

CRY OF CURS: LANGUAGE, CLASS AND THE MOB IN SIDNEY, SPENSER AND SHAKESPEARE

By Jason J. Zirbel

According to Stephen Greenblatt, "the Renaissance displays a markedly increased sensitivity, nourished by classicism, to theoretical implications of genre differentiation." In the works of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, the respective genres of pastoral romance, chivalric romance, and history stage play each work to advance the individual class interest of the author. In Book 2 of the *Old and New Arcadia*, the aristocratic Sidney depicts upper-class characters as possessing a linguistic facility which allows and at times justifies their manipulation of the inherently inarticulate lower-class mob. In Book 5 canto 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the knight Artegall acts as an enforcer of centralized authority, deconstructing the populist ideology of a demagogic giant, and recalling the bureaucratic Spenser's own fear of the unrestrained voice of the lower orders as laid out in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*. Finally, the Roman history play *Coriolanus* allows Shakespeare to demonstrate the importance of language and role-playing in the social and political arenas, thereby legitimating the occupation by which he earned the financial capital that allowed him to lay claim to the title of gentleman. The humanistic belief in the power of language to shape social reality is evident in the work of each author, as is influence of the class society that formed the ideology underlying each text.

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1—SEPARATING THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS IN SIR PHILIP SIDNEY'S <i>THE COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE'S ARCADIA</i>	5
CHAPTER 2— A TOURNEY OF WORDS: LANGUAGE AND LAW IN EDMUND SPENSER'S <i>THE FAERIE QUEENE</i>	29
CHAPTER 3— ROLE-PLAYING IN THE STREET: DISCOURSE AND LEGITIMACY IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S <i>CORIOLANUS</i>	50
CONCLUSION.....	72
WORKS CITED.....	75

INTRODUCTION

In 1580, Sir Philip Sidney lamented that “poesy . . . should only find in our time a hard welcome in England” (*Apology* 70). It was a dire, though perhaps misleading, assessment. But it is significant for its intimation of the link between English letters and emergent English nationalism that was a hallmark of sixteenth-century England.

Following Henry Tudor’s “successful baronial coup” in 1485 (Holstun, “The Giant’s Faction” 335), the English crown embarked on a program of centralization designed, in part, to forestall a return to the factionalism and violence of the fifteenth century.

Concurrent with this consolidation of authority was an influx of humanist ideals of republicanism and education. As the “king’s estate” was transformed into a “genuinely national administration” (Helgerson 4), the role of the individual became an increasingly pressing point of interrogation. At the nexus of these cross-currents were writers such as Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare, each of whom struggled to define the relationship of the individual to and within the emerging modern nation-state.

As noted by Stephen Alford, “Tudor politics was clearly informed by its intellectual context” (547). This intellectual context itself was molded by newly rediscovered classical authors such as Cicero, who celebrated the orator’s ability to “instruct his listener, give him pleasure, and stir his emotions” (75). The influence of Ciceronian humanism results in language becoming an index of political agency in the literature of early modern England. This concept was further bolstered by the republican

theory of classical historians such as Livy, Lucan, and Tacitus, all of whom offered support for the decentered voice in public affairs.

The nascent republican tradition (which would come to fruition during the 1640s) was far from monolithic. Rather, it was “constituted of a number of different elements and languages” (Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* 9) which vied with one another for legitimacy. As older social theories of “metaphysical organicism” give way to “theories of balanced state power” (Holstun, “Tragic Superfluity” 492), society was increasingly viewed as being comprised of competitive classes rather than organically related estates. As such, there was inherent within republican theory the question of which class is to be given voice. In the work of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, one observes a keen “sensitivity, nourished by classicism, of the theoretical implications of genre differentiation” (Greenblatt, “Murdering Peasants” 27) and the ways in which such differentiation could serve disparate class interests.

Andy Wood notes that there has long been a tendency to view “early modern social relations as only semi-modern, suspended between an older system characterized by deference, hierarchy and paternalism and the overt class struggles of the nineteenth century” (803). However, postmodernist historicism of the 1990s has deconstructed the “chronological endpoint of this meta-narrative” (Wood 803), allowing us to recognize “class antagonism [as] the mirror image of deference” (Wood 821). Wood therefore issues a call for

a less rigid, more flexible history of class identities and social conflicts:
one that does not require earlier struggles to match up to some imagined

nineteenth-century ideal type; one that frees us to recognize class as a fluid, ever-changing, emotive, dangerous force in human affairs. (826)

David Rollinson shares this sentiment in his discussion of the early modern English commons, noting that “recognition of the agency of the rebellious multitude and attempts to classify it are much older than nineteenth-century debates about class and class struggle” (252). Indeed, through comparing varied depictions of popular rebellion by authors of diverse social rank, one discovers how such depictions are inflected by the individual class consciousness of the author. This corresponds with the assertion of Howard and Strohm that, in sixteenth century England, the idea of a “commons [is] not restricted to any one political or factional position, but is broadly available to whomever can lay claim to them” (552). By adopting this model, one observes how Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare work within their respective genres to construct a “social imaginary” (Howard 552) that accords with the reality of their particular social situations.

Sidney uses the pastoral genre and Ciceronian oratory in Book 2 of both the *Old Arcadia* and the *New Arcadia* as filters that separate the legitimate from the illegitimate political voice. As a member of the aristocracy, Sidney had a personal interest in defining linguistic skill as an inherent virtue of the upper class. By allowing the prince Pyrocles to quell the rebellion with language (according to the poetic theory formulated in the *Apology*), Sidney promotes the traditional role of the aristocracy as counselor. In Book 5 canto 2 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the knight Artegall acts as an enforcer of centralized authority, deconstructing the populist ideology of a demagogic giant, averting open rebellion, and recalling Spenser’s own role as an administrator of Tudor

bureaucracy. Finally, the Roman history play *Coriolanus* allows Shakespeare to demonstrate the importance of language and role-playing in the social and political arenas. By contrasting a deliberative populace with an verbally abrasive patrician, Shakespeare reveals language's necessity in the fulfillment of social roles, thereby legitimating the occupation that bankrolled his questionable claim to the title of gentleman.

The generic choices of each author reflect more than aesthetic concerns. By observing how each author uses genre to shape the voice of the commons in revolt, while keeping in mind his particular class origin, one may test the theory of the Marxist critic George Lukacs that the "true bearers of ideology are forms" (qtd. in Eagleton 24). Ultimately, of course, the author has a degree of autonomy within the conventions that define a particular genre. It is the author who has the final word. But it is precisely the manner in which he uses this license that reveals his class ideology.

CHAPTER 1
SEPARATING THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS IN SIR PHILIP SIDNEY'S
THE COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE'S ARCADIA

For Philip Sidney, writing at the midpoint of the reign of Elizabeth I, the unregulated use of language had profound implications, both literary and political. As an aristocrat of high pedigree, enduring the “enforced idleness of a humiliating rustication” (Greenblatt “Murdering Peasants,” 18) at the hand of an authoritarian Queen, Sidney had a vested interest in promoting a limited form of republicanism while avoiding the chaos that he believed would inevitably accompany indiscriminant enfranchisement. According to the theory Sidney describes in the *Apology for Poetry*, poetry’s “final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls . . . can be capable of” (22). The ideological underpinning of this apparently disinterested idealism becomes manifest in the *Arcadia*, demonstrating Eagleton’s observation that “by giving ideology a determinate form . . . art is able to distance itself from it, thus revealing to us the limits of that ideology” (19). By allowing individual aristocratic characters the ability to understand and manipulate generic conventions and forms, Sidney identifies them as a class and empowers them politically. Conversely, by depicting lower-class characters as incapable of wielding the powerful generative tool of language, he demonstrates their inability to comprehend virtue and thereby justifies their political marginalization and manipulation.

Given Sidney's family history, his habit of alluding to the traditionally aristocratic role of counselor comes as little surprise. His father, Henry Sidney was of gentry stock and served several monarchs with distinction. (The boy king, Edward VI, is rumored to have died in his arms.) Philip Sidney's mother, Mary, was the daughter of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. Until 1580, Philip remained "the only legitimate male descendant of John Dudley" (Duncan-Jones 44), the heir apparent to his uncles the Earls of Leicester and Warwick, and, in Dr. John James's (perhaps fulsome) estimation, "the very hope of our age" (Duncan-Jones x). In his only piece of writing penned expressly for publication, the *Defense of the Earl of Leicester*, Sidney laid claim to his maternal antecedents as a means of distinguishing himself from a "base and wretched tongue . . . [that] dares not speak his own name" (129):

I am a Dudley in blood, that Duke's daughter's son, and do acknowledge, though in all truth I may justly affirm that I am by my father's side of ancient and always well esteemed and well matched gentry . . . my chiefest honor is to be a Dudley, and truly am glad to have cause to set forth the nobility of the blood whereof I am descended. (*Miscellaneous Prose* 134)

However, any honors garnered from his connection with the Dudley name were tainted by his grandfather's role in the attempt to disinherit Mary and Elizabeth Tudor and place Lady Jane Grey on the throne in 1553. Thus, both the honor and shame of his bloodline account for the hypersensitivity to issues of rank one finds throughout Sidney's life and within the *Arcadia* itself.

In spite of such “calamities fallen to that house” (*Miscellaneous Prose* 139), Sidney was groomed from a young age for a life at court. In 1564 he was sent to Shrewsbury school, where he was exhorted by his father to

Think upon every word you will speak, before you utter it, and remember how nature hath rampiered up (as it were) the tongue, with teeth, lips, yea, and hair without the lips, and all betokening reins, or bridles, for the loose use of this member. (qtd. in Duncan-Jones 21)

The humanist education offered at Shrewsbury and later at Oxford would have confirmed this high estimation of speech’s power, and the consequent need to control the vehicle of such influence. Educational theorists such as Ascham, Elyot, Starkey, and Gilbert advocated education as a necessary means of inserting non-monarchical voices into the national dialogue in the form of council. Of course, such voices were invariably aristocratic: “in England as in other countries north of the Alps . . . the humanist tradition was profoundly conditioned by its association with a courtly, basically aristocratic society” (Ferguson 188). Sidney’s familial connections allowed him access to royal spectacles in which the association between speech and power played out. In 1566, Sidney accompanied Shrewsbury headmaster Thomas Ashton to Kenilworth Castle to join his uncles the Earls of Leicester and Warwick as they entertained the queen with “five days [of] sermons, orations and disputations” (Duncan-Jones 36). It would seem that much of Sidney’s adolescence was informed by the nexus of language and influence.

At seventeen Sidney was, like most young men of his station, sent to the continent to complete his education and prepare him for his duties as courtier/statesman. These

biographical details have parallels in the education of his fictive counterpart in the *Old Arcadia* (OA). Philisides has, like Sidney, been

brought up from cradle age with such care as parents are wont to bestow on their children as mean to be the maintainers of their name . . . [and] suffered to spend time in travel . . . they offered learning unto me, especially that kind that teacheth what in truth and not in opinion is to be embraced, and what to be eschewed. (OA 290)

Throughout his adult life, Sidney pursued this idealized sense of truth, and found in language an efficacious means of doing so. Such truth is an Aristotelian *architectonike* that culminates in “the knowledge of a man’s self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only” (*Apology* 23). According to Sidney, poetry trumps both philosophy and history in its ability to move men from mere *gnosis*, knowledge, to *praxis*, virtuous action. Whereas “the one giveth the precept, and the other the example” (*Apology* 25), poetry offers concrete examples of abstract virtues.

As an example of the link between learning and virtue, Philisides relates a song taught to him by

old Languet . . .
 . . . the shepherd best swift Ister knew,
 For clerkly rede, and hating what is naught,
 For faithful heart, clean hands, and mouth as true. (OA 222)

The poem is a tribute to Hubert Languet, advisor to young Sidney during his extended European tour (1572-75), and staunch supporter of Protestant republicanism in his own right, to whom Sidney wrote

I declare and will maintain as long as I live, that I have derived more advantage from my acquaintance with you, than from all the time that I have spent on my travels. (*Correspondence* 48)

Languet regularly encouraged Sidney to keep in mind his own “splendor of birth, majesty of person . . . expectation of great wealth, [and] the authority and influence of [his] relations in [his] country” (*Correspondence* 183-84). Like many humanists, Languet believed strongly in a program of education that would fit out promising young aristocrats for a life of public service. To this end, he exhorted the young Sidney to study the letters of Cicero, “not only for the beauty of the Latin, but also for the very important matter they contain. There is nowhere a better statement of the causes which overthrew the Roman republic” (*Correspondence* 20). Such causes are likewise treated in “Ister Bank.” The tale opens in a golden age preceding the creation of man, “When all this earth, this dam or mould of ours, / Was only woned with such as beasts begot.” In spite of Jove’s warning that rulers are apt to “forget the swink due to their hire,” the beasts demand a king. This granted,

Each other beast likewise his present brings;
And (but they drad their prince they oft should want)
They all consented were to give him wings.
And ay more awe towards him for to plant,

To their own work this privilege they grant:

That from thenceforth to all eternity

No beast should freely speak, but only he. (OA 224)

The result of the beasts' forfeiture of speech is tyranny, and the moral of Philisides's fable is that a de-centered public voice is essential to forestalling despotism. The tenor of "Ister Bank" testifies to the influence Languet exercised on Sidney's thinking. Another of Languet's protégés, the French writer Philippe Duplessis Mornay, writes in *De Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (1579) that

Kings should always remember that it is from God, but by the people and for the people that they rule; and that they should not claim that they have received their kingdom from God alone and by the sword, as they say, since they were first girded with that very sword by the people. (69)

The proper relationship of ruler to subject is at the heart of Sidney's *Arcadia*. In an attempt to sidestep the fulfillment of an oracle, and against the advice of his most trusted advisor, Duke Basilius forsakes his rightful station and retires to the forest of Arcadia with his wife and two daughters. This shirking of responsibility initiates a cascade of subsequent crises. The duke delegates authority to the commoner Dametas, under whose care he places his heir Pamela. Pamela and her younger sister, Philoclea, are courted by two roving princes, Pyrocles and Musidorus, who masquerade as an Amazon and a shepherd, respectively, in order to avoid revealing their amorous motives. Finally, the populace ultimately rises up in response to what they feel is their

abandonment by their rightful ruler. In his biography of Sidney, Fulke Greville writes that, in the *Arcadia*, Sidney

left an authentical president to after ages, that howsoever tyrants allow of no scope, stamp, or standard, but their own will; yet with princes there is a latitude for subjects to reserve native and legall freedom, by paying humble tribute in manner, though not in matter, to them. (70)

The passage draws several distinctions that are fundamental to any investigation of how Sidney's literary works are related to his political existence. The first of these is the distinction between a tyrant and a legitimate prince. Much of the political writing of sixteenth-century England embraced the issue of a monarch's rights and duties versus those of the subject. For proto-republicans such as Sidney and Greville, the "latitude" granted to subjects gauges the legitimacy of a sovereign. A good ruler avails himself of the counsel offered by his subjects. Sidney's espousal of this position is evidenced in his *Letter to Queen Elizabeth Touching Her Marriage to Monsieur*. When seeking to dissuade Queen Elizabeth from an unpopular marriage to the Catholic Duke of Alençon he reminds her that

Your inward force . . . consisteth in your subjects . . . whom your happy government hath granted the free exercise of eternal truth . . . your state is so enwrapped, as it were impossible for you, without excessive trouble, to pull yourself out of the party so long maintained. (*Miscellaneous Prose* 47)

Implicit in this principle of reciprocity between the monarch and subject (as envisioned by Sidney) is the provision that such “free exercise” must be limited to the right sort. While Sidney’s *Letter to Queen Elizabeth* insists on honoring the tradition of a public dialogue, it is quick to warn against England’s coming to resemble Pompey’s Rome, “a popular estate, where indeed men were to rise or fall according to the foolish breath of the many headed confusion” (*Miscellaneous Prose* 54).

This leads to the second distinction drawn by Greville: while the “native and legall freedom” of the English subject is to participate in the political discourse of the realm, this right must be tempered and exercised only under the guise of a deferential “manner.” In the *Arcadia*, such an observation of forms does more than merely ingratiate the courtier to the monarch. There is a patently ethical/virtuous component to Sidney’s conception of language and its forms as set out in the *Apology*. In the *Arcadia*, those capable of using language enter into the debate. Those unable to do so are silenced ethically through their virtual inability to speak properly. This serves not only to exclude a particular class of the population from those freedoms included in the contract between sovereign and subject, but also to preclude the possibility of that class even entering into any dialogue dealing with the state as a *res publica*.

“Ister Bank” is a prime example of the “authentical president” cited by Greville. It situates the *Arcadia* within the emerging dialogue concerning the degree to which the state is a *res publica*, a public thing. Moreover, by couching Philisides’s political tale in pastoral form, Sidney taps into a tradition that has classical precedents in Virgil and Theocritus. This pastoral tradition had since its inception been used as a political tool, a

means of treating the “brute historical fact of the destructive impact of the politico-military world” (Boyle 105). This was, of course, not unknown to Renaissance literary theorists like Sidney: “sometimes, under the pretty guise tales of wolves and sheep, [pastoral poetry] can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience” (*Apology* 43). Just as the matters discussed are understood to possess a greater allegorical significance beyond that of animal husbandry, so the shepherds such as Philisides are themselves understood to be more than rustic laborers. At the opening of the First Eclogues the reader is informed that these are “not such base shepherds as we commonly make account of, but the very owners of the sheep themselves” (*OA* 50). This distinction is particularly telling when one remembers that Sidney is writing at the Countess of Pembroke’s estate at Wilton, “itself the result of early sixteenth-century enclosures bitterly resented by the poor” (Greenblatt, “Murdering Peasants” 16). Quite possibly, Sidney was aware enough of his surroundings to suggest some correlation between the fictive shepherds with the historical landowners who benefited from such enclosures. Even more importantly in terms of class identification within Arcadia, these shepherds are able to “under hidden forms utter such matters as were otherwise not fit for their delivery” (*OA* 50). Their elevated status is further underscored by the fact that their orations and dialogues are overseen by the Duke himself, suggesting senatorial overtones:

But nothing lifted it [this pastoral exercise] up to so high a key as the presence of their own duke who, not only by looking on but by great courtesy and liberality, animated the shepherds the more exquisitely to

seek a worthy accomplishment of his good liking . . . he willed,
with all freedom of speech and behavior, to keep their accustomed
method (OA 50-51)

In spite of the fact that the drama of the *Arcadia* has as its mainspring the failure of Basilius to avail himself of good counsel, instead using “much dukely sophistry to deceive himself, [and] make his will wisdom” (OA 8), the shepherds of the eclogues provide a model of magistracy. At the very least, they are identifiable with the “yeomen [who] next unto the nobilitie . . . have the greatest charge and doings in the common wealth” (Smith 74). Since they move/play freely within the confines of sanctioned language, they are able to comment on and debate issues which are beyond the ken of bona fide rustics such as Dametas. When Philisides delivers “Ister Bank” in the midst of the Third Eclogues, he is working within a recognized set of conventions to sing out against autocracy. He is not, however, advocating an indiscriminate outpouring of voices. Sidney’s use of language aims to naturalize the belief that the common people should not meddle in public affairs, as opposed to “magistrates (officers) [who] were not bound by this dictate as they belonged to God’s chosen elite” (Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* 50).

In contrast to the fluency of the stylized shepherds is the inarticulateness of Dametas, who “stood like a director over them, with nodding, gaping, winking or stamping, showing how he did like or dislike those things he did not understand” (OA 51). His lack of language skills links him to the “fourth sort” (after monarchs, lords and yeomen) discussed by Smith in *De Republica Anglorum*,

those which the olde Romans called *capite censij proletarij* or *operae*, day labourers, poore husbandmen, yea marchantes, or retailers which have no free lande, copiholders, all artificers, as Taylers, Shoomakers, Carpenters, Brickemakers, Bricklayers, Masons, &c. These have no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth, and no account is made of them but onelie to be ruled, not to rule other (76)

The Duke's failure to properly distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate voices results in the improper promotion of Dametas to a position of authority. Dametas is characterized by a "rudeness, which the Duke interpreted [as] plainness" (OA 28). Such outward crudity reflects the coarseness of Dametas's inner nature. He is a travesty of real authority in that he is "glad he might use his authority in chiding" (OA 28). The princess Cleophila, incapable of "yield[ing] any answer to so base a creature" (OA 28), is instead quietly disdainful of him. Thus challenged, Dametas is reduced to "making faces like an ape that had newly taken a purgation, pale, shaking, and foaming at the mouth" (OA 31). Because he has been inappropriately elevated by Basilius, Dametas is finally revealed to be burdened by "so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry" (*Apology* 89). He is reduced to a beast, incapable of speech, and consequently, incapable of effectively wielding power.

Sidney's juxtaposition of stylized and non-stylized figures recalls Rosalie Colie's discussion of *Don Quixote*: "some episodes in that book arrange themselves in their generic pattern and decorum, others crack along conventional fissures" (31). According to Tracey Sedinger, this contrast represents Sidney's departure from the pastoral mode.

Because his “virulent class prejudice” cannot brook the genre’s “romanticized portrayal of the lower sorts” (61), Sidney deconstructs its conventions through the non-conforming figure of Dametas. But this overlooks the privileged treatment of the shepherds as discussed above. An alternative reading is that Sidney uses the genre itself as a signifier of class. Granted, “Dametas’s small talents cannot bear the weight of pastoral expectation” (Sedinger 61); but this is not a fault of the form. The integrity of pastoral is not compromised by the fact that Dametas falls outside its boundaries. On the contrary, those boundaries are thereby reified. The inherently selective nature of the form allows it to serve Sidney’s class-conscious agenda: “there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused” (*Apology* 88). In the heteroglossic narrative of the Arcadian greenspace, language is the filter by which legitimate political discourse is separated from illegitimate.

It is not only through their handling of poetic forms that a certain class of characters is legitimated. For Sidney, there exists no sharp delineation between poetry and oratory. He seems to anticipate Fowler’s opinion that “since there is no end to the genre distinctions that might be made, there is no point in making more of them than the critical end in view requires” (130). For all of the prescriptions contained in the *Apology*, Sidney is even willing to concede that a degree of contiguity exists between poetry and oratory, noting that “both have such an affinity in this wordish consideration . . . for the uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the mind, which is the end of speech” (84-85). Like Fowler, who finds generic distinctions to be justified only insofar as they are useful as hermeneutic tools, Sidney defines poetry as such according to *what it does*.

Poetry's "final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of" (*Apology* 22).

The sociopolitical repercussions of the class ideology that informs Sidney's philosophy are epitomized by the rebellion in Book 2 of the *Arcadia*. The depiction of the mob and its manipulation by Pyrocles provide examples of how "elites have achieved internal integration . . . through speaking a standardized, 'U' form of speech, a style of verbal discourse deemed appropriate to public and professional contexts" (Wood 807). According to their tradition, the Phagonian people have gathered to celebrate Duke Basilius's birthday. The celebratory atmosphere gives way to one of social unrest as a combination of potations and speech turns the heads of the commoners:

being chafed with wine and emboldened with the Duke's absented manner of living, there was no matter their ears had ever heard of that grew not to be the subject of their winy conference. Public affairs were mingled with private grudge . . . railing was counted the fruit of freedom, and saying nothing had his utmost praise in ignorance. At length the prince's person fell to be their table-talk; and to speak licentiously of that was a tickling point of courage to them (*OA* 111)

The mob's use of speech is conflated with their imbibing of alcohol, a trope that is further developed as the episode continues and increasingly unfettered speech translates to a further loss of self-control: "the very unbridled use of words having increased fire to their minds. . . . These words being spoken, like a furious storm presently took hold of their well-inclined brains" (*OA* 111-12). In spite of their good intentions, the commoners

are constitutionally incapable of resisting the powerful allure of language. They are capable of holding neither their liquor nor their tongues.

The mob is portrayed as incapable of maintaining the separation of the public and private spheres as their intemperate indulgence in language blurs distinctions:

There needed no drum where each man cried; each spake to other that spake as fast to him. . . . Their banquet turned to a battle, their winy mirths to bloody rages . . . they never weighed how to arm themselves, but took up everything for a weapon that fury offered to their hands . . . there were other took pitchforks and rakes, converting husbandry to soldiery. Some caught hold of spits, things serviceable for the lives of men, to be the instruments of their deaths (OA 112)

Language affects the commoners viscerally. It is an external force that they are incapable of either effectively wielding or resisting. Just as the character of Dametas is marked as a clown through his lack of initiation into the mysteries of sanctioned speech, the commons is inscribed as a “barbarous people” (OA 113) by their inability to control their own voice. Because the uprising is occasioned by the intemperate use of words on the part of the lower-class, it makes narrative/thematic sense that the noble Pyrocles should employ rhetoric to restore order. This solution also accords well with Sidney’s historical situation and ideological position. The recurring riots of sixteenth century England had demonstrated what a formidable force an incensed populace could be. A strictly military solution is clearly inadequate. Similarly, a simple show of force, whether real or symbolic, cannot cement Sidney’s ideological program with any degree of permanence.

Pyrocles must use language to appeal to a transcendent ideology of nationalism, one that incorporates the people themselves while simultaneously disempowering them.

Standing before the mob, “sword by side, ready not drawn” (*OA* 113), Pyrocles naturalizes and remystifies the central power of the Duke’s person by appealing to the mob’s sense of tradition:

O what would the first Arcadians, your worthy predecessors, say if they lived at this time and saw their offspring defacing such an excellent monarchy, which they with much labour and blood so wisely established?
(*OA* 114)

He evokes their own material self-interest, reminding them of the “tyrannous yoke of your fellow subject, in whom the innate meanness will bring forth ravenous covetousness” (114). At the same time, he exploits fears of external enemies: “what would your enemies more wish unto you than to see you with your own hands overthrow your estate?” By exploiting the possibility of domestic and foreign threats, Pyrocles convinces the impressionable mob that disaster will attend any deviation from the current state of affairs.

Pyrocles’s artful speech has the intended effect. The mob reorganizes so that they with much jollity grown to be the duke’s guard that but then before meant to be his murderers. . . . A good rule: that to be leaders in disobedience teacheth ever disobedience to the same leaders. So was this ungracious motion converted into their own bowels, and they by a true judgement grown their own punishers. (*OA* 116)

Here is a reversal of the Tacitean trope, common during the Renaissance, in which the tyrant becomes his own unwitting punisher. In this case, those rising up from below are depicted as falling prey to their own tyranny. Pyrocles effects this transvaluation through rhetoric. Sidney's treatment of the mob shows them as bestial, corporeal and irrational. Each of these frailties is communicated through the mob's inability to engage in proper dialogue. It is possible to equate them with the "*mysomousoi*" of whom Sidney writes in the *Apology*,

poet-haters . . . [who] seek a praise by dispraising others . . . prodigally spend a great many wandering words . . . by stirring the spleen may stay the brain from a thorough beholding the worthiness of the subject . . . there is nothing of so great a majesty but that an itching tongue may rub itself upon it. (51)

Like the *mysomousoi*, the mob experiences language pathologically and for this reason cannot use it to transcend the "clayey lodgings" mentioned in the *Apology*.

The effect of speech on the mob is couched in terms of the gut. What began as distending wind has, by the close of the episode, been converted to a disturbance of the bowels. The hot air of the mob's pot-valiant complaint surges into a morbid coprolalia, a pestilence within the body politic, until eased by the oratory of Pyrocles. Like the poet, Pyrocles offers the mob "food for the tenderest stomachs" (*Apology* 30).

According to Jean Robertson "we are intended to admire the powerful oratory with which he [Pyrocles] sways the crowd rather than to scrutinize his arguments" (130n7). But this is an especially difficult premise to accept, given the *Arcadia*'s intense

interrogation of character and motive. In the aftermath of the uprising, Basilius realizes that his shirking of ducal duty has destabilized the political economy and disaffected the populace. He therefore resolves to return to his capital of Mantinea and resume his rightful post. This prospect alarms Pyrocles,

for the good beginning she had obtained of Philoclea made her desire to continue the same trade till unto the more perfecting her desires; and to come to any public place she did deadly fear, lest the mask by many eyes might the sooner be discovered (OA 156)

Thus, Pyrocles's earlier manipulation of the rebellious commons is shown to be anything but disinterested. Taken in context, Pyrocles's fluency and dubious ethical grounds serve two purposes. They draw a sharp distinction between the articulate noble who transcends/creates reality through language and the inarticulate mass that falls victim to it: ". . . the poet only bringeth his own stuff and doth not learn a conceit out of matter, but maketh matter for a conceit" (*Apology* 50). Furthermore, they illustrate how "poesy may not only be abused . . . by the reason of his sweet charming force it can do more hurt than any other army of words. . . . With a sword thou mayest kill thy father, and with a sword thou mayest defend thy prince and country" (*Apology* 60). Therefore, the ability to use language confers agency. Without fluency, one is merely manipulated. With fluency, one is capable of knowing and therefore choosing between right and wrong. The distinction between the upper and lower classes is one of *gnosis*.

Sometime after 1584 Sidney began to revise and expand his "inky tribute" (*Apology* 72) to the muses, revising and greatly expanding Books 1 and 2 and part of

Book 3 before his untimely death in 1586. The revisions were published by Greville in 1590 and were spliced together with the unrevised concluding chapters and published by Sidney's sister Mary in 1593. Fourteen editions of what came to be known as *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* were produced by 1725. The book was a perennial favorite throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was differentiated as the *New Arcadia* (NA) only after Feuillerat published the recently rediscovered original in 1912. The revisions of the *New Arcadia* display a "remarkable social sensitivity" (Berrong 19) to conditions in Tudor England. But beyond that, they deny what little volition the *Old Arcadia* allows the lower class, again depicting the commoners as unable to effectively use language and consequently incapable of governing themselves. Whereas the mob of the old *Arcadia* is a homogenized mass of "many voices" in "unmeet agreement" (OA 112), the revised mob is drawn with greater attention to the conflicting interests contained within it. Fearing "lest in long fight [he] should be conquered with conquering" (NA 380), Pyrocles withdraws to the judgment seat and calls for the mob to "choose among yourselves someone who may relate your griefs and demands" (NA 383) to the duke. However,

. . . when they began to talk of their griefs, never bees made such a confused humming. . . . At length they fell to contrarities. . . . But no confusion was greater than of particular men's likings and dislikings. . . . No less ado was there about him who should be their spokesman. (NA 383)

The reasons given for this lack of consensus situate the *New Arcadia* within the “historical shift from the language of ‘estates’ to that of ‘classes’” in which groups are “distinguished and evaluated primarily on economic criteria” (Wrightson 32). Whereas the *Old Arcadia* depicts the common people as a monolithic entity distinguishable for its lack of rationality, the commonalty in the *New Arcadia* demonstrates a heightened awareness of their individual self-interests:

. . . the artisans . . . would have corn and wine set at a lower price, . . . the ploughmen, vine-labourers and farmers would none of that. The countrymen demanded that every man might be free in the chief towns: that could not the burgesses like of. The peasants would have all the gentlemen destroyed; the citizens (especially such as cooks, barbers, and those others that lived most on gentlemen) would but have them reformed. And of each side were like divisions, one neighbourhood beginning to find fault with another. (NA 383)

According to Richard Berrong, it is “remarkable” that Sidney “dares to display such awareness to his aristocratic readers” (19). Berrong contends that Sidney’s revision allows the commoners a degree of articulation which threatens to lay the blame for civil unrest at the feet of an exploitative aristocracy, and notes that this is in marked contrast to Sidney’s earlier approach “of simply dismissing the uprising as an example of passion uncontrolled by reason” (19) in the *Old Arcadia*. Indeed, the caviling among the members of the mob does include the “carefully differentiated and delineated complaints of . . . discontented sixteenth-century English commoners” (19). But the existence of

such grievances would have possessed little shock value for Sidney's audience, given that "rebellion and riot were as much a part of Tudor England as the divorces of Henry VIII and the ill-fated romances of his daughter, Elizabeth" (Beer 2). Of greater significance is Sidney's use of this increased social realism in the revised *Arcadia* to further legitimate the disenfranchisement of the lower orders. In the original version, it is Pyrocles's fluency alone that quells the rebellion and reincorporates the rebels into a stable, but exploitative, social structure. Sidney's revision goes further, making the case that, even if granted a public voice, the commoners inevitably fail to avail themselves of it. Their inability to formulate and articulate a political will necessitates Pyrocles's use of rhetoric to establish a peace among them. "[D]ivision having manifested their weakness" (*NA* 384), only the fluency of an aristocratic voice can bring them to a reconciliation beneath the standard of nationalism. Sidney's acknowledgement of class envy in no way precludes an elitist agenda. He is not suggesting that an exploitative class system is responsible for social tensions. Rather, he uses an episode of civil unrest—familiar in Tudor England—to illustrate what he views as the danger of a truly democratic public voice: factionalism and violence.

Sidney's emendations also treat the genuine causes of the rebellion. Both the original and the revised *Arcadia* close the riot episode with a comment on the "weak trust of the many-headed multitude, whom inconstancy only doth guide to well-doing" (*OA* 115, *NA* 385). In the original, this assessment is delivered by the third-person narrator. In the emended version, it is voiced as an aside by Clinias, who

. . . in his youth had been a scholar so far as to learn rather words than manners, and of words rather plenty than order; and oft had used to be an actor in tragedies, where he had learned (besides a slidingness of language) acquaintance with many passions. . . . (NA 387)

Because his “education [has] made him full of tongue” (NA 387), Clinias is employed as an *agent provocateur* by the duke’s sister Cecropia, who hopes to advance the fortunes of her own son by inciting the people to riot. To this end, she has had Clinias “whisper rumours into the people’s ears” (NA 387). It may be that Sidney is here incorporating another lesson learned during his European tour a decade earlier. On August 24, 1572, both the young aristocrat and his mentor Languet sought refuge in the Paris residence of Francis Walsingham during a city-wide purge of French Protestants. The massive bloodletting of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, while carried out by the populace at large, was generally considered to have been instigated by Catherine de Medici, mother of the French king Charles IX. Similarly, in the *New Arcadia*, the lower orders are pawns in the power struggles of the upper class. Although Sidney’s revisions remove the culpability from the commonalty, they also remove what little agency the commonalty possessed in the original. It is no longer a matter of the lowest class making rash decisions. They have been rendered utterly devoid of volition. They do not act. They merely react.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, Clinias relates to Basilius the events leading up to the rebellion, “proposing indeed to tell him the truth of all, saving what did touch himself or Cecropia” (NA 389). Again, Sidney lifts passages verbatim from the *Old*

Arcadia and has them delivered by Clinias, suggesting to the reader the exact nature of the “mischievous devices” (NA 387) that Clinias had used to incite the commonalty:

[I]t were tedious to remember their far-fetched constructions. But the sum was, you disdained them: and what were the pomps of your estate if their arms maintained you not? Who would call you a prince if you had not a people? When certain of them of wretched estates and worse minds . . . began to say that your government was to be looked into . . . why none but great men and gentlemen could be admitted into your counsel; that the commons, forsooth, were too plainheaded to say their opinions, but yet their blood and sweat must maintain all. (NA 391)

The inclusion of these grievances indicates a social awareness of Sidney’s part. It echoes the democratic republicanism of humanist writers such as George Buchanan, who went so far as the advocate regicide if a king were sufficiently remiss in his duty to his subjects. But Sidney’s handling of popular complaint certainly does not align him with Buchanan or imply sympathy with the lower orders. Rather, Sidney gives the commonalty voice only to suggest the destabilization that is the effect of their enfranchisement. For Sidney, such democratic sentiments are merely tools of manipulation for demagogues such as Cecropia and their underlings. The violence which inevitably attends such expression reveals that such language is mere rhetoric, and dangerous rhetoric at that.

Sidney’s aim is certainly not to represent all aristocratic characters as exemplars of virtue. The irresponsibility of Duke Basilius, the scheming of his sister, the

concupiscence of Pyrocles each illustrate that “something rotten in the state of Arcadia affects all classes” (Sedinger 68). Sidney goes out of his way to question the motives of ostensibly heroic characters. His methods cause great pains for readers such as C. S. Lewis, who writes that “we cannot suspend our disbelief in a Musidorus [or a Pyrocles] who commits indecent assaults” (332). Rather, Sidney’s use of language situates moral and ethical struggles wholly in the upper echelons of society. Whereas the commonalty is supra-ethical, that is, situated outside of and therefore excluded from moral debate, the aristocratic class is represented as being both individualistic and universal, embodying as it does such struggles:

The oppressed is nothing, he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple, with all the degrees of dignity as its disposal: he has an exclusive right to meta-language. The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical; it is Myth. (Barthes 149)

Sidney does not aim to undermine monarchy, or to suggest that nobility is inherently without blemish. Rather, those possessed of legitimate voices engage in knowing good and evil, which for Sidney is a prerequisite of true virtue: “he cannot be good that knows not why he is good . . . his rude simplicity is either easily changed or easily deceived” (OA 8). By denying an entire class the linguistic capacity that, for him, is a prerequisite of *gnosis*, he denies them an active voice in the most fundamental debate

of right versus wrong. He does not simply construct a false binary of good/evil, right/wrong, aristocrat /laborer. He removes the lower-class element from the equation.

CHAPTER 2
 A TOURNEY OF WORDS: LANGUAGE AND LAW IN
 EDMUND SPENSER'S *THE FAERIE QUEENE*

Many early English humanists, such as Roger Ascham, tutor to Queen Elizabeth, derided chivalric romance for its “open manslaughter and bold bawdry” (69). However, a generation later, Spenser would adopt the form when assaying to “fashion a gentleman” (“A Letter of the Authors” 15). This evolution of the generic form reflected political changes that occurred during the intervening years. As the centralizing trend of Tudor policy molded a modern state from a feudal kingdom, the traditional knight became an administrator of state policy. Rather than pursuing individualistic and aristocratic ideals of honor, the knight came to function as an extension of a sovereign authority. In Book 5 canto 2 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the knight Artegall acts as an enforcer of the class structure that accompanies the emergence of the capitalist state. Using language to undermine the egalitarian ideology of a populist giant, Artegall dispenses a class-inflected justice even while laying claim to the utopian, classless ideal described in the introductory proem, thus illustrating Fredric Jameson’s observation that

all class-consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity . . . [and] all such collectivities are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society. (281)

Spenser's adaptation of the romance genre allows him to use what had once been seen as an anarchic and violent medium to further the interest of a stabilized and authoritarian state.

Like Sidney, Spenser received a humanist education founded on classical precepts of eloquence and rhetorical skill, albeit under less privileged circumstances. Sidney attended Shrewsbury School, within the jurisdiction of his father, Sir Henry Sidney, Lord President of the Marches of Wales. Spenser was enrolled in the Merchant Taylors' School as a poor scholar. Afterward, Sidney matriculated at Oxford, where his uncle Robert Dudley was Chancellor. In contrast, Spenser matriculated at Cambridge as a sizar,

A poorer student who, in return for the cost of his instruction and room and board, performed servant duties in the college, such as waiting table in the dining commons, attending a wealthier fellow student as a valet, or running errands for the college master or fellows. (Rambuss 18)

Sidney's experiences at school, his access to the center of power at Kenilworth, and his subsequent reception on the continent all support the notion of his importance as a member of a hereditary caste and inform the manner with which he promotes the aristocratic voice to the exclusion of the non-aristocratic in the *Arcadia*. Spenser's own experiences as a sizar would have reinforced the belief of Richard Mulcaster, headmaster of Merchant Taylors', who held that the "principal aim of schooling was to prepare students for a life of public service" (Rambuss 16). Whereas service for a person of Sidney's rank ideally meant providing counsel to the monarch, Spenser's education

prepared him for a series of secretarial positions to several prominent men: Dr. John Young, Bishop of Rochester, in 1579; the Earl of Leicester, in 1579; and Lord Grey, Lord of Deputy of Ireland, from 1580 onward. Such posts entailed duties far beyond those of a “mere amanuensis” (Rambuss 27). Spenser was required to not only record and defend the policies of his superior, but to actively participate in them. This steady upward climb within the colonial bureaucracy reached its zenith, at least materially, in Spenser’s acquisition of real estate. As Louis Montrose notes

It was by virtue of his MA that Spenser could begin to think of himself as Master Spenser; however, it was only after he had begun to acquire land and offices in Ireland that he could consider himself, and be formally acknowledged as, a gentleman. (qtd. in Rambuss 29)

By serving as a bureaucratic functionary within the stratified class structure of late Tudor England, Spenser was able to further his own personal interests. Through his observation of a rigid social hierarchy, Spenser was allowed enough mobility to transcend the limitations of the class into which he was born.

In “A Letter of the Authors,” Spenser writes to Raleigh regarding *The Faerie Queene* that “the generall end . . . of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (15). Following the precedent set by the epic poetry of antiquity, Spenser had hoped to complete a work comprised of twenty-four books, the first twelve of which would treat one of the “twelve private moral virtues, as Aristotle hath devised” (15). Of the six books completed before Spenser’s death in 1599, Book 5, *The Legend of Artegall or of Justice*, chronicles the moral education of the

knight Artegall as he travels the land of Faerie, encountering increasingly thorny moral and legal issues he is required to resolve. In canto 2, Artegall confronts a mob on the verge of violent eruption spurred by the radical populist rhetoric of a giant. By containing the threat of open revolt, Artegall identifies himself as an apologist for a system of hegemony and strengthens his claim to self-agency under its auspices:

Indeed, it is the glimpse of such sullen resistance, and the sense of the nascent political dangers of such potential unification of the laboring population, which generates the mirror image of solidarity among the ruling groups. (Jameson 280)

The economic causes of this unrest and Artegall's use of language to quell it reveal how intimately class and language were related in Tudor England.

The arrangement of the seventeen dedicatory sonnets that precede *The Faerie Queene* reveal Spenser's acute class-consciousness. Their addressees provide a profile of the upper strata of Elizabeth's court, running the gamut from Lord High Chancellor to the Ladies of the Court. The inclusion of the latter is especially befitting a work in the romance genre, which ostensibly honors the female gender, and employs its "allegoricall devices" ("A Letter of the Authors" 16) in such extravagant celebration of a female monarch. That these dedications are headed up by tributes to the Lord High Chancellor and the High Treasurer (the legal and financial authorities of state) foreshadows the concern of Artegall, the knight of justice, with preserving the economic status quo using ideology/law, rather than relying solely on physical force. The binary of physical force

and ideology is further defined by the fact that the knight Artegall is accompanied by the groom Talus,

An yron man . . .

Who in his hand an yron flale did hould,

With which he thresht out falsehood . . . (5.1.12)

As the personification of brute force, Talus's presence allows for the "allegorical separation of rhetoric and violence" (Greenblatt, "Murdering Peasants" 23) and distinguishes Artegall's reliance on language to impose order. That this binary discriminates based on class is suggested by the agricultural implement Talus wields. In a "sensitive to the semiotics of execution" (Greenblatt, "Murdering Peasants" 11), Talus's flail identifies him with a lower-class of adversary. Language, rather than physical, force is the mark of authority in this episode of Spenser's chivalric allegory. It is therefore brandished by the knight rather than his groom.

The chivalric code that emerged among the perennially warring baronial factions of medieval France was fundamentally opposed to the idea of a single, centralized authority. Humanist writers such as Ascham disparaged chivalric romance because of the fact that

The political culture of the world of honour was essentially pluralist.

There was little room for the concepts of sovereignty, or of unconditional obedience. . . . [T]he place which will and autonomy occupied in the honour code implied the possibility of changing one's master . . . (James 327)

Spenser expresses his distrust of such a traditional, feudal conception of honor in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. Irenius (“peaceful”) derides Ireland’s “many wyde countries...in which the lawes of England were neuer established” in spite of their acceptance of Henry VIII as “theire onelye king and liege Lord” (8-9). Irenius cites as the reason for such instability the fact that “euerie one made his will and comaundment a lawe unto his owne vassal. Thus was not the lawe of England euer properlye applied” (18). As the etymology of his name suggests, Irenius represents the belief of Ascham and others that a decentralization of authority threatens social harmony.

However, even at the time Ascham was writing, a shift was taking place. As part of the Tudor program of consolidation,

the realm and the community of honour came to be identical, presided over by a crown whose sovereign authority constituted the only kind of “lordship” which effectively survived. This was the result of the “nationalization” of the honour system for which Henry VIII was most, if not wholly, responsible. (James 328)

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the nationalization of chivalric honor took on mythic dimensions as it was incorporated into the cult of Elizabeth. By the time Spenser wrote his nationalist epic, the “language of chivalry [had become] the primary language of Elizabethan public display” (Helgerson 51). The knight errant became less an autonomous pursuer of individualistic virtue and more a facilitator whose prestige derived from his association with a centralized, standardized authority:

The knight was giving way to the gentleman. And the gentleman was being required to accept not only those responsibilities that traditionally devolved upon the knight, but also many of those that had hitherto been...the preserve of the clergy. He must now exert an intellectual as well as a physical force in society. He must not only see that justice is done, but take part in the shaping of the laws and their administration.
(Ferguson 187)

Artegall personifies this shift in the characterization of the knight errant from roving adventurer to enforcer of orthodoxy. He is sent into the world by Astraea as the “instrument” of her “great iustice” (5. proem). Just as Spenser’s education prepared him for a position in the service of Tudor bureaucracy, Artgall is sanctioned/mandated for his duties not through birthright, but by virtue of the instruction he has received under the auspices of Astraea. In fact, Artgall “is no Fary borne, ne sib at all / To Elfes, but sprong of seed terrestriall” (3.3.26). Artgall’s knowledge derives from Astraea herself, who

. . . found this gentle childe,
Amongst his peres playing his childish sport:
Whom seeing fit, and with no crime defilded,
She did allure with gifts and speeches milde,
To wend with her. So thence him farre she brought

Into a caue from companie exiled,
 In which she nousled him, till yeares he raught,
 And all the discipline of iustice there him taught. (5.1.6)

Like his knowledge, Artegall's authority derives directly from Astraea. When she dispatches the knight to execute her will, she bestows on him the sword Chrysaor, until now

. . . kept in store

In *Ioues* eternall house, vnwist of wight,
 Since he himselfe it vs'd in that great fight
 Against the *Titans*, that whylome rebelled
 Gainst highest heauen . . . (5.1.9)

This symbol of delegated authority identifies Artegall with Odysseus, in whom Homer "hath ensampled. . . a vertuous man" ("A Letter of the Authors" 15). In Book 2 of the *Iliad*, it is Odysseus who, taking the scepter of Agamemnon—by Homer "ensampled a good gouenour" ("A Letter of the Authors" 15)—beats down and silences the unruly common soldier Thersites,

fluent and flowing as you are. Keep quiet.
 Who are *you* to wrangle with kings, you alone?

 So stop your babbling, mouthing the names of kings,
 flinging indecencies in their teeth . . . (*Iliad* 2.286-291)

Perhaps more important than the similarities between Odysseus and Artegall are the differences between their respective approaches to crowd control. Whereas Odysseus, otherwise renowned for his wit and facility with language, relies on brute force to subdue the lower orders, Artegall chooses to debate the giant. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that “knights in a chivalric romance tend not to argue, but to challenge, taunt, and joust” (Holstun, “The Giant’s Faction” 337). Artegall’s reliance on language while fulfilling his role as administrator allows him to vanquish not simply a single adversary but the entire ideology which he represents.

Artegall first sees the giant standing above a “great assembly,”

Vpon a rocke, and holding forth on hie

An huge great paire of ballance in his hand,

With which he boasted in his surquedrie,

That all the world he would weigh equallie (5.2.30)

The scales that the giant holds identify his menace as something beyond that of a mere adversary. They connect him symbolically with both Astraea and Artegall, and situate him firmly in the discourse of the Book of Justice. Other adversaries Artegall has met up to this point have been motivated by individual desire. Sir Sanglier and the Squire each “the liuing Lady claime” (5.1.26) for themselves. Pollente “keepes a Bridges passage by strong hond” (5.2.4) and extracts tolls from unsuspecting travelers. Munera’s sole concern is for the “coffers of her wicked treasury” (5.2.9).

The giant's incendiary call for a radical redistribution of wealth has much broader implications.

He said that he would all the earth vptake,
 And all the sea, deuided each from either:
 So would he of the fire one ballaunce make,
 And one of th'ayre, without or wind, or wether:
 Then would he ballaunce heauen and hell together,
 And all that did within them all containe;
 Of all those weight, he would not misse a fether.
 And looke what surplus did of eache remaine,
 He would to his owne part restore the same againe. (5.2.31)

The giant's elevated position and his promise to redress injustice evoke Irenius's description of similar gatherings in the *View*:

greate assemblies [gather] together vpon a Rath or hill there to parlye (as they saye) about matters and wronges . . . trewe yt hath bene oftentimes approued, that in these metinges manye mischeifes haue bene both practized and wrought: For to them, doe commonlie resorte all the scume of loose people . . . (100)

Such open discourse poses grave dangers because "evill thinges beinge deckt and suborned with the gaye attyre of goodlie wordes, maye easelie deceave and carrye awaye the affeccion of a younge mynde" (*View* 96). Thus the giant is "much admired of fooles,

women, and boys" (5.2.30). Like the mob in the *Arcadia*, the crowd that Artegall encounters is defenseless against the potency of words.

The anxiety over the misuse of such a powerful medium is a logical correlative of the humanist belief in the power of language and has a classical precedent in Plato's *Republic*. Socrates banishes the poets from his ideal city-state because of the destabilizing influence of their craft:

If you accept the honeyed Muse, in song or poetry, pleasure and pain will
be twin kings in your city in place of established custom and the thing
which has always been generally accepted as best—reason. (328)

Spenser's giant appeals to these "twin kings" when he plays to the crowd's class envy:

Tyrants that make men subiect to their law,
I will supresse, that they no more may raine;
And Lordings curbe, that commons ouer-aw;
And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will draw. (5.2.38)

Hearing the giant's boastful rhetoric, the lower orders are worked up into a state of frenzy that recalls the effect of Clinias's speech on the commons in Sidney's revised *Arcadia*. For both Sidney and Spenser the unrestrained voice threatens to create instability. As in the *Arcadia*, the commonalty's susceptibility in *The Faerie Queene* to the charms of language is revealed as it is transformed (metaphorically) into an irrational swarm of vermin by the giant's linguistic chicanery:

. . . the vulgar did about him flocke,
And cluster thicke vnto his leasings vaine,

Like foolish flies about an hony crocke,
 In hope by him great benefite to gaine
 And vncontrolled freedome to obtaine. (5.2.33)

The unfettered speech of the giant poses a “specifically ideological threat” (Holstun, “The Giant’s Faction” 340), attacking as it does the very structure of a society based on private ownership. Moreover, his grievance that “realms and nations [have] run awry” (5.2.32) cannot be summarily dismissed as groundless or self-serving. The action of Book 5 is initiated by the fact that the “world is runne quite out of square” (5.proem). By promising to eradicate differences between rich and poor, the giant seems to align himself with those concerns of instability voiced in the proem. He might be read as struggling to return the world to a condition

. . . of yore,
 When good was onely for it selfe desyred,
 And all men sought their owne, and none no more;
 When Iustice was not for most meed outhyred,
 But simple Truth did rayne, and was of all admired. (5.proem)

In his philosophical joust with the giant, Artegall’s task as administrator of justice is to demonstrate that this “golden age” (5.proem) is typified by order rather than by egalitarianism. He must defend an existing system of economic disparity and class exploitation against the communistic idealism of the giant. The ensuing debate, in which each party struggles to define/impose his own class-inflected conception of justice, illustrates Jameson’s claim that the

normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one, and . . .
 the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses
 fight it out within the general unity of the shared code. (70)

By using language rather than force, Artegall not only silences the giant, he silences the giant's ideological argument and imposes his own class-inflected agenda by claiming its basis is in universal law rather than self-interest.

To illustrate to the people the inequality that results from class competition, the giant compares material disparity with examples from the natural world:

For why, he sayd they all vnequall were,
 And had encroached vppon other share,
 Like as the sea (which plaine he shewed there)
 Had worne the earth, so did the fire the aire,
 So all the rest did others parts empaire.

 All which he vndertooke for to repaire,
 In sort as they were formed auncienty,
 And all things would reduce vnto equalitie. (5.2.32)

According to the giant's logic, such natural phenomena are analogous to the exploitative relationship between rulers and ruled, haves and have-nots, upper and lower classes. The

giant's rhetoric recalls the connection made in the proem between celestial and material worlds:

. . . the heauens reuolution
 Is wandred farre, from where it first was pight,
 And so doe make contrarie constitution
 Of all this lower world, toward dissolution. (5.proem)

Artegall parries the giant's discontent by advocating quietist acceptance of existing class relations, trusting that "Such heauenly iustice doth among them raine, / That euery one doe know their certaine bound" (5.2.36). Artgall's reply relates Spenser's allegory to contemporary justifications of economic and political inequality. In response to the endemic riots of the sixteenth century, sermons often used arguments for quietism similar to Artgall's. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, compiler of *The Book of Common Prayer*, and a major architect of Tudor centralization, wrote in 1549:

They to whom God hath sent poverty in goods, let them also be poor and humble in spirit, and then be they blessed in heaven [L]et them then be obedient, meek, patient in adversity, and long-suffering, and in no wise rebel against the laws and magistrates. (qtd. in Beer 190).

Angered, the giant lashes out at Artgall, again conflating natural and social phenomena:

Thou foolish Elfe (said the Gyant wroth)
 Seest not, how badly al things present bee,
 And each estate quite out of order goth?
 The sea it selfe doest thou not plainely see

Encroch vppon the land there vnder thee;
 And th'earth it selfe how daily it's increast,
 By all that dying to it turned be.
 Were it not good that wrong were then surceast,
 And from the most, that some were giuen to the least? (5.2.37)

In response, Artegall mounts a more spirited defense of the existing class structure, revealing the syllogistic fallacy of the giant's reasoning. Accepting the giant's major premise that the natural world corresponds to the socioeconomic, Artegall disputes the giant's minor premise that the natural world is unjust. Hence, the giant's conclusion is proven false. Artegall does this by asserting that all creation comprises a whole, and that the ebb and flow of the various elements does not constitute competition, merely the natural flux of existence:

What though the sea with waues continuall
 Doe eate the earth, it is no more at all:
 Ne is the earth the lesse, or loseth ought,
 For whatsoever from one place doth fall,
 Is with the tide vnto an other brought:
 For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought. (5.2.39)

Thus Artegall demonstrates how, according to the precedent established by the giant himself, it is not only just but natural that some should profit by the loss of others. The competition among classes becomes, literally, an elemental principle of existence.

With the giant on the defensive, Artegall delivers a further rhetorical stroke. Elaborating on the trope he has appropriated from the giant, he deftly shows how not only inequality but a strict hierarchical structure is part of both the natural and the socioeconomic worlds:

All in the powre of their great Maker lie:
 All creatures must obey the voice of the most hie.

 The hils doe not the lowly dales disdain;
 The dales doe not the lofty hils enuy.
 He maketh Kings to sit in souerainty;
 He maketh subiects to their powre obay;
 He pulleth downe, he setteth vp on hy;
 He giues to this, from that he takes away.

For al we haue is his: what he list doe, he may. (5.2.40-41)

Artegall's reference to a hierarchy that extends from omnipotent godhead to sovereign kings and their subjects reminds the reader and the giant that Artegall himself is in the employ of Astraea. As the knight of justice, Artegall is implicated in and empowered by the existing social structure:

Justice is the key virtue, the most sacred of all, for it reflects the 'imperiall might' of God which he 'lends' to princes, giving them a divine right, like his own. (Yates 71)

As a delegated defender of this structure, Artegall is both enabled and mandated to understand its workings. By contrast, the giant, like the commonalty in the *Arcadia*, is incapable of transcendence. Thus rooted in the material world, he is incapable of properly understanding it. He is therefore powerless before the law articulated by Artegall.

Having bested the giant in the arena of logic, Artegall issues a semantic challenge that he knows the giant cannot meet. Artegall defies the giant to

Weigh but one word which from thy lips doth fall.

For how canst thou those greater secrets know,

That doest not know the least thing of them all?

Ill can he rule the great, that cannot reach the small. (5.2.43)

Although the giant has demonstrated some small faculty for language in his provoking of the common people, this is merely a matter of capitalizing on the commonalty's susceptibility to the spoken word. Polemically speaking, Artegall's challenge is the *coup de grace*. The giant's vain attempt to fulfill it reveals the extent to which he has overextended himself:

He answered, that he would try it streight,

So he the words into his ballaunce threw,

But streight the winged words out of his ballaunce flew.

.....

Which when he saw, he greatly grew in rage,

And almost would his balances haue broken:

But *Artegall* him fairely gan asswage,
 And said; be not vpon thy balance wroken:
 For they doe nought but right or wrong betoken;
 But in the minde the doome of right must bee;
 And so likewise of words, the which be spoken,
 The eare must be the ballance, to decree
 And iudge, whether with truth or falsehood they agree. (5.2.44-47)

At this point, *Artegall* can afford to adopt a tone of paternalism. The class interests of the giant and his attendant mob have been proven illegitimate, the ideological threat defused. Theoretically, a nationalist agenda works to subsume such voices once the threat is resolved. But the apparatus of state, besides constructing an inclusive ideology, must also mete out justice. The giant must be dispatched

For it was not the right, which he did seeke;
 But rather stroue extremities to way,
 Th'one to diminish, th'other for to eeke.
 For of the meene he greatly did misleeke.
 Whom when so lewdly minded *Talus* found,
 Approaching nigh vnto him cheeke by cheeke,
 He shouldered him from off the higher ground,
 And down the rock him throwing, in the sea him dround. (5.2.49)

This act of violence on *Talus*'s part more clearly separates the ideological coercion that *Artegall* personifies from the (less effective) physical coercion that was the sole basis of

power preceding centralization. Despite the fact that “euen wilde beasts did feare his awfull sight, / And men admyr’d his ouerruling might” (5.1.8), Artégall is spared the use of violence when dealing with the giant and his mob of followers. Instead, Astraea has

. . . left her groome

An yron man, which did on her attend

Alwayes, to execute her stedfast doome,

And willed him with *Artégall* to wend,

And do what euer thing he did intend.

His name was *Talus*, made of yron mould,

Immoueable, resistlesse, without end.

Who in his hand an yron flae did hould,

With which he thresht out falsehood, and did truth vnfold. (5.1.12)

Within the context of Spenser’s nationalistic allegory, Talus is the faceless, inexorable physical force that backs an increasingly centralized legal apparatus. As such, he approximates/foreshadows Weber’s *Gewaltmonopol des Staates*, the modern state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Gregory points out that, “in light of the *View’s* proposals, Talus looks like a Spenserian fantasy of sufficient force” (381). But true coherence of an entity on the scale of the modern nation-state cannot be maintained solely through force, a fact that the hardships of endless military campaigns in Ireland must surely have brought home to Spenser. As Foucault realizes, “the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary” (201). True control requires an ideology that successfully internalizes submission and contains centrifugal elements.

Therefore, even though he is accompanied by Talus and is a formidable force in his own right, Artegall uses language to deconstruct the ideology of the giant.

Like Sidney, Spenser demonstrates an acute awareness of language's function as a signifier of class and an index of political agency. However, unlike the aristocratic Sidney, Spenser was descended of "modest, non-gentle stock" (Rambuss 14) and thus had no claim to an advisory role under the precepts of classical republicanism. This difference in social status is reflected in the respective class ideologies that inform their literary works. Sidney's main concern is with promoting and increasing the legitimacy and authority of the aristocratic courtier's voice. It is the unrestrained outpouring of many voices which, for him, poses the greatest threat to the stability of the state. The mob scene in the *Arcadia* works to show how a lack of coherence disqualifies the lower orders from participating in public discourse. As noted by Renwick, Spenser operates within a "new State that function[s] through nobodies whose official powers tend to supercede their own hereditary offices and privileges" (*View* 226). As an "upwardly mobile careerist" (Rambuss 14) lacking entitlement, Spenser views language as a means of transcending/transgressing class boundaries and insinuating himself into the political economy. However, upward mobility requires a stratified social system that includes a recognized and legitimated power differential. Spenser's ambition must in some public way reify the very institutions it undermines for private advancement. Thus, his concern in the mob scene of *The Faerie Queene* is that the consolidation of illegitimate voices will overturn a stable social structure in which he is struggling to place himself. Spenser's giant is not identified in terms of his own class identity because it is a moot

point. It is enough that he serves as a mouthpiece for centrifugal elements. Just as Sidney's use of language in the *Arcadia* naturalizes the disenfranchisement of the non-aristocratic element, Spenser's use of language in Book 5 canto 2 of *The Faerie Queene* essentializes a system of class disparity in which he had a vested personal interest.

CHAPTER 3
ROLE-PLAYING IN THE STREET: DISCOURSE AND LEGITIMACY
IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *CORIOLANUS*

Unlike Sidney and Spenser, Shakespeare was neither aristocrat nor bureaucrat. Rather, he was a tradesman's son who came to London to earn his living as a professional writer and actor. While he did not aspire to a government appointment as counselor or functionary, his works reveal the same concerns as those of his more politically active contemporaries. The close linkage of language, class, and enfranchisement in *Coriolanus* reveals an acute awareness of the power of words to shape the political landscape. But whereas the conventions of mixed and verse romance allow for the mobs in the *Arcadia* and *The Faerie Queene* to remain inarticulate and readily disenfranchised, the dramatic genre grants voice to the plebian rioters as well as patricians. The patrician Coriolanus's inability to enter into a dialogue with an articulate plebian electorate threatens the stability of the newly formed Roman republic and proves his ultimate downfall. Conversely, it was through the "powerful mimetic magic" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 75) of the public stage that Shakespeare gained the financial security to lay claim to the title of gentleman. By revealing the fundamental importance of language in public performances, be they theatrical or political, Shakespeare not only draws on the humanist tradition of oratory and rhetoric to assuage internal dissent within the state, but also legitimates and empowers the medium through which he transformed his own class identity.

Although denied the university education from which Sidney and Spenser benefited, Shakespeare did receive a rudimentary humanist education at the free grammar school in Stratford. In a room above the guildhall he was “taught, through Latin texts that formed the bulk of [the] curriculum, to emulate and admire Roman ideals of civic duty” (Shrank 408). Such lessons were corroborated with real life examples. Stratford had been incorporated as an independent township in 1553 and Shakespeare’s father John was deeply involved with this corporation, holding a series of civic offices of increasing responsibility, including one term as bailiff, the chief elected officer, responsible for, among other things, setting the price of corn every Thursday. (Shrank 411)

John Shakespeare, a yeoman by rank and glover by trade, had in 1575 attempted to leverage his material success into one of social standing, applying to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms,

an expensive process a person undertook not only to confer honor on himself but also to enhance the status of his children and grandchildren. . . . To be granted a coat of arms . . . was to rise above playacting to the thing itself. (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 76)

Part of the process of Tudor centralization during the sixteenth century was the codification of heraldry, “whereby honorable status needed to be granted or confirmed by state-authenticated and state-supported heraldic visitations” (James 328), rather than under the auspices of local nobility.

Under the precepts of the Tudor College of Heraldry, John Shakespeare was entitled, as a person . . . advanced into an office or dignity of public administration upon his instant request and willingness to bear the same without reproach, a coat of Arms. (qtd. in Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 78)

However, in spite of this entitlement, a precipitous downturn in John Shakespeare's financial fortunes scuttled his hopes of cementing his fleeting material success. In 1578 he was selling and mortgaging property; in 1580 he was bound over by the Queen's Bench; and in 1591 he was reported as absenting himself from church services "for fear of process for debt" (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 62). Not until 1596, with the financial backing of his successful son, was the suit renewed and granted.

William Shakespeare's own anxiety over his class identity is suggested by the motto of his family crest, *Non sanz droict*, "not without right" (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 79). This defensiveness is not without grounds. Richard Helgerson notes that "as the player-poet who presented the most direct competition to the scholar-poets at their own specialty . . . Shakespeare became an indigestible lump in the craw of the new authors' theater" (203). In *Every Man out of His Humour*, Ben Jonson portrays the clown Sogliardo as purchasing a coat of arms with the motto "not without mustard." In 1602 the "disgruntled genealogist" Ralph Brooke named Shakespeare in a complaint against the Garter King-of-Arms for wrongfully elevating individuals to unmerited status (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 80). The Vagabond Act of 1604 continued to identify "players of interludes" as vagrants (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 88). By the time he was writing and performing *Coriolanus* in 1608, Shakespeare had generated enough financial

capital to underwrite his family crest and purchase the second largest house in Stratford.

Yet he was still marked by his non-gentle origins and occupation as a stage-player.

Shakespeare's treatment of language and class in *Coriolanus* is an effort to legitimate his own means of social mobility, even while paying limited homage to the social hierarchy of the society in which he lived.

In discussing Shakespeare's choice of subject matter, Andrew Hadfield notes that

Shakespeare might have avoided...direct representation of European politics because he was more naturally cautious than his contemporaries and as much an astute businessman as an intellectual; it may be that he had to write for more popular audiences...and so chose to concentrate on more accessible subjects. ("Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe" 14)

Shakespeare's choice of the story of Coriolanus would have fulfilled both criteria. By treating the broad political theme of popular role in government, the historical subject matter allowed for oblique references to the autocratic King James's insistence on authority through divine right rather than a mandate of the people. In *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, James I wrote that

The proper office of a King towards his Subjects, agrees very wel with the office of the head towards the body, and all the members thereof: For the head, being the seate of Judgement, proceedeth the care and foresight of guiding....As the discourse and direction flowes from the head, and the execution according to their office: so it is betwixt a wise Prince, and his people. (qtd. in Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* 176)

Moreover, Shakespeare's material was presumably familiar to a large contingent of his audience. The Roman histories of Cicero, Tacitus and Livy and contemporary political commentaries were popular throughout the sixteenth century, as noted by Gabriel Harvey in the late 1570s:

You cannot stepp into a scholars studye but (ten to on) you shall litely finde open either Bodin de Republica or Le Royes Exposition upon Aristotles Politiques or sum other like French or Italian Discourses. (qtd. in Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* 17)

Familiarity with the themes treated in such works was not necessarily limited to men of university education such as Sidney and Spenser. Even those individuals denied any formal education, as was the case for much of Shakespeare's audience, would have had a passing acquaintance with such stories through other means of public exposure. The currency of Coriolanus's story is demonstrated by its inclusion in a sermon preached by William Barlow at Paul's Cross soon after the abortive Essex rebellion of 1601:

men of great mindes & parts, proue either excellently good, or dangerously wicked: it is spoken by *Plato*, but applied by *Plutarch* vnto *Coriolanus*, a gallant young, but a discontented Romane, who might make a fit parallel for the late Earle, if you read his life: and this was caused, as he oft confessed to vs, by the seducement of *vanity*. (sig. C3v)

As its use in Barlow's sermon indicates, Coriolanus was a by-word for pride in the early seventeenth-century.

Shakespeare's source, Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus*, describes Coriolanus as

so chollericke and impacient, that he would yeld to no living creature:
which made him churlishe and uncivill, and altogether unfit for any mans
conversation. (144)

In adapting Plutarch's story for the stage, Shakespeare develops the theme of language and class, demonstrating the threat Coriolanus's lack of communicative skill poses to the health of the Roman republic.

Coriolanus is described as "noble fellow / who sensibly outdares his senseless sword" (1.4.52-53). But in spite of his patrician bloodline or his martial exploits his refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the plebian voice ultimately renders him a liability to social cohesion. This is in stark contrast to the work of Sidney and Spenser, in which linguistic facility is granted through the membership in or affiliation with a hegemonic class and allows for the suppression of dissident voices. *Coriolanus* does not elevate the voice of one class at the expense of another; it instead demonstrates the importance of discourse to the stability of an integrated state. Such notions are contrary to the autocratic polity of James I; their inclusion in *Coriolanus* makes it difficult to regard Shakespeare as "dutiful servant, content to improvise a part of his own within its orthodoxy" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 253). The dubiousness of Shakespeare's claim to the rank of gentleman leads him to identify facility of language as a prerequisite of legitimate political participation, rather than an entitlement of nobility.

That *Coriolanus* opens, closes, and in large part occurs in the public street suggests the "participatory ethos of . . . actor-audience relations" (Howard 551) which

characterized the Tudor and early Stuart stage. Shakespeare further situates himself within this ethos, deviating from his source in Plutarch and introducing the characters of the Citizens who debate among themselves whether or not to revolt.

1. Cit. Before we proceed any further, here me speak.

All. Speak, speak.

1. Cit. You are resolved to die rather than to famish?

All. Resolv'd, resolv'd.

1. Cit. First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people.

All. We know't, we know't.

1. Cit. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?

All. No more talking on't; let it be done. Away, away! (1.1.1-13)

At first blush, the plebs appear to be identifiable with the mobs in Book 2 of the *Arcadia* and Book 5 canto 2 of *The Faerie Queene*. They are irritable, bloodthirsty, and inarticulate, reduced to parroting the incendiary promptings of a single voice. But this overlooks the fact that Shakespeare opens the scene *in medias res*, with the plebs already in revolt. The first spoken line is rather a call by the First Citizen to pause and deliberate. As the scene continues, the cause of their unrest is revealed to be a "hunger for bread, not . . . thirst for revenge" (1.1.24-25). This is a further departure from Plutarch, in which "there grewe sedition in the cittie bicause the Senate dyd favour the riche against the people, who dyd complaine of the sore oppression of userers" (147). Shakespeare's innovation provides the commonalty with a legitimate motive for unrest, the immediacy

of which is absent in either Sidney or Spenser. Furthermore, it calls to mind contemporary events, evoking the Midlands Revolt of 1607 in which rebels were protesting the landowners' policy of transforming traditionally public, open fields into centralized, fenced-in, private property. The gentry, nascent capitalists, were intent on consolidating through enclosure previously scattered, communally worked plots of land as professionally managed private farms. (Riss 55)

For Shakespeare's audience, the depiction of a commons decrying the patrician "store-houses cramm'd with grain" (1.1.81) would have been particularly timely.

The protestors are met by the patrician Menenius, who adopts a paternalistic tone in which he equates the patrician class with both the Roman state and heaven itself:

I tell you, friends, most charitable care have the patricians of you. For your wants, your suffering in this dearth, you may as well strike at heaven with your staves as lift them against the Roman state. . . . [Y]ou slander the helms o' th' state, who care for you like fathers, when you curse them as enemies. (1.1.65-78)

The First Citizen rejects Menenius's paternalism, articulating an awareness of the class divisions that underlie such rhetoric:

They ne'er cared for us yet. Suffer'd us to famish . . . make edicts for usury, to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act establish'd against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor. (1.1.79-85)

Menenius next proposes to deliver a “pretty tale” (1.1.90) in the hopes of containing the dissident voices of the citizens within the rhetoric of social organicism. The response of the First Citizen demonstrates an awareness and a self-control denied the mobs in both the *Arcadia* and *The Faerie Queene*:

Well, I’ll hear it, sir; yet you must not think to fob off our disgrace with a tale. But and’t please you, deliver. (1.1.93-95)

Menenius invokes the same tradition used by James in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, in which the body politic is allegorized as a corporeal entity. Menenius’s fable relates how an aristocratic belly answers the rebelling limbs:

Your most grave belly was deliberate,
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answered:
“True it is, my incorporate friends,” quoth he,
“That I receive the general food at first
Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
Because I am the store-house and the shop
Of the whole body. . . .” (1.1.128-34)

In Menenius’s tale, as in Sidney and Spenser, the upper-class voice is again the voice of reason, delivering in measured tones an encomium of incorporation, a call to forego class interests for the good of the state. In his *Apology for Poetry*, Sidney cites the episode in Plutarch as a proof of the “strange effects of poetical invention”:

[W]hen the whole people of Rome had resolutely divided themselves from the Senate, with apparent show of utter ruin. . . . [Menenius Agrippa] behaves himself like a homely and familiar poet. He telleth them a tale. . . . This applied by him wrought such effect in the people . . . for upon reasonable conditions a perfect reconcilment ensued. (40-41)

But when one recalls that Shakespeare “[rewrote] Plutarch on order to highlight famine not usury as the cause for the plebians’ rebellion” (Riss 55), Menenius’s mention of the Senate as the “store-house and the shop” of the body politic becomes anything but politic. Rather, it threatens to exacerbate the rebellion, calling attention to the fact that the aristocrats are neither shop-workers nor the producers of surplus necessitating store-houses. According to Arthur Riss,

To Menenius, hunger is a discursive phenomena to be manipulated, not a literal condition that must be acknowledged. To the plebs, however, hunger is a current and literal situation. Therefore once Menenius identifies the belly as the seat of political authority, he does not merely fail to restrain the revolt, he actually legitimizes it. (62)

Riss attributes the plebs’ immunity to Menenius’s rhetoric to the fact that they are “too hungry to think abstractly” (62) and are in “no position to think of their bellies as rhetorical vehicles” (63). But this elides the fact that the First Citizen demonstrates a

remarkable linguistic facility, not only giving ear to the words of Menenius, but handily improvising within the trope established by him:

Your belly's answer—what?
 The kingly-crowned head, the vigilant eye,
 The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,
 Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter . . . (1.1.114-17)

The citizens are neither passive nor inarticulate; they employ language to resist the definition Menenius tries to impose on them. Instead of containing the plebian revolt within the rhetoric of the body politic, Menenius's parable "establish[es] a kind of lexical grid" (Kermode 247) along which patricians and plebs move with more or less equal agency.

Language becomes a classless medium in which the ideological struggle between the upper and lower orders occurs. Its democratic potential is evinced by the plebs' appropriation of Menenius's and James's trope to leverage their discontent into disenfranchisement. Coriolanus's sneering account illustrates both his elitism and the threat that language poses to his aristocratic world-view:

[T]hey said they were an-hungry; sighed forth proverbs—
 That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,
 That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent not
 Corn for the rich men only. With these shreds

They vented their complainings, which being answer'd,

And a petition granted them . . .

Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms . . . (1.1.208-15)

Coriolanus is not only disdainful of the clichés that the plebs resort to using, he also refuses to acknowledge as legitimate the alterations in political reality that the plebian voice has effected. His response to the plebian enfranchisement that “the rabble should have first [unroof'd] the city / Ere so prevail'd with me” (1.1.218-19) reveals him as extremist and foreshadows the moment when his class prejudice will eclipse even his celebrated patriotism.

In addition to using language to repel Menenius's hegemonic ideology and petition the Senate for greater representation, the citizens debate among themselves how to cast their vote in Coriolanus's suit for Consul:

1. *Cit.* Once if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him.
2. *Cit.* We may, sir, if we will.
3. *Cit.* We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no [moral] power to do. (2.3.1-5)

The variety of positions evokes the conventional early modern characterization of the commons as a “many-headed multitude” (2.3.16) lacking consensus and coherence. But the politeness of the exchange, the use of the collective pronoun, the sober appreciation for their new authority, and the salience of the points all belie this stereotype.

Moreover, the citizens themselves are aware of the challenges to their unity:

[O]ur wits are so diversely color'd; and truly I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, north, south, and their consent of one direct way should be at once to all the points a' th' compass. (2.3.20-24)

This recourse to the trope of the body politic recognizes the aristocratic distrust of the commons as mob, but only in order to show the reductive fallacy of the construct.

Because they are able to articulate a sufficient degree of self-awareness, the plebs can establish and critique their position. Patterson notes that this scene "has not only framed the question of the general will but also its partial solution...by the intimations of majoritarianism . . . [and] individualism" (130-31):

[T]he greater part carries it. . . . He's to make his requests by particulars, wherein every one of us has a single honor, in giving him our own voices with our own tongues. . . . (2.3.37-45)

By allowing the plebs a rational voice, Shakespeare allows them to define themselves according to their own interests, rather than be defined by the language of another class. Additionally, this public scene of deliberation and political participation provides Shakespeare's audience with an exemplar of republicanism in operation.

Coriolanus's unwavering identification with the patrician class and his ultra-conservative social philosophy lead him to equate plebian empowerment with patrician loss. He believes that by giving ear to the plebian voice, the patricians have

compromised their own interests. He therefore berates those senators who have ceded the franchise to the plebs, warning that

. . . You are plebians,
 If they be senators; and they are no less,
 When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste
 Most palates theirs. (3.1.101-04)

Coriolanus claims that, armed with the vote, the plebs' greater numbers will flood the political economy and debase the value of the patrician voice. For Coriolanus, whether it be it in terms of material or political capital, "extreme indigence in others is the bottom line in the symbolic computing of personal net worth" (Patterson 133). Furthermore, according to Coriolanus's hierarchical ideology, compromising the rigidity of class distinctions compromises society itself:

It makes the consuls base . . .
 . . . when two authorities are up,
 Neither supreme, how soon confusion
 May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take
 The one by th' other. (3.1.108-12)

Without the strict organizing principle of an unassailable class structure, confusion reigns. By giving voice to the plebs, the senators have consigned the republic to the sort of "social schizophrenia" familiar to denizens of the Tudor and early Stuart stage in which individuals alter their status regardless of their "origins as the sons or stepsons of glovemakers and bricklayers" (Patterson 18). Coriolanus shuns such social integration

and insists on seeing the world as static and essentialist rather than as relational. It is his ideal to be “author of himself / And [know] no other kin” (5.3.36-37), rather than incorporate himself into a republican dialogue with the lower orders. Leah Marcus maintains that “he is a unity, self-identical, self-contained like a sword...[U]nalterable, impervious, like marble” (206). This alienating obstinacy is illustrated by his antipathy to language, the relativism of which conflicts with his absolutist ethos. Coriolanus prefers individualistic action over the linguistic skill that the civilians demonstrate as a requisite of deliberative democracy. His belief in the mutual exclusivity of action and speech stems from his childhood, when he had rather “see the swords and hear a drum/ than look upon his schoolmaster” (1.4.55-56). By his own account, this tendency developed into a fear of language as he grew into manhood:

... oft,

When blows have made me stay, I fled from words.

.....

I had rather have one scratch my head i' th' sun

When the alarum were struck than idly sit

To hear my nothings monster'd. (2.2.71-77)

His distaste for discourse extends beyond a mere distrust of others' words. He is incapable of utilizing discourse himself, even when doing so will augment his own authority. As such, he demonstrates Shrank's observation that “linguistic incompetence . . . is a sign of social impotence” (416). The consulship is his; he need simply agree to

“speak to the people” (2.2.135), “to ask it kindly” (2.3.75), to “tell . . . his noble deeds”

(2.3.8). Yet he balks even at this:

Let me o'erleap that custom; for I cannot

Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them

For my wounds' sake to give their suffrage. (2.2.136-38)

As indicated by his choice of words, Coriolanus feels that by assuming an actor's role, he degrades the essential nobility that he possesses as a member of the patrician class. It is a sentiment he revisits throughout the play. To parley with the plebs in the marketplace is a “part which never / [he] shall discharge to th' life” (3.2.105-06). He dreads having to

. . . mountebank their loves,

Cog their hearts from them, and come home belov'd

Of all the trades in Rome. (3.2.132-34)

Presumably, Shakespeare's audience appreciated the irony of an actor declaiming these lines to all the trades of London. Perhaps, too, they recognized in the paradox a veiled critique of an autocrat's refusal to participate in public dialogue. In spite of the lower class status marking players, the identification of a ruler as an actor was not an unfamiliar concept in late Tudor and early Stuart England, as indicated by an address of Queen Elizabeth to Parliament in 1584,

We princes, I tell you, are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed. The eyes of many behold our actions; a spot is soon spied on our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doings. It

behooveth us, therefore, to be careful that our proceeding be just and honorable. (qtd. in Teague 63)

Through her use of stagecraft, Elizabeth insinuated herself into a corporate entity of anointed monarchs and sought to establish her centrality within her own court.

Coriolanus's refusal to involve himself in like manner somewhat tarnishes his aristocratic claim to power. Lionized by the people for his martial exploits, Coriolanus's verbal mulishness disallows his incorporation into the republic and denies him the authority he craves.

Coriolanus not only dismisses such social ceremonies as histrionic, he also fears and distrusts the transformative power of the words with which they are enacted. Language has elevated "woolen vassals" (3.2.9) through enfranchisement. Might it not have the potential to effect that reverse, corrupting his own aristocratic virtue? In steeling himself to address the plebs, Coriolanus prepares for the emasculation and moral opprobrium he associates with inter-class dialogue:

. . . My throat of war be turn'd,
Which quier'd with my drum, into a pipe
Small as a eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lull asleep. . .
 . . . A beggar's tongue
Make motion through my lips . . .
 . . . I will not do't,

Lest I surcease to honor my own truth,
 And by my body's action teach my mind
 A most inherent baseness. (3.2.112-23)

Coriolanus's anxiety regarding language extends beyond a mere reluctance to dirty his hands with the plebs. He fears that by accepting a role in the republican discourse of Rome, he fundamentally and irreparably abases himself.

As an apologist for Coriolanus, Menenius explains that

His nature is too noble for the world;
 He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
 Or Jove for 's power to thunder. His heart's mouth;
 What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent . . . (3.1.254-57)

According to this explanation, a superfluity of nobility, or a hypersensitivity to it, is equated with an inability to manipulate language. As noted by Frank Kermode, the epithet "noble" is frequently "tinged with irony" (248) throughout the play. The patrician Titus Lartius demonstrates a similar dramatic irony when he praises Coriolanus as

A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art,
 Were not so rich a jewel. Thou wast a soldier
 Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
 Only in strokes, but, with thy grim-looks and
 The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds,
 Thou mad'st thine enemies shake, as if the world
 Were feverous and did tremble. (1.4.55-61)

In the early seventeenth century, at the time when *Coriolanus* was being written and first produced, “carbuncle” could signify not only a “person of resplendent quality” (“Carbuncle,” def. 1b) but also a “malignant tumor” (“Carbuncle,” def. 3) or a “red spot . . . caused by habits of intemperance” (“Carbuncle,” def. 3b). Read alongside the body politic metaphor which runs throughout the play, the unintended subtext of Lartius’s praise is that Coriolanus’s “grim-looks” and “thunder-like percussion” contribute to a “feverous” state of political health. This fever spikes when the tribunes call for Coriolanus’s expulsion as a traitor.

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
 As reek a’ th’ rotten fens, whose loves I prize
 As the dead carcasses of unburied men
 That do corrupt my air—I banish you! (3.3.120-23)

Coriolanus’s use of “cry of curs” as a synecdoche for the people demonstrates his disdain of the multitude and the voice they have been granted. It is this rabid class prejudice and logophobia that ultimately drive him out of Rome. Because he will not “buy / [The people’s] mercy at the price of one fair word” (3.3.90-91), Coriolanus ultimately substantiates the false charges brought against him.

Having been “by th’ voice of slaves . . . / Hoop’d out of Rome” (4.5.77-78), Coriolanus seeks voluntary exile among the Volscians, with whose help he hopes to lay siege to his “cank’red country” (4.5.91). The alarmed Romans send envoys to parley with their erstwhile champion, but Coriolanus’s unwillingness to negotiate now extends to the Roman patricians as well as to the plebs. In spite of their long friendship,

Coriolanus “coy[s] / To hear [General] Cominius speak” (5.1.6-7) when the latter begs clemency for Rome. The senator Menenius fares no better in his attempt to “conjure [Coriolanus] to pardon Rome and [his] petitionary countrymen” (5.2.75-76). Coriolanus rejects Menenius’s plea in terms that again reveal his antipathy to language:

Mine ears against your suits are stronger than

Your gates against my force . . .

.....

. . . Another word Menenius,

I will not hear thee speak. (5.2.88-92)

Eventually, however, Coriolanus yields to the entreaties of his mother. Volumnia plies her son with images of the shame that will forever attend his name should he sack Rome:

. . . the benefit

Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name

Whose repetition will be dogg’d with curses. . . . (5.3.142-44)

Despite his uncompromising elitism, Coriolanus cannot sever the “bond and privilege of nature” (5.3.25). Volumnia’s words elicit from Coriolanus a peace that

. . . All the swords

In Italy, and her confederate arms,

Could not have made. . . . (5.3.207-09)

Thus, his mother’s speech (and the verbal threat of an embittered posterity) ultimately dissuades Coriolanus from pursuing his elitism to treasonous lengths. This not only validates language as a powerful social tool, it also serves as a final reminder of the

awareness that characterizes the plebs throughout *Coriolanus*. They are mindful of the fact that

. . . what [Coriolanus] hath done famously, he did it to that end. Though soft-conscienc'd men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother, and to be partly proud, which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue. (1.1.36-40)

The plebs seem to have known all along precisely what motivates the tragic title figure. Such prescience, voiced in the midst of a debate that opens the play, empowers and further distinguishes the commonalty in *Coriolanus* from the incoherent and easily disenfranchised mobs of the *Arcadias* and *The Faerie Queene*.

The inherently performative nature of the dramatic form complicates any attempt to read *Coriolanus* as advocating a single class ideology. Patrician and pleb alike display tendencies that must be overcome for the betterment of society at large. The plebs are, at times, confused and easily swayed. The patricians can be aloof and, in the case of Coriolanus, dangerously unyielding. In discussing the polyglossic nature of the text, Patterson remarks that *Coriolanus* treats a “semantics of power” (142) that will come to a head with the constitutional battles of the 1640s. One might also assert that the play is concerned with the power of semantics, for at its center is the importance of language to mediate class dissensions and foster national cohesion. Coriolanus’s tragic mistake is that he flouts the matrix that language forms and along/within which civil society functions. His inability/refusal to recognize the logocentric nature of human society, his dismissal of its functioning as mere empty ceremony, renders him a sociopath in the most literal

sense. By succeeding in the arena of the public theater, Shakespeare attained the financial status that allowed him to effect a change in social status. His success in creating roles on the stage allowed him to recreate his role off of it. His depiction of a patrician rendered an "ugly political innocent" (Kermode 243) by his inability to similarly function comprises Shakespeare's validation of his own metamorphosis into a gentleman.

CONCLUSION

The *Arcadias*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Coriolanus* exemplify Arthur Ferguson's observation that "techniques of public discussion were still in the experimental stage" (155) in England during the sixteenth century. Each text confronts the question of who should be allowed to speak, when, and why. Drawing on the humanist awareness of the sociopolitical implications of language and genre, Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare construct models of society that reflect the class ideologies to which they knowingly or unknowingly subscribe. In spite of the considerable differences among their respective depictions of the commons, each author evinces an overriding concern for the stability of early modern English society. This is attributable, in part, to the factionalism that preceded the Tudors and the endemic fear that "England could be divided and overrun with a sectarian civil war as France had been throughout the 1570s and 1580s" (Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* 3). In pursuit of this stability, each text addresses the fundamental nature of the relationship between individual and collective and the manner in which it is mediated through discourse.

As noted by Eagleton, "individual psychology is . . . a *social* product" (7). That is, our perception of reality is shaped by the collective environment in which we exist. We cannot, as Coriolanus wishes, be authors of ourselves. Coriolanus's tragic flaw is that he refuses to admit his connection to anything beyond himself. His rejection of language and the social bonds it entails creates the rift between himself and the plebian class that is subsequently exploited by the opportunistic tribunes. While Coriolanus recognizes, all too well, the class conflict that is a part of any non-idealized social

situation, he fails to accept that “language constitutes identities” (Wood 811) and that, as such, it is essential to maintaining a viable civilization.

The *Arcadias*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Coriolanus* all contain caveats against the misuse of language. Language is agency, potency, authority. Its misappropriation threatens to rend the social fabric. It beguiles the mob of the *Old Arcadia* and enthralls the mob of the *New Arcadia* when used by Clinias to incite rebellion. It is the medium used by the giant in *The Faerie Queene* to rile the commonalty into a state of near frenzy. The Roman tribunes fill the uncommunicative vacuum between Coriolanus and the enfranchised plebs with their own divisive voices, temporarily manipulating the plebs into rejecting Coriolanus’s suit for consul. In each case, the commonalty is depicted as susceptible to the charms of a voice that rises above the fray.

While each author shares the conviction that there exist varying degrees of legitimacy, their individual definitions of legitimacy reveal their separate class identities. The ideological clash among the varying approaches characterizes Foucault’s assertion that “discourse is not simply that which expresses struggles or systems of domination, but that for which, and by which, one struggles; it is the power which one is striving to seize” (qtd. in Wood 811). In each author’s work, class competition focuses on the question of who is given voice. Hence, to promote the aristocratic agenda, Sidney denies the non-aristocratic voice the coherence and self-control needed to legitimate it. To bolster his position as a functionary of the Tudor state, Spenser depicts his knight as administering justice through rhetoric and logic rather than feats of arms. To valorize his own transgression of class lines, Shakespeare posits linguistic facility and stagecraft as a valid

part of civic activity. Through the medium of language, each author seeks to transcend the class barriers particular to his situation, to subvert class restrictions without dismantling society, and succeeds in writing himself into a particular role in English letters.

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