SPECTERS OF HORATIO

BY CHRISTOPHER WARLEY

Only at the end of a slow evolution tending to strip away the specifically symbolic aspect of the acts and relations of production was the economy able to constitute itself as such, in the objectivity of a separate universe, governed by its own rules, those of self-interested calculation, competition and exploitation; and also, much later, in ‘pure’ economic theory which records the social separation and the practical abstraction of which the economic cosmos is the product, while tacitly writing it into the principle of its object construction. But, conversely, it was only by means of a break tending to repress the economic aspect of the specifically symbolic acts and relations of production into the lower world of the economy that the various universes of symbolic production were able to constitute themselves as closed, separate microcosms in which thoroughly symbolic, pure and (from the point of view of the economic economy) disinterested actions were performed, based on the refusal or repression of the element of productive labour that they implied.

—Pierre Bourdieu, Pascalian Meditations

I. JUST HORATIO

“Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man / As e’er my conversation coped withal” claims Hamlet in act three, and the play, more often than not, seems to reinforce his assessment. Throughout, Horatio is apparently a figure with a privileged interpretative position. Editors regularly gloss “just” as “well-balanced,” “honest,” or “well-adjusted,” and what seems “just” about Horatio is his fairness, equity, reasonableness, faithfulness, honorableness—in short, his ability to deliver an impartial and apparently unbiased account of Hamlet, his story, and the ghost that sets the play in motion. Marcellus asks Horatio (“he that knows” [1.1.70]) for an explanation of the war preparations of which the watch is a part. Hamlet’s remarks about Horatio’s justness appear immediately before he asks him to keep a close eye on Claudius’ reactions to the Mouse-trap. As Hamlet lies dying, he commands Horatio to “report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied” (5.2.322–23), and Horatio
then promises that he can “truly deliver” this story to Fortinbras and the “yet unknowing world” (5.2.369, 362). Most famously, Marcellus directs Horatio to speak to the ghost: “Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio” (1.1.42).

Horatio’s justness marks him as unusual in a play full of plotting and calculating characters. In his honorable, straight-forward dealing, he is “just” in a sense that coheres, according to the OED, at the end of the seventeenth century—he is “just Horatio,” “only” or “merely” Horatio, a singularly even-handed figure in a play in which “indirections” are deployed by everyone else to find out “directions.” Such even-handedness helps to account for the scholarly attraction to Horatio, for it is not only Marcellus and Hamlet who have viewed him as a reliable interpreter. “Thou art a scholar; speak to it” has become a sort of mantra, a shorthand for criticism itself. Stephen Greenblatt ends a 1997 article in *Critical Inquiry* by quoting Marcellus’s call, an injunction that functions almost as a professional code of ethics; reading literature is a way to speak to the ghosts of the dead, to bring them back, to stave off momentarily the “death sentence” that awaits us all. This ethic implies, though, that reading or viewing *Hamlet* requires identifying, one way or another, with Horatio, and this identification occurs regardless of how one actually interprets the play. To interpret *Hamlet*, one must promise to become Horatio, occupy his position, and be a “just” interpreter. To speak to ghosts, one must be Horatio.

In this article I try to read the position of Horatio. This reading leads me to three conclusions. First, the claim to universality—to objectivity, disinterest, and “justness”—is never really universal. It is always interested, impartial, and (maybe) unjust. If “Horatio” represents an emerging rationality, it is a rationality with an injunction stuck at the front (“Ho”), an almost interpellative hail (“Illo, ho, ho, my lord” calls Marcellus to Hamlet after his encounter with the ghost [1.5.115]; “Ho, Guildenstern!” says Claudius, impatiently summoning him [4.1.32]).

The opening quote contains Pierre Bourdieu’s version of this familiar critique where he is unpacking the “scholastic fallacy”—the belief that scholars can be, or ought to be, disinterested interpreters.

Second, by reading Horatio I am interested in the sense that a just reading is a rational, objective, and disinterested one—the notion that justness might not only mean righteous or equitable, but that “just” might combine those two meanings with a sense of “just” as “precise,” a meaning around since at least the fourteenth century, according to the Middle English Dictionary. Bourdieu is again helpful here, since his understanding of the scholastic fallacy of objective interpretation

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Christopher Warley is tied to his analysis of the appearance of economics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the realm of interest where one never acts equitably but only in one’s own interest. The very conception of impartiality is, for Bourdieu, implicated in a broader shift in the process of social distinction, what used to be called the “transition from feudalism to capitalism”: changes in the ways that people classified the world, and consequently themselves, and what counted or didn’t count as a legitimate way of doing that.  

My third point is as much polemic as argument: that class is a question that cannot and should not go away. For so much of contemporary criticism, and especially Renaissance criticism, the question of class seems just boring, the endless recitation of the crisis of the aristocracy, the emergence of the bourgeoisie, or the appearance of merchants and commercialism. It is no wonder, then, that class dimensions of the Renaissance have become a sort of continual background noise to criticism primarily interested in other things. By reading the position of Horatio, I want to suggest that class criticism cannot be entirely predictable, and that it is an area within the field that needs renewed theoretical and historical attention.  

As Franco Moretti suggests in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, what distinguishes English Renaissance tragedy generally is the disappearance of the chorus figure who represents a “universal, ‘higher’ point of view”: “For millennia,” claims Moretti, “‘ideas’ had been validated not by their ‘intrinsic truth’ (a modern scientific criterion), but by the ‘authority’ of those who proffered them. With modern tragedy, the principle of authority is dissolved, and with it vanishes the chief obstacle to the existence of that rational public that others, in other ways, will take charge of forming fully.” “Others will take charge” because, for Moretti, “there is little in English tragedy that anticipates the new age opened up by the stroke of an axe at Whitehall on 30 January 1649.”10 Attention to Horatio, however, suggests that *Hamlet*, anyway, does participate in taking charge of the emerging rational public. Horatio’s just capacity to interpret is predicated, I think, upon the spectral logic of his social position: it is a position that seems, at the same time, to be no position at all. And this spectral position is a foundation—if I can put it that way—of the new public sphere of the seventeenth century. The changing of the guard that *Hamlet* narrates, then, is the transition to a new form of social distinction, a new class position—Horatio’s position—that denies that it is a class position at all. Its authority emerges,
instead, in a doubled-edged spectrality: if the justness of Horatio’s interpretations ultimately depends on his a-positionality, such a foundation means that interpretation will be a volatile, ongoing struggle. The struggle over the meaning of *Hamlet*, in short, is a class struggle that is a distinctly new feature of early modern existence.

II. THE MARCELLUS COMPLEX

To interpret *Hamlet* means to become Horatio. Who, then, is this figure who seems to be the embodiment of disinterest, who seems to be nearly disembodied himself? Who exactly is Horatio? We know very little about him. Horatio is first called into the play by Francisco (“Stand, ho! Who is there?” [1.1.14]) and first named by Barnardo, who seems partially to recognize him as he approaches: “What, is Horatio there?” (1.1.19). Horatio is thus introduced as fully implicated in both the metaphoric changing of the guard and the general question of identity with which the play notoriously begins. If the opening line (“Who’s there?”) is the central question of the play—who is Hamlet? what defines identity in this play? who appears with the historical changing of the guard?—it is a question that is asked of Horatio as well. “Who is there?” demands Francisco, and Horatio responds “Friends to this ground” (1.1.15). The first information we have of this figure is political allegiance; Horatio is not the figure that the state’s security apparatus is on the lookout for. And yet a moment later, when Barnardo, amidst the general confusion, asks again “What, is Horatio there?” Horatio responds more enigmatically: “A piece of him” (1.1.19). It’s a joke, of course—Horatio doesn’t really want to be up on the ramparts in the bitter cold watching for a ghost he doesn’t believe in. He seems to think, at best, that the likelihood of such an encounter is pretty low.

Nevertheless, Horatio’s first lines set up a central problem: is he a friend to the state, or is only “part” of him a friend? Which piece of Horatio do we see? Marcellus, religiously devout, is clearly suspicious: “Horatio says ’tis but our fantasy, / And will not let belief take hold / Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us” (1.1.23–25). “Tush, tush, ’twill not appear” (1.1.30) responds Horatio, which may be, as the OED suggests (citing this passage), “[a]n exclamation of impatient contempt or disparagement,” but which is just as likely balanced Horatio’s way of gently fending off Marcellus’s defensiveness.11 “Impatient contempt” would suggest that we see all of Horatio here—his mockery of the beliefs of these soldiers. Instead, he asks a

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few lines later to hear more of Barnardo’s version of the story. Horatio presents Marcellus and Barnardo only a “piece” of himself; he is both friend and intruder on these battlements.

But Marcellus and Barnardo have invited Horatio along, and they seem quite familiar with him. The soldiers have previously assailed his “fortified” ears with their story. Yet there remains social tension in their familiarity readily apparent when Marcellus asks Horatio for political information: “Good now, sit down, and tell me he that knows, / Why this same strict and most observant watch / So nightly toils the subject of the land[?]” (1.1.70–72). Marcellus is keenly aware that he himself is he that does not know, and there is a hint of irritation. But Marcellus is right, for Horatio, in his careful way (“At least the whisper goes so” [1.1.80]), knows quite a lot about the political and historical background of Denmark. He proceeds to explain to Marcellus and the audience the political reasons for the watch and subsequently the entire Fortinbras subplot. This frame makes explicable the end of the play (Fortinbras’s “I have some rights of memory in this kingdom” [5.2.372]), and it defines Hamlet perhaps more than any other frame in the play, both in the “How all occasions do inform against me” soliloquy, as well as the fairly roundabout way that we learn Hamlet’s age in act five scene 1, one of the few moments when we can say with some precision exactly who, or at least when, Hamlet is.

This exposition is crucial not only because it establishes Horatio’s credentials for providing interpretation and information: it is crucial because it also establishes Horatio not as someone “just”—disinterested, fair, and balanced—but as someone interested, someone who not only knows but who is in the know—a courtly insider who has heard the gossip. For Marcellus, then, Horatio represents something of an elitist—one who tacitly or explicitly rejects Marcellus’s belief in ghosts in favor of some form of scholarship that is at the same time aligned with insider political knowledge. In other words, this interaction calls into question Hamlet’s later understanding of Horatio as just. Balanced Horatio after all, skeptical Horatio, who can be called on to provide a disinterested account, is thoroughly interested here. Moreover, though Horatio does not exactly believe in ghosts at the start of the scene, he is, of course, wrong. The ghost does appear, and the effect is to undermine the security of the scholar, the security of the idea that one could be disinterested, objective, and just:

As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always
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in the most competent position to do what is necessary: to speak to the specter. Herein lies perhaps, among so many others, an indelible lesson of Marxism. There is no longer, there has never been a scholar capable of speaking of anything and everything while addressing himself to everyone and anyone, and especially to ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts—nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being (“to be or not to be,” in the conventional reading).

Traditional scholars, insists Derrida, make distinctions between being and non-being, and they do so from a purportedly objective position, a position that is not, so to speak, a position at all. The appearance of the ghost reinforces what we have already learned from Marcellus—that Horatio is interested, that he does have a position. Marcellus is, indeed, ahead of Derrida here, for he tacitly makes the argument that Derrida makes in *Specters of Marx*:

If we were to refer uniquely to this traditional figure of the “scholar,” we would therefore have to be wary here of what we could define as the illusion, the mystification, or the complex of Marcellus. The latter was perhaps not in a situation to understand that a classical scholar would not be able to speak to the ghost. Marcellus did not know what the singularity of a position is, let’s not call it a class position as one used to say long ago, but the singularity of a place of speech, of a place of experience, and of a link of filiation, places and links from which alone one may address oneself to the ghost. “Thou art a Scholler—speake to it, Horatio,” he says naively, as if he were taking part in a colloquium. He appeals to the scholar or to the learned intellectual, to the man of culture as a spectator who better understands how to establish the necessary distance or how to find the appropriate words for observing, better yet, for apostrophizing the ghost, which is to say also for speaking the language of kings or of the dead.

Marcellus’s injunction to Horatio is more complex than Derrida implies. Derrida suggests that Marcellus’s call signals that he “was perhaps not in a situation to understand” that Horatio is not a disinterested spectator, that Marcellus does not understand that Horatio does not understand “how to establish the necessary distance.” Yet it is in the interaction with Marcellus that Horatio’s position becomes apparent. Far from a naïve student, Marcellus is a soldier and a believer in ghosts. He looks everyday, as a matter of occupation, at the line between life and death. Indeed, Marcellus is not asking, or is not only asking, for Horatio to
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explain the ghost to him. He already has an explanation for it, as he makes clear at the end of the scene:

It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is that time

(1.1.157–64)

For Marcellus the ghost is a sign of the correctness of his belief in a Christian God, in folk wisdom and sprites, and in the possibility of a more just world. “We do it wrong, being so majestical, / To offer it the show of violence, / For it is as the air invulnerable, / And our vain blows malicious mockery” (1.1.143–46). When Marcellus demands that Horatio, as a “scholar,” speak to the ghost, he does so not only as part of a deference to “he that knows”—though no doubt that is part of it. Marcellus is also mocking Horatio: go ahead, scholar, speak to this. In other words, the line that is regularly taken as a scholarly call to arms is, in part, making fun of the pretensions of scholarship. In Derrida’s reading, rather, we see his social position, the singularity of his “place of experience,” the desire that others look to scholars (or to literature) for answers, even when they don’t. Marcellus the soldier becomes Marcellus the student or Marcellus the text, the product of the vision of the professor. What becomes identified here is not Marcellus’s innocence but the scholar’s interest.

Derrida’s phrase “the singularity of a position,” is nevertheless helpful for describing the effect of the interaction between Horatio and Marcellus. The singular interest of all—characters and critic—emerges here, the fact that neither Horatio nor Marcellus nor Derrida is objective. For the religious awe of Marcellus, his wonder and obsession with the “majestical” ghost, is as thoroughly undermined here as Horatio’s initial skepticism—there is something more to this ghost than “air invulnerable.” Marcellus too changes from his encounter. While in act one scene one it is Horatio who suggests that the ghost “bodes some strange eruption to our state” in act one scene four, it is Marcellus—making more explicit the hints of political interest he shows in demanding to know why there is “this same strict and most observant watch”—who registers the play’s most famous expression of political suspicion: “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”

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Marcellus’s position has changed; the ghost has already unsettled him.

The Marcellus complex, then, names not the misidentification of a position as universal—Derrida’s account—but rather the means by which positions themselves become apparent: the distinctions that distinguish the distinguisher. And more crucially, it might name the process by which positions change. Marcellus is not a fully fleshed out character in the play—he does not hold elaborate opinions, does not consistently remark on things in a way leading to a coherent, if complex, identity. In other words, he disappears after act one. But he is remarkably suggestive nonetheless, in no small part because his presence sets off a set of distinctions and differentiations that effect the “complex” that remains throughout the play: the specter of Horatio.14

III. SORTING HORIZTO

“Let’s not call it a class position as one used to say long ago,” adds Derrida about this singularity of position. Derrida’s phrase undermines the easy security “class analysis” offered so many years of Marxist criticism, as if once one determined class position one knew, unequivocally, the truth of the matter, the base of all superstructures, the ground of all meaning. Determining class position, though, turns out to be pretty difficult, particularly in the case of Horatio. Marcellus’s reading of Horatio is complicated when they first meet Hamlet in act one scene two:

**Horatio:** Hail to your lordship!
**Hamlet:** I am glad to see you well.
   Horatio—or I do forget myself.
**Horatio:** The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.
**Hamlet:** Sir, my good friend, I'll change that name with you.
   And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?
   Marcellus?
**Marcellus:** My good lord!
**Hamlet:** I am very glad to see you. [To Barnardo] Good even, sir.
   But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?
**Horatio:** A truant disposition, good my lord.
**Hamlet:** I would not hear your enemy say so,
   Nor shall you do my ear that violence
   To make it truster of your own report
   Against yourself. I know you are no truant[.]
   (1.2.160–73)
Marcellus’s relation to Hamlet is never in doubt. Hamlet knows who he is, briefly names him, and then Marcellus (like Barnardo) all but disappears from the dialogue, getting only one line in the rest of the scene. In contrast, Horatio’s relationship with Hamlet is less clear: not “your poor servant” but “my good friend.” Some of the distinctiveness of Horatio’s first meeting with Hamlet emerges in contrast to Hamlet’s greeting of his other acquaintances from school, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in act two scene two. In asking why they have arrived at Elsinore—Hamlet already knows the answer—he demands that they “deal justly” (2.2.245) with him, which they don’t. They are interested interpreters, acting on behalf of Claudius. Hamlet’s understanding of them is evident in his backhanded compliment that he “will not sort you with the rest of my servants, for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended” (2.2.265–67). Hamlet stresses, in other words, that unlike Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are servants, not friends, and they are at that very moment “dreadfully” attending him. And they are not even servants, really, but enemies not to be trusted, not “just” in that they are not acting in the interests of Hamlet.

Hamlet sorts Horatio quite differently, and consequently sorts himself quite differently in relation to Horatio. Although he insists politely that Horatio is a friend, he seems more specifically a servant who attends well, not dreadfully, because he is someone Hamlet can trust. There appears here, in the first interaction of Hamlet and Horatio, a dialectic that will unfold throughout the play. In relation to Horatio, the bondsman to Hamlet’s lord (“Hail to your lordship!”), Hamlet manages to not “forget” himself (“Horatio—or I do forget myself”). Because Horatio plays the other to Hamlet, Horatio cannot have, as Hamlet insists here, a “truant disposition.” Lurking inside the joke—a truant disposition is an inclination to play hooky—lies another sense of “truant”: “One who begs without justification; a sturdy beggar; a vagabond; an idle rogue or knave. (Often a mere term of abuse).”

Much of Hamlet’s problem throughout the play is that he has a “truant disposition,” idly playing hooky from his obligation to kill Claudius and revenge his father’s murder. Hamlet “begs without justification” because he has justification, at least according to the ghost, and it is this delay and hand-wringing that makes Hamlet see himself as a “rogue and peasant slave,” as one, in short, with a truant disposition. Yet in Horatio’s status as servant to Hamlet, as the other by which Hamlet knows himself, there cannot be any truancy, delay, erring, or lack of justification. In relation to Horatio, Hamlet should be most securely
a lord to hail, a master who comes into being by denying his mastery over his servant (“I would not hear your enemy say so”).

But Horatio does maintain a “truant disposition.” He seems at times as frustratingly unfathomable as Hamlet. How old is Horatio? If he seems Hamlet’s peer from Wittenberg, he also seems to have been an eye witness of Hamlet senior’s combat with Norway (“Such was the very armor he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated” [1.1.60–61]); in other words, if Hamlet is thirty years old, Horatio must be, as Harold Jenkins notes, “considerably more.” The point here is not to determine how old Horatio is; the point, rather, is that one cannot determine this piece of him. As a result, one might say that Hamlet’s “truant disposition,” that unknowable interiority that other sorts of scholars have obsessed over for centuries, depends upon Horatio’s disposition, on the fact that we only know a piece of him. Were Horatio to report Hamlet’s cause aright, were he to “truly deliver” Hamlet’s story, we would know what audiences and readers have always wanted to know: “who’s there?” Who’s Hamlet? How do you judge meaning and intention and outcome in this play? How do we speak to this ghostly text? Indeed, were Horatio merely what Marcellus initially sees him as—a scholar and political insider—the play might look quite different, with a built in interpretation that resolves and solidifies meaning and makes the entire thing completely uninteresting.

But the “singularity” of Horatio’s “place of speech” is considerably more elusive, and much of what is tantalizing in the play emerges because he does not offer a definitive interpretation and does not, thereby, specify his own social standing. Instead, Hamlet’s truant disposition is a dialectical effect of Horatio’s truant disposition, of Horatio’s incompleteness and unknowableness. To define himself, Hamlet must consequently define this “just” man:

```plaintext
horatio: Here, sweet lord, at your service.
hamlet: Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man
        As e’er my conversation coped withal.
horatio: O, my dear lord—
hamlet: Nay, do not think I flatter.
        For what advancement may I hope from thee,
        That no revenue hast but thy good spirits
        To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be
        flattered?
        No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
        And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
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Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish her election,
S’hat sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been
As one in suff’ring all that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards
Hast ta’en with equal thanks; and blessed are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commedelled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune’s finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him
In my heart’s core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.

(3.2.52–73)

Why does Hamlet think he can trust Horatio? Horatio is, as far as Hamlet is concerned, a complete nobody who has “no revenue” but his “good spirits / To feed and clothe” him. This social abjectness authorizes Horatio as interpreter and signals his “election” as one who takes “Fortune’s buffets and rewards” “with equal thanks.” Horatio is, claims Hamlet, not “passion’s slave” who becomes merely a “pipe” for Fortune to play on. This freedom from fortune, Horatio’s tacit reasonableness and justness, is tied inextricably for Hamlet to Horatio’s poverty. Because he is poor, Horatio seems exempt from the world of court and its misdirections. Such poverty provides Hamlet with a disinterested, objective interpreter, someone with an ability to know, finally, the truth of things. As far as Hamlet is concerned, Horatio is not truant; he is quite timely and in his correct place. He is poor, and consequently just. Hamlet transforms the poverty of Horatio into a figure of rationality itself, justly judging Claudius’s reaction. “Poor” for Hamlet does not, or rather, should not, name a specific social or economic position; it names a state of being. Horatio’s ontological poorness is supposed to signal Hamlet’s ontological nobility.

But Hamlet’s words certainly cannot be construed as an objective account of who Horatio really is. They are, rather, an expression of Hamlet’s desire. Hamlet, after all, is nothing if not truant and wandering, and whatever professions of love he expresses for his servant here, he is enlisting Horatio in his own indirections to catch the conscience of the king. Hamlet describes, rather, a figure he wishes to be: not cursed by fortune to set time back into joint, not played upon like a pipe, and not passion’s slave, or worse, in a “dream of passion” (2.2.490). Hamlet must command himself not to flatter the poor (“Do not think I flatter”), for to flatter them effectively erases his own social position.
by making clear that the “Prince” is only a prince in relation to the poor who recognize him as a lord. Though Hamlet wishes to place Horatio in his “heart’s core,” to define the ontology of both of them, he can only “wear” Horatio like a suit of solemn black. Indeed, the encounter teeters on something like social inversion. When Hamlet asks “Why should the poor be flattered,” he puts himself in the position of the obsequious, calculating courtier. But Hamlet will not flatter: not because he rejects courtliness (he is the paradigmatic courtier, according to Ophelia) but rather because Horatio is poor, and Hamlet can receive no “advancement” from him. For a moment, the positions of lord and servant are reversed. Hamlet becomes a servant seeking favor (“What advancement may I hope from thee”?), and Horatio a lord handing it out. But this reversal quickly is rejected: as the alliteration makes clear, only pomp, not the poor, should be licked.

In Horatio, then, we have a number of contradictions. For Hamlet, his position as a disinterested outsider makes him a reliable and just judge. This ontological poverty guarantees and obscures Hamlet’s social position, for it recognizes Hamlet as the one who can determine what, or who, is just. For Marcellus, in contrast, Horatio’s position as an interested insider makes him reliable, at least in terms of politics. We never see, in other words, more than a piece of Horatio’s truant disposition. And yet the very incongruity of Horatio’s disposition—that he is both singular and universal, that he is “just”—authorizes his interpretation throughout the play and transforms him into a figure of interpretation in general. Horatio’s interpretations are grounded in an ontology (poor) that is never identifiable (truant); he is a courtly insider who nevertheless tends to remain on the periphery of court. And Horatio is crucial, finally, because the nobility of Hamlet and Hamlet rests upon, or within, this ghostly character who is both known and unknown.

IV. THUS CRACKS A NOBLE HEART

That Hamlet is obsessed with his own tenuous nobility from the start of the play seems beyond doubt. He bitterly admits to Gertrude in act one scene two that the death of his “noble father” is indeed “common” (1.2.71, 74), but he insinuates not only that her marrying her brother-in-law has made her sexually “common” property but has likewise made her not noble. Complaining about Claudius’ drinking, Hamlet laments that the “dram of evil / Doth all the noble substance often dout” (1.4.36–37). His “How all occasions do inform against
me” soliloquy begins with the existential question “What is a man” (4.4.33) but it gradually transforms into a question of what it means to be “great” (4.4.53). And most famously, the fundamental question of humanity, ontology itself, may be “to be, or not to be,” but Hamlet is more concerned with a socially specific reaction to this predicament: “Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing end them” (3.1.56–60; my emphasis). Hamlet’s very being sits awkwardly contemplating whether true nobility suffers or “take[s] arms” as his father did. This obsession with his social standing at the conclusion of the play centers in particular on Hamlet’s “wounded name” (5.2.327), the adjective itself evoking the military terms of his father’s royal exploits. If Hamlet’s name is wounded in the sense that his motives and objectives remain unclear, a “wounded name” is at the same time the disintegrating nobility of his father that he tries to claim in act five (“This is I, / Hamlet the Dane” [5.1.247–48]). A healed name would signal that Hamlet has died in a military exploit and has proven to be, as Fortinbras suggests, “most royal” (5.2.381), a warrior-king like Old Hamlet.

Hamlet understands himself as born to reset this out-of-jointness, but it becomes clear that healing Hamlet’s “name” lies entirely in Horatio’s hands:

**HAMLET**: I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time—as this fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest—O, I could tell you—
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

**HORATIO**: Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here’s yet some liquor left.

**HAMLET**: As th’ art a man,
Give me the cup. Let go. By heaven, I’ll ha’t!
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in they heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

(5.2.316–32)

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“Unsatisfied,” of course, is a pretty accurate description of how many readers and viewers of *Hamlet* have felt, for there is very little in the way of solution or explanation offered. Hamlet’s madness remains enigmatic. And one reason the play remains so bewildering is because Horatio does not—or at least not exactly—report Hamlet’s story. Rather than healing Hamlet’s name, Horatio initially tries to kill himself, denying his own position in the world of the play. When he claims that “I am more an antique Roman than a Dane,” he insists upon his virtuous role as a classical scholar of Senecan stoicism. In this light, when Fortinbras appears and asks “Where is this sight?” Horatio responds, in fine scholarly fashion, with a dialectical question: “What is it you would see?” (5.2.345). And yet by agreeing to remain “in this harsh world,” Horatio acknowledges that he is in fact also a Dane; that is, he acknowledges that he is the means by which Hamlet, and perhaps nobility in general, will continue to live in the world. “What is it you would see” means, in this sense, that Horatio will show whatever nobles like Fortinbras want to see. Horatio’s continued presence at the end of the play guarantees his position as the poor observer who dialectically enforces the nobility of Hamlet and Fortinbras. At this moment, “now,” a specifically “noble heart” “cracks” (5.2.342). Horatio’s continued presence guarantees Hamlet’s nobility, but Hamlet’s acknowledgement of the necessity of that presence destroys the very nobility Horatio’s report would guarantee.

This cracking of nobility, its instability and tenuousness, pervades act five. Despite the presence of a multitude of deceased bodies, the act focuses less on death as a universal trait of humanity than upon the death of a conception of social greatness. Act five scene one begins with the two clowns unpacking the social implications of Ophelia’s death and burial: “If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o’ Christian burial” (5.1.23–24). Death, the second clown makes clear, operates differently for different social classes. At this moment something like a classic class analysis starts to take shape: both religion and the law function merely to legitimate a ruling class. Hovering throughout the scene is the slogan, around since at least the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt, “When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” The only law is “crownier’s quest law” (5.1.22), the pun on coroner and crown reinforcing the notion that the law is merely the “quest” of nobles for social domination. In this radically leveling sense, gravediggers hold up “Adam’s profession,” because they were “the first that ever bore arms” (5.1.33, 31). In place of military weaponry or a coat of arms, digging becomes a sign of a truer, more
foundational, social superiority: “There is no ancient gentlemen but gard’ners, ditchers, and gravediggers” (5.1.29–30).21

Yet the gravedigger and his associate turn out to be no revolutionaries. Their position, socially and theatrically, is more complex than simple class antagonism. The clown’s final answer to his own riddle (“What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?”) returns us again to a sort of critique. Gravediggers build stronger because, of man-made productions, only graves last. But of course this is not true, for we are watching the gravedigger dig up graves. If graves last till doomsday, then it would seem that doomsday has arrived. Figuratively, the effects of the clowns’ speech is to dig up graves—to undermine secure notions of existence and replace them with questions of practice. The gravedigger moves away from the ontological question with which the play opens (“who’s there”) to a more practical question: “What is he.” One is defined, for the gravedigger, not by “who” one is but by “what” one does. The gravediggers set in motion, then, what a young Karl Marx famously termed in a letter to Arnold Ruge a “ruthless criticism of everything existing.”22 This ruthless criticism differs from traditional ideological critique by insisting upon its inclusion in its own practice: in response to Hamlet’s question about whose grave this is, the gravedigger responds “mine” (5.1.114). He is not distinct from the grave he digs; as “sexton” (5.1.152) he is defined by his occupation, not his essence.

Just as the sexton digs up graves, so too the interaction of Hamlet and Horatio continues the deconstruction of beginnings and endings. Hamlet remarks on the clown’s apparent insensitivity, that he “sings in gravemaking,” and Horatio replies that “custom hath made it in him a property of easiness” (5.1.61–3) Hamlet quickly picks up on the phrase’s social overtones, for there is nothing “easy” about the property of the gravemaker’s labor-intensive profession: “The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense” (5.1.62–66), he insists. Only those without calluses on their hands have the capacity, Lord Hamlet argues, to have a “sense,” both a physical sensation but also a thought, which is “daintier.” But “daintier” also implies self-criticism and increasing self-consciousness on Hamlet’s part: only those who do no work are deluded enough to believe in the daintiness of politeness or the superiority of their own thinking. In relation to the gravedigger, then, Hamlet discovers a clearer “sense” of his own lack of calluses, the limitations of his thinking. While there is no one that Hamlet cannot out pun or out quibble elsewhere in the play, the gravedigger marks a performance Hamlet cannot escape: “How absolute the knave is! We
must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us” (5.1.129–30). “Us” here means Hamlet and Horatio, but it also means those with uncalloused hands (perhaps a sense of a royal we lurks here as well). Hamlet’s increasing awareness of his dying social position frames his more general reactions to the skulls that the gravedigger throws up out of the grave. Far from universal humanity, Hamlet describes the ends of quite specifically uncalloused, daintier people: politicians, courtiers, gentle ladies, lawyers, and lawyers who are great buyers of land (we are about to meet Osric, who “hath much land, and fertile” [5.2.72–73]). And of course Hamlet himself, “the courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword” (3.1.151), is one of these people as well, which is part of what bothers him so much. The graveyard scene consequently literalizes Hamlet’s remark to Polonius about walking out of the air and into his grave.

What he meets in this grave is a skull. The skull is the means by which pieces of Hamlet’s identity are secured—his age, his relation to the Fortinbras subplot, the projection of a childhood that differentiates this newly mature Hamlet. It is also the means by which Hamlet’s nobility becomes again wounded and unstable, for the skull marks the literal death of the other of an older nobility, the court jester. Indeed, Hamlet quickly sees Yorick’s skull not so much as a sign of his own mortality but as the death of a class marker: “Dost thou think Alexander looked o’ this fashion i’ th’ earth?” (5.1.187–88). What specifically concerns Hamlet here is the death of a warrior king and the collapse of the social distinctions that make kings kings: “To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till a find it stopping a bunghole?” (5.1.192–94). “Base” does not mean merely dust; it means socially lower, the “base” or grounding that “noble dust” becomes. Horatio interjects—“’Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so” (5.1.195–96)—and this is the Horatio who is, often enough, nobility’s apologist, who frets in act four scene five that Ophelia “may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds” (4.5.14–15) and who worries about restoring order at the end of the play (“let this same be presently preformed, / Even while men’s minds are wild, lest more mischance / On plots and errors happen” [5.2.376–78]). But Hamlet sees his own impeding death, the collapse of his social position, with growing clarity: “Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away” (5.1.203–4). Hamlet recognizes that he will not be, cannot be, a Caesar, or even an Old Hamlet. The moment of such noble warriors has past, the corruption and innobility that serve as the “base” of nobil-
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ity finally emerging, coming to light, in Claudius: “But soft, but soft awhile! Here comes the king—” (5.1.207) who enters on cue.

If history occurs first as tragedy, it repeats itself as farce. Hamlet’s bizarre encounter with Laertes in and around Ophelia’s grave enacts the greatness that Hamlet has been so concerned about throughout the play, but it is a greatness that is great for an eggshell. As the procession enters, Hamlet notes the “maimed rites” of the funeral ceremony, but there is a broader social significance here connected to Ophelia being buried in a grave that once held the court jester and commoner Yorick. Vanessa Harding notes that “[i]n the larger civic frame, funerals were explicit re-presentations of order, both demonstrating the hierarchical order of society and invoking the orderly behaviour of a coherent and compliant populace.”23 Yet it is striking that in Ophelia’s funeral the hierarchical order of society occurs so baldly and badly as to undermine its own enforcement. What is “maimed,” in other words, is the “hierarchical order of society,” which seems to be less hierarchical than unstable. As the Doctor of Divinity notes, the funeral is the result of “that great command [that] o’ersways the order” (5.1.216–218)—“o’ersways” in the sense of both overruling and overturning “the order.” At this moment of overswaying, the histrionics begin. Laertes leaps into the grave to catch his sister “once more in my arms” (5.1.240), and (if one accepts Q1’s stage direction) Hamlet jumps in after him to proclaim “This is I, / Hamlet the Dane.”24 His assertion of his paternal right, his self-nomination as the royal warrior, the securing of his identity, borders on the ludic. Equivocation undoes him quite. The birth of Hamlet’s royal self here is its death. The scene is effectively a parody of the “valiant Hamlet” who, Horatio tells us, “did slay this Fortinbras” (1.1.84, 86) in the play’s story of origin. In place of military prowess, Hamlet junior offers culinary daring:

\[
\text{hamlet: } \begin{align*}
\text{'Swounds, show me what thou' do.} \\
\text{Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?} \\
\text{Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?} \\
\text{I'll do't.}
\end{align*}
\]

(5.1.264–67)

The scene makes a mockery of any claims, by anyone, to royal or noble status. Such a claim, the scene implies, is little more than “leaping in her grave.” Royal violence is sublimated into histrionic games—first the grappling in Ophelia’s grave, and finally the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.25
Act five scene 1 digs up, then, the process of socially distinguishing, the unstable differentiation that produces things and ideas. Let me turn momentarily to the excellent reading of this scene by Richard Halpern to make this point clearer. Using Yorick's skull as a figure to critique Derrida's *Specters of Marx* as, effectively, young-Hegelian idealism, Halpern argues that

[for Marx, the ‘real’ is defined, on the one hand, by ‘its effect and influence on the development of men,’ that is, by its social effectivity and not by an ontological determination which would ally it with ‘substance’ or ‘essence.’ But it is defined on the other hand (and in a complementary fashion) by its practical imperviousness to the philosopher's discourse. The real, for Marx, is that which is not perturbed by critique. It is a Thing whose place is not jostled by our symbolizations of it, one of the ‘things between heaven and earth’ which are not ‘accounted for in your philosophy.’ The skull or *caput mortuum* which calmly and blankly returns the philosopher's gaze embodies the solidity of a real which maddeningly persists beyond our attempts to think away its contradictions.

Halpern’s first point is crucial, that the “real” consists of its “social effectivity” rather than an essential “substance’ or ‘essence.” This “sensuous practice” is the remarkable feature of Marx’s dialectical materialism and distinguishes it sharply from other materialisms that, again in Halpern’s words, focus “on objects rather than on human activity or practice.”27 A materialism that imagines that the real or truth lies in the object itself is, Marx stresses in the “Theses on Feuerbach,” simply another form of idealism.28

But Halpern’s second point borders, though never quite ventures into, this idealism when he insists that the “real,” in this case Yorick’s skull, “is a Thing whose place is not jostled by our symbolizations of it.” Halpern substitutes “our symbolizations of it” for Marx’s phrase “a basis which is not in the least disturbed, in its effect and influence on the development of men, by the fact that these philosophers revolt against it as ‘self-consciousness’ and the ‘unique.’” Yet clearly “our symbolizations of” real practice matter when they are directed at understanding what Marx calls the “production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness”; otherwise, all reflection, philosophical or dialectical material, would be a pointless activity, and any critique at all would be impossible.29 The trouble, then, is not “symbolizations” of practice but idealist conceptions of “self-consciousness.” Even in his stress on “social effectivity,” Halpern seems to imagine a consciousness that looks at a

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The real world that remains indifferent to its cognitive activity; consequently, the world and cognitive activity remain distinct, separate things. Marx’s point here, I take it, is that consciousness is part of the world, an integral component of social production. Halpern’s Lacan-inflected Real may be indifferent to what we think about it, but it also resides, so to speak, inside our heads. Critique consists of coming to understand not only the real as “sensuous practice” but also of understanding “consciousness” as fully implicated in and part of that practice.

The “materiality” of the skull, then, consists not of its “solidity” but its participation in differentiation. How do we even know whose skull this is? It is only identified by the gravedigger; Hamlet, not surprisingly, doesn’t recognize it. Given that Renaissance graves were regularly unmarked, it seems likely that the only reason the gravedigger might know whose skull this is is because he put it there. The skull is less an object than a process of social differentiation. The gravedigger’s classification of the skull delineates his position, delineates Hamlet’s position, and gives us a crucial temporal marker in the play (when Old Hamlet defeated Fortinbras; when Young Hamlet was born). As distinctions, the gravedigger’s symbolizations of the skull clearly matter, and the solidity of the skull itself comes under attack (to Hamlet’s horror) by the gravedigger’s spade. Through, around, and about the skull we see the sensuous practice that Marx insists is the ground of all consciousness, but it is a ground that has no definite stability, no solidity at all. And yet it is real and material in another sense, for it has a social effectivity. In the gravedigger scene, then, and really throughout Hamlet, a new form of social distinction emerges. As Hamlet’s noble name slowly dies from its wound, it is replaced by the distinction of Horatio. And Horatio, like Marx’s notion of “materiality” itself, is simultaneously embodied and disembodied, a “just” interpreter authorized by his putative distance from the object and the action, apparently only a spectator to Hamlet’s oration on Yorick’s skull.

V O WHAT A NOBLE MIND IS HERE O’ERTHROWN:
THE SCHOLASTIC FALLACY

The close of the play is Horatio’s most important moment, and his interaction with Fortinbras returns us to the question of the changing of the guard with which the play begins. Fortinbras too, like Hamlet, needs an other to define himself against, and initially, perhaps, Horatio seems to start fulfilling his assigned role as interpreter and reinforcer of noble hegemony:
horatio: But since, so jump upon this bloody question,
You from the Polack wars, and you from England,
Are here arrived, give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view,
And let me speak to th’ yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall’n on th’inventors’ heads. All this can I
Truly deliver.

As Katherine Eggert points out, Horatio “seems truly to remember
Hamlet only as a revenge tragedy” that fantasizes about reconstructing a
myth of kingship as “living, stable, and coherent.” Horatio’s promised
tale functions much like his continued presence as a Dane—it guarantees the nobility of Hamlet and heals his wounded name: Hamlet
remains “Hamlet the Dane.” This conservative Horatio is reinforced by
Fortinbras’s response: “Let us haste to hear it. / And call the noblest to
the audience” (5.2.369–70). Horatio’s story will be a story about a noble,
told to nobles, which reinforces nobility. And indeed, Horatio quickly
reverts to the kiss-ass that he appears to be in act four scene five when
he convinces Gertrude she should speak with Ophelia. Horatio advises
Fortinbras to bear Hamlet “High on a stage” “lest more mischance /
On plots and errors happen” (5.2.377–78). Horatio functions here not
simply to maintain peace but to conserve noble rule as well.

And yet there remains a socially disruptive possibility in the very
fact that nobles like Hamlet or Fortinbras require Horatio’s interpreta-
tion. Some of this disruption is apparent in the odd fact that Horatio
speaks at all at the end of the play: he is the only character on stage
who is not a courtier or noble (Osric is an interesting problem), and
he seems nearly as in control of the scene as Fortinbras. Indeed, one
reasonable way of construing this scene is as a tacit, or maybe not so
tacit, battle of wills between Horatio and Fortinbras over the true
meaning of Hamlet’s name. Fortinbras announces succinctly and sol-
dier-like that Hamlet ought to be brought to the state “like a soldier,”
“For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal;
and for his passage / The soldiers’ music and the rite of war / Speak
loudly for him” (5.2.379, 380–83). The soldiers’ music speaks loudly for
Fortinbras, anyway, for in controlling the interpretation of what Hamlet,
and Hamlet, means, Fortinbras endeavors to define and reinforce his
own royal rule and “rights of memory.” Erased from this account is the mysteriously multiple Hamlet. The “courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, and sword” is reduced to an old-fashioned definition of royalty as the warrior class.

In contrast, perhaps it is the multiple Hamlet that Horatio promises (or threatens) to describe when the body “High on a stage” is placed and Horatio speaks “to th’ yet unknowing world.” Horatio seems, for a moment, to attempt to speak truth to power here—using the promise of a play, and the Globe Theater, as a forum that addresses not merely the “noblest” but also the “unknowing world.” This almost democratic promise is especially apparent at the end of the first quarto version, a text which seems to imagine its relationship to a readership differently than Q2 or F1:

horatio: Content yourselves. I’ll show to all the ground,
The first beginning of this tragedy.  
Let there a scaffold be reared up in the market-place  
And let the state of the world be there,  
Where you shall hear such a sad story told  
That never mortal man could more unfold.32

There is a double meaning on “ground” here: both the foundation of the “Tragedy,” but also the sense that Horatio will speak to all the ground—all the groundlings, to everyone. This ground is a much more socially specific version of Q2’s and F1’s “th’ yet unknowing world.” The play will not be caviar to the general—will not be the sort of play Hamlet himself seems to like—but will be Horatio’s play, a play directed at multiple audiences and not the exclusive purview of a noble elite.

We should not overstate this democratic vision. The “justness” of Horatio’s interpretation continues, especially in Q2 and F1, to justify at least the possibility of noble rule, and Fortinbras, not Horatio, always gets the final word. Nevertheless, in all three early printed versions of the ending of Hamlet, something clearly has changed from the beginning: some changing of the guard has been enacted, some historical shift accomplished.33 What has changed? I want to try to explain this transformation by returning to the opening quotation from Bourdieu. One of the things that Bourdieu is getting at in Pascalian Meditations is an origin of what he terms the scholastic fallacy, the notion that academic inquiry is disinterested—unbiased, objective, perhaps just. In order to explain the emergence of this scholastic fallacy, Bourdieu turns to the means by which the economy was able to become a dis-

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distinct thing—a discipline, an object of analysis, a specialized discourse, a realm of pure “self-interested calculation.” This objectification of the economic only becomes possible, Bourdieu insists, through a dialectical process whereby other “various universes of symbolic production were able to constitute themselves as closed, separate microcosms in which thoroughly symbolic, pure and (from the point of view of the economic economy) disinterested actions were performed.” At the moment when other forms of symbolic capital—say, literature, or drama, or scholarship—deny their economic interests, the economic itself becomes an object of analysis, a thing apart from the realm of scholarship or literature. And this separateness, in turn, reinforces the putative autonomy and disinterest of symbolic capital such as literature.

How does this relate to *Hamlet* and to Horatio? Unlike *King Lear*, there does not seem to be much in *Hamlet* that is straightforwardly economic. The first place to begin is to recognize that by “economic” Bourdieu does not mean the sort of number crunching that we typically associate with economics—that is, the compulsion to include figures, charts, and statistics whenever one wishes to speak of economic realities. Such a mathematical fallacy, so to speak, gives the impression that the economy is a thing free of discourse, a trans-historical certainty open to scientific scrutiny. Instead, such a reified realm is the outcome of the process Bourdieu is interested in examining, the creation of the “economic economy.” Second, I also do not think Bourdieu means what is often termed commercialism, the proliferation of trade, a notion that the appearance of a merchant in an early modern play or poem must signify the spreading of an innate, if inchoate, instinct to trade. Instead, by economic I think Bourdieu means not a thing but the processes by which various forms of capital are produced and distributed—the acts of social differentiation by which any social configuration comes into existence. A more traditional scholarship terms this realm “social class,” or what Marx calls “a certain mode of co-operation . . . [that] is itself a ‘productive force’” in *The German Ideology*. Bourdieu’s work makes a variety of crucial departures from Marx’s understanding of social class, but I think that when he describes the objectification of the economic as such, one thing that Bourdieu is getting at is the denial of the process of social differentiation—the denial of what is traditionally called social class. When “the economic economy” becomes purportedly the only place that interested economic activity occurs, other forms of symbolic capital are able to constitute themselves as “disinterested.” And by “disinterested,” Bourdieu means that they deny their position in economic production, deny that they have a definite
social position in production, and deny, consequently, that they speak from a particular position at all. The result of this process is that, on the one hand, economics seems to be primarily the realm where class divisions function. Here is an origin of the peculiar way that class and economics are routinely aligned, as if they were nearly synonyms. At the same time, literature or scholarship become realms that seem to be free, or seem that they ought to be free, of social class altogether. The scholastic fallacy is the idea that scholarship is, or ought to be, or could be, objective, just, and judged only according to merit.

It is at this point that I think Bourdieu’s argument becomes useful for *Hamlet*. For one clear difference between Horatio’s final speech in Q1 and in Q2 and F1 is the stress in Q1 on his position “in the market-place.” Instead of asking that Hamlet’s body—the play itself, so to speak—be placed “High on a stage,” Horatio asks that a “scaffold be reared up.” Instead of a spectacle that reinforces the nobility of Hamlet through an old-fashioned revenge tragedy, rearing up a scaffold in the market-place shows Hamlet and *Hamlet* “to all the ground.” It stresses that the “ground” of the prince, the play, and the interpretation of the play is the “market-place,” the on-going distribution of social and symbolic and economic capital. Rather than purporting to be “disinterested,” or even “just,” Horatio promises to place the play back into its “first beginning”—the process of social differentiation. Hamlet and his noble position become literally the product of market relations, both in the sense that the play itself recalls its economic existence (putting a scaffold up in the market-place is in this sense synonymous with “putting on a play” by, say, a traveling company of actors), and in the sense that we see that all social titles and class are ultimately products of the social division of labor. In calling for a scaffold, the character of Horatio is also reminding the audience that he is a “player” who is, at that very moment, at work. This reading would, I think, constitute something like a classic Marxist analysis of the play.

And yet I think Bourdieu’s argument allows us to complicate and extend this analysis quite a bit. What, after all, is this “market-place” that promises to ground all meaning? By naming this very beginning “the market-place,” Horatio is in Q1 setting in motion the process of economic objectification that appears in Q2 and F1 as social mystification when Horatio will speak to a noble audience. In other words, Q1 and Q2/F1 really are not, at least at this moment, as different as they initially appear. For “the market-place” seems to be the “real” ground of the play, a realm of “pure self-interest,” the location where social and class divisions can exist and become clear and apparent. Even

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as Q1 undermines the social pretension of Q2 and F1 (the urge to “call the noblest to the audience”), it participates in the same process whereby sorts of knowledge are divided. By insisting on speaking in the market-place, Horatio appears, once again, disinterested and objective—just Horatio, now promising to speak the plain truth of pure economic fact. But this Horatio is no more disinterested than the figure who cuddles up to Hamlet and Fortinbrass and Gertrude. In both cases, the social position of Horatio remains tantalizingly unclear. Locating the truth of the play in the market-place is simply the flip-side of locating the truth of the play in a noble audience: both moves mystify the process by which the authorization of a social position that can interpret is produced.

Horatio remains, even in Q1, a specter. In a play haunted by a ghost who seems to direct much of the action, Horatio is a ghost who promises to interpret much of the action. In a play in which the patrimony of aristocratic rule fails to renew itself, the new ruler of the play is Horatio. And he rules not because of his definite social position—his noble blood, his known-ness—but because of his apparent lack of social position: his poverty, his disinterest, his justness. Here is the changing of the guard in the play, the movement from a social system authorized by known positions to a social system authorized by unknowable, disinterested positions—a new Denmark or new England in which “the singularity of a place of speech” is never secured. Let me close by putting this argument as bluntly as possible. Social position in Hamlet—class—is not a given, a pre-existing structure that becomes unearthed and located in the empirical truth of economic fact. Instead, social position is a never-ending, unstable process of making social distinctions. Social class in the play always deconstructs itself. This differentiation continues to be productive. “Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.” Marcellus’s injunction retains its grip on the scholastic imagination because, like Horatio, scholars remain classed subjects: always interested, but required to appear objective to interpret at all.

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NOTES

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4 See Julia Reinhard Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard, *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993): “critics neither simply read *Hamlet* objectively, diagnosing its problems, nor project their fantasies onto the play in a purely subjectivist criticism, but rather take up *positions in fantasy* laid out by the play” (86). See also Richard Halpern, “An Impure History of Ghosts: Derrida, Marx, Shakespeare,” in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2001), 31–52. Halpern adds that if readers “are in some sense allotted fantasy positions by the play,” it is a “play that they have played a role in constructing” (32).

5 I understand this reading as an instance of the well-known formulae in Marxist and poststructural critiques of reason. These critiques always eventually show that reason is instrumental: it mystifies and naturalizes particular interests, rather than only functioning as an objective constant. Two preeminent examples would be Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (New York: Continuum, 1982); and Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981). Elizabeth Harvey shows that something similar is happening with early modern understandings of the rational soul in works such as John Donne’s *Metempsychosis* and the House of Alma episode in book 2 of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. By invoking the Pythagorean concept of the transmigration of the soul, these works, argues Harvey, deconstruct the superiority of the rational soul over animal being famously articulated in such humanist works as Pico della Mirandola’s “Oration on the Dignity of Man.” See Harvey, “Nomadic Souls: Pythagoras, Spenser, Donne,” forthcoming in *Spenser Studies*.

6 See in particular the fourth entry for “just(e)” as an adjective: “Of persons: exact; of a craftsman’s hands or eyes: marked or characterized by precision; of weight or measure: exact, precise; (b) of clothing, armor: having correct dimensions, fitting; (c) of places: exactly located; (d) of reports, narrations, calculations: accurate, correct” Middle English Dictionary online, s.v., just(e), http://quod.lib.umich.edu.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/m/med (accessed 24 February 2006). On the emergence of criticism as disinterested, compare Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984).


8 To give some representative examples, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), Stephen Greenblatt notes that “with the partial exception of Wyatt,” all the writers he considers are “middle class” (9), but this remark is mostly a point of departure for his focus on the process of self-fashioning. In *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ.

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Specters of Horatio Press, 1989), William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden note that “[s]ince Marx, our eyes cannot miss the patent obsession of Renaissance culture throughout the period with social status and its insignia” (46); nevertheless, they discuss questions of class in two pages. The concept of class might be said to underpin much of the conceptual shift from court to nation in Richard Helgerson’s Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), but Helgerson mostly mentions in passing issues such as Shakespeare’s “social insecurity” (203). More recently, in Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), Wendy Wall traces “a counter-narrative to criticism that defines early modern national identity as a court-based phenomenon,” by stressing a “‘middle class’ national identity” (6–7), but her interest lies primarily, as the title of her book indicates, with staging domesticity, not with staging class. For recent, non-Renaissance criticism that has re-enlivened understandings of class, see, for example, Walter Benn Michaels, The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); and Rita Felski, “Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame and the Lower Middle Class,” PMLA 115 (2000): 1–25.

See Fredric Jameson, “Marx’s Purloined Letter,” in Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx, ed. Michael Sprinker (New York: Verso, 1999): “[t]o denounce class, and concepts of ‘class affiliation,’ is . . . part of this primal self-definition within all the Marxisms themselves, which have always wanted to make sure you did not think they believed anything so simple-minded or orthodoxy reductive” (46–47); “it would be a great mistake for Marxism to abandon this extraordinarily rich and virtually untouched field of analysis on the grounds that class categories were somehow old-fashioned and Stalinist” (49).


Thanks to Bruce Smith for reminding me that the actor playing Marcellus is often thought to be one of the putative memorial reconstructors of Q1, so that the influence of the character may have been substantial.


G. F. Bradby, in The Problems of Hamlet (New York: Haskell House, 1965), suggests that “Shakespeare held two different views about Horatio” (17); he seems to be both a Dane and a foreigner who is not familiar with the customs (1.4.7). J. Dover Wilson, in What Happens in Hamlet, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1951), responds to Bradby by admitting that this “double role involves some incon-
sistency, but . . . only a very indifferent playwright will allow an audience to perceive such joins in his flats” (235).

18 On scholarly focus on questions of consciousness in the play, see Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007). De Grazia usefully records the emergence of *Hamlet* as a definitive modern play, but her desire to see the play as un- or pre-modern may be as unavoidably anachronistic as the urge to see it as the birth of modern consciousness.


21 See also Jenkins, ed., who notes that “whereas the rhyme [‘Who was then the gentleman?’] implies that in Adam’s time there were no gentlemen, the Clown’s speech wittily inverts this by implying that there were none but gentlemen” (378, 5.1.31n). On the origin and development of the concept of “true nobility,” see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), 1:236–41. Skinner notes that the slogan appears in John Heywood’s play *Gentleness and Nobility* (1512). Skinner develops these remarks further in *Visions of Politics*, 3 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 2:213–44.


24 Q1’s stage directions in scene 16 read “He leaps in after Laertes,” and the notion that Hamlet leaps into the grave likewise finds support in the anonymous elegy on Richard Burbage: “Oft have I seen him leap into the grave” (quoted in G. R. Hibbard, ed., *Hamlet*, by Shakespeare [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987], 15).


26 Halpern, “An Impure History,” 49.

27 Halpern, “An Impure History,”


30 See David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997): “Gentle and aristocratic families used plaques and statuary to commemorate their departed, but ordinary people were soon lost to memory. In most cases . . . the individuality of the deceased dissolved, becoming blended in the churchyard with the community of departed Christians. Even a plain wooden marker was unusual. It was considered noteworthy in 1606 when Humphrey Vincent of Northolt, Middlesex, promised to ‘lay a plank upon his father’s grave because it was his will upon his deathbed, and he took order with the carpenter to make it convenient.’ Families of the middling sort sometimes erected ephemeral memorials of perishable material, and tidy-minded bishops sought to have them removed. Is your churchyard pestered and cloyed with frames of wood, piles
of brick, or stones laid over the grave?’ asked Matthew Wren of the Diocese of Ely in 1638. Permanent outdoor headstones were rare before the eighteenth century, even for gentry, who were especially protective of their status and reputation” (470).


33 Despite their important differences, the three texts of *Hamlet* are more alike than they are different. See Lander: “Though Q1 and Q2 each reveal an internal coherence, they are not entirely independent versions, yet neither are they merely accidental variants of some essential *Hamlet*. Recent revisionist efforts to restore the ‘integrity’ of textual versions that have suffered conflation at the hands of eclectic editors would invest each instantiation of a text with its own inviolable identity. As valuable and bracing as these arguments have been, they appear, at times, to merely celebrate difference by venerating the material book in all its splendid idiosyncrasy” (123).


35 For a bracing critique of commercialism, see Wood, 11–33.