levinson emphasize the relationship between ritual and control. Citing the similarities between verbal politeness (which can often

\textsuperscript{163} Richard’s invention of his own ritualized language, a combination of the verbal and the visual, appeals to the authority of vision in the play, which insistently ascribes a certain legitimacy to things that are seen. The Welsh captain recognizes portents of ruin in the troubled sights of the land: “The bay trees in our country are all withered, / And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven. / The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth . . .” (2.4.8-10). Rather than being discredited as the mere superstitions of a rustic, these omens are authorized by the events that unfold. Similarly, grief is given visual currency, as when the Gardener memorializes the Queen’s grief with a living symbol: “Here did she fall a tear. Here in this place / I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace. / Rue even for ruth here shortly shall be seen / In the remembrance of a weeping queen” (3.4.104-7). And in the crucial scene before Flint Castle, it is Richard’s appearance that gives the insurgents pause. York dampens Bolingbroke’s plan to “dim [Richard’s] glory” with a frank description of the sight that meets his eyes: “Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his eye, / As bright as is the eagle’s, lightens forth / Controlling majesty” (3.3.68-70).
take the form of “interpersonal ritual”) and the “grand rites” of formal ritual, they note the importance of the “role of ritual in social control” and posit links between verbal politeness and political control “through the constraints it imposes on next actions by addressees” (47). In other words, interpersonal linguistic exchanges and the grand rites of ritual are interconnected: both involve similar constraints and expectations on the part of participants, and the overlap between the two is exploited in Richard II.

During the tense showdown at Flint Castle, as Richard begins to apprehend the very real threat to his throne posed by Bolingbroke, he engages the safety of ritualized language in order to protect himself. After exposing the fear behind the menace in accusing Bolingbroke of “dangerous treason” (3.3.93), Richard collapses into a lament that articulates a momentous crisis of identity at the same time that it channels performative power and plays to its audience: “Oh God, Oh God . . . Oh that I were as great / As is my grief, or lesser than my name, / Or that I could forget what I have been, / Or not remember what I must be now! / Swell’st thou, proud heart? I’l give thee scope to beat, / Since foes have scope to beat both thee and me” (3.3.134-141). Buried in the rhetoric – the plaintive “Oh,” the opposition of “great/lesser” and “forget/remember,” the subjunctive tenor of yearning for the impossible – there is a sharp insight. He claims to want an identity separate from “what I have been” as well as from “what I must be now.” What Richard longs for is an in-between state, a threshold between identities, and, interestingly, his language here creates it for him. Richard succeeds, however conditionally, in carving out an intermediate space for himself, just beyond the reach of his persecutors and the encroaching ‘world’ that they represent.
He has abandoned all pretence of royal pronouns, referring to himself exclusively as “I,” and this I is uprooted, anchored neither in a “name” nor in a past or present identity. The I is not even grounded in his body, as his appeal to his beating heart, separate from himself, makes clear. Thus the I becomes an unhinged signifier, an apt move in preparation for the lines that follow:

What must the king do now? Must he submit?
The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?
The king shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of king? A God’s name let it go.

(3.3.143-46)

Richard’s words bear the accent of ritual: the formality, the repetition, and the call-and-response format recall the pattern of liturgy, and the ceremony at hand appears to be the anointing of a new self. Richard revisits the subject position of “king” in a slightly skewed way, not by means of a plural pronoun, but through the third person. He invokes the play’s most contested title, but now it is tenuously rather than absolutely tied to his own speaker position. Viewed through the lens of deixis, this strategy is intriguing. We have seen how Richard can expand his deictic “zero-point,” the space that he occupies and from which his speaking self is based, in tense moments such as the warder scene. Here, he does the opposite, retreating into a contracted deictic centre. In dialogue – and particularly in dramatic dialogue – certain speaker positions are privileged over others. As Elam explains, “[a] central position is occupied by those deictics relating to the context-of-utterance (I-you-here-now), which serve as an indexical ‘zero-point’ from which the dramatic world is defined. In particular, it is on the ‘pronominal drama’ between the I-speaker and the you-listener/addressee that the dramatic dialectic is constructed. ‘I’ and ‘you’ are the only genuinely active roles in the
dramatic exchange” (142-43). By withdrawing from the active I role and transforming himself into the third-person “king,” thereby positioning himself as “an excluded and non-participant other presented merely as object of discourse” (Elam 143), Richard effectively takes himself out of the linguistic exchange. The modal verb shall in this line is also pertinent; holding the force of an imposed duty, it mandates obedience and eliminates the possibility for agentive choice. Yet Richard’s substitution of “I” for “king” creates the possibility of a remaining, separate Richard who may defy this obligation. Throughout the play, despite his frequent use of the monarch’s future-determining shall, Richard never applies this word to himself in the grammatical construction I shall. The idea of forced future action, something that obeys the mandate of duty rather than desire, seems to be anathema to him. These recurring statements of what “the king shall do” are the closest Richard ever comes to declaring that his behaviour will accord with what others have dictated for him, and even here his slippery self-reference grants him a loophole. Richard has achieved the in-between speaker stance that he wished for a few brief lines earlier; his third-person avoidance strategy permits him to momentarily escape the obligations of the king and to “forget” what he has been.

The anxiety of Richard’s position lies in the inevitable recognition that those obligations remain even when the name is lost. Following the self-command to “let it go,” Richard finally takes up the self-reference that is general to all speakers: “I’ll give my jewels for a set of beads, / My gorgeous palace for a hermitage . . .” (3.3.147-48). Stepping into the I position represents the assumption of responsibility. Because the utterance of I locates the speaker as the “generating axial centre . . . a plotting of the
person on a time/space continuum in the precise instance of speech” (Hanafi 93),
Richard at once positions himself as *origo* and implicates himself in all aspects of the
utterance. As Adamson notes, “‘I’ is both deictic and pronominal, standing
simultaneously for the agent and the referent of discourse, for both narrator and
character” (“Emphatic Deixis” 204). And indeed, for Richard, the *I* will represent both
agent and victim, a paradoxical position that is also captured in the modals of his
cryptic statement of reasoning, spoken directly to his “Cousin,” Bolingbroke: “What
you will have I’ll give, and willing too; / For do we must what force will have us do”
(3.3.204-6). The lines toggle between two of Richard’s modes of self-reference – the
relinquishing “I” and the coerced “we” – just as they play on the border of volition and
compulsion. The first line emphasizes the volitional quality of *will*, but progresses from
Bolingbroke’s desire (“what you will have”) to a contracted statement of future action
(“I’ll give”), to end on an adjectival stress on Richard’s own volition (“and willing
too”). He thus transforms what amounts to a promise of compliance into a statement
about his own act of will, an agency that is neatly reframed in the line that follows.
“For do we must . . .”: these four short syllables each encode an explosive assertion.
“For” invokes a causal relationship with the line preceding – the reason for Richard’s
willingness, it turns out, is the dictate of “force.” “Do we must” is an interesting
syntactic inversion that places primary stress on the verb, lessening the sly reversion to
the royal “we.” Again, Richard uses logical reasoning to showcase the absurdity of his
situation – no mere human volition can dictate what the king “must do,” and what
Bolingbroke “wills” is a consideration only due to the “force” that commands at this
moment. The scene ends with a powerful declaration of acknowledgement – “Then I
must not say no” (3.3.208) – in which Richard simultaneously decrees and acquiesces to the command that he had previously deferred. Richard’s fluctuating self-reference and modal choices in this scene preserve his agency at the same time that they indict Bolingbroke for his treachery.

The tendencies in Richard’s visual and verbal forms of communication – his bids to be master of symbols and to create a specialized identity through his language – converge in spectacular fashion during the deposition scene in Act Four. Summoned by his persecutors, Richard enters with the air of an in-between monarch: he remains flanked by attendants, but here they act as impersonal sentinels of the kingship. “[B]earing the crown and sceptre” (sd), they hold the royal paraphernalia close to Richard but out of his grasp. The first words spoken by Richard are typically incisive. He recognizes their power of his accusers as overseers of the proceedings, and so begins with a question that acknowledges their control, and indeed the relinquished title: “Alack, why I am sent for to a king” (4.1.162). Yet he quickly turns the advantage to himself by not waiting for a response, but proceeding in his familiar pattern of ritualized speech: “God save the king! Will no man say Amen? / Am I both priest and clerk? Well then, Amen” (4.1.171-72). Again, Richard’s speech mimics the call-and-response of a liturgy, and he plays both roles, effectively obviating his audience. He taps into the capacity of ritual for social control; as Berger argues, he lays down ground rules that limit the range of possible responses (Audition 54). Here, Richard precludes response, monopolizing a ceremony of his own invention – blessing the unkinged king – and setting the stage for the invented ritual that defines the play, when he will become both director and subject of the curious last rites of kingship.
As the warder scene demonstrates, a ritual requires a physical prop, and Richard demands a powerful one before launching a performance that is at once visually provocative and verbally cunning:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown,} \\
\text{Here, cousin. On this side my hand on that side thine.} \\
\text{Now is this golden crown like a deep well} \\
\text{That owes two buckets, filling one another,} \\
\text{The emptier ever dancing in the air,} \\
\text{The other down, unseen and full of water.} \\
\text{That bucket down, and full of tears, am I,} \\
\text{Drinking my griefs whilst you mount up on high.}^{164}
\end{align*}
\]

(4.1.181-88)

Berger suggests that these striking lines make Richard complicit in his own demise:

“Whatever we impute to Richard at either the intentional or the motivational level, his actions as well as his language dare Bolingbroke to assume the usurper’s role: “Here, cousin, seize the crown”” (Audition 55). However, this is the same man who insists on playing both “priest and clerk,” and he does not relinquish the dual role of usurper / usurped quite so easily. As Richard’s deictic markers show, he retains enough control to divest himself of the crown before Bolingbroke ever gets the chance to “seize” it. Of particular interest are the demonstrative pronouns this and that, words that function to distinguish spatial and temporal proximity and distance, respectively (Hope, Grammar 25). Levinson contends that these terms can be exploited to show emotional distance or intimacy in addition to a physical relationship with the speaker: “this can mean ‘the object in a pragmatically given area close to the speaker’s location at CT [time of utterance],’ and that ‘the object beyond the pragmatically given area close to the speaker’s location at CT’ . . . But the facts are complicated here by the shift from that to this to show empathy, and from this to that to show emotional distance (empathetic

\[164\] I follow the Oxford editors in retaining the repeated “Here, cousin” (found in F) at line 182.
deixis)” (Pragmatics 81). Richard uses this and that to narrate a discomfiting visual display, the incongruous spectacle of crown shared between two would-be kings: “Here, cousin. On this side my hand and on that side thine.” The deictic demonstratives align Richard with the crown; he marks it as proximal to himself, and emphasizes that Bolingbroke is distanced. The repeated “Here, cousin” reinforces the proximity, since the deictic adverb here also indicates physical or emotional closeness. Richard stresses that the crown is part of him, and Bolingbroke will have to violate that relationship of affinity if he is to take it.165 But a few lines later, in his analogy of the crown as a well, Richard shifts his alliance: “That bucket down, and full of tears, am I.” The shift to the distal that, used with the personal pronoun I, represents a relinquishment in Richard prior to any action on Bolingbroke’s part. It is a moving statement of his disrupted subject position, and it represents the moment of disconnection. He first aligns himself with the crown and marks it proximally, but we observe every painful detail as he transfers its ownership (note the insistent present tense of the transformative moment, when the crown is still marked proximally but on the cusp of changing hands: “Now is this golden crown like a deep well”). His subsequent use of that confirms the crown’s release, offering an active method of distancing himself and ensuring that it is Bolingbroke who has proximal claims on it. When Richard finally hands over the crown – “I give this heavy weight from off my head” (203) – it is no longer the crown itself but its “weight,” a burden of both its “cares” and its absence, that Richard marks as proximal.

165 Cassirer’s observation that “deictic particles” such as here, there, and this “are intimately fused with the direct gesture of showing, whereby a particular object is singled out from the sphere of immediate perception” (338) is also relevant here. The crown is singled out, “set apart” like the very act of ritual in which it is embedded, acquiring the significance peculiar to an object being observed from a fresh perspective.
Richard’s endeavour to redefine ritual so that he may be both priest and clerk, agent and victim, continues with the careful rote progress of an invented ceremony:

BOLINGBROKE Are you contented to resign the crown?

RICHARD Aye – no. No – aye, for I must nothing be,
Therefore no, no, for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me how I will undo myself.
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.

(4.1.200-209)

There are traces of sacrilege in this performance, for he knowingly undermines what he understands to be a “sacred state”: “awareness of this betrayal is inscribed in Richard’s language . . . it is the source of his self-contempt and his often sarcastic use of Christian rhetoric” (Berger, Audition 51). The self-cancelling aural effect of “Aye – no. No – aye” suggests that the in-between identity that Richard has been moving toward is now fully operative; he contends that, without the crown, he “must nothing be.” Yet the rest of the speech belies this impression, for his controlling voice directs the proceedings. “Now mark me how I will undo myself,” with its tripled self-reference, places an exaggerated emphasis on Richard’s agentive role. His modal phase “I will” (the only instance of the uncontracted I will construction by Richard in the play) suggests his complicity and indeed his desire to direct the proceedings. It is a defiant

166 “Aye – no. No – aye” is reminiscent of the sonnet language discussed in Chapter One. As Siemon observes, Richard “takes up the sonneteers’ discourse of self-division and abandoned hope by adopting the I/not I trope” in this punning phrase, as well as in his request to “Tell thou the lamentable tale of me” (5.1.44). Together, these lines recall Astophil’s “I am not I, pity the tale of me” (Astrophil and Stella 45.14). Siemon raises the intriguing suggestion that in Richard II, the “self-consciousness and irony of the sonnet tradition acquires new dimensions. They are put to work not among erotic poetics nor among the intimate associates of courtly advancement but within the broader public politics of the state, and the speaker is no longer the courtier or his amatory analogue, the lover, but the desired of all desires, the king himself” (197).
reaction against the dictating *must*, which represents a source of control and action independent of Richard. If he “must” be nothing, then at the very least he “will” replace the force behind this imposition with his own power. Richard also exploits the potential for ritualized action to place himself in the spotlight through the continual monitoring and narration of action that positions the speaker as central in the context of ritual. As Hanks observes, this type of self-orientation “is part of what it means to occupy a position in the ritual context” (*Intertexts* 232). Moreover, these successive descriptions of action (“I give this heavy weight from off my head”; “With mine own tears I wash away my balm”), that illustrate the type of deictic usage through which “inhabitants monitor and qualify the linkage between what they are saying and the contexts in which they are doing so” (*Intertexts* 62) establish the speaker’s agency, volition and also their intentions for the future. As Hanks asserts, the discourse of ritual is “marked by frequent use of conventional expressions describing what the performer is doing . . . and all these formulae index *intentional* states” (232, emphasis added). The change in tense, and the progression of the verbs themselves, is telling; after acknowledging the necessary confinement of the present moment – “I must nothing be,” Richard “resigns,” and then moves to reclaim control and volition over the immediate future: “Now, mark me how I will undo myself.” The next lines suggest the cleansing and relinquishment typical of ritual – “wash,” “give,” “deny,” “release”¹⁶⁷ – and each statement is marked with a surplus of personal deictic markers: “With *mine own* tears I wash away my balm.” The withheld “I” of the earlier scene in which Richard insisted that “the king shall do it” here emerges with an almost exaggerated flourish. Richard is no longer

¹⁶⁷ These actions correspond to examples cited by Hanks as typical of worship rituals, such as “begging, requesting, recounting, cleansing” (“I request”; ‘I address you all’). Hanks also notes the prevalence of self-situating within the physical site of the ritual: “I am seated at the foot of your altar” (232).
hiding, but assuming full agentive responsibility. He inhabits the speaking “I” role with the most assertive stance that we have seen from him in the entire play.

Richard’s new sense of agency sparks a renewed attempt at public control. When Northumberland, angry at Richard’s refusal to read aloud the crimes of which he is accused, protests that “The Commons will not then be satisfied” (4.1.271), Richard’s reply is resoundingly authoritative: “They shall be satisfied” (4.1.272). His response, dependent on an authority that he no longer has claim to, seems a reversion to outdated patterns of speech, an appeal to the prerogative of the king to mandate the “will” of others. Immediately following this presumptuous show of power, Richard returns to his familiar role of regaining control through re-referencing in an action that strongly recalls the warder scene. After demanding a looking glass, Richard gazes on his face and claims to reject its “brittle glory” (4.1.286): “Was this face the face / That every day under his household roof / Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face / That like the sun did make beholders wink?” (4.1.282-84). The use of this in these lines, a repeated indicator of proximity, initially establishes a contiguous relationship between his face and his identity.168

168 Several critics have pointed to the Marlovian echoes in the mirror scene, which recalls the moment when Faustus sees the conjured Helen of Troy: “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” (Doctor Faustus 5.1.90-91). While there are rich possibilities for dramatic irony in the overlap between the respective scenes, there are also pertinent differences. Whereas Faustus’s this marks the potency of the vision (Helen is indeed physically proximal, close enough to “kiss”), Richard’s marks the starting point from which his own identity recedes, moving from proximity to distance. Berger construes the entire deposition scene as belonging to an “allusive network” that actively responds to and subtly alters the Faustian spiritual melodrama: “if both Faustus’s spiritual melodrama and the megaphonics of Marlovian theater are heard in the echo chamber of Richard II, they are present as a model to be corrected or repudiated” (Audition 64-65). The difference, Berger asserts, is that “the self-slandering undertone of Richard’s rhetoric has no parallel in Doctor Faustus” (66). Berger first locates the Marlovian echo in Richard’s hyperbolic wish for self-eradication: “Oh that I were a mockery king of snow / Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke, / To melt myself away in water drops” (4.1.259-61). The final line “recalls the cry by Doctor Faustus just before being carried off to Hell: ‘O soul, be changed into small water-drops / And fall into the ocean, ne’er be found’” (Berger 64). Yet the significant difference between Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s lines is “melt,” a verb more actively
However, this proximity begins to dissipate as Richard shifts to the neutral “As brittle as the glory is the face” (287), pushing the image of the face away from himself (by using the, he marks the face as in-between, neither proximal nor distal). Then, in a grand theatrical gesture, he smashes the mirror and cements the distal relationship, saying, “For there it is, cracked in a hundred shivers” (288). In one sense, by moving neatly from the proximal this to the distal there, this passage acts as a virtual chart of Richard’s rejection of “the king” who “must” submit to the mandates of others, now reduced to “that face,” broken on the floor. On the field at Coventry, the thrown warder represented an expansion of deictic centre, a means by which Richard might extend his influence. Here, the act of corporeal expansion is reinforced by the polysemy charted by Richard’s deictic markers. Even as he claims to relinquish his old face, he clings to it. His final reference to the face is deictically proximal and proprietary – “my face” (290) – and the very act of throwing the mirror, a kingly gesture reminiscent of his strongest show of power in the play, shows him seeking to retain his claim on all subject positions: the king, the man behind the title, and the curious in-between role of one “greater than a king” (304). Curiously, this mirror scene suggests a greater strength at Richard’s disposal than that available to him in the warder scene. The difference is in the multiple positions that converge so readily: here he inhabits the role of “unkinged” Richard as fearlessly as he once occupied the position of “king.”

destructive than the neutral “change.” With this word, Shakespeare anticipates the ways that “melt” will become a byword of sorts for his tragic heroes’ wishes for destruction and “self-slander.” Interestingly, Coriolanus uses it when his wife and mother appeal to him in the moments before his capitulation: “I melt, and am not / Of stronger earth than others” (5.3.27-28); Hamlet famously uses it in his first soliloquy: “O that this too too solid flesh would melt” (1.2.129); and Antony uses it to frame his nihilistic desire for isolation: “Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space” (1.1.35-36).
Elam suggests that much of the progression of a dramatic text may be traced to a succession of various “deictic orientations”; different characters take turns inhabiting the central speaking I role, addressing various yous, thereby creating a clearly segmented sequence. This sequence may be further subdivided by the changes in orientation undergone by individual characters: “each time the speaker changes indexical direction, addresses a new ‘you’, indicates a different object, enters into a different relationship with his situation or his fellows, a new semiotic unit is set up” (145). Despite its anchoring function, deixis also reflects fluctuation: conditions are always changing, and as a result new situations are always being initiated. Deixis, then, is a useful way to linguistically map the fluctuations of the speaking subject; the speaker is always engaged in self-situating, but, as Richard’s position in this play conspicuously illustrates, the relationship between speaker and situation is never fixed. Given that the small words of deixis work to orient the self, what we find by tracking these markers is a window into the speaker’s inner world. Richard’s deictic orientation inscribes how he conceives of himself, how he endeavours to protect himself, and the means by which he actively constitutes himself as a subject in the world. His variable deictic markers show him re-making the boundary between himself and the world, changing his own position in response to the shifting ground beneath him.

Like modality, deixis linguistically represents a site of contact between the self and the world, and it may be understood in similar terms as a crucial indicator of the struggle taking place on that border: “It is a central means of contestation, and the site of working out, whether by negotiation or imposition, of ideological systems” (Hodge and Kress 123). In terms of the works under consideration in this project, Richard II
represents the most extreme crisis at the border between self and world. The speakers that I have been discussing share a sensitivity to the impinging influence of others; they are, like the sonnet speaker, alert to subtle forms of verbal recourse against a threatening interlocutor; like the speakers in *Troilus and Cressida*, aggressively resistant to the processes of communal language; and, like Coriolanus, fiercely retaliatory and unwilling to submit to a new frame for self-positioning. While Richard, too, is shaken out of his familiar orientation to the world, his tactics of resistance are rather different. Richard consistently attempts to reposition himself in relation to the world, to find a new centre, and with his “own tongue” to create a threshold between identities that somehow bypasses the traditional conflict zone of self and other. We see this in the language of the deposition scene, and it is also evident at the end of the play when he is proximal to no one but himself: “I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world; / And for because the world is populous, / And *here* is not a creature but myself, / I cannot do it. Yet I’ll hammer’t out” (5.5.1-5, emphasis added). In these final moments, Richard’s declaration of inability is superseded by his volitional agency. The tension between these forces – the dictates of a world that determines what he “cannot” do, and the desire to reclaim control – are inscribed in the small words by which Richard identifies himself and his place in the world.
Afterword: “Dressing old words new”

Shakespeare’s language is not old English. It’s young English. It has all its hormones and is full of life.
- Ralph Alan Cohen (qtd. in Rubin, “Lessons in Shakespeare”)

In the introduction to his book *Shakespeare’s Language*, Frank Kermode bolsters his argument for renewed attention to the language of Shakespeare by quoting the director Richard Eyre: “The life of the plays is in the language, not alongside it, or underneath it. Feelings and thoughts are released at the moment of speech.” Yet, as Kermode admits, despite the dynamic environment of live theatre, and the audience’s engagement with what Eyre calls “the pulse, the rhythms, the shapes, sounds, and above all the meanings” of the words on stage, there are a few reasons for the nuances of this language to give us pause. It is an inescapable truth that no matter how active and attentive an audience, some linguistic details will be elided in performance. As Kermode dryly observes, “It is simply inconceivable that anybody at the Globe, even those described . . . as ‘the wiser sort,’ could have followed every sentence of *Coriolanus*” (5). There is also the matter of challenges posed by the clever linguistic play employed by dramatists. Kermode notes that difficulty with dramatic language was a reality for Elizabethan audiences as well as contemporary ones, “less because the language itself was unfamiliar (though much more to us), than because of the strange and original uses an individual writer might put it to” (4). It is, of course, the abiding challenge of playwrights to be linguistic innovators, for their craft thrives on fresh and inventive dialogue. But what does comprehensive access to the language of Shakespeare entail? Kermode’s answer to these concerns returns to notions of close

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169 In the preface, Kermode notes that he sees his book as a corrective of sorts: “This book is addressed to a non-professional audience with an interest in Shakespeare that has not, I believe, been well served by modern critics, who on the whole seem to have little time for his language” (vii).
reading; if the vital components of a play, its “life,” lie in its language, then we should strive to excavate its obscured details. He suggests that the full representation of characters onstage, “the whole business of personation, is in large part not in the gesture but in the linguistic detail; we want to understand as much of this as we can” (7).

Part of my endeavour in this study has been to work toward a comprehensive understanding of Shakespeare’s linguistic detail, unearthing the nuances of the small words that can tell us so much. In looking closely at the category of modal verbs, and by considering their extensive semantic and functional range in early modern English, I hope to have helped expose the many different ways that the word shall, for example, might be opened up for innovative and resonant play. These verbs are part of the specialized code of early modern English, a vibrant, transitional, and rapidly expanding language with rich linguistic resources ripe for exploitation by the writers of the period. Indeed, Jonathan Hope suggests that Shakespeare in particular was well-suited to mine the potential of this burgeoning language: “Thanks to the date of his birth, and the place, Shakespeare was almost uniquely positioned to take advantage of the variation offered by Early Modern English . . . The resulting interplay between the old and the new, the strange and familiar, is one of the least-known glories of his plays, and one of the few under-researched areas in Shakespeare studies” (“Natiue English” 255). Other grammatical details such as deictic markers also offer intriguing fodder for dramatic artistry. These words represent “unsought key[s]” (Booth xi) to the intricate processes by which meaning is made in language. In this study, I have drawn attention to some critical moments, such as the “absolute shall” scene in Coriolanus, when small words
are deliberately held up for attention. In these instances, linguistic details and the rules of language use are foregrounded, so that audiences are invited to scrutinize pragmatic function and semantic effects. As Keir Elam suggests, at an “extreme of linguistic self-consciousness, such commentary serves to ‘frame’ the very process of . . . verbal communication, and so becomes part of a broader metadramatic or metatheatrical superstructure” (156). Yet even in less explicit instances, absent this type of self-conscious foregrounding, there is a subtle social and pragmatic interplay at work that extends beyond the control of the speaker and the manipulation of the playwright.

This more covert type of interchange points to a significance beyond an exhaustive understanding of linguistic detail. Let us return for a moment to Sonnet 76, the poem with which this project began. Here, the “player-poet” sonnet speaker (Schalkwyk 5) offers a defense against the pressure for writers to be inventive, to engage in the “strange and original uses” of language that Kermode suggests is the task of the writer. The sonnet speaker describes his verse as “barren of new pride, / So far from variation or quick change” (76.1-2). He claims that his words eschew the creative potential of “new-found methods” in favour of a different type of resourcefulness (76.4). It is in “dressing old words new” that the speaker achieves originality (76.11); it is in the moment of iteration – the meanings produced in what Eyre calls “the moment of speech” – that something novel is created. Linguistic encounters are central to my project, from words shared between speakers, to various forms of talk, to aggressive linguistic collisions between characters. As witnesses to the moment of the encounter, we are privy to a site of transformation – this is the moment when the resistant self meets the encroaching world, in which interpersonal meanings are created, and
semantic values and future outcomes are determined before us. We share in this
dynamic process, and we too become interlocutors of sorts.

A recent article in the business section of the New York Times profiles an
organization that teaches corporate executives about “the vulnerabilities to which the
powerful are susceptible” using Shakespeare’s leaders as a model. Leaving aside
concerns about the dubious application of this model – one CEO opines that with King
Lear “Shakespeare had written a case study that eerily predicted his dismissal” and the
rise and fall of his rival – we might consider the intriguing claim of Ralph Alan Cohen,
one of the Shakespeare specialists recruited to provide a sound-bite for the article
(Rubin B4). His assertion (cited in the epigraph), suggests that Shakespeare’s language
is newer than we tend to imagine. In making a distinction between “old” and “young,”
and in emphasizing the continuing vitality of Shakespeare’s language, Cohen points up
questions of how we – not only business leaders, but also critics, teachers, students,
audiences – interact with Shakespeare’s language today. The language retains its vigor
precisely through these types of interactive relationships that extend to extra-textual
interlocutors. In our own linguistic encounters with Shakespeare, we too take part, like
Shakespeare’s speakers, in “dressing old words new.”
Works Consulted


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