

“The King is a Thing”: *Hamlet* and the Prostheses of Nobility

by

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Abstract

The language used in critical readings of *Hamlet* is rife with implicitly teleological terms: according to many critics, and the ghost of King Hamlet, the story of his father's murder and Claudius' succession requires Hamlet to *do* something. I ask, why should Hamlet kill his uncle, revenge his father, correct his mother, become king, marry Ophelia, and produce heirs to rule when he is gone? While Hamlet's inaction is often described as delay or paralysis, I suggest that the Danish prince resists teleology through his studied ambivalence towards dynasty: land-owning, child-bearing, wars and marriage. Building on recent theoretical and historical work by scholars like Lee Edelman, Will Fisher, Margreta de Grazia and Madhavi Menon, I suggest that *Hamlet*, through the interventions of its main character, thwarts the assumption that the relationship between a nobleman and his land is natural, that the desire for possession and rule is inherent. Combining de Grazia's invaluable historicism with Fisher's discussion of prostheses, I read the Renaissance nobleman as a prosthetic creature, physically and politically embodied by his marriage, his children, his land. In delaying the revenge he has been called upon to carry out, in hesitating to take up the crown, Hamlet defers the prostheses of nobility, and opens up a space from which to question the dynastic project.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Introduction: Hamlet and Teleology	1
Chapter One: “Things Rank and Gross in Nature”	9
Chapter Two: “The Bud of Britain”	19
Chapter Three: “The King is a Thing”	32
Chapter Four: “Let’s Talk of Graves”	39
Conclusion	54
Works Cited	58

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для Антона, потому что он пришел со мной.

Introduction: *Hamlet* and Teleology

Margreta de Grazia: What has *Hamlet* to do with the forward thrust of world history? (“Teleology” 253).

Hamlet: Nothing (3.2.13).

The language used in critical readings of *Hamlet* is rife with implicitly teleological terms. By “teleology” I mean not only the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition, which suggests “the doctrine or study of ends or final causes, esp. as related to the evidences of design or purpose in nature”: I am also thinking of Madhavi Menon’s use of the term to denote the all-too common sense that “everything [has] a point,” that “the ends [ought to] justify the means and reveal them to have been purposeful all along” (“Venus” 491). Teleology, Menon says, is often associated with reproduction: in fact, it “names the causal link between two generational and generative moments in history when the child, though he may well be father to the man, is also the final design of his progenitor” (“Venus” 496).

In many readings, and according to the ghost of King Hamlet, the “horrible, most horrible” story of his father’s murder and Claudius’ succession requires Hamlet to *do* something (1.5.76). “[I]f thou has nature in thee,” the ghost tells his son, “bear it not” – as Prince, Hamlet must revenge his father, become king, “set right” what has gone wrong in the kingdom (1.5.80-81). As the king’s son, Hamlet has been preordained for this position, and his teleological duties involve not only carrying on his father’s line, preserving the family estate, and marrying well in order to produce an heir: he must also ensure that Denmark is a productive, “purposeful” nation rather than “a couch for luxury and damned incest” (1.5.83). Revenge depends, says the ghost, on whether Hamlet has “nature” in him; this “naturalization” of the values of dynasty is common to many other

characters in the play. Hamlet is supposed to achieve a certain end: dynastic success. And the means by which he achieves it ought to work, clearly and practically, towards this goal.

The language used by many Shakespeare scholars reveals a similarly teleological attitude both towards the play, and to other scholarly responses: Hamlet “fails,” he “delays,” he “hesitates,” the play contains a “stalled plot,” notable for the “hero’s inability to act” (Sedinger 456). Likewise, readings of *Hamlet* are subject to “trenchant critique” if they are suspected to be “interminable,” if they are seen to lack a “matter” that “puts an end to fruitless thinking” (Sedinger 456). And yet why should not critical inquiry be interminable? Why should it bear fruit? And, notwithstanding the ghost and the multitude of scholars who echo his demands for progression towards climax, why should Hamlet kill his uncle, revenge his father, correct his mother, become king, marry Ophelia, and produce heirs to rule when he is gone?

These questions may seem counterintuitive, if not downright contrary. Yet an argument for the anti-teleological nature of *Hamlet* – for the ambivalent attitude this play, through the interventions of its main character, takes towards teleology in the form of dynasty – is enabled not only through Hamlet’s own critical thought, but also through the work of Shakespeare scholars like Menon and Margreta de Grazia. The latter challenges readers of *Hamlet* to move away from the tradition of interpreting the play through ideas about the progression of society towards a modernist crisis of consciousness. Menon, who also mentions these modernist readings of Shakespeare’s work, discusses the anti-teleological leanings of “Venus and Adonis,” providing the inspiration for a similar study of *Hamlet*.

Hamlet, I argue, is anti-teleological in his studied ambivalence towards dynasty: land-owning, child-bearing, wars and marriage. Much of my analysis works by building on de Grazia's reading of *Hamlet*, despite the fact that I depart from her findings in several ways. Even as she sets out to remove problematic narratives about Hamlet's place in the canon, de Grazia's historicism ends up valorizing teleology in the form of dynasty. De Grazia's critique of traditional *Hamlet* hermeneutics is scrupulous and important; and yet, in explaining Hamlet's behaviour primarily through recourse to historical information, her own account tends to render Hamlet too smoothly intelligible, to resolve those ambiguities, ambivalences and agonies which critics have been wont to read as "modern."

De Grazia attempts to take the focus off Hamlet's "deep and complex inwardness" (which, she says, was identified as the play's "salient feature" around 1800 and has dominated interpretation ever since) in favour of a historical discussion of "dispossession" in Renaissance England (*Hamlet* 5). In the process, de Grazia provides an in-depth survey of responses to Hamlet's "deep and complex inwardness" which is often described in terms of "delay," as scholars try to understand why he does not kill his uncle, redeem his mother, revenge his mother and become king all in one fell swoop. "Critics began to realize," de Grazia says, "that the intelligibility of Hamlet depended on" this question of delay, and "theories began to proliferate" (*Hamlet* 256-7). These theories usually explain Hamlet's "inaction" by suggesting that he is "paralyzed" through "excessive thought."

In a 1926 article entitled "Hamlet's Delay – A Restatement of the Problem," for example, Bernard R. Conrad lists the "the main theories" that seek to explain Hamlet's

hesitation, including work by Johann von Goethe, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Sidney Lee, “Professor Bradley,” and the “Klein-Werder” theory (680). While Conrad disagrees with minor elements in each of these readings, he concludes that they “harmoniz[e] in general tone” and “contain a large measure of truth” (681). These theories agree, says Conrad, that Hamlet is “foiled by introspective workings of the mind,” that his will is prevented “by excess of intellect,” that he “at last almost loses his purpose through his thoughts” (680, 81).

This is the critical tradition that de Grazia insists “has been built on an oversight,” has caused readers to ignore “the premise of the play”: Hamlet’s “dispossession” (*Hamlet* 5, 1). The “promise of the patronymic is broken,” de Grazia points out, when Hamlet II fails to succeed Hamlet I (*Hamlet* 1). This dispossession (which “as far as the [Danish] court is concerned, has taken place legitimately”) would “have been unthinkable in a hereditary monarchy” like early modern England, a society in which “[m]en are commensurate with the acreage they possess, as if their bodies were literally extended by the tracts of land they hold” (*Hamlet* 1, 5).

In *Hamlet without Hamlet*, de Grazia seeks to re-historicize the play by stripping away the multitude of modernist readings of Hamlet, and by foregrounding the cultural practices surrounding land-ownership in Renaissance England. The relationship between a nobleman’s identity and his land is de Grazia’s main focus; she does away with the Hamlet who emerges through readings like Conrad’s, the “modern character with a modern telos,” a man held back by the “stumbling blocks” of “uncompromising materiality which externalize the self-opposition that circumscribes his own subjectivity” (*Hamlet* 256). If *Hamlet* is “the tragedy of a failed teleology,” de Grazia says, Hamlet’s

failure is the failure to re-possess his kingdom (*Hamlet* 256).

While de Grazia does well to discard the metanarrative of Hamlet as proto-modern man, her account remains teleological insofar as Hamlet still fails to attain the goal of dynastic success. Building on recent theoretical work by scholars like Menon, Will Fisher, and Lee Edelman, I suggest that *Hamlet*, through the interventions of its main character, thwarts the assumption that the relationship between a nobleman and his land is natural, that the desire for possession and rule is inherent. Combining de Grazia's invaluable historicism with Fisher's discussion of prostheses, I read the Renaissance nobleman, possessed of land, commensurate with his acreage, as a prosthetic creature, physically and politically embodied by his marriage, his children, his land. In delaying the revenge he has been called upon to carry out, in hesitating to take up the crown, Hamlet defers the prostheses of nobility, and opens up a space from which to question the dynastic project.

In the introduction to *Hamlet without Hamlet*, de Grazia addresses the title of her book, saying that "to suppose [...] that *Hamlet* could be considered without Hamlet is obviously absurd. After all, little would remain: Hamlet either speaks or is spoken about for much of the play" (1). Nonetheless, to consider the play devoid of its main character is in some sense precisely what de Grazia intends to do. De Grazia's desire to "do without" Hamlet is the result of her contention that "the modern Hamlet" is "distinguished by an inner being so transcendent it hardly comes into contact with the play from which it emerges," and has become a "blind spot," obscuring proper historical understanding of the material conditions at work in the play (*Hamlet* 1).

"Hamlet remains perennially in the critical forefront," de Grazia says, "as new

(and newer still) explanations emerge to account for the symptom of delay. The question keeps the play modern, for the modern by definition must always look new, up-to-date, or, better yet, a bit ahead of its time, and Hamlet – once abstracted from plot and absorbed in himself – remains indefinitely open to modernization” (“Teleology” 374). In insisting that Hamlet is not, after all, indefinitely open to modernization, and in her compelling portrayal of the politics and culture of the context in which the play was written, de Grazia offers the necessary reminder not to attribute contemporary interests to characters from ages long past (or at least, to do so no more than we can help). In removing Hamlet, however, de Grazia obscures much of the “matter” of the play, his mischief, his “miching mallecho”: Hamlet’s social commentary (3.2.135).

This thesis represents an attempt to put Hamlet back into *Hamlet*, while avoiding the scholarly pitfalls de Grazia has delineated so well. I am not interested in Hamlet as modern or transcendent. I want to show that his “intransitive inwardness,” far from failing to come into contact with the play from which it emerges, is as compelling and lucid as it is precisely because it exists at the point of contact between a person and his culture (*Hamlet* 1). Hamlet’s famous soliloquies are scathing critiques of just that society, just those relations and priorities, upon which de Grazia wants to focus.

My first chapter responds to one of the organizing metaphors through which de Grazia reads *Hamlet*: the binary opposition she develops between flowers, which are supposed to represent a flourishing, healthy dynasty (in other words, teleological success), and weeds (symbolic of teleological failure) thought to be the result of sin and corruption in the Danish court. I use Menon’s work on teleology to suggest, instead, an anti-teleological (or at least ambivalently teleological) interpretation of these symbols.

Through close-readings of several passages from the play, and through a historical discussion of the flower's symbolic worth in Renaissance England, I argue that *Hamlet* works to break down such easy assumptions about virtue, worth, and productivity.

De Grazia's framework is applicable to other texts, however, and in Chapter Two, I discuss two of these: John Fletcher's *Bonduca* and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. These plays share much with *Hamlet* in terms of plot details and general focus, and yet, unlike the latter play, they represent traditional responses to the threat of dispossession. *Bonduca* fights the Romans after they steal her land and rape her daughters following the death of her husband Prasutagus, and King Edward is deposed by a group of nobles including his own wife, in large part because his love for Gaveston is perceived as deeply harmful for England. These plays focus on families of wealth and power as they struggle to retain or regain their influence in the face of internal and external strife, and de Grazia's focus on possession and dispossession, and her discussion of plant and flowers as metaphors for land-ownership and flourishing dynasty, provide a useful framework through which to read these plays. The title characters of *Bonduca* and *Edward II* struggle to retain the prostheses of possession, and represent their rule as natural, right and organic.

In Chapter Three, returning to my contention that *Hamlet* undermines the naturalization of dynasty, I draw upon Fisher's book, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* to read the Elizabethan or Jacobean nobleman as a prosthetic creature. Fisher outlines the complex, dialectical relationship between accessories such as hair and handkerchiefs and the gendered subject in early modern England. "[C]lothing," Fisher explains, "was considered constitutive" of gender, as were

codpieces and beards (13). I modify Fisher's discussion to explore the figure of the nobleman as constructed: in the abstract, through social discourses and relations of power, and in concrete terms, through the prostheses of possession. The nobleman is materialized through his land and heirs, and through activities like marriage and war, which produce sons and daughters and allow him to acquire tracts of land. I outline the prosthetic nature of the person Hamlet is supposed to become on the death of his father, showing that Hamlet's hesitation to take revenge amounts to a deferral of these prostheses, and is, consequently, an opportunity to critique what Edelman calls "the genealogical fantasy" (42).

In Chapter Four, I examine in more detail Hamlet's rejection of wars of conquest, marriage, reproduction, and the ownership of land. I discuss Hamlet in terms of Old Norway's nephew, Fortinbras (and vice versa) contrasting Fortinbras' aggressively acquisitive attitude towards prosthetics with Hamlet's apparent resistance to them. I introduce Edelman's term "reproductive futurism" to illustrate, in theoretical terms, the politics of rejecting the prosthetic heir. Finally, I consider Hamlet in light of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's notion of narrative prostheses.

In conclusion, I briefly examine Hamlet in light of Bernard Williams's discussion of tragedy, and Friedrich Nietzsche's claim that the Danish prince's inaction is the result of his newfound knowledge about the "eternal essence of things" (40). I end with a brief look at Hamlet's one legacy – at his bequeathing of his life-story, along with the responsibility of its repetition, to his closest friend and advisor, Horatio – whom he charges with the "delivery" of the story of his life.

Chapter One: “Things Rank and Gross in Nature”

De Grazia’s reading contrasts the flowers, fruit, and “genealogical oak[s]” that traditionally symbolize a flourishing dynasty with the weedy, rank place that, she argues, Denmark has become (*Hamlet* 119). *Hamlet* works against these kinds of dichotomies, however: the title character’s disillusionment with human institutions and categorization does not lend itself to interpretation through the traditional flower language that de Grazia proposes. In fact, the play reflects the confusion and suspicion surrounding flowers and gardening in Renaissance England.

According to de Grazia, Hamlet’s grief – his apparent personal disintegration, his affectation of madness, his genuine mental disturbance – springs not only from his father’s death and his mother’s “overhasty marriage,” as Gertrude would have it, but is also the result of his “disentitlement” (2.2.60, *Hamlet* 43). “It is not clear,” de Grazia says, “that personal identity can survive deracination” (*Hamlet* 43). Vegetable metaphors and imagery proliferate in de Grazia’s reading, as they do in the text of *Hamlet*, beginning with King Hamlet’s assertion that he was murdered by his brother Claudius while “sleeping within [his] orchard” (1.5.59).

In “*Richard II* and the Taint of Metonymy,” Menon discusses the “traditional textual mode” of the “garden metaphor” in which “gardens and nature are used to indicate the level of depravity in a land,” producing “diagnostic reading[s]” about the “state of the state” (655). De Grazia’s reading places *Hamlet* within this mode. In so doing, she suggests that the logic of the text depends on teleology, and mourns its failure in the fall of the house of Hamlet. That this is the case may seem so obvious as to not bear mentioning. I want to suggest, however, that *Hamlet*, to borrow a phrase from

Menon, actually “spurns teleology.” If Hamlet is a flower, he does not fail to bloom: rather, to borrow from Menon, he remains “stubbornly blasted” (“Venus” 501).

For de Grazia, the state has become an “unweeded garden,” a “sterile promontory” in which “there is copulation but no generation”: “the play instances what may be the bleakest moment of a civilization: the extinction of a bloodline, that of a family, dynasty, or race” (*Hamlet* 126). The Danish “royal family is extinguished,” says de Grazia, and “[t]his is what it means that weeds rather than flowers are growing in the garden of Denmark” (*Hamlet* 126). In this framework, flowers represent the teleological success that is dynasty: while the life of an individual flower or person may be brief, each forms a link in the chain of reproduction that extends far into the future (just as, in the fantasy of Hamlet’s succession, he would continue the family line and enlarge its holdings through the generation of heirs and heiresses). The worms and weeds which obsess Hamlet symbolize, according to de Grazia, murder, incest, adultery, and the sterility which results from depravity.

In his introduction to *Richard II*, Peter Ure discusses the history of comparisons of the “disordered state and ruler with the neglected garden” (li). “Other writers before Shakespeare,” Ure notes, “especially political satirists, had compared the elements of disorder in a state to weeds that must be rooted out and plucked away; so common, indeed, is this figure that it makes for what is almost a subsidiary meaning of the verb *weed*” (li-ii). Ure lists, as other sources for this comparison, the “sixteenth-century reformer” Henry Brinklow, Traiano Boccalini, “some passages in classical writers which compare the lopping of tall plants to the elimination of the unruly great,” and parables in the Gospel of Matthew which compare “priests, knights, and labourers” to “husbandmen

whose duty it is to tend the vineyard of the church” (liii).

The garden scene in *Richard II* is paradigmatic of the garden-as-state metaphor, in which the comparison is usually made by detached observers who critique the corrupt “higher orders” of society. In *Richard II*, for instance, it is the Gardeners who make explicit the link between the unweeded garden and the disordered kingdom. They “belong to [the] tradition” of the “incorruptible,” “humble and detached” pastoral character, capable of “innocent but perceptive” critique of courtiers (Ure iv). The garden metaphor has long been imbued with the kind of moralizing demonstrated by the Gardener when he instructs his assistant to “prune the emblematic plants as Richard should have done those of his kingdom” (Ure li).

As Menon points out, Hamlet “plucks at the garden metaphor in his first soliloquy of disgust” (“Richard” 655). “How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,” Hamlet says, “Seem to me all the uses of this world! / Fie on’t, oh fie! ‘tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely” (1.2.133-36). Hamlet’s use of this metaphor, however, does not closely follow the traditional model, as outlined by Ure. Hamlet is not a bucolic rustic, uniquely positioned to comment on the lives of his “betters” – he is implicated, rather, in the very weediness he describes. “The violation of natural law,” Menon explains, “(whether by homosexuality or incest) is a tried and tested explanation of human depravity, and so the internal siege of the garden of England is metaphorically evoked in *Richard II* to explain the state of decay that King Richard’s rule has bred in his kingdom” (“Richard” 655). But Hamlet does not say Denmark is a weedy garden – he uses this phrase to describe the *world*. What is an internal siege waged by weeds and caterpillars in *Richard II* is, in Hamlet, not contrary to nature, but rather the

state of nature. The point is not that Claudius, or King Hamlet, or even Hamlet himself is failing to pick the weeds. To even try to pick weeds – to try to make a garden out of the wild and weedy place that is the earth – is a futile gesture. Thus, *Hamlet* breaks from traditional symbolism.

For de Grazia, the flowers of dynasty fail to bloom because of the corruption in the state of Denmark, and because of Hamlet's inaction. Certain places in the text do support de Grazia's reading: King Hamlet says that, were Hamlet to ignore his injunction to revenge, he would be "duller [...] than the fat weed that roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf" (1.5.33). And the use of flowers to represent teleological success does occur elsewhere in Shakespeare's work (as in the sonnets, for instance, which I discuss further in Chapter Four). I propose, however, an alternative reading of the symbolism of flowers, one less invested in the teleological success of dynasty: flowers and weeds, both in *Hamlet* and in contemporary discourses on gardening, are disturbingly interchangeable.

The language used by many characters in the play to discuss sin, sex, reproduction and love indicates that the dichotomy de Grazia develops between weeds and flowers tends to obscure the ambivalence these symbols take on. Although flowers are sometimes associated with productive, healthy growth, they are also associated with sin and debauchery. King Hamlet tells his son, for instance, that he was "of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched, cut off even in the blossoms of my sin" – in this line, the blossoms of sin reflect the burgeoning orchard in which he was poisoned. The orchard, in de Grazia's reading, should be a wholesome, productive site, and yet here it shelters the king in his sinful, "[u]nhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd" state (1.5.76, 77). Hamlet echoes his father's language when decides not to kill Claudius as he is "a-

praying”: since his own father was killed “with all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,” he does not want to murder Claudius while he is absolved of all his sins (3.3.80-1).

And this indeterminacy is found throughout the text: Ophelia tells her brother Laertes not to “trea[d]” the “primrose path of dalliance” (1.3.49). As Harold Jenkins observes, the “primrose path of dalliance” is Shakespeare’s version of Matthew 7:13-14 (“enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction”), found also in *Macbeth* (“the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire”) and in *All’s Well That Ends Well* (“the flow’ry way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire”) (201). That this is Shakespeare’s variation is significant – Ophelia is not merely using a stock phrase (although the saying has become proverbial since) in complicating the traditional symbol of the flower as healthy, natural, productive. In the same speech, Ophelia describes the way to heaven as “steep and thorny” just as King Hamlet tells his son to “leave [his] mother to heaven, and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her” (1.3.47, 1.5.86-8). Flowers not only represent productive political and genealogical growth; they also indicate sin, debauchery, incipient damnation. Conversely, plants that seem pernicious (those with thorns, for instance) may be associated with virtue.

For de Grazia, however, the distinction between flowers and weeds is deeply important. In her analysis of Ophelia’s death scene, for instance, de Grazia argues that, “through the play’s surrealistic semantics, at the moment of death, [Ophelia] turns into a mudbank covered by noxious weeds. Like the body of the state, “things rank and gross in nature possess it merely”” (*Hamlet* 126). De Grazia is referring to the fact that Ophelia, when she drowns, is decorated with “weedy trophies” – “fantastic garlands” made of

“crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long purples” which she hangs upon a willow growing “aslant a brook” (*Hamlet* 4.7.169-70, 167). These garlands, de Grazia says, are “sinister and obscene,” “grotesque valedictory tribute[s] to [the] spoiled family honour,” they are emblematic “of spoiled genealogy, [the] image of blasted dynastic promise” (*Hamlet* 119). Ophelia’s “fantastic garlands,” “crownnet” and “trophies,” de Grazia suggests, “actually mimic [the] heraldic achievements” that will never be granted to her father’s descendants (*Hamlet* 119). De Grazia reads these garlands as signs of the terrible consequences of unchaste behaviour, and a valediction to Polonius’ lost dynastic potential.

De Grazia finds it significant that Ophelia’s “trophies” are not made out of “cultivated flowers like roses but of wild flowers and weeds, among them sinister and obscene stinging nettles and “long purples”” (*Hamlet* 119). That Ophelia decorates herself with wildflowers seems entirely fitting, however, since the “cultivated” court of Denmark is corrupted, debauched. The “cultivation” of the Danish courtiers has lost Ophelia a lover and a father, and left her sad, alone – “of ladies most deject and wretched” (3.1.178). And the flowers with which Ophelia decorates herself do not seem sinister – they are associated, rather, with a kind of countrified, rustic sexuality. While this is certainly an aspect of Ophelia’s madness (associated, perhaps, with her lewd songs), it seems possible to read this scene as Ophelia’s liberation from the toxic confines of the Danish court.

Despite the obvious pathos of the scene, Ophelia’s death is beautiful, lyrical, peaceful: she is compared to a “mermaid,” she sings to herself, “chant[ing] snatches of old tunes,” and appears “incapable of her own distress” (4.7.177-78). In the brook, she is

“a creature native and indu’d unto that element” when the stream pulls her down from her “melodious lay” (4.7.180-83). Ophelia’s weedy trophies may function as a kind of self-fashioning: perhaps her trophies are a blazon for her own life, rather than grisly mock-heraldic tributes on behalf of her father. Ophelia’s weeds, at least, do not seem necessarily noxious. Perhaps, in her earlier distribution of the “cultivated flowers” to her brother, and in her new outfit of weedy garlands, Ophelia has cast off the burdens of life as a noblewoman (4.5.155).

In any case, the distinction between flowers and weeds rests upon relative and highly subjective qualities of beauty and worth, and thus ought not to be taken for granted in a play that reminds the audience, “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (2.2.244-45). Just as Friar Laurence says in *Romeo and Juliet*, the distinction between “baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers” is blurred, since there is “nought so vile that on the earth doth live/ But to the earth some special good doth give” (2.3.17). Renaissance discourse on the values and distinctions of various flowers is revealed to be not only ambiguous but even fraught with deceit and suspicion in Rebecca Bushnell’s *Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens*. “While Shakespeare was staging his ladies inventing a flower language,” Bushnell explains, “in the real market for plants the norm was disorder rather than order”: as “taste and market values construc[t]ed and deconstruct[t]ed social hierarchy in plants, [...] gardeners intent on profit [...] tried to work the system to their advantage” (140).

“[E]xperimentation in the production of new colours and new styles” of plants, Bushnell explains, led to “abuse and corruption,” with some vendors “peddl[ing] common flowers as rarities” (141). Horticultural manuals, for instance, were full of

recipes, “some of them preposterous,” for changing the scent, taste, shape, and “even the very nature of all sorts of fruits and flowers” (Bushnell 141). It seems likely that Shakespeare was aware of concerns about floral fraudulence (such as the efforts to expose the “Mercenary Flower Catchers about London”) (Bushnell 138). But in any case, the proliferation of texts on the subject of flower cultivation, and the high-profile debates about the value or meaning of a particular colour or style of flower (which frequently focus on the changeable nature of these attributes) precludes a “stable or fixed” language of flowers in Renaissance England (Bushnell 138).

In John Parkinson’s *Paradiso in Sole*, for instance, the author uses flowers as a simile for the human potential for deceit: flowers, he says, like people, can possess “glorious shew of beauty and bravery” yet be “stinking in smell, or else of no other use” (Bushnell 136). The sense of the possible falseness of flowers is likely related to the proliferation of recipes for their modification, which “celebrated the human power to alter just about anything in nature” (141). This kind of experimental gardening seems to have shared a discursive realm with cosmetics, magic and even alchemy, as seen in Giambattista Della Porta’s *Natural Magick* in which recipes to modify flowers jostle with instructions on how to “counterfeit gold,” “beautify women,” and manufacture “strange cures” (1). Della Porta’s celebration of the human ability to improve on nature makes him sound like a particularly enterprising plastic surgeon: “I know there is nothing so beautiful,” he declares, “but it may be adorned, nor so full, but it may be augmented” (4).

The book’s title, *Natural Magick*, may seem somewhat paradoxical, especially in a cultural context in which magic was often considered the province of satanic witches; in fact, in the introduction, Della Porta tells of having been called a “conjurer,” and attempts

to disassociate himself from the kind of “magick” that is “infamous, and unhappie” (3, 4). For rhetorical reasons, then, Della Porta’s book balances an emphasis on the magical nature of his recipes with a depiction of these skills as “natural” and easy to acquire. Della Porta claims to be able to teach readers how to make nature more beautiful and profitable: how to “make fruits and flowers,” for instance, “to be of diverse colours, such as are not naturally incident to their kind,” or sweeter, or to see that “fruits that are in their growing, may be made to receive and resemble all figures and impressions whatsoever” (Bushnell 142). “The principle most often employed in these recipes,” as Bushnell points out, is that of “copulation” or “fusion through grafting of disparate things on fertile ground” (142). Della Porta claimed his methods were “infallible” because

the ground never grows old or barren, but is everywhere rank to receive new seed, and to produce new, and is ever unsatisfied fruitfulness, and brings perpetual increase. And if nature be always admirable, she will seem more wonderful in plants. Copulation was but of one kind, here it is almost infinite and not only every tree can be ingrafted into every tree, but one tree may be adulterated with them all” (33).

Della Porta’s commitment to “fruitfulness,” “perpetual increase,” and “copulation” sounds very like a recipe for dynasty, an institution which is continually challenged and thwarted in *Hamlet*. Della Porta’s rhetoric, which so effectively blurs the lines between human reproduction and the creation of heirs, indicates that the “traditional textual mode” of comparing fertile families to healthy gardens was common in the discourse of the time. *Natural Magick*, however, also undermines the idea of “natural” reproduction or “natural” fertility, as the commercial and cosmetic priorities of both human reproduction

and plant cultivation become clear. Despite the number of times Della Porta repeats the word “natural,” his book teaches magic, modification, and mutation; and reminds his audience of how much of this is already going on around them.

While de Grazia’s flowers of teleology provide a useful framework through which to read other plays from the period, in *Hamlet*, flowers are linked with sin, death and hell. There is no symbol for pure, natural productivity – the play represents human affairs as corrupt and unnatural, and, through Hamlet’s soliloquies, the audience is denied the comforting assurance that this is a state of affairs particular to Denmark. Instead, the play reminds the audience that “a pleasing shape” can be deceptive (2.2.596). “[O]ne may smile, and smile,” as Hamlet says, “and be a villain” (1.5.108).

Chapter Two: “The Bud of Britain”

De Grazia’s focus on the politics of land-owning and lineage, and her discussion of natural metaphors, provide a useful framework through which to read other plays from the period that focus on dispossession, and that represent dynasty as natural and desirable. Fletcher’s *Bonduca* and Marlowe’s *Edward II* are two such plays. These texts, written within twenty years of each other by prominent English dramatists, have, upon first glance, much in common with *Hamlet*: they revolve around individuals or families whose dynastic claims are threatened by external and internal forces. *Bonduca* and *Edward II* differ from *Hamlet* in some important ways, however: the title characters display a whole-hearted devotion to dynasty, and Bonduca and Edward represent the political institutions of ownership of land and production of heirs as natural, in part through the use of plant metaphors and imagery.

The rhetoric deployed by Bonduca, her kinsman Caratach, and Edward, in their attempts to retain power and position, often works against the ways in which these rulers are sometimes described as unusual or aberrant. Bonduca’s gender is repeatedly invoked as an explanation for her military and personal failings; even Caratach derides Bonduca’s and her daughters’ “misunderstand[ing] [of] the rules of soldierly honor and war” (Crawford 363). He attributes “inherent culpability and weakness” to Bonduca’s daughters, telling them they “should have kept their legs close” to avoid rape, and commands Bonduca go “home and spin, woman!” (Crawford 363). Julie Crawford’s discussion of the politics of gender in King James’ court makes clear that Bonduca’s gender could have presented a real problem for contemporary audiences. As Crawford points out, the political exigencies of Queen Elizabeth’s reign were much different from

those of King James'. In the former, Amazons were depicted positively and works like Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, "in which Britomart, a woman warrior and explicit analogy of Elizabeth, saves the nation," were most popular (359). Citing Sharon Macdonald, Crawford describes the two "Boadicea myths" most prevalent at the time: "that she was Queen of England, and that she was victorious," whereas "other ingredients" of the story were "ignored," such as her motherhood, her daughters, and the rape of her daughters, in order to draw a closer resemblance between Boadicea and Queen Elizabeth, the "Virgin Queen" (359).

In this context, Bonduca's struggles against the occupying Romans would have appeared the more heroic. *Bonduca* was first performed in James' reign, however, when the image of the warrior queen had suddenly become less popular at court. After James is crowned, Crawford reports, "viragos and warrior women are no longer celebrated and rarely even ambivalently represented either textually or on stage"; they are rather "grouped with all gender-subversive women" like the "cross-dressing woman and the witch," and condemned (360). Nonetheless, "within a few years after James' succession [...] Elizabeth was being recalled with a fervent nostalgia" (360). Crawford suggests that this ambivalence explains Fletcher's choice to situate Caratach as the "hero" of the play, inasmuch as he "denigrates and displaces Bonduca" (358). While I am not convinced that Caratach is the hero of the play, it is through his intervention, and willingness to join forces with the Romans, that British stock prevails despite their occupation by a foreign power.

It has been suggested that Caratach's own ability to rule is called into question by his apparently homoerotic attitude towards the Roman soldiers, just as Edward's

relationship with Gaveston is often cited as the reason for his being deposed and murdered (Crawford 358). I argue, however, that issues of gender and sexuality are “subplots” in these plays, and Bonduca, Caratach and Edward all provide plausible claims for leadership, despite ultimately failing in their struggles. Discussions of dynasty, furthermore, “naturalize” the institution to the extent that even the “failures” these leaders experience are recuperated into a discourse about the natural succession of heirs. Edward’s son, also Edward, will rule England in his father’s stead like a “vine” that persists, even though a branch or two has been removed, and Caratach joins the Roman forces after the defeat of his people in a movement that is figured as a “graft” of Roman onto British stock.

As indigenous Britons, Bonduca and Caratach are represented as the “natural” rulers of their land, to which they and their army are organically connected. The potential for future British rule is embodied in Bonduca’s son Hengo, the precociously brave young heir who is described in mineral, animal, and vegetable terms: he is a “jewel,” a “whelp,” the “Bud of Britain” who, as he matures, will carry on his family’s legacy (11). If Hengo is a bud, Bonduca is the plant upon which he grows: the Bonducan dynasty has a plausible claim to future success, as Bonduca’s continued existence is necessary for her son’s development.

Even the conquering forces associate the Britons with the flora and fauna of the British landscape – they are “described by the Romans as able to blend in with their environment” (Jowitt 477). It is not only that the Britons “take advantage of their superior knowledge of the terrain and prevent the Romans from using their favored military tactics of open battle,” however (Jowitt 477). There is even metonymic slippage between the

Britons and Britain, as when the Roman soldier Petillius complains, “the hills are wooded with their partizans, and all the valleys over-grown with darts, as moors are with rank rushes: no ground left us to charge upon, no room to strike” (22). The trees are partisans to the British cause; even the grass threatens the Roman invasion, like spears set in the ground against a cavalry charge. The Britons’ weapons are indistinguishable from the forests and moors which cover their land; the very earth is on their side. Caratach echoes this sentiment, although in derogatory terms, when he says with heavy censure that the British men, like “boding owls, creep into tods of ivy, / And hoot their fears to one another nightly” (10).

This “naturalization” of the British people’s relationship to the land is in stark contrast to the depiction of Romans as mercenary men. They are soldiers, their business is acquisition, wealth, conquest. While the Britains “grapple for the ground [they] live on, the liberty [they] hold as dear as life,” the Romans are “measure the end of nature,” they are “men [who] besides themselves, allow no neighbour, those minds that where the day is, claim inheritance, and where the sun makes ripe the fruits, their harvest, and where they march but measure out more ground to add to Rome” (7, 13). The British fight is noble self-defense – Bonduca’s people cannot live without their land, whereas the Romans fight only to “claim” as their “inheritance” the “ground” in which British liberty inheres. This inheritance, of course, will be deadly for the original inhabitants, since the Romans cannot abide “neighbours.” What is ripening fruit to the Briton – a beautiful image of natural fertility – is human-circumscribed, financially profitable “harvest” to the Romans, whose very footsteps are acquisitive, calculating, as they “measure out” more land to add to their country.

Paul Green argues that “the playwright has considerably more interest in the average Roman soldier than in the average British soldier,” and that “Fletcher carefully manipulates his material to engage the audience’s sympathies predominately [...] for the Romans” (306). I am not convinced, however; it seems to me that the natural imagery and metaphors lend a moral authority to the Britons. I find Claire Jowitt’s discussion of the play’s ambivalence towards this question more compelling: she focuses on the play’s “Virginian context” (476). The existence of the Jamestown colony, according to Jowitt, contributes to *Bonduca*’s likely contemporary reception as the story of “indigenous inhabitants in a colonial terrain inevitably succumbing to the power and control of a more advanced civilization” (475). Thus, while sympathy and reverence may be accorded to the primitive yet charming Britons, the Roman conquest is nonetheless viewed as inevitable and even desirable. As Jowitt puts it, the play does not offer “easy solutions to the moral conundrum concerning whether the Romans or Britons possess more honor, [because] [insofar [a]s the ancient Britons represent native Americans in the play, the audience is invited to support their subjugation; as they represent “British” independence, their defeat is, of course, a mournful affair” (476).

The fact that Fletcher’s audience was comprised of British citizens whose own culture included indigenous British traditions and transplanted Roman customs would have heightened the dramatic potential of the play; it catalogues a seminal moment in Britain’s history. To continue with the metaphor of insemination, Caratach himself describes the conquest using a metaphor of plant propagation: grafting was commonly regarded in the sixteenth and seventeenth century as an “analogue to procreation” (Nardizzi 1). “That hardy Roman,” Caratach says, “that hopes to graft himself into my

stock, / Must first begin his kindred underground, / and be allied in ashes” (13-14). In a line that sounds defiant and patriotic in its reference to the destruction and death of Romans (as ashes underground), Caratach is actually articulating an attitude more amenable to cultural integration than that expressed by Bonduca or her daughters. For Caratach, the Romans, though they are not a naturally occurring part of the British landscape, are nonetheless so apt to the climate that they can, through grafting to British stock, become a new plant. In his use of the adjective “hardy,” Caratach reveals his admiration for aspects of the Roman constitution, and suggests that the addition of Roman blood to Britain might even prove beneficial.

Caratach’s view differs significantly from those of his female relatives. When defeat is assured, Bonduca and her daughters prepare to commit suicide; when one daughter hesitates, her mother and sister Bonvica urge her on, since, as Jowitt says, “within the parameters of the play, [suicide] is their only possible avenue of resistance” (364). “One daughter asks her sister,” Jowitt continues, ““What would ye live to be?” and Bonduca replies for her, “A whore still?” cynically re-articulating the possibilities for their lives under Roman rule” (364). Caratach chooses assimilation (and insemination) rather than death, although, while Hengo is alive, he devotes himself to protecting the heir of the Britons. “His whole concern in this act,” as Jodi Mikalachki says, “is the nursing and feeding of the boy Hengo, who is dying of sickness and hunger after the British defeat” (105). Caratach not only feeds and protects Hengo; he also speaks to him using “tender and protective” language, calling him “sweet chicken” and “flower” (105).

According to Mikalachki, Hengo’s name, invented by Fletcher, echoes that of Hengist, “the first Saxon ruler in Britain,” often used to represent England’s Saxon

heritage (105). “The moving spectacle of the old warrior nursing the last sprig of British manhood,” Mikalachki argues, “suggests an imaginative attempt to construct a native, masculine genealogy” (105). Once Hengo has been killed, however, Caratach immediately capitulates to the Romans. This move is hardly surprising, since much of the play up to this point has reiterated the great mutual admiration between Caratach and the invading army. And although this act might appear unpatriotic or traitorous, it is actually the rehearsal of a common stage trope, the “masculine embrace” with which “Jacobean dramas set in Roman Britain often conclude” (Mikalachki 96). This embrace, of course, is “staged literally or invoked rhetorically as a figure for the new relation between Rome and Britain” (97). And this new relation, as Caratach suggests in his grafting metaphor, will produce a (metaphorical) heir to replace Hengo – the new Britain.

I find Mikalachki’s discussion of the concluding male embrace more convincing than arguments like that offered by Crawford, who, in her discussion of *Bonduca* and Caratach in terms of Elizabeth I and James I, suggests that, “just as James’ homoerotic and even sodomitical behaviors compromised the homosociality of his court and further troubled public perception of his ability to govern England, in *Bonduca*, Caratach’s overzealous allegiance to male alliances and affinity for all things Roman troubles his heroism and cast doubt on his ability to serve the Britons” (358). Certainly, Caratach expresses powerful desire for the Romans. “Witness these wounds,” he tells *Bonduca*, in an ecstasy of lust, “I do [dote on the enemy] [...] I love an enemy [...] he that in the head on’s troop defies me, / Bending my manly body with his sword, / I make a mistress. Yellow-tressed Hymen ne’er tied a longing virgin with more joy, / Than I am married to that man that wounds me” (9). As Mikalachki’s discussion makes clear, however,

Caratach's expression of his martial ambitions in explicitly sexual and even marital terms need not preclude his potential as a powerful, productive leader of Britain. Caratach is perfectly poised for the "union" between Britain and Rome: the wound he so desires will allow the "grafting" of the "hardy Roman" onto his stock that will occur once Briton has fallen and all his relatives are dead.

This "natural rhetoric," then, recuperates Caratach and Bonduca, despite issues of gender and sexuality which might call into question their right to rule. The title character of Marlowe's *Edward II* is another ruler trying to retain political control under threat. Scholars have often noted Marlowe's tendency to write about unusual characters; Thomas Cartelli refers to "a thorough resistance to regimes of the normal," and, in *Speculating Strangeness*, Emily C. Bartels points out that Marlowe's work seems to focus "exclusively [on the figure of the stranger], [and] fill[s] the stage with Oriental barbarians, black magicians, homosexuals, African queens and kings, Machiavellian Christians, Turks and Jews" (213, xiii). Marlowe, Bartels argues, "helped to transform the theatre into one of the most popular and powerful arenas for social and political comment and dissent" at the time (Bartels xiii). Bartels claims that "Marlowe's plays, in bringing alien types to center stage, subversively resist [their] exploitation and expose the demonization of the other as a strategy for self-authorization and self-empowerment, whether on the foreign or the domestic front" (xv).

While I am tempted to agree with Bartels, I have also argued that Marlowe's plays often resist the demonization of "foreign" characters precisely by demonstrating their commitment to political institutions recognized and valued by an Elizabethan audience: lineage, reproduction, and the maintenance of family ties. In this way, Marlowe

represents Edward as a sympathetic character: his somewhat unorthodox love life and his unwise political behaviour are balanced by a commitment to the “fantasy of genealogy” and the hope that this son will carry on his legacy (Edelman 42). Critics often misread *Edward II* as a play “about” sodomy. As other scholars have noted, however, Edward’s reign is not “lamentable and troublesome” because of his homoeroticism: as Stephen Guy-Bray says, Edward is not killed for his love affair with Gaveston (traditionally, English kings have managed to have extra-marital affairs with both men and women without getting themselves killed); rather, it is because Edward “attempt[s] to legitimize [their] relationship that [...] the nobles rebel” (131).

Edward’s reign is troubled because his bestowal of titles and lands threatens primogeniture – not necessarily the inheritance of his son, who remains loyal to the King his father, but the rights of other nobles at court. Edward elevates Gaveston to “undeserved” social and economic heights, which alarms and enrages his courtiers. “Brother,” Kent protests when Edward makes Gaveston “Lord high Chamberlaine, Earle of Cornwall, king and lord of Man,” “the least of these may well suffice for one of greater birth than Gaveston” (1.2.156, 59).

Towards the end of the play, Edward seeks to reconcile his unusual behaviour with his role as king of England. He struggles to retain his crown (that ultimate prosthetic of power), and comforts himself with the thought that his son will someday reign in his stead. Edward, like Bonduca and Caratach, is committed to teleological success in the form of dynasty, and depicts his reign as “natural” in part through the use of plant metaphors. Although he is in some sense a stranger, incomprehensible, Edward is humanized through his commitment to lineage. Much of the plot, however, details

Edward's continued preference of Gaveston, and later Spenser. "Rend not my heart with thy too piercing words," he tells Gaveston when he discovers he is to be exiled, "Thou from this land, I from myself am banisht" – in conflating himself with England, and Gaveston with himself, Edward verbalizes Gaveston's unacceptable closeness to the throne (1.4.117-18). While the nobles might be willing to accept Gaveston as a mere minion, he has become entirely too close to the king.

"Leave now to oppose thy selfe against the king, [...] the mightiest of kings have had their minions," says Mortimer Senior to his nephew, listing a series of famous same-sex love affairs. "Uncle," Mortimer Junior replies, "his wanton humour greeves not me, / but this I scorne, that one so baselie borne, / Should by his soveraignes favour grow so pert, / and riote it with the treasure of the realme" (1.4.386- 404). It is an economic or class boundary which is ruptured; same-sex love is not the issue. Cartelli argues convincingly that Marlowe "effectively obviates the dispute regarding the natural and unnatural by representing homosexual behaviour as one among many material practices [...] that operate beyond the reach of moral or idealist categories" (Cartelli 217). It is not Edward's "homosexual behaviour" that causes problems at court, but rather the fact that Isabella and Edward junior are apparently "discarded" in favour of Gaveston and Spenser (Cartelli 217). As Mario DiGangi points out, "to understand Marlowe's contribution to a cultural preoccupation with favoritism, we need to acknowledge that male homoerotic relations [could] be socially orderly as well as socially disorderly, and that "sodomy" names not a form of homoerotic desire but a political transgression often associated with inappropriate forms of intimacy between men" (204).

DiGangi continues, "a legitimate favorite is expected to serve as a companion and

counselor, [but at some point], the favorite's intimacy with the king become[s] perceptible as something other than friendship – as sodomy" (205). Mortimer's real problem with Edward's "sodomy," I would argue, is that, far from being "steril[e] or nonproductive," Edward and Gaveston's relationship has produced a rival, new competition for the nobles at court (Edelman 59). DiGangi says that "Edward's request that Gaveston "share the kingdom" with him establishes from the outset the classical model of the favorite as friend" (205). This model is familiar and authorized: "the mightiest kings have had their minions" (1.4.393). But Gaveston is neither merely a friend nor a minion – he is raised to a much higher social position.

When Gaveston is killed, Edward's language and actions suggest that he mourns a fallen son. He calls on "earth, the common mother of us all" and on his "father's sword" in pronouncing vengeance upon Warwicke and Mortimer (3.1.128-30). He promises to take "revenge imortallie, on [their] accursed traiterous progenie" – in proposing to kill their children in revenge for Gaveston's death, Edward situates the latter in the position of his own offspring (.3.1.140). "[Y]ou villaines [...] have slaine my Gaveston," Edward mourns, and so, as if to replace a lost son, he immediately "adopt[s] [Spenser, sweet Spenser," and, "meerely of [his] love," makes him Earl of Gloucester and Lord Chamberlaine (3.1.43-47).

Bartels' examination of sodomy and favouritism in Holinshed, which was doubtless one of Marlowe's sources for the play, provides further evidence to suggest that the sexual relationship Edward and Gaveston is of secondary significance to their problematically familial bond. The important thing for a leader is that he be invested in the rulership of his estate, and committed to lineage: as in the case of Caratach, for

instance, homoeroticism need not preclude leadership abilities if the previous criteria are met. Edward's guilt lies in his neglect of the etiquette of preferment, not in his sex life.

In Holinshed's discussion of "sodomy," Bartels claims, "abstract qualifiers carry across to and associate sodomy with other, public transgressions whose criminality is unquestionable" (Bartels 105). These other transgressions are, finally, unacceptable. In one example of this, which Bartels calls an "odd but telling turn of narrative," Holinshed segues from a discussion of Gaveston to the story of a "naughtie fellow called John Poidras who thrust himselfe into the kings hall" and "gave foorth that he was sonne and right heire of king Edward the first" (Bartels 105). Despite the fact that "his claim, based on a changeling story, posed no real threat to the king's legitimacy," Poidras' assertion was offensive to the extent that he was "drawne, hanged, and as a traitour bowelled" (Bartels 105). I find the implicit association between a pretender to the throne and Gaveston suggestive because Poidras' claim was based on his being the son of the king; clearly, he imposed too far upon the body of the monarch, and for this he, like Gaveston, had to be removed.

In the beginning and middle of the play, Edward is most noticeably committed to Gaveston and Spencer. Towards the end of the text, however, when he suspects he will be murdered, Edward reflects more and more upon the biological son who will carry on his line. "So shall not Englands Vine be perished," he comforts himself, "But Edwards name survives, though Edward dies" (5.1.47-48). "Commend me to my sonne," Edward says, "and bid him rule / Better than I, yet how have I transgrest, / Unless it be with too much clemencie" (5.1.121-23). When Edward realizes that to remain alive, and to retain his crown, he must submit to his kingly, fatherly duties, he surrenders to the dynastic

imperative. And although Edward dies, his son and his name – England’s vine – will survive. As we will see in Chapter Four, Hamlet undergoes no such “death-bed conversion” to the prostheses of nobility, and dies calmly, knowing his father’s “vine” perishes with him.

Chapter Three: “The King’s a Thing.”

The representation of Bonduca’s son and heir as “the Bud of Britain,” and Edward’s attempt to console himself by calling his son England’s “vine,” fit into the traditional textual mode that de Grazia applies to *Hamlet*. I propose another framework, one which does not focus on “natural” metaphors but rather emphasizes the artificial nature of the human body: I read the nobleman, concerned with making an apt marriage, producing many heirs, and owning acres and acres of land, as a prosthetic creature, embodied by possessions and social relations. This framework draws on recent critical work on prosthetics and disability by Fisher, Mitchell and Snyder, who have demonstrated that the limits of the human body are less clear than is commonly thought, that identity is embodied not only in our flesh and blood but in the prostheses that we attach, or allow to be attached, to ourselves.

In identifying the nobleman as a prosthetic creature, I join Fisher’s discussion of prosthesis with Grazia’s historical analysis of the politics of land-owning in Renaissance England. In *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, Fisher makes a case for the prosthetic nature of human existence, both in the here and now, and in early modern England. Fisher describes the “things” through which gender identity has been materialized (accessories like handkerchiefs or codpieces) as “prosthetic.” For Fisher, the prosthesis is an item, simultaneously body and not body, which contributes to – which in some sense embodies – identity, or aspects of identity. Quoting Freud, he reminds us that we are all “prosthetic gods”: our eyes are improved with glasses and telescopes, for instance, our heads sheltered with hats, and our feet protected by shoes (31).

The word “prosthesis,” of course, usually refers to a physical object meant to replace a part of the body considered missing or deformed. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, defines prosthesis as “an artificial replacement for a part of the body,” and “prosthetics” as “the part of surgery that consists in supplying deficiencies” (Fisher 27-28). And yet Fisher shows that the limits, the boundaries of the self are not as clear or evident as one might suppose: is hair, for example, part of the body? Although it is very easily detachable, it does come from the body, and is attached to it. And yet hair (the length of it, for example, or the style) is, and was in Renaissance England, profoundly linked to identity, associated with a wide range of attributes including gender, social standing, region and political affiliation. Prosthetics, says Fisher, “are both integral to the subject’s sense of identity or self, and at the same time resolutely detachable or “auxiliary”” (26).

Drawing on Fisher’s analysis of the objects through which identity is materialized, I identify possession (or future possession) of an estate, and the production (or potential production) of an heir, as the prostheses through which the Renaissance nobleman is embodied. Fisher cites Jacques Derrida’s *supplément* as an “analog” for “the prosthesis”: they are both, he suggests, “an originary or constitutive addition: that is to say, an *addition* which is also a *replacement* (in that it compensates for a lack in the thing to which it is added)” (Fisher 26). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida calls writing a “substitute [that] make[s] one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make[s] itself pass for the plenitude” of, say, thought, of communication (144). In a similar way, the estate becomes the material manifestation of a host of other relations and meanings which together compose the nobleman. The “supplement,” Derrida says, “adds itself, it is

a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that [...] representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function” (144-45). The estate functions as supplement to nature because its very existence tends to delineate nature as that-which-is-not estate. The estate is a cumulation of identity in which the ownership of property creates a nobleman out of a man, and the existence of the man who owns the land turns “nature” into an estate.

The land owned by a nobleman transcends any original functions (like providing shelter and revenue, for instance), and comes to represent the plenitude of nobility: the estate enriches, and comes to substitute for the person or family who owns it. As Derrida is careful to point out, the addition or replacement can only ever “supplement,” but not cure or remove, the “deficiency and infirmity” in that to which it has been added (144). In the case of a nobleman, the deficiency and infirmity supplemented by the possession of land is mortality: in bequeathing a piece of land to his son, a man attempts to extend himself into a life beyond his own. (As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the gesture is both significant and futile.)

While the Renaissance nobleman is alive, as de Grazia says, it is as if “[his] bod[y] were literally extended by the tracts of land [he] hold[s]” because he is in some sense “commensurate with the acreage [he] possess[es]” (5). When a body is extended by a tract of land, the presence of the land prosthetically enlarges that body. By a sort of reciprocal synecdochal (land as part of land-owner) or metonymic (land as associated with land-owner) substitution, the land represents the man, and vice versa. The land owned by a nobleman is, like hair, literally quite easily detachable, yet nonetheless

absolutely integral to the subject's identity. A nobleman with no land is less than a serf, because not only has he lost his livelihood, he has lost the relations (to the land, to social hierarchy, to other people) which previously defined him. The conflation of land with landlord is apparent throughout de Grazia's discussion: "king and kingdom," she observes, "are designated by the same name" since they are, in some sense, supposed to be indivisible (43). The king of Norway, for example, *is* Norway, and will be until he dies and is succeeded by someone (Fortinbras, in this case) who then becomes Norway in his place (44).

De Grazia quotes Sir Edward Coke, the "great expounder of the common law," as the source for a putative etymological connection between the words "heir" and "inheritance": "he who is an heir adheres [to his inheritance and] [...] the inheritance adheres to him who is the heir" (43). The adhesive is the discourse, the culture, the languages and relations which maintain the prosthetic attachment, which, to continue with Fisher, "occup[ies] and occlude[s] a disturbing middle ground, disrupting the clear mediation of subject and object" (26). Just as Norway the land *is* Norway the king (and vice versa), the prosthetic estate is "[o]ntologically unstable, [and] can be definitively claimed by neither the body nor the world" (26).

According to Fisher, prostheses "create deficiency" by participating in the "activ[e] produc[tion]" of certain ideas about wholeness and lack: people are determined to be whole or lacking in comparison to a "normative social ideal" (28). Fisher discusses the imagined "normal body" as an "idealized somatic form": people either fit into or deviate from the "corporeal norm" (26). The expectation that Hamlet, as Prince, would succeed his father is the normative social ideal that causes Hamlet's sense of loss, his

personal diminution, when his uncle “pop[s] in” and succeeds in his place (5.2.65). For de Grazia, Hamlet’s torment is the result of his having lost “the election and his hopes” – which is to say, his land: he cannot fulfill the idealized somatic form, or corporeal norm, of the nobleman, because he has lost that which constitutes him (5.2.65).

Shakespeare emphasizes, says de Grazia, the horror of a nobleman losing that which defines him: a nobleman without land is infirm, deficient, perhaps even disabled: Hamlet, deprived of his birthright, is a “starving horse; a capon; a thankless beggar; a hollow reed; a trapped prisoner; a disgruntled menial; a contumacious poor man” (2). Hamlet’s loss is figured as amputation – as castration, no less. Denmark is, or should be, part of Hamlet’s body. Of course, inheritances do not always adhere to the inheritor – they, like hair and codpieces, are detachable. Estates create identity when they adhere, and they cause anguish when they are removed.

If an estate is a prosthetic, a *supplément*, so also is the heir. It is the possession of land, with the addition of heirs to pass it on to, which supplements the deficiency – the infirmity of mortality. “[I]n the early modern period,” Fisher explains, “the concept of manhood underwent a significant shift”: up to this period, a “man’s identity” was primarily “defined on the basis of patrilineal inheritance” and “linked with his ability to reproduce himself” (Fisher 69). Fisher, citing research by a host of scholars, explains that two models of masculinity coexisted in a state of tension: the earlier model, based on reproduction, and a later model, a kind of “performative masculinity” in which “masculine identity was secured through the sexual “conquest” of women” (69).

The extent to which masculinity depends upon reproduction is clear in cultural texts from the time, which demonstrate serious anxieties about the raising of children

(especially sons), as a necessary precondition for the family line to continue unbroken. Contemporary advice manuals written by land-owning fathers to their heirs reiterate the interdependence of land and heirs, and serve as reminders of the heir's teleological duties. In Sir Walter Raleigh's "Advice to a Son and to Posterity" and in Lord Burghley's "Precepts on the Well-Ordering of a Man's Life," the authors advise their heirs to raise their own sons so that they may eventually become extensions of their fathers, with identical names, habits, and estates. The son's goal is to preserve, if not to enlarge, the land his father has passed on to him. Thus, much of the advice presented in these texts deals with issues pertaining to maintenance of the family estate through marriage and childbirth (in addition to the usual Polonius-esque proverbs which advise against such vices as excessive drinking and borrowing money from one's friends). "That gentleman [who] sells an acre of land loses an ounce of credit, for gentility is nothing but ancient riches," Burghley reminds his son (10). Good parenting (on the son's part) is necessary, Burghley says, because otherwise, "what portion thou shalt leave [thy children] at thy death they may thank death for it and not thee" (11).

It is not only crucial to have a son (as demonstrated by the number of King Henry VIII's wives), but also that he should, in thanking his father for his inheritance, keep his progenitor's memory, with his wealth, intact. While, as King Hamlet's ghost would have it, a good son ought to serve as an extension of his father even beyond the grave, the anxiety surrounding women's role in the construction and preservation of an estate comes through in these texts as well: "Marry thy daughters in time lest they marry themselves," Burghley tells his son, and "use great providence and circumspection in thy choice of wife" since marriage is "an action like a stratagem in war when man can err but once"

(9). Marriage is a life-and-death matter, insofar as the unbroken line of succession, the promise of a posthumous existence through primogeniture, is dependent, in part, on a wife.

Raleigh goes further than Burghley in terms of marital cautions, and warns his son to make up his will in such a way as to ensure that the estate will not pass to a widow's second husband. "Leave thy wife," he specifies, "no more than of necessity thou must, but only during her widowhood" to ensure that she does not transmit "the quiet of thy labours, the fruit which thou hast planted [...] and spend with joy and ease what thou has spared and gotten with care and travail" (22). "Wives," Raleigh insists, "were ordained to continue the generations of men, not to transfer them and diminish them either in continuance or ability, and therefore thy house and estate, which liveth in thy son and not in thy wife, is to be preferred" (22).

In Raleigh's description, the estate is figured as a living thing, a family heirloom, that, like an orchard, is gotten with care and travail and bears fruit. This is the sorry state of affairs which King Hamlet's ghost rails against – his murderous brother is enjoying his wife *and* the fruits of his labours! In such a context, Hamlet's hesitation to revenge his father and take up the prostheses of nobility becomes all the more striking: not because his "delay" is the result of personal failings that prevent him from "doing his duty," but because his reluctance consists of a meticulous and excruciating examination of the politics and ethics of his singular situation.

Chapter Four: "Let's Talk of Graves"

While Hamlet retains his admiration for a few individuals (notably his father and Horatio), he often dwells on the constructed nature of human identity, expressing his contempt for courtly organizations like marriage, possession and law. He does not describe these as productive, naturally occurring and fruitful; they are, rather, characterized by "the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despised love, the law's delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes" (3.1.71-74). Although Hamlet's respect for his father is often expressed in grandiose, mythical comparisons (King Hamlet is "Hyperion" compared to Claudius the satyr, he is a "mountain" while Claudius is a moor, the difference between Hamlet I and Claudius is as pronounced as that between Hamlet and Hercules), Hamlet seems to want to remember his father in specific, human terms: "he was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again" (1.2.140, 3.4.66-67, 1.2.155, 1.2.187-88). In this line, Hamlet foreshadows his own resistance to the prostheses of nobility, his hesitation to take up a revenge which, successfully accomplished, would make him king.

Hamlet's thought is often of an anti-teleological nature, especially insofar as he critiques the values of dynasty. He rails against marriage, reproduction, war, and possession of land. While, as de Grazia reminds us, commentators have been all too ready to understand Hamlet's social critique as a uniquely modern crisis of consciousness, Menon's work offers an alternative. In "Spurning Teleology in 'Venus and Adonis'" Menon discusses not only the teleological tendencies of "much literary criticism" in which "the ends justify the means, and reveal them to have been purposeful all along," but also the issue of teleology within a text; whether a text privileges the logic

of teleology (491). “The fantasy of consummated endings,” she explains, “is found less in the literary texts of the Renaissance” than in “critical-historical narratives about the movement from “early modern” to “modern” regimes of sexuality” (492). Although “Renaissance desire is [often] seen as essentially reproductive, giving birth to descendants who then return to the womb to understand from where they have come,” this is not necessarily an accurate depiction of the desires expressed by characters in Renaissance literature (496).

Shakespeare’s “Venus and Adonis” is an “antiteleological success,” according to Menon, due to its “investment in failure as a theoretical paradigm” (498). “While in the *Metamorphoses* Adonis lustily capitulates to Venus,” Menon explains, Shakespeare’s Adonis “firmly resists the goddess’s overtures”; whereas, in Ovid’s text, “Adonis is transformed after his death into an annually renewing flower, in the Shakespearean poem he is transformed into a flower that withers away” (499).

Hamlet, too, I would suggest, is “far more interested in the relationship between sexuality and failure than in the teleological success of sex” (500). In this chapter, I discuss the way Hamlet rejects, or at least continually defers taking up, the prostheses of nobility, and his avoidance of activities often undertaken for the purpose of obtaining (or enlarging) these prostheses. I begin with the trappings of genealogy as embodied in armour, and then discuss Hamlet in contrast to Fortinbras, specifically in terms of the Norwegian prince’s aptitude for war. I examine Hamlet’s critique of land-ownership, marriage, and the production of heirs, and conclude with an examination of Hamlet’s unprosthetic body as in some sense “disabled.”

Hamlet’s lack of prostheses is foreshadowed when he meets his father’s ghost,

who continues to wear the armour his son ought to have inherited. In *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass discuss the relationship between arms (or armour) and identity, suggesting that “the dislocation of paternal inheritance is prefigured by the failure of the son to resemble the father” (265). The “most privileged markings of identity,” Jones and Stallybrass explain, were found “less within the body of the knight,” but rather in the “heraldic signs that adorn it” (250). The “armoured body,” then, “is identified [...] not as an “individual,” but as a genealogical body, a body marked [...] by its kinship connections” (250). It is remarkable, as Jones and Stallybrass point out, that Hamlet’s father, as a ghost, wears “the very Armor he had on” while alive, since “the rite of mourning was itself a ritual transmission of the father’s armor to his son” in which “memory and inheritance [were] two sides of the same coin” (250). In his failure to “inherit his father’s armor,” Hamlet “visually refuses his father’s legacy” (265).

In this Hamlet appears in stark contrast to Fortinbras, whom I mentioned earlier as an example of primogeniture “working,” of the fulfillment of what de Grazia calls “the promise of the patronymic” (*Hamlet* 75). In *Hamlet*, de Grazia says, “imperial ambition [is associated] with the young Norwegian prince” who is named “for his strength in arms” (*Hamlet* 75). De Grazia’s discussion of “arms” locates the memory of Denmark’s “glory days” in the armour in which King Hamlet’s ghost is “encased” as he “marches across the battlements” (*Hamlet* 75). These arms – weapons and armour – are themselves prosthetic extensions of king and of kingdom, as they supplement the king’s body, and participate in territorial conquest. And King Hamlet was himself a noted soldier, whose “exploits included the subduing of Norway in single combat, the smiting of Polacks on

the ice, the pummelling of the English, and campaigns against the French” (*Hamlet* 75). King Claudius, however, “consistently avoids combat,” and Hamlet is “hardly more inclined to take up arms” (*Hamlet* 76). He “writes rather than fights himself out of danger” when his uncle plots against his life, and he returns from England “naked,” “unarmed and without an army,” unlike Laertes who arrives from France supplemented by a violent “rabble” (*Hamlet* 76-77).

Here we see what so many critics have called Hamlet’s “lack of action.” Having commented on the issue of delay in “Teleology, Delay and the “Old Mole,”” de Grazia proposes her own explanation in *Hamlet without Hamlet*: “Hamlet’s lethargy” is symptomatic of a general debauchery in Denmark, demonstrated by King Hamlet’s “inertia in his final days, and Denmark’s state of unreadiness on the eve of the anticipated attack” (77). De Grazia claims that Fortinbras demonstrates the proper military vigour, and that Hamlet, in contrast, fails to act appropriately. I suggest, instead, that Hamlet’s critique of war is an instance of his deferral of the prostheses of nobility – and that his philosophical treatment of the conquest of land demonstrates its futility.

Fortinbras, argues de Grazia, has “given his army the military exercise necessary to make the state wholesome” whereas Denmark is a “pursy” and “drossy” country (*Hamlet* 78). Hamlet’s father, she says, was “stuffed and drowsy” at the time of his death, in contrast to his earlier days of military glory (*Hamlet* 78). Connecting King Hamlet’s ostensible laziness to his decadent state, de Grazia suggests that Denmark “erupts” because of “th’imposthume of much wealth and peace,” and that Norway prevails because, as a country, it has “purged itself back to health” (*Hamlet* 78). This is how de Grazia explains “Fortinbras’ shocking willingness to spend twenty thousand ducats and

two thousand men” for the irrelevant “little patch of ground” discussed in Act Four, Scene Four (*Hamlet* 78).

While de Grazia is inclined to read Fortinbras’ attack on this piece of land as purgative of the “imposthume” that wealth and peace have created in Norway, I interpret this scene rather differently. Fortinbras is Hamlet’s foil not insofar as the Norwegian prince’s behaviour shows that Hamlet is too slow to revenge, or inadequately martial, but just the opposite: Fortinbras signifies the excessively warlike, aggressive ruler, who wastes men’s lives for a scrap of ground that has “no profit in it but the name” (4.4.18-19). The name of this land, of course, is only profitable for those whose identity inheres in the property they have inherited or conquered. While the war profits Fortinbras’ Captain not at all (he tells Hamlet that he would not pay five ducats to farm it), the successful conquest of even such a small piece of ground will no doubt increase his leader’s prestige and fame (4.4.19-20).

De Grazia argues that “military action is the only cure to” national decadence, and is “worth the cost”; to support her reading, de Grazia provides a quotation from Fulke Greville, in which he uses Hamlet’s term, “imposthumes,” to describe the “Ease and Wantonness” which can only be purged by “warr” (*Hamlet* 78). While de Grazia is no doubt right to identify a cultural discourse in which war is perceived as a kind of medicine for a country’s excesses, I am not convinced that, within the play itself, this discourse is preferred, or that indiscriminate military action is justified. When Hamlet says that “rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honour’s at the stake,” he speaks with bitter irony, not admiration: for Hamlet, the “imminent death of twenty thousand men” in Fortinbras’

army is a terrible waste, the dead men are victims of “a fantasy and trick of fate” (4.4.61). In comparing himself, a man who fails to revenge “a father kill’d, a mother stain’d,” to Fortinbras, a man who “expos[es] what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death and danger dare, even for an eggshell,” Hamlet finds it difficult to say who falls further short of right (4.4.57, 51-53).

This critical attitude towards the acquisition of land is found throughout the play: the famous speech which details the way “a king may go progress through the guts of a beggar” anticipates later discussions of the utter pointlessness of owning property, or ruling a country (4.3.30-31). “Your worm is your only emperor,” says Hamlet, since “[w]e fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots” (4.3.22-3). Much of Hamlet’s rhetoric on the transient nature of worldly goods resonates with Christian precepts like Proverbs 28:20: “A faithful man shall abound with blessings; but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.” The crucial difference, of course, is that Hamlet does not find solace in faith, in the idea of an afterlife. He appears actually to fear this idea, as it would only serve to prolong the agonies of existence: Hamlet bemoans the fact that the Almighty has set his “canon ‘gainst self-slaughter,” and worries about the “dreams” that might possess him after death: there is no comfort to be found after death, then, and no assurance to be found in life (3.1.71, 1.2.132).

In the “graveyard scene,” Hamlet derides the fetishism of land ownership as puerile illusion. While his words evince some grief, his criticism of the futility of lineage and inheritance is harsh. “This fellow,” he remarks, *a propos* of a skull,

might be in ’s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries; is this the fine of his fines and the

recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor have no more, ha? (5.1.101-110).

Horatio replies, “Not a jot more, my lord,” and Hamlet concludes (punning on the fact that the vellum upon which deeds of assurance are written is made of calf- or sheepskin), that “they are sheeps and calves which seek out assurance in that” (5.1.111, 114-15).

Hamlet exposes the fallacy of the patrimony, the failure of the supplement to prevent infirmity or evade mortality: the inheritor, like his father, can look forward to no more than a coffin, a box which will hardly contain the pieces of paper that proclaim his great estate.

This idea, as it appears in *Hamlet*, echoes certain lines from Shakespeare's *Richard II* (written between two and five years earlier), which also depicts a king dethroned and murdered. Conscious that the end of his reign is drawing near, King Richard says,

of comfort no man speak,
Let's talk of graves, of worms [...]
Let's choose executors and talk of wills:
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground? [...]
Nothing can we call our own but death
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones [...]

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings;
How some have been deposed; some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed;
Some poison'd by their wives: some sleeping kill'd;
All murder'd (3.2.144-45, 48-50, 52-57).

As the loss of his own crown looms, King Richard repeats the word “deposed”: our bodies are deposed, the murdered kings are deposed, while living they were haunted by the ghosts that *they* deposed. This litany enacts the pointless, endless cycle of kingship; deposing some other, merely to be deposed oneself; breeding heirs who will themselves be deposed. There is no comfort to be had, and executors and wills are entirely futile, since the only possession we have to bequeath is the “paste” that covers our bones. To sit upon the ground and tell sad stories is the only option: any other conversation would be false hypocrisy.

The “barren earth” evoked in these lines, like Hamlet's fine dirt, contrasts sharply with the rosy, fertile England that John of Gaunt eulogizes in Act Two, Scene One of *Richard II*. John's description perfectly embodies the country-as-mother metaphor which Hamlet and Richard descry, the fantastic depiction of the teleological paradise, the country as a virtuous mother who always gives birth to kings: “This other Eden, demi-paradise,” John says, “this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, this nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings” (2.1.42, 50-51). This is a far cry from Hamlet's weedy garden; he does not, even as a fantasy, conceive of Denmark in such terms. National health and fruitfulness are often connected to the royal family's ability to produce

appropriate progeny, and yet Hamlet's attitude towards marriage and reproduction is hardly more positive than his depiction of land-ownership.

Although readers and critics have often assumed that Hamlet's critique of marriage is the result of Ophelia's rejection of him, I agree with Jenkins that "it is clearly he, not she, who repudiates their former love" (281). Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia is the result rather than the cause of his refusal to engage in the institutions of marriage and reproduction. "Are you honest?" Hamlet asks Ophelia (3.1.103). "Are you fair? [...] [I]f you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty" (3.1.105, 7-8). When Ophelia asks whether "beauty [could] have better commerce than with honesty," Hamlet responds, "the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into its likeness" (3.1.109-110, 111-15).

Hamlet has "realised" that the presence of beauty in a woman entails unchaste behaviour: thus, he says, he no longer loves Ophelia. She cannot "escape calumny" unless she spends the rest of her days in a nunnery: marriage and reproduction only "breed sinners" and turn men into "monsters" (3.1.138, 121-22, 140). In referring to Polonius as a "fishmonger," Hamlet simultaneously implies that Ophelia is a prostitute pimped out by her father, and describes her as dead fish (2.2.174). Hamlet's metaphors figure Ophelia as a corpse, and their potential progeny as the worms that multiply in rotting flesh: she is a dead dog, in which the sun will "breed maggots" (2.2.181). "I say, we will have no marriages!" he rages to Ophelia, "those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go" (3.1.149-51).

Critics and readers have been mistaken in assuming that Hamlet knows, or thinks

he knows, anything to discredit Ophelia specifically. His anger and disgust are aimed, not at one specific woman in response to her own particular faults, but at women generally, at the men who love them, at the institutions of marriage and child-bearing. To demonstrate the extraordinary nature of Hamlet's rejection of reproduction and marriage, I refer to Edelman's analysis of the politics of child-bearing and sexuality in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman uses the phrase "reproductive futurism" to describe the way "the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought" (Edelman 2). The figures of Mother and Father ensure the future in the shape of the[ir] Child, while the non-parents are "cas[t] outside the political domain" – into, as it were, the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Edelman 2).

Although it may seem odd to apply *No Future* to the context in which Shakespeare wrote, Fisher's research suggests that Edelman's critique is as pertinent to this time as it is to our own. As I mentioned earlier, Fisher indicates that, "in the early modern period, the concept of manhood" and a "man's identity" were primarily "defined on the basis of patrilineal inheritance" and linked with his ability to reproduce himself" (Fisher 69). The heterocentric nature of this emphasis on patrilineal inheritance, and the sexual conquest of women, is one of the subjects of Edelman's discussion. Under a system of reproductive futurism, Edelman argues, something called "queerness" is figured as "the lifeless machinery responsible for animating the "spirit" of futurity" (Edelman 27). The queer, for Edelman, refuses to admit the "absolute and invisible authority" of the biblical mandate "be fruitful and multiply" (Edelman 15). While Hamlet's refusal to be fruitful and multiply stems not, I think, from sexual attraction to

men, he is queer insofar as he is eccentric, or different from the norm; the contempt with which he views the dynastic project sets him outside the system of reproductive futurism. In refusing this logic, Edelman suggests, the queer character is cast out from society, made abject – and Hamlet is an outcast, his “wild and whirling words” incomprehensible to almost everyone at court (1.5.139). Reproductive futurism “impose[s] an ideological limit on political discourse and, in ignoring this “ideological limit,” in refusing to procreate on what looks like ideological grounds, Hamlet renders himself unintelligible: he has rejected the “imprimatur of meaning-production” as located in the social relations I have termed prostheses of nobility (2, 13).

This rejection is part of the utter contempt in which he holds the social conventions around him. “God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another,” Hamlet says, addressing either women at large or humanity in general: “you jig, you amble, you lisp, and nickname God’s creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance” (3.1.144-48). Hamlet’s bitter invective has, of late, been interpreted as misogyny; Freudian readings are more specific, linking his anger to his supposed desire for his mother. I suggest, however, that Hamlet’s sudden hatred is not exclusively directed at women. His repudiation of what Edelman calls “the organizing principle of communal relations” is due to his perception that human institutions are corrupt (2).

And Hamlet often reserves his bile for himself. “[Y]ou should not have believed me [when I told you that I loved you],” he tells Ophelia, “virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it; I loved you not” (3.1.117-19). This metaphor of grafting suggests Hamlet’s own personal corruption, or tendency towards sin – a tendency which he seems to attribute to humans generally. If the line read “my old stock”

instead of “our old stock,” I would think that Hamlet refers to Ophelia as the virtue who, despite her inclusion into Hamlet’s life, has failed to make him less of an “arrant knave” (3.1.129). This comment is generalized, however, in the use of the word “our”: the setting-together of men and women in marriage does not make them better people, and the new people produced in the “grafting” of marriage will be just as flawed and mendacious as their parents.

Hamlet’s metaphor (although perhaps not the cynical lesson he draws from it) was a common one in Renaissance England; Vin Nardizzi shows that the “practice of plant-grafting [...] was regarded in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English gardening manuals as [...] an analogue to procreation” (1). Nardizzi’s piece begins with a discussion of Sonnet 15, in which “the speaker of Shakespeare’s sonnets makes a spectacular pronouncement to the beautiful young man: “I engraft you new” (1). Grafting as a “ver[b] of generation” is implicated in discussions of “art/nature” elsewhere in Shakespeare’s work; Nardizzi reminds us of *The Winter’s Tale*, when Perdita says “she will not allow “streaked gillyvers” or grafted carnations into her garden because, in the flowers’ “piedness” she detects “an art which...shares with great creating nature””(3). For some of the characters in *The Winter’s Tale*, “the act of grafting [...] resembles social degeneracy rather than engineered fruitfulness” (Nardizzi 4). Hamlet’s concern is not, however, that to marry and have children with Ophelia would be to make a “socially disadvantageous graft on his lineage,” but rather that marriage itself is a false and ultimately doomed attempt to improve a subject who, instead of flourishing as part of a new social relation will merely continue to “relish” of their old stock (6). The old stock, here, presumably the Hamlet line, or Hamlet’s human forebears more generally, is not

represented as pure and noble — it is contrasted with “virtue,” which will not “take” on the old stock, which cannot change its essence.

Hamlet’s speeches on the subject of marriage represent the antithesis of the speaker’s words in Sonnet 1:

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty’s rose might never die,
But as the ripper should by time increase
His tender heir might bear memory (7).

In this poem, the teleological metaphor of the flower is celebrated in the body of the young man so beautiful that he is required to reproduce himself, both for the benefit of his own lineage, and for society at large, since “we” desire increase from creatures so extremely fair. In the sonnet, “marriage and a wife’s generative body are integral conditions of this fantasy’s possibility,” and yet, in Hamlet’s account, the wife’s body is rotting, decaying, a useless graft which merely hangs, wart-like, upon the stock it was meant to inoculate (9).

Hamlet rejects the prostheses, then, of land and heirs, and he likewise rails against marriage and wars of conquest. How is this un-prosthetic prince to be understood? Perhaps it make sense to consider him as somehow disabled, as he himself suggests when he describes himself in terms of castration (*Hamlet* 2). David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder argue (in a section entitled “Supplementing the Void”) that “narrative prosthesis (or the dependence of literary narratives upon disability) forwards the notion that all narratives operate out of a desire to compensate for a limitation or to reign in excess” (53). “Literary narratives,” Mitchell and Snyder continue, “begin a process of explanatory

compensation wherein perceived “aberrancies” can be rescued” (53). This process often takes a certain typical route: first, a “deviance is marked as improper to a social context”: in *Hamlet*, as I have suggested, this deviance is dispossession (53). Second, a narrative “consolidates the need for its own existence by calling for an explanation of the deviation’s origins and formative consequences” (53). In this case, the explanation for Hamlet’s deviance is provided through the presence of a villain, Claudius. Third, say Snyder and Mitchell, “the deviance is brought from the periphery of the concerns to the center of the story”: arguably, in *Hamlet*, this stage takes up much of the bulk of the play, with Hamlet progressing from his initial melancholy to fits of rage and despair. The last stage Mitchell and Snyder identify, “the remainder of the story,” is devoted to “rehabilitat[ing] or fix[ing] the deviance,” usually through recourse to a cure, or by the extermination of difference (53).

The apparently social deviance of dispossession takes on a physical or embodied dimension in a context when, to recall de Grazia, men are “commensurate” with the land they own. It would seem that Hamlet’s “disability” of dispossession is not rehabilitated, since he never becomes King Hamlet (except for the brief moments between Claudius’ death and his own, which can hardly qualify). The alternative offered by Mitchell and Snyder – that Hamlet’s death is an “extermination of the deviant as the purification of the social body” – is perhaps more apt since his death is, in part, the result of his murder of Polonius, which is connected to his deferral of the murder of Claudius (53). It might make sense to suggest, then, that Hamlet’s death is the result of his hesitation to take up the prostheses of nobility, although not the result of his dispossession per se (if he had immediately denounced or killed Claudius and taken the throne himself, Hamlet would

not have suffered the same death). To suggest that Hamlet is exterminated in order to purify the social body does not really make sense, however, in light of the fact that he dies along with several other people, of varying levels of guilt or social aberration.

And there is a sort of agency in the manner of Hamlet's death, if only a negative agency. When Horatio says, upon hearing Osric's message that Laertes has challenged Hamlet, "If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit," Hamlet replies, "if [death] be now, 'tis not to come [...] since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"(5.2.189-90, 192-195). To paraphrase a line from *Macbeth*, nothing in Hamlet's life becomes him like the leaving it: just as Hamlet defers, as he hesitates to take up the prostheses of nobility rather than reject them outright, he allows himself to be drawn into a situation which he knows might lead to his death. Hamlet's fight with Laertes is a kind of passive suicide: the refusal to choose between life and death.

Conclusion

Although Hamlet's aversion to reproduction and marriage is usually read as a reaction to his mother's relationship with his uncle, Hamlet's disgust with these institutions seems to transcend his specific experience, and he extends this scorn liberally to the world around him. Inspired by Menon's anti-teleological reading of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," I have suggested that in *Hamlet*, dynastic flowers are not choked out by non-productive weeds but remain stubbornly blasted. I have read Hamlet's hesitation as an unwillingness to take up the prostheses that usually constitute a person of his rank, and I have shown how he differs from his comparatively combative and acquisitive fictional peers. All that remains is to say something about the play's end.

Hamlet, fittingly, is co-terminous with the entire royal family of Denmark, and, it seems, with Danish sovereignty: Fortinbras, the conqueror *ex machina*, arrives in a timely fashion to assert his right to the country, and the play concludes as his men prepare to give Hamlet a soldier's burial. This is a typical tragic ending, and yet there is an important difference between *Hamlet* and other tragedies. Bernard Williams, in a discussion of classical Greek tragedy, argues that these works confront the audience with "the world's horrors," and thus offer "a necessary supplement and a suitable limitation to the tireless aim of moral philosophy to make the world safe for well-disposed people" (Williams 47, 52). Hamlet presents the reader with the horrors inherent in human life in a different way than other tragedies of disentanglement and political collapse like *Bonduca* and *Edward II* (or *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, for that matter). While the latter plays tell the story of specific horrors, Hamlet focuses on the sense in which horror is inherent in human life; the famously introspective Prince of Denmark considers the horrible (O most

horrible!) nature of marriage, reproduction, the ownership of land, and political power. These institutions, he discovers, fail to make people “good,” or to protect them from horror. To recall Menon: while *Bonduca* and *Edward II* tell the story of particular failures, Hamlet actually takes failure as “a theoretical paradigm” (“Venus” 498).

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche suggests that Hamlet’s revulsion is directed at the human experience in general: Hamlet, he says, has “gazed into the true essence of things, [he has] *acquired knowledge* and [he finds] action repulsive for [his actions] can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; [he regards] it as laughable or shameful that [he] should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint” (40). “Knowledge kills action,” argues Nietzsche, “action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion – this is the lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he thinks too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were” (40). I differ from Nietzsche’s reading on several points: I am not sure whether *Hamlet* makes claims about any kind of “eternal essence,” nor am I convinced that Hamlet has learned what this “true essence” is. I am hesitant, finally, to ascribe any kind of “lesson” to this play.

I am interested, however, in Nietzsche’s assertion that action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion. Whether this is a point made by the text as a whole, it does seem that Hamlet might agree, at least in part, with this assertion. Throughout the text, Hamlet argues passionately for the pointlessness of life, of marriage, of reproduction, of owning land, of ruling a country. “Country matters” are “nothing,” as Hamlet says, in a phrase which simultaneously evokes sex and political or national issues (3.2.74). Denmark is a prison; Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are traitors; his uncle is a murderer;

his mother corrupt; and his lover nothing but a breeder of sinners. With the exception of his father, who is dead before the action begins, there is only one relationship in Hamlet's life that does not disappoint him bitterly, which still has meaning, even at the end of the play. Hamlet's "only confidant" is Horatio, "a scholar" who calls himself "more an antique Roman than a Dane" (*Hamlet* 90, 21-22, 70). Horatio is the closest thing Hamlet has to an heir; he is the one charged with telling Hamlet's story, repeating what his "dying voice" has to say, and making sure that he is remembered properly.

It is Horatio who is witness to Hamlet's death, and who, despite his move towards suicide, is commanded by Hamlet to "[g]ive me the cup; let go" (5.2.350). In preventing Horatio's death, Hamlet ensures that his friend will live to complete his narrative task. Since the play's audience knows exactly what Horatio has to tell, the point of this conversation between Hamlet and Horatio is to underline the importance of their relationship, and to show that Hamlet will not be forgotten but has, in a sense, passed on enough of himself to carry on in the form of his friend. "Oh God!" cries Hamlet, "Horatio, what a wounded name, things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!" (5.2.349-50). Hamlet has no wife and no son to leave behind; Hamlet desires only that his secrets live on, and he needs Horatio to bear them forth. "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart," he tells Horatio, "Absent thee from felicity awhile, / and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, to tell my story" (5.3.351-54).

"So tell [Fortinbras]," Hamlet insists, "with the occurents, more and less" – and Horatio promises to

 speak to the yet unknowing world

 how these things came about; so you shall hear

of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
of deaths put on by cunning, and forced cause
and, in this upshot, purposes mistook
fall'n on the inventor's heads. All this I can
truly deliver (5.2.384-90).

The word “deliver” evokes a scene of childbirth; Horatio will deliver himself of a story that has been planted in him by Hamlet, a story which is all the dispossessed Hamlet has to leave to his country, his people, and the new government. Having deferred the prostheses of nobility up to the last possible moment, Hamlet's sole bequest is fitting, for he is a scholar, too: all he leaves behind him is “words, words, words” (2.2.192).

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