The Aesthetics of Railing: *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*

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*Cet essai explore comment Shakespeare utilise la rhétorique des insultes cruelles et fortement métaphoriques des débuts de la modernité afin de réaliser une rivalité agressive entre le déclinant idéal aristocratique élisabéthain du sang et du langage épique d'une part, et le théâtre satirique en émergence d'autre part. Ce type de théâtre se justifie en associant le guerrier aristocratique à un corps suintant, efféminé, et malade. Cet essai se concentre en particulier sur les pièces *Troilus and Cressida* et *Coriolanus*, qui établissent un fort lien entre la manifestation de maladies internes sur la peau et la perte d'autonomie masculine. Dans *Troilus and Cressida*, Thersites, incarnant le personnage du fou, domine la pièce avec ses discours vicieux qui transforment sur le plan rhétorique le personnage héroïque de l'aristocrate masculin en une créature abjecte. Parallèlement, *Coriolan*, en fort contraste avec Thersites, est un guerrier autonome, qui néanmoins soutient l'opinion de Thersites que le spectacle théâtral, ainsi que la fréquentation des gens du peuple dégradent les idéaux guerriers aristocratiques. Les deux pièces suggèrent que c'est à travers une langue caustique et scatologique de l'insulte, de pair avec une destruction rhétorique des idéaux de l'aristocratie guerrière, que le théâtre britannique du début du dix-septième siècle remplace une esthétique traditionnelle de l'élite faite de sang héroïque par une célébration de la puissance rhétorique des croûtes et des éruptions cutanées.*

Like many of his Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporaries, Shakespeare was caught up in the art of railing. Railing works like Jonson's *Every Man out of His Humour*, Martin Marprelate's *Hay, any Work for Cooper*, and Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* make their aggressively polemical points via extended, insult-ridden, rhetorically intricate speeches laced with inventive, colloquial language. The salient expression of this rebellion is, of course, a large and capacious vocabulary of insults; particularly popular are insults about whoredom and effeminacy, about class status (with insults like "knave" and "varlet" as well as comparisons to base animals), about disease, excrement, and (given the aggressive nature of these works) about knives and stabbing. Such language is, of course, popular in other theatrical genres of the period, but it is so common in railing theatre as to dominate its rhetoric,

representing theatrical language as a series of violent and aggressive projectiles that iconoclastically shatter reigning ideals of the period.

Typical of railing rhetoric is the following diatribe by the character Asper in *Every Man out of His Humour*:

O, how I hate the monstrousness of time,
Where every servile imitating spirit
(Plagued with an itching leprosy of wit)
In a mere halting fury strives to fling
His ulc'rous body in the Thespian spring
And straight leaps forth a poet, but as lame
As Vulcan or the founder of Cripple-gate!¹

Not content with complaining against writers who are metrically “lame,” Asper piles on aggressive language of hate, baseness, bodily deformity, and skin disease to create the most revolting image possible of aspiring, mediocre writers. His speech illustrates how railing moves beyond conventional satire and polemics and towards highly subjective accumulations of what Elizabethans and Jacobean writers termed “invective,” “reviling,” or “abuse” (as well as “railing”).

Railing is, of course, equally prominent in Shakespeare's plays of the period; the three plays by Shakespeare with the highest railing content (higher by far than *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, or *The Winter's Tale*) are *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*. Focusing on *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*, I explore the aesthetics of railing by considering the following, related, questions: “What kind of aesthetic and cultural work does railing perform in Shakespeare's hyper-railing plays, and to what extent is railing in his plays typical of railing works written during this period?” One answer, I suggest, is that these plays perform an aggressively rivalrous relationship between an aristocratic aesthetics of blood, gilding, and epic language on the one hand, and an emergent satirical theatre on the other, which empowers itself by associating traditional aristocratic ideals with the leaky, vulnerable, and/or effeminate body, as well as with skin disease.² As the Jacobean writer Thomas Adams comments, skin diseases like lesions, carbuncles, ulcers, and cankers denote a swelling of internal humours so gross and corrupt as to erupt upon the skin. Skin disease, by extension, reveals those vicious and viscous aspects of one's personality that one attempts to hide.³ Hence it is by associating aristocrats with skin disease—with corruption and baseness—that theatre takes on the role of an aggressive rival to idealized representations of aristocracy.

The complex relationship between aristocracy and theatre has received critical attention from several perspectives, including the role of aristocratic patronage in

theatre, theatrical satires of commoners who aspire to aristocratic status, and the complex gendering of male aristocrats in theatre. There has, however, been limited discussion of the way that railing theatre actively participates in the rhetorical and performative erosion of Elizabethan aristocratic ideals, ideals articulated by Thomas Wright's characterization of the Earl of Southampton as an aristocrat whose balanced passions

... appertain to soldiers to stir them up to courage and magnanimity: your martial prowesses are patent at home and famous abroad.... For methinks as often as I consider your presence about His Majesty it seemeth to me with mine eyes to behold another matchless Parmenio for trust and fidelity about our invincible Alexander of the North.⁴

Wright's clearly idealized portrait of Southampton represents him as a man of courage, generosity, loyalty, and self-control. In strong contrast, railing writers, like Shakespeare in his railing plays, participate in a larger literary movement that responds (as I suggest below) to a series of *fin de siècle* crises; this sense of crisis encouraged disillusion with idealized articulations of the aristocracy. While Shakespeare shares this project of disillusion with writers like Marston and Jonson, his particular mark on railing theatre is to highlight the erosion of traditional (one might say classic) aristocratic values by placing his railing plays in ancient warrior cultures rather than in the more common urban, contemporary settings of City Comedy. Furthermore, Shakespeare's railing plays tend to end more pessimistically than plays like Marston's *The Malcontent* and Dekker's *Satiromastix*, plays which gesture to the creation of a constructive order out of the purgings of an old, corrupt order.

My focus on Shakespeare's railing plays is part of a larger attempt to bring attention to railing as a dominant aesthetic form in late Elizabethan/early Jacobean theatre and pamphlets.⁵ Whether we look at religious railing works (like those of the Marprelate wars), misogynistic and misandronic pamphlets (such as those associated with the Swetnam controversy), the Poets' War plays, or, simply, torrents of personal abuse (represented by the Nashe-Harvey pamphlet war), Shakespeare's railing plays are typical of a larger interest in railing that is, I argue, symptomatic of a crisis of articulation emerging out of the fissures between the Tudor and Stuart reigns. These crises include the heightening of tension between Protestant groups; growth in vagrancy and crime associated with social dislocation as well as with a population growth of 35% in London during the latter half of the sixteenth-century; periods of starvation (with accompanying food riots); visitations of the plague; and inflation.⁶ Thomas Dekker speaks to this sense of crisis and change in *The*

Wonderfull Yeare, as he writes about natural and political calamities associated with the death of Elizabeth I:

The report of her death (like a thunder clap) ... tooke away hearts from millions: for having brought up (even under her wing) a nation that was almost begotten and borne under her; that never shouted any other *Ave* than for her name, ... how was it possible, but that her sicknes should throw abroad an universall feare, and her death an astonishment?...

O what an Earth-quake is the alteration of a State! Looke from the Chamber of Presence, to the Farmers cottage, and you shall finde nothing but distraction: the whole Kingdome seemes a wildernes, and the people in it are transformed to wild men. ⁷

For Dekker, as for many Englishmen of the period, the loss of Elizabeth signifies the loss of a nurturing, protecting mother and nurse, whose absence leaves a kingdom ailing and in chaos. No wonder that scholars have seen the “image of England as that of the ‘Beleagured Isle,’ a small and worried nation on the fringe of Europe, nervously calculating the changes of its régime’s survival in the face of internal and external enemies.”⁸ This sense of fear and anxiety, I suggest, explains the appeal of railing—of a vivid language of crisis that gives dramatic voice to such *fin de siècle* anxieties. In the process, these works offer a radical, experimental poetics that responds to what may have seemed to be the insufficiency of such traditional Elizabethan forms of expression as the lyric, pastoral, and epic.

Railing writers articulate the insufficiency of these forms by shaping their poetics out of material that was largely rejected (or ejected) by dominant poetics of the period. As such, railing texts participate in an emerging poetics of detritus or excrement, based on the sixteenth-century meaning of the term as “that which remains after a process of sifting or refining; the dregs, lees, refuse” (OED).⁹ This meaning is reflected in Thomas Elyot’s definition of excrement as “matter superfluous and unsavory, which by natural powers may not be converted in to fleshe, but remaining in the body corrupt the members, and therefore desireth to have them expelled.”¹⁰ His commentary reflects how excrement was most often identified with the detritus of corrupt, superfluous, or imbalanced humours that were purged from the body naturally or via purgatives; “excrement” refers, by extension, to anything that comes from the body, including feces, vomit, pus, tears, hair, nails, or eruptions on the skin, like carbuncles and boils. The various meanings of “excrement” are, not surprisingly, common in railing works, whether they be found in Gabriel Harvey’s exhortation to “hee and shee-scoldes, you that loue to pleade-it-out inuincibly at the barre of the dunghill”; in Constantia Munda’s reference to Joseph Swetnam’s

railing pamphlet as “the dregs of folly, and the lees/ Of mercenary Pasquils;” or in Philip Stubbes’s exhortation to playwrights to “corrupt his [God’s] people no longer with your dregges.”¹¹

The above references speak as well to the doubled work of railing. On the one hand, associations of railing with such excremental attributes as shedding hair or skin oozings link railing theatre (indeed theatre in general) with venereal diseases or poison—hence with the corruption of audiences; on the other hand, railers frequently associated themselves with doctors who purge their audiences of evil humours.¹² Railing writers, indeed, seem to revel in the pathologies of railing, even as they claim its moral, purgative effects.¹³ This dual nature of railing is the focus of *Whipping of the Satyre* (probably by John Weever), whose author makes the following complaint about railing texts by Marston:

What though the world was surfeited with sinne,
And with the surfet dangerously sicke,
And with the sicknesse had miscarried bene?
Must it of force his filthy phisicke licke,
Who little knowing what it ought to haue,
For purging pilles, a pild purgation gaue?¹⁴

Like a number of railing writers, the author of *Whipping* ironically deploys all the alliterative, invective-ridden force of railing to condemn the excessive nature of railing, a language which, he claims, poisons as much as it heals.

In looking at how Shakespeare navigates the art of railing during this period of cultural and rhetorical crisis, I will focus on *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus* as companion pieces to my earlier study of railing language and masculine, aristocratic identity in *Timon of Athens*.¹⁵ I hope to place these plays within an emerging, experimental poetics that speaks to the excitement of creating, reading, and watching “railing,” “abuse,” “reviling,” and “invective.” This attention to railing is, in fact, one of the few characteristics that links *Troilus and Cressida* with *Coriolanus*. Although both plays deal with the scenario of war and are both perhaps tragedies (there is some disagreement about the genre of *Troilus and Cressida*), *Troilus and Cressida* is an Elizabethan play that takes place in ancient Greece with an ensemble cast, while *Coriolanus* is a Jacobean play that takes place in ancient Rome and has one central protagonist. But as two of the three Shakespeare plays with the highest railing content, they carry out similar aesthetic work. It is in these plays, for instance, that Shakespeare returns with particular force to the language of skin disease.¹⁶ This language, however, has different resonances in the plays. In *Troilus and Cressida* skin disease associates the Greek camp with sexual disease; in *Coriolanus* it explores

the diseased body of class distinctions—hence the lack of particular references to sexual disease in the play. And if *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus* have one railing character each, each railer is in many ways the opposite of the other. The railer of *Troilus and Cressida*, Thersites, is a commoner and professional fool who histrionically dismantles the Greek (and Elizabethan) ideal of the aristocratic warrior by associating aristocratic skin with cankers and running sores.¹⁷ In strong contrast, the railer of *Coriolanus*—Coriolanus himself—is an aristocrat who associates the mob of citizens with abject, amphitheatre-type audiences. Despite these differences, both plays employ railing to depict the erosion of reigning, but waning, Elizabethan ideals of warrior aristocracy, along with its accompanying heroic literature, and both do so by pitting an aristocratic aesthetics of blood and gilding against the language of skin disease. We might, then, see both plays as extending the work done by Shakespeare in *As You Like It*. Much as this comedy satirizes the courtly lyrics of Orlando by replacing them with the witty prose dialogue of the highly performative Rosalind, so *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus* enact a rivalry between the elevated language of heroic epic and the vivid, colloquial language of railing.¹⁸ Yet where *As You Like It* may be read as tracing the triumph of drama over aristocratic lyric, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus* represent this conquest as a kind of loss of heroic ideals and epic language—hence the residue of nostalgia for an aristocratic ideal that runs through these two plays, particularly through *Coriolanus*.

IF *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA* and *Coriolanus* consistently dismantle dominant ideals of warrior aristocracy, it is because, as a number of scholars have suggested, theatre and aristocracy shared a kind of mirroring relationship to each other, centred on the theatricality of aristocracy. One need only consider aristocratic dress to be reminded of how aristocrats constructed and displayed their magnificence by presenting themselves as vivid dioramas of grandeur, artifice, and superiority.¹⁹ Certainly the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre shared this conceptualization, since costumes, often obtained from aristocrats, were the most expensive and elaborate aspects of staging.²⁰ Railing theatre presents yet another common link between theatre and the tradition of the warrior aristocrat: both are characterized by choler, a humour which links the physical aggression of the warrior with the verbal aggression of railing, yielding to “fyre, fighting, or anger” as well as to “wytte sharpe and quycke.”²¹

But theatre also represents, mirror-like, the opposite of aristocracy. Perhaps this is why, rather than simply reflect the magnificence of aristocratic ideals, theatre

of this period often employs railing to strip away façades of magnificence, a purpose made clear by Asper in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, who claims that he will,

... to these courteous eyes [*indicating audience*] oppose a mirror
 As large as is the stage whereon we act,
 Where they shall see the time's deformity
 Anatomized in every nerve and sinew,
 With constant courage and contempt of fear.²²

Asper and his counterpart Macilente go on to rail against a variety of characters—from overreaching citizens, to fops, to bad poets, to characters like the excessively chivalric Puntarvolo, who cling to outworn aristocratic ideals.

On the surface, tirades that include members of the elite classes would seem self-destructive: not only did theatrical companies remain dependent on aristocratic patronage, but theatre was increasingly becoming a vehicle for elite audiences. Yet the fact that a tendency to rail against traditional representations of aristocracy is shared by Jonson, Shakespeare, Marston, and Dekker (among other writers of the period), suggests that such railings may not gesture to a popularizing, anti-aristocratic tendency. Instead, they represent a desire to undermine traditional ideals of aristocracy in order to replace these with a witty and cynical take on the elite classes—one which elite Jacobean audiences, particularly younger ones, seem to have enjoyed.

This, at least, would explain why a number of elite theatregoers seem to have (apparently) taken perverse delight in the stripping away of aristocratic illusions.²³ As one character claims in John Day's *Isle of Gulls*, "I love to heare vice anotonized, & abuse let blood in the maister vaine, is there any great mans life charactred int?"²⁴ Spectatorship here, as in many plays of the period, is imagined as a sort of medical theatre, in which the audience watches the playwright/physician cut open a "great man" in order to "ope the vaine of sinne."²⁵ Theatre, in this way, performs a highly aggressive and violent version of Aristotelian purgation, recalling the literal purgings enacted in Jonson's *Poetaster* and Dekker's *Satiromastix*, in which central characters are forced to vomit up pretentious language. In Day's play, however, the focus is on the letting of a spirit—blood—vital to the definition of aristocracy. Hence, Day's character implies that the role of theatre is to cure the aristocracy of its excessive blood. It does so by "character," a multiple pun that returns relentlessly to the aesthetic power of theatrical representation. "Character" not only signified a character in a play, as well as description and portrayal, but it meant, as well, "to engrave" and "imprint." These latter definitions speak to theatre's growing ability to make its deep and particular mark on representations of "great men." By this

rhetorical means, the theatrical profession competes directly with aristocrats' desire to control their own self-representations.

Yet if a playwright like Day celebrates the audience's imaginative participation in the process of theatrical imprinting, he just as strongly satirizes his foppish character, who clearly goes to the theatre not just to watch "vice anotonized," but also to take lurid delight in vicious satire against great men. Day's allusion to sensationalist spectatorship returns to the notion of railing as particularly popular with younger, educated men, who take pleasure in satirizing the ideals of the previous generation. Day's character, in this way, reflects Thomas Wright's contention that excessive heat in young men turns them into creatures whose "incontinency" makes them easily "addicted to pastimes and plays."²⁶ In this light, it is worth remembering that—with the notable exception of Shakespeare—the major railing playwrights (Marston, Dekker, Jonson) were still in their twenties by 1600.

Given the popularity of satirizing great men during this *fin* (and *début*) *de siècle* period, it is worth pausing to rehearse why the sixteenth-century cultural and literary ideal of the aristocratic warrior should be in a state of crisis so strong as to have this ideal savaged on stage and in print. Anna Bryson reads the erosion of this ideal in light of the movement from the strong aristocratic leadership of (much of) the sixteenth-century to the more limited, urban, model of the later Elizabethan and Jacobean courtier. Daniel Javitch traces the etiology of a late-Elizabethan crisis of aristocratic identity to the death of Philip Sidney in 1586—the idealized and internalized model for England's male, aristocratic future.²⁷ Other scholars have associated the crisis with the death of Queen Elizabeth; her death signaled the passing of the ideal of the chivalric poet-soldier who gallantly supports and protects his female monarch. This ideal, according to Robin Headlam Wells, was most potently symbolized, then destroyed, by the figure of the Earl of Essex, who inherited Sidney's sword upon his death.²⁸ Essex, of course, destroyed this model when he rebelled against his queen, then was beheaded, in 1601.²⁹ Despite their somewhat different areas of emphasis, these scholars all agree that, by the early seventeenth century, the ideal of the Renaissance warrior aristocrat had lost much of its glamour and appeal.

Significantly, the period of Essex's fall and execution coincides with the dates attributed to the composition of *Troilus and Cressida*—the play by Shakespeare that most viciously displays the failures of chivalric ideals. (Interestingly, this is also the period of the highest intensity of railing theatre in England.) If, in other words, we read *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus* in light of a crisis of aristocratic identity, then it becomes clearer why their metatheatrical rhetoric represents theatre as a

site where audiences—commoner or elite—initially participate in the delights of identifying with the illusions of aristocracy, only to identify, later, with characters who savagely tear apart the insufficiency of these illusions.

This radical performance of disillusion explains as well why railing was considered to be so dangerous during the period. The strong responses to railing by political and ecclesiastical authorities—jailing and executing those associated with the Marprelate controversy; ordering pamphlets by Nashe, Harvey, and other satirists to be banned and burnt; and sending Nashe and Jonson to jail for writing the (apparently) railing play, *The Isle of Dogges*—all suggest that the authorities of London's churches and government saw, perhaps all too well, that it is by shaping a stridently anti-authoritative language, aesthetics, and form that these writers were helping dismantle such reigning cultural institutions as the dominance of the Anglican church and the ideal of the chivalric aristocratic soldier. Theatre's ability to embody, literally, its radical ideas on stage made it particularly dangerous, given that, as Laura Levine has argued, its vivid, performative character reinforced a "profoundly 'magical' ideal that representations in general can alter the things they are only supposed to represent."³⁰ This kind of threat echoes the claim made by the physician Thomas Adams that the dangers of any public enterprise (like theatre) inhere in its "*Epidemicall*" encouragement of vice, which is disseminated by an "invisible poison of a generall pestilence [which] infected it [the world] to the heart. For *Vice* in manners ... distilleth insensible contagion into the fountaine of life."³¹

Railing theatre, in this sense, shows that pleasurable rhetoric and self-indulgent metaphors often go hand-in-hand with political and moral revolution. From this perspective, the radical rhetoric of railing theatre runs counter to Sander Gilman's theory that art functions as a defense against "the fear of collapse, the sense of dissolution" by employing "rigid forms."³² Many railing plays, in contrast, have been criticized for their quite loose structure and their embrace of (rather than defense against) the language of disease and putrefaction.³³ It appears, then, that the solace of these plays lies less in creating a world that denies disease and mutability and more in creating the fiction of a shared community of cynical, witty playgoers who participate aesthetically in—and hence imaginatively control—the dissolution of traditional Elizabethan hierarchies.³⁴

By performing the eroding ideal of the chivalric aristocrat—and by associating this erosion with the ailing body politic—these writers participate in a larger aesthetic process that is at once revolutionary and viciously pleasurable. Shakespeare, in scripting such plays, seems to have preferred to focus on the bracing, vivid process of railing rather than on its effects, given that the language of his railing

plays participates in the destruction of the old order but not in the construction of a new one, allowing for no clear moment in which theatre may enact a healing of the audience's humours. This is not to say that Shakespeare himself was going through something of an anachronistically nihilistic phase, since at the same time he is also writing plays with more positive trajectories; rather, it seems that, during a time of high experimentation with the forms of comedy, tragedy, and romance, Shakespeare was drawn to the quite dark theatrical implications associated with a theatre of rage.³⁵

Troilus and Cressida: The Oozing Skin of Aristocracy

Typical of railing's dark, caustic rhetoric is Thersites' rant against the Trojan war, a war which Thersites represents as, "such patchery, such juggling, such knavery. All the argument is a whore and a cuckold.... Now the dry serpigo on the subject, and war and lechery confound all."³⁶ Thersites immediately shapes his rant on associations of warrior aristocracy with theatricality, illicit sexuality, and skin disease. At a time when Elizabethans were confronting the highly contagious nature of syphilis and related diseases, Thersites depicts the Trojan war as contaminated by a patch (a professional fool) and by a juggler—both player-like creatures who, in this passage, dismantle illusions of aristocratic grandeur by projecting sexual and skin disease upon the warrior elite.³⁷ While my own emphasis here is not on Renaissance humoral pathology per se, it is clear that Thersites is deploying Renaissance humoral theories when he associates the warrior camps with "serpigo"—a skin disease that was often associated with venereal diseases like syphilis.³⁸ In making this association of warriors with serpigo, Thersites craftily shifts emphasis away from an excess of choler—a humour necessary for the aggressive qualities of a warrior—and towards implications of loose sexual desire and disease.³⁹

The very association of warrior aristocracy with any kind of skin eruption was, not surprisingly, an insult, particularly given the Renaissance belief that imperfections on the body were a mark of lack of discipline over one's body and self.⁴⁰ Much as Day's foppish character in the *Isle of Gulls* represents theatre as engraving its satirical mark on notions of great men, so this player-fool's contaminating breath projects a fantasy that his caustic voice eats away at the gorgeous veneer of aristocratic magnificence, given that serpigo was a disease that ate away at healthy skin.⁴¹ Thersites enacts, in this way, Francis Bacon's contention that people may work on the imagination of others "by a *Secret Operation*, or *Binding* or *Changing* the *Spirit of Another*."⁴² Such a character would reflect Renaissance notions of the

contaminatory properties of diseases like syphilis, which were often considered to be spread by bad air, or, in Thersites' case, by his corrupt breath.⁴³ For the early modern writer Thomas Adams, this contaminating breath might speak to a literal disease as well—to Thersites' own "scurvy disease" of the "itch," which is associated with the personality of the busy-body. This disease is "a corrupt humor between the skin and the flesh, running with a serpendinous course, til it hath defiled the whole body."⁴⁴

Thersites' contaminating language (and perhaps corrupt skin), along with his own status as a player-like figure (the professional fool of the Greek camp), represent theatre as a process which makes visible on the flesh those imperfections which the aristocracy attempts to mask via a glittering façade of magnificence. For if the warriors in *Troilus and Cressida* present different notions of the ideal male warrior, they nonetheless share a common association of the ideal warrior with high birth, courage, constructive action, and self-control—all of these traits supported by the elevated rhetoric uttered by Agamemnon, Ulysses, and Nestor in the play (particularly when we first encounter these three characters in act I, scene 3). At a time when masculine, aristocratic bodies were increasingly coded by the notion of the controlled, closed body, Thersites unrelentingly reminds us that these elite warriors are composed of what Gail Kern Paster calls the "open and fungible" Galenic body—a construct that represents elite warriors as vulnerable, weak, and questionably masculine, unable to control their own desires and unable to protect themselves from aggressive, verbal attacks by the likes of Thersites.⁴⁵ (Thersites' status as a kind of aggressive weapon is manifested by the way that different Greek warriors, especially Achilles, use him as a weapon to diminish the heroic status of their rivals.) Thersites adds to this agon between his verbal powers as fool and the aristocratic performance of warrior masculinity by employing incantatory language which makes it unclear whether he is revealing existing deficiencies of the warrior caste or whether he creates the illusion of skin disease and projects it onto the audience's conceptualization of great men.⁴⁶

I want to consider Thersites' metaphors of skin disease in light of Mary Douglas's contention that, in modern societies, "dirt avoidance ... is a matter of ... aesthetics," for Thersites shapes a kind of anti-aesthetic vision of the Greek camp by employing the language of pustules and scabs to shape an art of abjection and aggression that is the underbelly of both Elizabethan ideals of heroic magnificence, and of the dominant aesthetics of the late Elizabethan period.⁴⁷ One authoritative notion of art in the late Elizabethan period—most strongly associated with Philip Sidney's *A Defence of Poetry*—defines poetry as that force which moves readers to pleasure by

means of marvelous characters and plots, while, in the process, leading readers to the consideration of higher thoughts. The poet achieves these ends by ranging freely in his inventiveness of plot and character, even as he follows Aristotelian structures of unity. This teaching and delighting via marvelous stories and elegant language can, according to Sidney, most fully be realized in heroic poetry. While Sidney praises the courtly aesthetics of lyric (with some hesitation) and pastoral poetry, as well as epic, he famously condemns English theatre for its ridiculous plots, hydra-like structures, and transgressions of class and aesthetic distinctions by “mingling kings and clowns.”⁴⁸ This last concern is quite pervasive during the period, echoed for instance by Thomas Wright, who notes how “Stage-players ... adorn themselves gloriously like Gentlemen, then like clowns, after as women, then like fools, because the fashion of their garments maketh them resemble these persons.”⁴⁹

Other antitheatrical critics—Philip Stubbs, Stephen Gosson, and (later) William Prynne—condemned theatre both for its transgressions of class distinctions and for moving audiences towards immorality and self indulgence. Stubbs claims that actors and audiences are “Whoores, queanes, baudes, ... curtizans, lecherous old men, amorous young men, with such like of infinitie varietie.”⁵⁰ In much the same vein, Prynne associates the theatre with “whores and lewd companions ... Panders, Players, Bawdes, Adulteresses, ... [and] “effeminacy.”⁵¹ To a large extent, members of The London Corporation and the Anglican Bishopric allied themselves with this kind of thinking, as legislation of the period further condemned theatre because, as legislators claimed, its erotic content promoted prostitution, marital infidelity, sodomy, and an irreligious stance. Hence the frequent attempts to curtail the growth of theatre from the 1570s on.

While one might expect Shakespeare to take a defensive stance against the contention that theatre is a site of perversion, he instead creates Thersites as the terrifying embodiment of what Jonathan Gil Harris would term theatre-as-syphilis. But if, according to Harris, dominant anxieties of syphilis are marked by associations of the disease with invasions by foreigners, in *Troilus and Cressida* it is theatre itself that is the syphilitic and colonizing foreign body. Having successfully colonized the suburbs of London, its occasional incursions into the centre of London would threaten to contaminate those it breathes upon with its many perversions.⁵²

Theatre’s ability to contaminate others by projecting its corrupt breath onto the vulnerably receptive ears of its audiences is noted by other railing playwrights, Jonson in particular. In *Poetaster*, the Prologue (Livor) states that,

I am risen here with a covetous hope
To blast your pleasures and destroy your sports

With wrestings, comments, applications,
 Spy-like suggestions, privy whisperings,
 And thousand such promoting sleights as these.⁵³

Theatre is represented as a site of venality, whose perversions are disseminated by abusive language and breath. Jonson draws here on the early modern theory which saw breath not just as a metaphor for influence, but also as a literal vehicle for contagion, given that bodily boundaries were seen as “Transpirable and Trans-fluxible, ... so open to the ayre as that it may pass and repasse through them.”⁵⁴ This sense of threat was, of course, furthered by the belief that theatre was a site of contagion and contamination.⁵⁵ However, the fact that Jonson begins *Poetaster* with this mis-asmic address gestures to the complexity with which audiences responded to such language. Clearly the audiences who attended railing plays did not take such threats of contamination literally, since they did not attempt to avoid the theatre; rather they took pleasure in the cynical and witty language of Thersites, Livor, Asper, and others, along with the implication that they were participating in an aesthetic of railing that consciously embraced characteristics condemned by more authoritative aesthetic theories of the late Elizabethan period.⁵⁶

Thersites’ conspiratorial intimacy with his audience reflects the kind of coterie group of witty and cynical people suggested by Livor, above. Thersites uses this sense of exclusivity to move against Sidney’s theory that poets teach us virtue by showing us “the soon repenting pride of Agamemnon.”⁵⁷ Instead, Thersites employs the language of skin disease to undermine the initial, rhetorically grand, speeches by Agamemnon, Nestor, and Ulysses that immediately precede Thersites’ first speech. Above all, Thersites employs drama’s rhetorical strengths—*asides* and *soliloquies*—to engage in a vivid, intimate, and seductive relationship with the audience, and he does so by transforming the spectacle of Agamemnon from that of an authoritative, masculine leader to something abject, Other, and viscous.

Thersites’ first words in the play initiate this transformation, as he wonders out loud: “Agamemnon—how if he had biles, full, all over, generally?” (II.1.2–3).⁵⁸ “Biles,” here, refers to a kind of canker, the outward manifestation of excessive bile—generally considered to be a symptom of excessive aggression and/or lust. In this way, Thersites employs the early modern notion that “passions are drowned in corporal organs and instruments” to initiate his representation of Agamemnon as an aristocrat who has so lost control of his passions as to become, literally, diseased by them.⁵⁹

Thersites so cleverly and pervasively employs such scabrous references that he threatens to wrest the role of protagonist away from Troilus, Cressida, and

other contenders for the position. Thersites has six long speeches—three of them soliloquies, the most soliloquies spoken by any character in the play.⁶⁰ His pervasive speech and presence suggest, first, that no Greek character can affirm an ideal about himself or herself without having it immediately deflated by Thersites, and, secondly, that Thersites gives us a greater sense of an interior life than any other character in the play; this, along with his frequent asides to the audience, means that his speeches strongly invite audience identification with his inner life of abhorrence, abjection, and aggression, colouring the way that the audience perceives the Greek camp. Thersites might be termed an artist who exploits the kind of rhetorical and metaphorical structures affirmed by Sidney, but for a quite anti-Sidneian effect—that of undermining any vision of aristocratic masculine magnificence.

After bringing up Agamemnon's hypothetical biles, Thersites adds "And those biles did run—say so—did not the general run, then? Were not that a botchy core?" (11.1.5–6). This unpleasant meditation, which links running sores with the cowardice of running away, leads Thersites to add, "Then would come some matter from him" (11.1.7). In a few sentences Thersites skillfully employs puns, alliteration, and the motif of bilious "matter" to transform the matter of Agamemnon's grand speeches into runny pus, viscerally embodying Elizabethan cultural fears about theatre's ability to undermine heroic ideals; the result is that we witness, imaginatively, Agamemnon's masculine, aristocratic identity ooze out with his bile.

This caustic attack on one individual is, of course, an attack on the entirety of the Greek camp, given that Agamemnon, as leader of the Greek forces, is a kind of reigning symbol for Greek warrior culture as a whole. Agamemnon's ability to contaminate his camp with biliousness is all the more significant because his association with runny, viscous matter recalls the common early modern notion that viscous material will "partly follow the touch of another body; and partly stick and continue to themselves."⁶¹ And, given the equally common association of skin disease with sexual disease, Agamemnon's viscous, running matter recalls, as well, Girolamo Fracastoro's remark that syphilis is "analogous with thick, foul phlegm," a characteristic which he goes on to represent as "viscous, muscilagious" and "thick."⁶² Such early modern theories give force to the way that Thersites' seemingly inexhaustive list of skin diseases invades the autonomy of the Greek body politic in the most politically and aesthetically subversive way possible—transforming it from its ideal of autonomous warrior masculinity into a large, viscous, running sore.

Above all, Thersites' revelation—or projection—of the vices of the Greeks to his audience enacts the opposite of a Sidneian aesthetics, which consists of hiding and masking:

But if the question be for your own use and learning, whether it be better to have it set down as it should be, or as it was, then certainly is more doctrinable the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon than the true Cyrus in Justin, ... as to a lady that desired to fashion her countenance to the best grace, a painter should more benefit her to portraiture a most sweet face, writing Canidia upon it, than to paint Canidia as she was, who, Horace sweareth, was full ill-favoured.⁶³

Sidney's project is to uphold ideals by praising those who create an embellished mask over internal and external faults in order to shape a heroic ideal—beautiful on the outside, virtuous on the inside. Thersites, of course, does the opposite. But it is not enough for Thersites to uncover the faults of Agamemnon; he performs a verbal anatomy as well, whose purpose is to destroy any idealized notions of authority and heroism. If the work of heroic poetry, according to Sidney, is to shape the ideal courtier-soldier, that of Thersites is to deploy the rhetoric of railing and the theatrics of asides and soliloquies to tear off facades of masculine aristocratic grandeur, revealing the leaders' abject, leaky, vulnerable selves.

The horrifying associations between running matter and bodily vulnerability are expressed in Mary Douglas's contention that: "We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body."⁶⁴ Douglas adds that running matter "attacks the boundary between myself and it," threatening one's self-conceptualization as an autonomous, coherent being (a notion central to traditional representations of the warrior aristocrat).⁶⁵ Douglas's analysis of viscosity and vulnerability clearly recalls early modern theories of the body's vulnerability to contamination by pestilential air as well as by proximity to other, culturally inferior, bodies. As Thersites is well aware, notions of the open body with its running fluids were associated with women or subalterns.⁶⁶ If the work of poetry, according to Sidney, is to shape the ideal courtier-soldier, that of Thersites is to use caustic language of excrement, viscosity, and abjection to erode the Greek leaders' self-representations as superior, autonomous, masculine warriors.

The link between the vulnerable early modern body and Douglas's cultural theory of marginality is further dramatized by Douglas's comment that, in some tribes: "They treat the body as if it were a beleaguered town, every ingress and exit guarded for spies and traitors. Anything issuing from the body is ... strictly avoided."⁶⁷ *Troilus and Cressida* is, of course, a play about the opposite—the way that spies and traitors, along with badly guarded ingresses and exits, threaten the stability of the two warrior camps. The play speaks, in this sense, to the common

early modern notion of the body “as a fortified ... yet vulnerable enclosure—castle, ship, city or temple—threatened constantly by ‘enimie’ incursions.”⁶⁸ The most troubling manifestation of these ingresses and exits is women, namely Helen and Cressida—both of whom are foreigners in the camps in which they eventually reside. It is, of course, Helen’s rape by Paris that causes the initial wound to the Greek body politic, leading to a series of inter-contaminations between the Greek and Trojan camps. Calchas, Troilus, Hector and others enter the Greek camp; Diomedes enters the Trojan camp. And, clearly, Helen and Cressida are sites of sexual ingress and egress by both camps, as Menelaus and Paris both claim Helen sexually, while Troilus and Diomedes claim Cressida.⁶⁹

Given the threat purportedly posed to masculine authority by sexual entrances and exits, it is not surprising that the language of sexual disease should creep into that of skin disease. Indeed, the association of Helen and Cressida (and men linked with them) with venereal diseases is one of the more commented on aspects of the play.⁷⁰ Thersites is, not surprisingly, prominent in representing Helen and Cressida, as well as the aristocratic warriors, as tainted by sexual disease, given that he cries for “... vengeance on the whole camp! Or, rather, the Neapolitan boneache, for that, methinks, is the curse depending on those that war for a placket” (II.3.17–19). Yet if Thersites represents these two women as “plackets” (petticoats, or vaginas) who spread the “Neapolitan boneache” (syphilis) among the Greeks and Trojans, there is no evidence, in the play itself, that either woman suffers from a disease.⁷¹ But that is exactly the point for Thersites: his project is to displace physical evidence with rhetorical power; Helen and Cressida are diseased not because they have caught a venereal disease, but because Thersites’ miasmatic breath contaminates these women, in the audience’s imagination, with disease.⁷²

Yet it is not, finally, a woman whom Thersites most associates with sexual and skin diseases; it is Achilles’ boon companion, Patroclus. While Thersites accords only two lines of direct insult about Helen and four to Cressida, he gives 22 lines of insult to Patroclus.⁷³ Thersites’ constant, cornucopic cursing of Patroclus is particularly curious, since Patroclus is among the least affected by entrances and exits in the play. The fact that he has “little stomach to the war,” along with his isolation in his tent should suggest that he is unlikely to contract any sexual disease from associations with Troy or its women (III.3.220). Yet most of Thersites’ copious abuses of Patroclus centre on sexuality and skin oozings. While Thersites frequently associates Patroclus with disease, he saves his nastiest representation of Patroclus for the end of the play, where he launches into a tour de force of the art of railing:

Now, the rotten diseases of the the guts-gripping, ruptures, catarrhs, loads o' gravel in the back, lethargies, cold palsies, raw eyes, dirt-rotten livers, wheezing lungs, bladders full of imposthume, sciaticas, limekilns i' th' palm, incurable boneache and the riveled fee simple of the tetter, and the like, take and take again such preposterous discoveries! (V.1.17–24)

Not content with simply associating Patroclus with disease, Thersites employs copia and alliteration to erode any sense of Patroclus' autonomous, elite, warrior identity. To be besieged by such diseases already signified a total breakdown of one's control over one's body, but a number of these symptoms were associated particularly with venereal diseases, especially syphilis ("the rotten diseases of the south," "ruptures," "imposthumes," "boneache"), as well as with old age—the ultimate attribute of loss of warrior masculine control ("catarrh," "gravel," "lethargies," "cold palsies," "wheezing," "sciatica," and "riveled").⁷⁴ Several of these traits further erode the notion of the masculine warrior body given their association with cowardice ("lethargies," "cold palsies," and "dirt-rotten livers"). Above all, these traits are associated with the contaminating and viscous rupture of corrupt internal matter onto the external skin. "Ruptures" were breaks on the surface of the skin; "catarrhs" were discharges from the nose and eyes; "gravel" was often expelled with urine; "lethargies" were associated with excess of viscous humours; "imposthumes" were bodily cysts; and "tettors" were a pustular eruption of the skin. To these associations of Patroclus with venereal disease, corruption of the masculine aristocratic body, and contaminating viscous matter, Thersites elsewhere adds his comments on Patroclus as "Achilles' brach" and his "male varlet"—both words for subalterns in a male, sodomitical relationship. This accumulation of epithets implies that the particular threat embodied by Patroclus is that of the erosion of the controlled, male, elite body as—in Thersites' view at least—Patroclus' body is placed in the position of abject subjection, loss of control, and uncontrolled lust rather than the choler of the warrior (V.1.15).⁷⁵

But the point is not whether Patroclus is Achilles' diseased and dependent whore, given that there is no concrete evidence in the play of any of the above; rather it is that Thersites' powerful breath spreads syphilitic words that encourage us to respond to Patroclus as Achilles' base, diseased lover. Thersites' insults, in this sense, are verbally viscous—external emanations of his breath that threaten any elite person's attempt to control his warrior, aristocratic autonomy. And, indeed, Thersites himself has a viscous identity in his culture. Like a professional player, this licensed fool is given verbal powers over the aristocrats that servants normally do not have, a power he employs to dismantle the edifice of aristocratic masculinity that the Greeks and Trojans have built for themselves. Thersites' ability to project

verbal discharges onto the skin of Greek elite warriors makes him, finally, more threatening to the Greek camp than are Helen, Cressida, or Patroclus, as he verbally transforms the aristocratic, heroic, and autonomous image of soldiery into a version of himself—a base, viscous, and vicious fool.

Thersites, as we have seen, is the closest to a professional actor in this play, given that he is a fool whose main job is to mimic Trojans and Greeks for the pleasure of others, and given that his rhetoric enacts all the aspects of theatricality that were considered threatening to early modern authorities.⁷⁶ From this perspective, Thersites' verbal flaying of authority figures represents the early modern theatre as the site where, to quote Kenneth Gross, "forbidden sights were exposed, analyzed, and also displaced, ... tempting the audience's desire to see both the mask and what was behind the mask."⁷⁷ Thersites, of course, adds to this sense of revelation by appearing to invent many of the vices that he then projects upon elite warriors. *Troilus and Cressida*, in this sense, is an agon between two notions of theatricality: on the one hand its audience witnesses the glorious display of aristocratic magnificence affirmed by glittering costumes, courtly entertainments, and grand rhetoric; on the other hand it sees the late Elizabethan/early Jacobean professional theatre as a site that frequently displaces the spectacle of wealth and magnificence with the rhetoric of biles, cankers, and welts.

Thersites' unrelenting rhetoric of skin eruptions, sexual submission, and excrement suggests how vicious the play's representation is of the aristocratic warrior, even for a railing playwright. Where railing plays by Marston, Dekker, and Jonson display a variety of self-inflated characters who must be purged of their humours, the self-loving characters in *Troilus and Cressida*—in strong contrast—remain notably unchanged.⁷⁸ And, unlike the plays of the Poetomachia, *Troilus and Cressida* has tragic implications, as one major character (Hector) dies. Shakespeare further distances his play from contemporary railing plays by placing *Troilus and Cressida* in the classical past and with the background of war, a war which appears to have no heroes or winners. Thersites, in this light, embodies a specific kind of theatrical mirroring—the theatre as a site of plague, contaminating its audiences with its abject, diseased identity; by extension, *Troilus and Cressida* displays theatre's ability to displace and destroy reigning ideals and performances of aristocratic men as autonomous, heroic warriors.⁷⁹

***Coriolanus*: The Impossible Aesthetics of Blood**

One's first impression of *Coriolanus* suggests a quite different take on theatricality and aristocracy from that of *Troilus and Cressida*. For if Thersites actively participates in the erosion of ideals of the warrior aristocrat, his railing counterpart in *Coriolanus*—Coriolanus himself—embodies and sustains such ideals. Yet both characters share a similar vision of theatrical spectacle as a site that dismantles heroic ideals. This shared perspective is most evident when Coriolanus' mother convinces Coriolanus to humble himself before the common people in order to get their votes for consulship. Coriolanus states that he can only comply with this act by becoming a kind of actor—by transforming his aggressive, controlled, masculine voice into a flaccid non-masculine voice, at once female and gelded male;⁸⁰ hence he proclaims, incantatorily:

Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! My throat of war be turned,
Which quired with my drum, into a pipe
Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lulls asleep. (III.2.111–15)⁸¹

As Cynthia Marshall and Meredith Skura have noted, this speech is resonant with metatheatrical gestures, particularly given that Coriolanus strips himself of his masculine heroic identity much as a boy actor transforms himself into a female dramatic character; both do so in order to engage the attention of an unknown, largely commoner, audience.⁸²

The strong contrast between this abject, histrionic Coriolanus and the aggressive, heroic Coriolanus in battle can be read, I suggest, as a central agon between a warrior aristocratic artistry of blood that Coriolanus wishes to impose upon Rome and a theatre of skin disease, associated by Coriolanus with the citizens, a theatre that erodes aristocratic grandeur and distinction. Far more than in *Troilus and Cressida*, the textual encoding of this dynamics has something of an elegiac quality to it, looking back as it does to the inability to sustain the kind of heroic role represented by earlier Shakespearean characters like Henry v or Talbot. But if the rivalry between the performance of heroic aristocracy and theatrical performance is represented here in less sordid terms than that in *Troilus and Cressida*, its ultimate trajectory is quite as dark; *Coriolanus*, like *Troilus and Cressida*, returns frequently to such problems as the impossibility of heroism in a time of satire and the vulnerability of the aristocrat's idealized, warrior self-representation.

Given that Coriolanus embodies the Elizabethan aristocratic warrior ideal (Coriolanus, of course, is a Roman warrior, but the ideals he articulates are consistent with Elizabethan ideals), it is not surprising that his aesthetics should have a Sidneian quality to it. Above all, Coriolanus speaks for an aesthetics of blood, one which he, Sidney-like—but to a more hyperbolic degree—associates with heroic art over popular theatre. In doing so, Coriolanus echoes the early modern equivalence of blood with heroism, a notion articulated by Wright, as he comments that

if the blood of Elephants, being incensed with a red colour, had force to stir in theme the Passion of Ire in battle, how much more may we say that if much hot blood abound in the body, that subject, by the force of the Humour, shall easily and often be moved to anger.⁸³

Coriolanus' frequent references to blood return continually to the notion that blood is an aesthetic object that reflects and reveals the heroic traits of the angry and aggressive heroic warrior. Emerging from a scene of battle, Coriolanus, covered in the blood of his enemies, calls upon those who "love this painting/Wherein you see me smeared" (1.6.69–70).⁸⁴ Here he seems to echo his mother's own conceptualization of blood as a kind of painting, or as "gilt" (1.3.39–40). Blood appears, then, as a glorious emblem that marks those aristocratic few who participate in a culture of heroism.⁸⁵ It is, of course, no coincidence that Coriolanus should glory in blood. Blood not only signified the blood shed by warriors and the blood of nobility, but also "the heat of new blood [that] would contain courage and capacity to act its properties."⁸⁶

Yet by associating the heroic virtue of blood with a "painting over" of oneself (rather than with an essential, internal trait, like choler), Coriolanus implies that warrior aristocracy is distinguished less by internal humours or inherited nobility and more by a covering over of one's skin with the artistry of blood, elsewhere referred to as a "stamp" or as a "mask" (1.6. 23, 1.8 10). The warrior ideal with which Coriolanus identifies himself, then, is a kind of aesthetic self-reflection. This self-conceptualization implies that the aristocratic warrior is constantly vulnerable to losing the mask or painting by which he represents himself as part of the elite.

Small wonder that Coriolanus tries so consistently to separate himself from commoners, whom he sees as threats to his performance of warrior aristocracy. Hence his first words of the play to commoners: "What's the matter you dissentious rogues,/ That rubbing the poor itch of your opinion/ Make yourselves scabs?" (1.1.162). In strong contrast to the shining language of gilt and the glorious viscosity of blood, we re-encounter a Thersites-like anti-aesthetics of skin disease, whose very presence threatens to contaminate aristocrats with its own abjection, subjection, and anonymity, particularly as the crowd, in *Coriolanus*, is elsewhere associated

with the “mass of playgoers” in the early Jacobean period.⁸⁷ Following much of Renaissance medical science of the time, Coriolanus sees the identity of commoners as essential, rather than as a mask, and this identity is associated with being a “rank-scented” (III.1.66) viscous mass that suffers from “boils,” “plagues” and “measles” (I.4.31; III.1.78).⁸⁸ The last two references are particularly noteworthy, given that the plague and measles were considered to be notably contaminating—all the more reason for Coriolanus to attempt to separate himself from the pustular citizenry that horrifies Coriolanus with its anonymity. (For him the citizens are above all a “rabble” [I.1.216, III.1.135] and a “meiny” [III.1.66]). Coriolanus’ terror of losing his hold on aristocratic warrior autonomy leads him, obsessively, to remind the citizens and himself that his aesthetics of blood is far superior to what he sees as a body politic of skin disease.⁸⁹

This aggressive stance is all the more necessary as Coriolanus finds himself to be something of an anachronism—an old-fashioned warrior whose proud, aggressive style of leadership has no place in the Roman Republic, given that the Republic’s governing system (in *Coriolanus*, at least) flattens traditional hierarchies via increased democracy and political negotiations. Coriolanus’ vulnerability is heightened by the relative lack of any compensatory interiority. In strong contrast to Lear or Hamlet, Coriolanus has only three short soliloquies—as many as Thersites, but with fewer lines. I would suggest that the character’s lack of soliloquies is based on a rejection of internality, because the internal, in this play, is often the site where one discovers one’s essential, abject, humanity. Coriolanus makes up for this apparent lack of inner life by affirming a public warrior self either in opposition to the plebeians, or by identifying himself with the character who most appears to resemble his warrior ideal—Tullus Aufidius.

Coriolanus, it would seem, employs his aggressive identification with Aufidius not only to affirm his own mask of aristocratic masculinity but also to separate himself from the chaotic, leaky, lower class crowds that he so despises. Coriolanus further buttresses his heroic aristocratic identity by distinguishing between two types of bodily fluids—the glorious viscosity of blood associated with masculinity and courage, and the ignoble viscosity of scabs and pustules, associated with the subordinate, dirt-ridden (in his eyes) people.⁹⁰ Hence, his association of the blood-smearred warrior with elite artistry. In the process, Coriolanus is affirming, as well, a Sidneian distinction between two kinds of art—on the one hand, the aristocratic art of painting, gilding, or limning that Sidney associates with the creation of the heroic Cyrus, and on the other hand, the plebian art of theatre that Coriolanus, like Sidney, associates with the erosion of heroic identity.

The fragility of Coriolanus' aristocratic identity, along with his fear of performing before commoners, becomes clearest when Coriolanus' mother asks him to prostrate himself before the masses in order to become Consul. This ceremony, we have seen, leads Coriolanus to envision himself as a "harlot" or "eunuch" who has betrayed his autonomous, aristocratic identity (III.2.112, 114). His sense of abasement would explain why Coriolanus associates his self-display before the people with having to stand naked (III.2.99). Acting, for him, is not (as one would think) associated with masks, clothing, or any other covering of the self. Instead Coriolanus discovers that "the provocative business of displaying one's body on stage for public approval ... is ... as stark as physical nakedness."⁹¹ The associations of acting with nakedness here gesture to the power of satirical Jacobean theatre to strip away, Thersites-like, masks of aristocratic grandeur, magnificence, and superiority, displaying the aristocrat's essential semblance to the common people.⁹²

This is why nakedness, for Coriolanus, is particularly associated with showing one's wounds to the citizens.⁹³ In battle and among his elite peers Coriolanus may equate his wounds (in a quite un-Freudian manner) with an affirmation of his warrior masculinity, yet when he is forced to display his wounds to commoners they come to signify the vulnerable, porous self—as if the openings in his skin allow the contaminating pustules of the plebeians to corrupt his aristocratic blood. Coriolanus' tendency to interpret the citizens as a mob is telling here. As Skura has commented about the experience of acting, "once there is more than one spectator, the audience becomes something else—a crowd, even a mob or a pack"; for Coriolanus, the crowd appears ready to tear away his heroic identity from him.⁹⁴ Refusing to accede to the new order of political negotiations, Coriolanus (anachronistically) speaks for a nostalgic return to the Elizabethan ideal of warrior aristocrat, even as the play he appears in gestures to the impossibility of maintaining this ideal in the post-Elizabethan world.

Rather than acknowledge the demise of the aristocratic warrior ideal, Coriolanus defends this identity at all costs—even to death—by constantly affirming the rhetoric of blood. When he faces judgment against the citizens, he embraces "the steep Tarpeian death,/ Vagabond exile, flaying" (III.3.88–90). His fantasy of death by flaying not only demonstrates a heroic ability to withstand any kind of torture or pain, but also implies an impossible desire to rid himself of a skin that (in his mind) has become contaminated by the scabbed, plague-ridden, skin of the plebeians. This language of aggressive self-destruction returns at the end of the play, where he states: "Cut me to pieces, Volsces ... / Stain all your edges on me" (v.6.110–111). Affirming the joyous language of blood by dying as a warrior is

the only sustainable way to maintain Coriolanus' self-image as an aristocrat and avoid an abject identification with the masses.

Coriolanus is not a strict allegory for early Jacobean theatre as a whole; yet, like *Troilus and Cressida*, moments of railing resonate with problems of theatrical culture and aesthetics. It is, I think, no coincidence that the play is about the inability of a culture to sustain a traditional heroic role, given the increasing popularity of satirical comedy over history at this time. But if, in his affirmation of traditional heroism, the figure of Coriolanus apparently stands apart from many of the elite playgoers of the early Jacobean period, his consideration of commoners as audiences who contaminate the elite with their abject status resonates with an increasingly articulated desire by elite Jacobean audiences to separate themselves from commoners.⁹⁵ This desire is infamously articulated by "Never Writer" in one 1609 quarto to *Troilus and Cressida* (written at about the same time as *Coriolanus*), who claims that the strength of the play lies in the fact that it has not been "sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude" (Preface. 1–3, 33–34). Here, the tobacco-infused breath of the audience is represented as a visible air-borne plague, contaminating elite audiences with its baseness, hence threatening them with the loss of any sense of distinction.

THE IDENTITY AND PERFORMANCE of aristocracy are, we have seen, crucial to *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*. Both employ the rhetoric of railing to perform eroding ideals of the aristocratic warrior in a culture that no longer believes in these ideals; both represent theatre as a site that powerfully destroys these ideals. What we experience from these plays, finally, are two distinct, yet related, contests between an aesthetics of aristocratic magnificence and a theatre that dismantles this aesthetics with the railing language of skin disease. I have suggested that such responses resonate with particular crises of theatrical and aristocratic identity in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period—above all the loss of the ideals of the heroic warrior. When we take into account, as well, antitheatrical associations of theatricality with prostitution and disease in these plays, one might theorize that Shakespeare was liberally absorbing antitheatrical treatises to shape his own sharp satires of the insufficiencies of early seventeenth-century aristocratic ideals and, perhaps, of the vicious manner by which much of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean theatre was participating in the dismantling of these ideals.⁹⁶

Shakespeare's response to railing theatre over a period of roughly ten years—in *Timon of Athens* as well as in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*—is complex, even contradictory, given that the plays rail against facades of aristocracy while also

expressing nostalgia for this loss of traditional ideals of aristocracy.⁹⁷ And if theatre, in Shakespeare's railing plays, is represented as a diseased space that contaminates its audiences with its cynical and corrupting influence, the vivid language of railing, its energetic and aggressive rivalry with aristocratic self-representations, reveal the excitement of participating in this radical and experimental expression of writing and performance. As such, these plays express the advantages of a crisis of theatrical identity—the ability to open up a series of explorative spaces that reflect upon the meaning of theatre at a time when the early modern English theatre had not yet settled on its conventions, traditions, or symbolic order.

Whether or not Shakespeare's railing plays were popular in their day, it is clear that Shakespeare, at least, was fascinated with the creative possibilities of railing. It is, it would seem, out of a caustic, excremental language of railing, out of the destruction of traditional conventions of warrior aristocracy, that theatre (in these railing plays) explores and shapes an alternative to the dominant languages of lyric, epic, and even tragedy—an aesthetics of railing that gives articulation to late Elizabethan and early Jacobean scenes of crisis. This theatrics absorbs the language of antitheatrical writers by using their language against them, replacing, in the process, a traditional and elite aesthetics of heroic blood with a celebration of the rhetorical power of scabs and biles.

Notes

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1. Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, ed. Helen Ostovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), "Induction," ll. 69–75.
2. I employ the term "aristocratic" in its larger sense to include titled aristocrats, those closely related to titled aristocrats, or those expecting to inherit a title. By this definition, both Sir Philip Sidney and the Earl of Essex are aristocrats, even though Sidney himself was never a titled aristocrat in England (he was made a Baron by the King of France).
3. Thomas Adams, *Diseases of the Soule, Divine, Morall, and Physicall* (London: 1616), p. 19v. Adams adds, interestingly, that skin disease is often associated with people who have an excessive tendency to gossip, bad mouth, and speak with florid, rhetorical constructs—all characteristics associated with Thersites, the railing character of *Troilus and Cressida* (pp. 10–11).

4. Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in General*, ed. William Webster Newbold, in *The Renaissance Imagination* 15 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), p. 80. While the work was published in 1601, Webster notes internal evidence that it was written in 1597 (p. 12).
5. See Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast, "Promiscuous Textualities: the Nashe-Harvey Controversy and the Unnatural Productions of Print," *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas Brooks (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 173–96; and "'Unmanly Melancholy': Lack, Fetishism, and Abuse in *Timon of Athens*," *Criticism* 42 (2000), pp. 207–28. For an overview of the period of popularity of railing plays, see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 76–80, 158–64.
6. A number of these crises are listed by Jim Sharpe in "Social Strain and Social Dislocation, 1585–1603," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 192–211. Interestingly, Margaret Healy represents this period as having a crisis of bodily identity and autonomy; she notes that the addition of Paracelsan theory to that of the Galenic body represents the body as "more porous and vulnerable, and thus more susceptible to penetration and occupation by hostile circumambient forces," in *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues, Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2003), p. 48. Like Sharpe, Healy lists a number of social, political, and health problems of the period that led to a sense of "social crisis" (pp. 90–92; 231–33).
7. Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful Yere*. (*The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, Vol. 1, The Huth Library, ed. Alexander B. Grosart [London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, Ltd., 1884]), pp. 86–88.
8. Sharpe, p. 205.
9. On this conceptualization of "excrement," see especially Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim, Introduction, *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology*, ed. Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. xv. See also Bruce Thomas Boehrer, "The Ordure of Things: Ben Jonson, Sir John Harington, and the Culture of Excrement in Early Modern England," in *New Perspectives on Ben Jonson*, ed. James Hirsh (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1997), pp. 174–96.
10. Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth, Gathered and Made by Syr Thomas Elyot knyghte, out of the Chiefe Authors of Physyke* (London: 1534), pp. 54v–55r. On this passage, see also Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 31–32.
11. Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces Superrogation* (*The Works of Gabriel Harvey, D.C.L.*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart [London, 1884]), vol. 2, p. 43. Constantia Munda, "The Worming of a mad Dogge," in *The Women's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance*, ed. Simon Shepherd (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 137. Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona

- Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), p. 199. Such references make clear, as well, a curious tendency in railing works to use railing language in order to condemn other writers for using railing language.
12. On associations of theatre with both medicine and poison in the early Jacobean period, see especially Tanya Pollard, "No Faith in Physic: Masquerades of Medicine On-stage and Off," in *Disease, Diagnosis and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). A number of other scholars have noted how theatre was often represented as a site of poison and disease. See, for instance, Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Greg W. Bentley, *Shakespeare and the New Disease: The Dramatic Function of Syphilis* in *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Timon of Athens*, *American University Studies*, Series IV, *English Language and Literature*, Vol. 85 (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) pp. 48–50; Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 81; Jonathan Gil Harris, "'Some love that drew him oft from home': Syphilis and International Commerce in *The Comedy of Errors*," in *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 69–92; Healy, pp. 90–95; and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987; rpt. 1988), pp. 22–29.
  13. For a somewhat different interpretation of the work of such theatre, see Bentley. Bentley sees such theatre as creating more of a direct criticism of the audience in an effort to improve it morally; see especially pp. 94–95. I share with Bentley the notion that Shakespeare's quite negative ending to a play like *Troilus and Cressida* suggests a somewhat caustic critique of an aesthetic culture of wit, cynicism, and foppery. For the notion of an aesthetics of excrement (as opposed to one of railing that contains excremental language), see Boehrer, who considers excrement more in the contemporary sense of fecal matter, particularly in relation to psychoanalytic implications of anality. A somewhat different take on the rhetoric of disease is expressed by Healy, pp. 98–103.
  14. John Weever (?), *The Whipping of the Satyre* (London, 1601), vol. 2, pp. 163–68.
  15. Prendergast, "Unmanly Melancholy," pp. 207–228.
  16. While metaphors of disease are quite conventional to the early modern theatre, what is more salient at this time is the intensity and frequency of language of skin disease. Its main instigator is John Marston, whose railing pamphlets of the late 1590s provided the first sustained use of such terminology. This language, in turn, entered the late Elizabethan theatre with the Poets' War. Shakespeare, then, would have been picking up on a quite recent trend in theatrical rhetoric when he began employing the metaphors of skin disease extensively.
  17. On Thersites as railer, see also F. H. Langman, "Troilus and Cressida," in *Jonson and Shakespeare*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Humanities Press, 1983), p. 61.

18. I discuss this pattern in *Renaissance Fantasies: The Gendering of Aesthetics in Early Modern Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000), pp. 117–131.
19. On this conceptualization of the aristocracy, see especially Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
20. For an extended discussion of these associations, see Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 15–86 and 175–206.
21. Elyot, *The Castel of Helth*, p. 3v. On aristocracy and choler, see Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 193–200. On this association in Classical Athenian culture, see Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the city in Western Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1994), p. 63.
22. Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, “Induction,” ll. 126–30.
23. This is not to suggest that such plays were only popular in private, more elite, theatres, although it is true that private theatres came to be associated with these kinds of plays. On the issue of plays put on for private theatres and the amphitheatres, as well as the audiences for plays of the period, see especially Gurr, pp. 27–31, 45–49, and 81–108.
24. John Day, *John Day's The Isle of Guls*, ed. Raymond S. Burns (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980), “Induction,” ll. 54–6. On this passage, see also Gurr, p. 75. *The Isle of Guls* itself is not a railing play; in the induction, in fact, Day makes clear that he is going against the audience's desire for railing.
25. Day, *The Ile of Gulls*, “Induction,” l. 138.
26. Wright, p. 118. This perspective on younger men is echoed by Bentley; Bentley notes how the Inns of Court plays, by the late sixteenth century, were associated with young, licentious audiences (50–52).
27. Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); see also Javitch.
28. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Wells places *Troilus and Cressida* in this particular context, then represents *Coriolanus* as a fraught response to the resurgence of this model of masculinity, embodied in Prince Henry. The concept of the courtier ideal, along with its limitations, has been traced by a number of critics, most notably by the following: David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 263–66; Bruce Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 44–48; Paster, *Humoring the Body*, pp. 189–95; and Frank Whigam, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). On the failure of this model in the Jacobean Court, see David Bergeron, *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991); Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 1–27; and Coppélia Kahn, “Magic of

- Bounty: *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power," *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*. ed. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
29. Shakespeare's company was clearly implicated in this crisis, given that it put on *Richard II* at the behest of the Earl of Essex the eve of Essex's rebellion. See E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930), vol. 2, p. 325.
  30. Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 5. The cultural influence of theatre has been traced by a number of scholars. See especially Pollard, pp. 31–33.
  31. Adams, B5.
  32. Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 1–2.
  33. See, for instance, Helen Ostovich's introduction to *Every Man out of His Humor* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2001).
  34. For Gilman, the concept of the diseased person is one in which we "construct boundaries between ourselves and those categories of individuals whom we believe (or hope) to be more at risk than ourselves" (p. 4). Railing plays participate more contradictorily in this process. While, for instance, the preface to the quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida* notes how the play has been uncontaminated by the "smoky breaths" of the plebeians, the ending of the play is marked by a diseased character who addresses the audience as equally marked by syphilis.
  35. Whether Shakespeare's plays convincingly attracted audiences to such performances is not, of course, known. What little evidence we have of the performance histories of *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens* is murky and often contradictory, a situation made more complex by the fact that, of the three plays, only *Coriolanus* seems originally to have been part of the *First Folio*. The most contradictory evidence is associated with *Troilus and Cressida*. *Troilus and Cressida*'s changed position in the *Folio* suggests that there was some initial problem (perhaps one of copyright) with its inclusion. Furthermore, one 1609 quarto has a preface asserting that the play had been performed at the Globe, while the other 1609 quarto asserts that the play has never been performed—in an amphitheatre, at least.
  36. William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Jonathan Crewe, in *The Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 2000), II.3.70–74. All further citations from *Troilus and Cressida* are by act, scene, and line number to this edition of the play.
  37. For a detailed and insightful reading of the influence of syphilis and sexual diseases on the rhetoric of drama of the period, see Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), especially pp. 42–51 and 84–102. See also Healy. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that Shakespeare does not specifically name syphilis as the disease that Thersites consistently projects upon others. While a number

- of references in *Troilus and Cressida* are clearly to syphilis, others are vaguer as to which sexual disease is being portrayed. As Greg Bentley and Valerie Traub have noted, Renaissance theorists themselves were often conflicted about the symptoms of syphilis and the extent to which syphilis had its own boundaries or whether it was closely related to, and even caused, other diseases. See Bentley, pp. 15–16; and Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 78.
38. I follow Bentley, Healy, and Carol Thomas Neely here in considering much of later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century humoral pathology as participating in both Galenic and Paracelsan medical theories. See Bentley, pp. 11–17; Healy, pp. 6–7; and Carol Thomas Neely, “Hot Blood: Estranging Mediterranean Bodies in Early Modern Medical and Dramatic Texts,” in *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 55–58.
  39. See, for example, Harris’s overview of representations of syphilis in the Elizabethan period, in “Some Love that Drew Him Oft from Home,” pp. 80–85. See also Healy, pp. 123–87.
  40. While this concept has been discussed by a number of scholars, it receives its fullest development in Schoenfeldt.
  41. On *serpigo* as an “eating” disease, one that was often associated with syphilis, see Harris, *Sick Economies*, pp. 85–89.
  42. Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, or A Naturall History In Ten Centuries* (London: 1651). The vulnerability of the early modern body is expressed by Paster, in *Humoring the Body*; see especially, p. 42. On the theory that syphilis could be spread by the breath, see Harris, *Sick Economies*, p. 43 and his “Some love that drew him oft from home,” pp. 80–82. Thersites’ breath, as such, epitomizes miasmatic air, the corrupt air that, in Galenic theory, caused diseases, including skin disease. On the associations between miasma and skin disease, see Healy, pp. 21.
  43. Associations of diseases like syphilis with corrupt air were a common aspect of early modern humoral theory. These associations have been remarked by a number of contemporary scholars. See especially Bentley, pp. 9–12; Harris, “Some love that drew him oft from home,” pp. 69–92; Healy, pp. 1–17; and Schoenfeldt. Bentley notes that while the theory of corrupt air continued through the sixteenth-century, it was increasingly displaced by the theory that sexual diseases were spread by sexual transmission.
  44. Adams, p. 19v.
  45. Paster, *Humoring the Body*. On the developing ideal of the controlled body, see also Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978); Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 9, 14–18; Schoenfeldt, pp. 8–39; and Traub, p. 72. While Schoenfeldt has a different perspective from Paster’s, they both share the concept that traditional masculinity was associ-

- ated with control of one's bodily self. The concept of Elizabethan/Jacobean bodily humours as reflecting the larger environment and elements has been charted by a number of critics; see especially Neely, pp. 55–56.
46. For a contrasting view to my point that Thersites appears to project his subjective thoughts onto the Greek camp, see Bentley, particularly his point that "Thersites bluntly, even brutally, speaks the truth" (p. 55).
  47. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984; rpt. 1988), p. 35.
  48. Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. J. A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966; rpt. 1986), p. 67.
  49. Wright, p. 187.
  50. Philip Stubbs, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), p. 202.
  51. William Prynne, *Histriomastix, The Players Scorn or Actors Tragaedie* (London: 1633), p. 3.
  52. See Harris, *Sick Economies*, pp. 86–88; see also his "Some love that drew him oft from home" pp. 81–83.
  53. Ben Jonson, *Poetaster, or The Arraignment*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), "Prologue," ll. 22–25.
  54. Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia; or A Description of the Body of Man* (London, 1615), p. 175. Qtd. in Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 19. On this notion, see also Schoenfeldt, especially pp. 1–17.
  55. This notion has been broached by a number of scholars, but see especially Barroll, pp. 70–116; Neill, pp. 22–29; and Traub, pp. 80–81.
  56. Healy sees a somewhat parallel response in early Jacobean plays about pox and prostitutes (pp. 168–72).
  57. Sidney, p. 33.
  58. On imagery of syphilis in this speech, see Bentley, pp. 58–59.
  59. Wright, p. 95. On the ineffective nature of Agamemnon's desire to project a persona of distinction, see also Neill, p. 27.
  60. Troilus, it is true, has seven long speeches, but only one is a soliloquy. Cressida has only two long speeches, one of which is a soliloquy. Ulysses has nine long speeches, but no soliloquy. Pandarus' only soliloquy (if it can be called one) is his address to the audience at the end of the play. On Thersites' central vision in the play, see also Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 100–102.
  61. Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, p. 64. On this passage, see also Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 33.
  62. Girolamo Fracastoro, *Syphilidis sive de morbo Gallico, libri III*, trans. William van Wyck (Los Angeles: The Primavera Press, 1934), pp. 7–8. On Fracastoro and syphilis, see also Bentley, pp. 32–34.
  63. Sidney, p. 35.
  64. Douglas, p. 121.

65. Douglas, p. 35.
66. On the associations of women and/or subalterns with the leaky body, see especially Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*; and Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).
67. Douglas, p. 123.
68. Douglas, p. 18.
69. For the link between mobility and troubling eroticism in the play, see also Traub, pp. 72–73.
70. See, for instance, Bentley, pp. 59–72; Harris, "Some love that drew him oft from home," pp. 69–92; Healy, pp. 136–39; and Traub, pp. 72–77.
71. On "Neapolitan boneache" as a reference to syphilis, see Bentley, pp. 61–62.
72. I have not developed this point further, in part because it has been fully developed by other critics. See especially Bentley, pp. 53–59; Gayle Greene, "Shakespeare's Cressida: 'A Kind of Self,'" in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 142–46; Harris, *Sick Economies*, pp. 97–100; and Traub, pp. 71–87.
73. Even Thersites' male targets receive notably fewer insults: Diomedes receives roughly eight lines of insult (about being a lecher), Menelaus receives ten lines of insult (about being a cuckold), and Ajax receives some fifteen lines (about being stupid).
74. On this speech as a reference to syphilis, see especially Bentley, pp. 63–66.
75. Dialogues between Patroclus and Achilles suggest that, whatever their erotic feelings might be each other, it is unclear whether they have actually had sexual relations, and there is no evidence, outside of Thersites' rants, that Patroclus has a sexual disease. The nature of the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles has been interpreted differently by different scholars. See, for instance, Linda Charnes, pp. 4–5; Jonathan Crewe, intro., *Troilus and Cressida*; Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 122–23; and Traub, pp. 84–86. The far more liquid conceptualizations of both early modern and classical Greek constructions of intimate male-male relationships have been noted, of course, by a number of scholars. See, for instance, Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Sennett, pp. 33–15.
76. On this notion of the player in both early modern and contemporary periods, see Skura, pp. 9–63.
77. Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 4. See also Neill, pp. 28–30.

78. I am thinking particularly of plays like Marston's *Histriomastix*, his *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, Jonson's *Every Man out of His Humor* and *Poetaster*, and Dekker's *Satiromastix*, all written around the same time as *Troilus and Cressida*.
79. This heightened language and cynicism may have something to do with the reopening of the hall playhouses in London in 1600—the date for the composition of *Troilus and Cressida*. This does not necessarily mean that the play was written exclusively for a private theatre, but the play's concerns with railing—associated strongly with plays written for the boys' companies—seem to accompany this awareness of a shift towards the private.
80. Among those who have commented on the vulnerability of Coriolanus' masculine identity are Janet Adelman, "Anger's My Meat": Feeding, Dependency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*," in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 131; Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 152–58; Cynthia Marshall, "Wound-Man: *Coriolanus*, Gender and the Theatrical Construction of Interiority," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 94–114; Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, pp. 94–97; and Richard Wheeler, "Since first we were dissevered: Trust and Autonomy in Shakespearean Tragedy and Romance," in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 160–61.
81. Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. Jonathan Crewe, *The Pelican Shakespeare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999). All citations from *Coriolanus* are by act, scene, and line number from this edition of the play.
82. Marshall, pp. 96–100; Skura, pp. 191–95.
83. Wright, p. 138.
84. It is interesting, in this light, that, for all of Shakespeare's associations of Coriolanus with blood, he opts not to associate Coriolanus' bloodletting with a kind of purgative healing of the body politic; rather, blood is consistently a sign of elite, heroic aggression over the abject citizenry, as well as over the Volscians. Instead, as Catherine Belling has noted, Coriolanus only sees bloodletting as healing to the aristocratic body. See her "Infectious Rape, Therapeutic Revenge: Bloodletting and the Health of Rome's Body," *Disease, Diagnosis and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 113–14.
85. On the Renaissance aristocracy's obsessions with blood as demarcating its superiority to other classes, see the articles in Peter C. Rollins's collection of essays, *Shakespeare's Theories of Blood, Character, and Class: A Festschrift in Honor of David Shelley Berkeley* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), especially David S. Berkeley, "Shakespeare's 'Severall Degrees in Bloud'," pp. 7–18; Dilin Liu and Anumarla Govindan, "From *Rosalynde* to *As You Like It*: Shakespeare's Celebration of Blood Order," pp. 61–76; and Den-

- nis F. Borrmann, "'Thou Art a Villain': From the Ensign to Iago—Blood Changes in *Othello*," pp. 77–94.
86. Berkeley, p. 8.
  87. Neill, p. 29.
  88. Janet Adelman (p. 130) has suggested that Coriolanus' fear of the mob has sexual implications; while she may have a point, the lack of references to sexual disease suggests that the particular threat embodied by the mob is predominantly the threat of loss of class distinctions.
  89. On notions of interiority, or lack thereof, in *Coriolanus*, see also Adelman, pp. 138–40; Crewe, intro., *Coriolanus*, pp. xxxviii–xl; Marshall, pp. 94–95; and Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). On Coriolanus' desire for absolute autonomy, see also Adelman, pp. 130–45; Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 205–11; Marshall, pp. 93–114; and Wheeler, pp. 152–63.
  90. References to "dirt" in the period are, of course, freighted with significance, given that dirty areas were considered to be sites that attracted disease. On this notion see especially Healy, pp. 93–95.
  91. Skura, p. 12.
  92. On associations between the naked self and the abject, anonymous mob, see also Neill, pp. 8–15. Neill's focus is, however, more on associations between nakedness and the anonymity of death.
  93. On associations between wounds and acting, see Skura, pp. 20–23. For a somewhat different reading of theatricality and wounds in *Coriolanus*, see Marshall, pp. 96–109. The notion that wounds have different gender significations based on the context (masculine if wounds are willed, feminine if they are associated with lack of control) is also broached by Kahn in *Roman Shakespeare*, pp. 17–18, and 151–58; and Paster in *The Body Embarrassed*, pp. 64–112.
  94. Skura, p. 27.
  95. On this tendency, see especially Gurr, pp. 60–73; 81–88, 165–74.
  96. This is not, of course, the only mode in which Shakespeare was writing in the period. As Richard Wheeler has noted, plays of this period alternate between tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Lear* that move towards "a tragic realization, in mutual destruction, of the longing for merger" and plays like *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*, which frustrate this move towards tragic vision by moving instead "towards isolation and emptiness" (pp. 151, 152).
  97. Possibly, these plays date from an even narrower period of composition, but the dating of these plays—particularly of *Timon of Athens*—is particularly fraught. I am using the dominant theory of dating for the plays suggested by E. K. Chambers in *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), vol. 4. For a quite different perspective on the dating of *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*, see Barroll. Most scholars place these plays between 1600–1608.