

POWER ON DISPLAY

The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres



LEONARD TENNENHOUSE

LEONARD TENNENHOUSE

POWER
ON
DISPLAY

*The politics of
Shakespeare's genres*

METHUEN NEW YORK & LONDON

*First published in 1986 by
Methuen, Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York
NY 10001*

*Published in Great Britain by
Methuen & Co. Ltd
11 New Fetter Lane
London EC4P 4EE*

© 1986 Leonard Tennenhouse

Typeset in Monophoto Apollo by
Vision Typesetting, Manchester
Printed in Great Britain by
St Edmundsbury Press, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form
or by any electronic, mechanical or other
means, now known or hereafter invented,
including photocopying and recording, or in any
information storage or retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tennenhouse, Leonard, 1942–
Power on display.

Includes index.

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616 – Political and social views.
2. Literary form.
3. Politics and literature – Great Britain.
4. Great Britain – History – Elizabeth, 1558–1603.
5. Great Britain – History – James I, 1603–1625.

I. Title.

PR3017.T46 1986 822.3'3 86–8670

ISBN 0-416-01271-X

ISBN 0-416-01281-7 (pbk.)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Tennenhouse, Leonard

Power on display: the politics of Shakespeare's genres.

1. Shakespeare, William – Criticism and interpretation

I. Title

822.3'3 PR2976

ISBN 0-416-01271-X

ISBN 0-416-01281-7

For Nancy Armstrong

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Stephen Orgel and Stephen J. Greenblatt for their sustaining encouragement. Each published essays of mine in which I began to think out the problems generating this book. Jonathan Goldberg was kind enough to read the completed manuscript.

With Leah Marcus and Peter Sallibrass I exchanged work in progress and carried on a dialogue that helped my work immeasurably. I also benefited from the intellectual generosity of A. R. Braunmuller, Jonathan Goldberg, Richard Helgerson, Ann R. Jones, Authur Marotti, Louis A. Montrose, Annabel Patterson, Maureen Quilligan, and Don E. Wayne. Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore published an earlier version of the chapter on the history plays. I thank them and Manchester University Press for permission to reprint sections of that essay; I also thank the editors of *Genre* for permission to reprint an earlier version of material that has gone into Chapter Four. Special gratitude goes to the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego, where I began assembling the final draft of this book. Finally, I want to thank Nancy Armstrong for questioning every literary assumption I ever took for granted.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Unless otherwise noted, I have used *The Riverside Shakespeare* edited by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1972) throughout this book.

CONTENTS

	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
	INTRODUCTION	
	<i>Shakespeare and the scene of reading</i>	1
1	STAGING CARNIVAL	
	<i>Comedy and the politics of the aristocratic body</i>	17
2	RITUALS OF STATE ✓	
	<i>History and the Elizabethan strategies of power</i>	72
3	THE THEATER OF PUNISHMENT	
	<i>Jacobean tragedy and the politics of misogyny</i>	102
4	FAMILY RITES	
	<i>City comedy, romance, and the strategies of patriarchalism</i>	147
	<i>Notes</i>	187
	<i>Index</i>	201

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare and the scene of reading

There are several political Shakespeares, two of whom are certainly well-known to literary scholars. The most familiar of these is the canonized Shakespeare, a product of the tradition of reading, whose name is identified with culture itself but whose plays are often used to maintain a difference between literature and popular culture. The modern literary institution generally uses this Shakespeare to organize culture according to the thematics of a post-Enlightenment humanism which finds universal psychological truths in his characters and loves him best for writing poetry that transcends history. This ahistorical Shakespeare is, in other words, quite clearly a construct who speaks the politics of culture in the tradition of Arnold and Eliot. Another political Shakespeare familiar to the Anglo-American literary establishment is the Renaissance playwright. He is also a construct, albeit one who has been assembled to supplement and – on rare occasions – even to challenge the ahistorical Shakespeare. Where the literary figure is presumed to have written truths that obtain over time and across cultures, the man Shakespeare is situated in a Renaissance context. His writing is largely topical and allegorical as he comments on the figures and policies of his time in relation to which, then, one can fix his political identity. This historical personage is produced by scholars who set their work in opposition to the idealizing themes of literature. They use Shakespeare as the means of constructing culture-specific conditions for reading. In this other scene of reading, which grounds literature in history, Shakespeare becomes a means of turning the canonized Shakespeare into a window onto Renaissance social relations, a mirror of his times, a text that presupposes a context “outside” of itself. While opposed, these Shakespeares are in large part the product of the same modern literary institution and speak its politics. Indeed, one reason

2 POWER ON DISPLAY

Shakespeare remains so central to our work is because he had been used to constitute a field of argumentation which appears to be composed of contradictory and competing positions. By so doing, we have also performed an act of containment. Rarely do we feel compelled to entertain the possibility of any other Shakespeares, so intrinsically coherent is the logic of this outside/inside, popular/literary, historical/universal Shakespeare.

The tenacity of both ways of reading Shakespeare bears witness to the fact that the Shakespeare who is a man of his historical moment dwells quite comfortably with the imaginative genius who belongs to the ages. All the same, another political Shakespeare can be identified, one radically incompatible with the more familiar two, precisely because he reveals the political compatibility of the historical Shakespeare with his transcendent double. In pursuing the assumption that Shakespeare was constantly in tune with his time, one discovers an author who at all times seemed to know the rhetorical strategies for making sense, as well as what it was politic to say. We also find it necessary to imagine a situation where literature and political discourse had not yet been differentiated in the manner of a modern critical discourse. To the degree his work was in keeping with that of other writers in that same situation – authors of political prose as well as other successful playwrights – Shakespeare exists for us as several different rhetorical strategies. It is the purpose of this book to demonstrate how these constituted the Renaissance debates concerning the nature and origins of political power.

Shakespeare's chronicle history plays offer a particularly clear demonstration that such a political Shakespeare existed. For one thing, these plays were successful in entertaining an Elizabethan theater-going audience even though they were obviously political – the audience apparently saw no conflict in an aesthetic performance that was also a political one. In this respect, the tradition of reading Shakespeare provides us with inadequate options, inadequate precisely when it comes to understanding the politics of his use of chronicle history. For over fifty years these plays have generally been read in one of three ways: as overtly political texts which one can interpret by reference to the historical source material; as dramatic entertainments to be classed as an aesthetic genre comparable with comedy, tragedy or romance; or as part of a process of Shakespeare's personal development which accompanied his youthful comedies and preceded the grand metaphysical tragedies and the mature vision of his lyrical romances.¹ Each of these positions testifies to the distinction between literature and politics and so serves the interests of modern society by imposing this belief on the past. Yet none of these can begin to explain the peculiarities of *Henry VIII*. Shakespeare – whether

alone or in collaboration – could not write a chronicle history play at the close of his career that meets the standard, according to readers, set by *Richard II*, *I Henry IV*, or *Henry V*. Some scholars have classified this later play with the romances, but their doing so is simply more testimony to suggest this play departs in some fundamental way from Shakespeare's other work in the genre. Rather than pursue the argument whether there is something wrong with *Henry VIII*, however, I want to consider if there is not something wrong with the categories we use to read the chronicle histories, since this designation of genre does not seem to come to terms with the way Shakespeare uses the materials of chronicle history when he sets them forth upon the stage. No amount of thematizing will make "chronicle history plays" a coherent category for describing dramatic art.

But chronicle history is not the only genre that reveals something amiss with conventional literary categories. We seldom read the romantic comedies as if they were political texts on the order of the histories. Yet after 1601/2 Shakespeare seems to have been unwilling or unable to write a romantic comedy. We classify the comedies he did write after *Twelfth Night* in a manner that suggests the inadequacy of the genre in another way. By designating a play such as *Measure for Measure* a "problem" comedy – a modern term to be sure – we may not agree on what problem the play poses, but we do agree that in some basic way the play problematizes an Elizabethan notion of comedy. Nor can *Measure for Measure* be called *sui generis* in this respect, for it bears striking resemblance to other absent monarch plays which came into vogue after 1603. It also bears certain affinities to the city comedies that became popular during the reign of James I. Shakespeare was not alone in abandoning romantic comedy after 1602, furthermore, for none of his fellow dramatists took up the form again either. The tradition of reading romantic comedy, like that of chronicle history, breaks along predictable lines. The overwhelmingly popular tradition of reading looks at comedy as an utterly apolitical form. Simply because it is about love and courtship, it cannot by definition be political, so the argument goes. Critical interest turns to these plays for evidence of the artist's growth and development or for signs of his preoccupation with specifically literary themes, Shakespeare's version of love in the western world, for example, or his celebration of art. A minority of Shakespeare scholars look for political import in the manner of his topical allusion and allegory. But seldom has criticism asked what political interests romantic comedy and chronicle history share that bound them together in a common fate.

Tragedy appears to be the one dramatic genre in which Shakespeare worked throughout his career. Yet here, too, history appears to have made its mark upon Shakespeare's genre. With the obvious exception of

4 POWER ON DISPLAY

Hamlet, tragedies written during the 1590s cannot be understood in the same terms as the grand metaphysical tragedies of the Jacobean Shakespeare. In that it concludes with the transfer of dynastic power from one family to another, furthermore, *Hamlet* bears strong resemblances to *Julius Caesar* and to *Titus Andronicus*, both of which disrupt genealogy and heap bodies upon the stage to display the destruction incurred when the state goes to war against itself. In open contrast with Elizabethan tragedy, such plays as *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Coriolanus* focus on the restoration and the consolidation of political power. These later tragedies display different political strategies, strategies – I will argue – explicitly aimed at revising those found in earlier dramatic genres, including even his own earlier tragedies. In their representation of the aristocratic community, in the prevalence of scenes of punishment, and in the radically altered powers attached to the female body, the later drama reshapes Shakespeare's dramatic materials to observe the same rules of production as Webster, Chapman, and Tourneur. To account for the rhetorical conflicts and discontinuities within the generic categories of modern criticism, then, it appears we would have to posit a Shakespeare changing, turning against himself, and declining. But such a logic intrinsic to his career will not explain why his contemporaries followed a similar pattern during the same historical period or why audience taste also changed over the course of Shakespeare's career. So long as discussion of the plays remains within the conventional literary genres, I am suggesting, the questions which motivate this book cannot find an answer. One cannot explain why certain forms were abandoned, why others were taken up, or why a genre might turn against itself and openly renounce a logic that was one and the same as its form during an earlier period of time. That is to say, traditional literary categories will not allow us to discuss the politics of Shakespeare's genres.

The problem of classifying Shakespeare's work according to dramatic genres is certainly not a modern one, but rather one which began with the earliest attempts to organize his plays. Indeed, the "Catalogue" printed in the First Folio divides plays into the comedies, histories, and tragedies. *Cymbeline* is listed as a tragedy, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* are placed under the comedies, and missing altogether from the "Catalogue" is *Troilus and Cressida* which does in fact appear sandwiched between the histories and the tragedies. That such obvious conflict within and among genres should arise in 1623 bodes further confusion for subsequent attempts at internal organization of the canon. It is as if once these plays are collected and put into print, they necessarily become texts of a different order than the dramatic performances they both replicate and

displace. We might say they take on a life independent of their origins in the theater as they are made into an internally coherent relational text. At this point, the process of dehistoricizing the texts has clearly begun. The arrangement of plays according to generic categories automatically detaches the work from history and presumes the internal organization of its meaning. To understand the process by which Shakespeare's plays are so organized according to generic categories, we would have to trace a course of some three hundred years from the First Folio to the appearance of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. The history of this great game of suppressing the political operations of writing – an act Frye is keenly aware he is performing – would require a wholly different study from the one I have undertaken in this book. I can imagine such another project where each attempt to fix the generic identity of Shakespeare's texts would be understood as a stage in a complex political process. It would be necessary, among other things, to understand the important movement to include Shakespeare within an educational curriculum for women at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. This movement culminated with Joanna Baillie's theory of dramatic genres in which each genre was informed by one of the passions, a notion that Hazlitt, among others, excoriated in an effort to save Shakespeare from middle-class sentimentality.²

My own study began with a set of questions quite different from those governing most generic criticism. These aim at discovering the historical principle which divides literary genres internally or makes them overlap in certain respects, not at developing criteria which bind them together. I have asked myself, for instance, what if it could be shown that a play such as *Henry VIII* represents power in much the same way as in dramatic romance and tragicomedy? And what if *Henry V* understood political conflict in terms resembling those of romantic comedy as well as contemporary political debate? Suppose one could show that *Hamlet* shares certain rhetorical strategies with the chronicle histories and that these oppose the strategies governing *King Lear* or *Macbeth*. Under such circumstances, would we not have to rethink the whole notion of artistic genres – what constitutes a history play as opposed to a tragedy, or a romantic comedy or a dramatic romance if these dramatic forms had more to do with the vicissitudes of political conflict than with any cultural logic intrinsic to a particular dramatic form? And this, even though the texts in question were written by the same author over the length of his career? Were such a relationship among various forms of Renaissance writing to be demonstrated, it would suggest, among other things, that the opposition between a literary use and a political use of similar cultural materials is largely an invention of the critical process. We might have to

6 POWER ON DISPLAY

conclude that Renaissance drama displayed its politics in its manner of idealizing or demystifying specific forms of power. It is my contention that such display and not a work's transcendence or referentiality made it aesthetically successful.

My goal, then, is to argue for a Shakespeare whose dramatic forms participated in the political life of Renaissance England. This is not to say, I must insist, that his drama held up a constant mirror to political events as if it stood somewhere outside of the field of activity, any more than to say the theater could adhere to a literary logic or take its shape from the development of an author's personality. I argue this in the face of a critical tradition which has insisted art and politics are essentially opposed in their strategies and objectives. Because my effort is directed at showing the basic political aims of Shakespeare's plays, I focus on those strategies I imagine his audience understood almost as we know common sense itself. Indeed, I have not even attempted to show – as well one might in describing the political Shakespeare – how the writer immersed in this milieu sought to question political authority. By examining how he includes recalcitrant cultural materials and dramatizes their suppression under the pressure of official strategies of idealization, some scholars have begun to identify such a subversive Shakespeare.³ My point is more simple than that: to show that, during the Renaissance, political imperatives were also aesthetic imperatives.

It is one thing to call for such a study that avoids the pitfalls of the literary institution; it is another to adhere to the general criteria for the political Shakespeare that my questions invoke. With an explanation of this difficulty is perhaps the best place to begin my effort. Whenever I teach Shakespeare, I become acutely aware of the place he occupies in modern culture, just as writing about his plays and poetry has sensitized me to the importance of his role in modern literary criticism. Most of all, I am impressed by the difficulty one has in describing a political Shakespeare, a difficulty – or prohibition, rather – which I can only attribute to my academic role and to literary criticism. Indeed, our most characteristic procedures for reading appear capable of converting almost any historical text into an object of modern culture. When I claim to describe a Shakespeare who is neither the aestheticized nor the historicized figure of traditional criticism, then, it is only my way of arguing against certain colonizing strategies of that criticism even as I participate in it. This is certainly not to claim I am in touch with the “real” Shakespeare. It is rather to use the body of writing we call Shakespeare as a means of unthinking some of the strategies of appropriation that may be common critical practice for someone in my position as an academic critic and literary scholar at this historical moment. Most of my procedures are

in this sense antiprocedural. I have developed them over the past four or five years as I found it necessary not to do to Shakespeare what my education – from the earliest years on – has virtually compelled me to do. With the purpose in mind of making this approach less strange by explaining the antiprocedures I have developed, let me now provide a sense of the genesis of this project.

For a number of years I have worked collaboratively with someone who writes on nineteenth-century British literature and history. In discussions of our respective domains of literary history, I have had frequent occasion to draw examples from Shakespeare. With remarkable frequency, the plot I summarized, the character I described, or the reading I offered struck my colleague as something that could have been written in post-Enlightenment England. If I argued for the historical specificity of some feature of Shakespearean drama, my collaborator could often produce counterexamples to demonstrate that almost anything I inferred from a Shakespearean drama about Renaissance culture could also – and more appropriately – be said of a novel.

In the name of historical criticism, I had to conclude, I had been performing an anthropological gesture which translates any and all cultures into the categories of modern culture. I had done this to mark a distinction between “us” and “them” – in this case between the modern and Renaissance milieux for writing and producing drama – in order to create historical difference. In reflecting upon this behavior, however, it seemed rather obvious how it served quite another objective. My reading of Shakespeare tried to distinguish my writing from the products of an earlier epoch, all the while transforming Shakespeare into the product of my own culture, namely, literary criticism. This is to say, by making Shakespeare other than myself in terms of his “context,” in effect I authorized the production of criticism. To constitute Shakespeare elsewhere in time was to create a reference outside of writing to which my critical strategies provided special access. In a word, contextualizing Shakespeare gave me a certain kind of power – resembling the Olympian perspective of most anthropology – over Renaissance culture. At the same time – and this is the extraordinary thing, the real legerdemain – even while I situated him in another “context,” I could make Shakespeare testify to the timelessness of the modern individual, my own ambitions, fears and desires. In one crucial respect, however, I always stopped short of carrying out the sort of work nineteenth-century novelists typically performed on Shakespeare.

For them, this critical move was admittedly political. By way of demonstration, I borrow a passage from an author whom literary criticism has succeeded in depoliticizing more than most. In *Shirley*, her

8 POWER ON DISPLAY

most openly political novel, Charlotte Brontë includes a scene of reading near the beginning of a narrative set at the time of the Luddite rebellions. In this scene *Coriolanus* is read aloud and commented upon, as if to instruct the reader in the procedures for reading not only such an openly political text as Shakespeare's but the narrative to follow as well. It demonstrates both what procedures should be used to appropriate Shakespeare for middle-class culture and the very real political interests the reading of literature served. My own point in using this example from a novel is to show the novelist was utterly conscious of depoliticizing Shakespeare. That she understood the political functions of reading Shakespeare as a work of literature is apparent in this breakdown of the scene in question:

Mediating. Brontë represents the reading of a Shakespeare play as a way of regulating relationships between individuals. Caroline Helstone, Robert Moore, and his sister Hortense debate how they shall spend their evening. When they reject such activities as chess, draughts, backgammon, and even gossip as frivolous or boring, Caroline proposes that Robert read Shakespeare aloud to the women. In contrast with other forms of play, the reading of Shakespeare provides a beneficial way of occupying leisure time, or as Caroline says, ". . . it would be pleasant to go back to the past; to hear people . . . speak to us and tell us their thought, and impart their ideas."⁴ Shakespeare thus displaces other symbolic practices onto words and, further, allows writing to mediate all human relationships.

Socializing. Robert Moore is half Belgian, half English. Caroline tells him that by reading, "Tonight you shall be entirely English" (p. 114). It is by acquiring the language of Shakespeare, then, that one benefits from the work of literature; it socializes the individual. As Caroline explains, "Your French forefathers don't speak so sweetly, nor so solemnly, nor so impressively as your English ancestors, Robert" (p. 114). Even as it constitutes Shakespearean drama as written text, then, this scene of reading turns writing into the record of and basis for speech. More than that, speech is made the direct expression of emotion which exists prior to the speech act and arises, then, from within the individual. Thus Shakespeare's mediation brings one individual in direct contact with the other. As Caroline explains, she has tried to select a passage for Robert to read aloud which "is toned with something in you. It shall waken your nature, fill your mind with music, it shall pass like a skillful hand over your heart. . . . Let glorious William come near and touch it; you will see how he will draw the English power and melody out of its chords" (p. 114).

Psychologizing. At the same time, one can see what happens to history. Rather than estranged and culturally other, Renaissance man becomes the voice of Robert's ancestor (even though Robert was born and reared in Belgium!) who speaks to him across time and cultural boundaries. Brought to life as it is read aloud in this setting, the written Shakespeare encloses the poles of human experience within the subjectivity of the reader: "It is to stir you," Caroline explains, "to give you new sensations. It is to make you feel your life strongly, not only your virtues, but your vicious ... perverse points . . . discover by the feelings the reading will give you at once how low and high you are" (p. 115). Robert's extremely controversial political position as a factory owner intent on mechanization has in a stroke been translated into psychological terms which locate one within a hierarchy of emotion that all men presumably are capable of feeling. And "the English power" which Shakespeare brings to the fore in the individual is simply the power of knowing human nature in this way. This is how Brontë describes the transformation Robert experiences as he reads Shakespeare under the loving tutelage of Caroline Helstone: ". . . stepping out of the narrow line of private prejudices, [he] began to revel in the large picture of human nature, to feel the reality stamped upon the characters who were speaking from that page before him" (p. 116).

Moralizing the text. In saying this, she is asking Robert to renounce one mode of power – that which she associates with the imperiously patriarchal nature of Coriolanus – and adopt another one – that which she identifies as a benevolent form of paternalism. She is, in other words, depoliticizing Shakespeare in order to make him represent a new kind of political authority, if only by virtue of negation. This is a form of political authority that appears *not* to be a form of authority as such, because it models itself upon family relationships and operates in and through subjectivity. As it is taken up by modern culture, then, Shakespeare finally becomes the means by which this historical change is brought about, the means, that is, by which authority is internalized and subjectivity becomes a self-regulating mechanism. Caroline explains the moral Robert should "tack to the play" of *Coriolanus*: "you must not be proud to your workpeople; you must not neglect chances of soothing them, and you must not be of an inflexible nature, uttering a request as austere as if it were a command" (p. 114).

Brontë was not being the least bit ironic here in saying this. She understood better than we do the power of reading. Indeed the point of this entire episode is to show that Caroline is well trained as a reader and will therefore make Robert a wonderful wife, in which capacity she will carry on the primary work of acculturation. Nor was Brontë alone in

10 POWER ON DISPLAY

understanding Shakespeare as such an instrument of social control. Her epoch saw him introduced into the standard curriculum with the formation of a national system of education. Shakespeare became part of a reading program designed to produce individuals that would inhabit and perpetuate a modern institutional culture, as opposed to the classical education that had once initiated gentlemen into the language of power. Robert Moore is a factory owner badly in need of such domestication to prepare him for managing the mechanized workplace. This is the same kind of education he needs to make him a good husband and father. If nothing else, it should be clear from this example how reading Shakespeare translates a language at once political and historical into one that appears to be neither because it is pure ideology – or, more accurately, because it is so like our own ideology.

To tell the truth, my own experience with Shakespeare has not been all that different from Robert Moore's, although I hope I have proved to be a more recalcitrant subject than he. Along with the work of acculturating individuals, the scene of reading in which one encounters Shakespeare may have shifted from the parlor to secondary schools and universities, but the strategies of reading do not differ substantially from those Brontë dramatizes in *Shirley*. We still enclose Renaissance culture within our own discourse and thus make it speak our notion of sexuality, the family, and the individual. And acquiring such literary competence still performs the work of socialization. Not only does it teach us how to moralize symbolic practices other than written literature, it also compels us to understand those practices as expressions of a truth that exists to them – within individuals. In this sense, it is perhaps more accurate to say that Shakespeare has written us than for us to say that, as literary critics and scholars, we have done so to him, for we do not acknowledge the political objectives working themselves out through the procedures I have described above. A novel such as *Shirley* openly acknowledges what it is doing to Shakespeare and why. We, more thoroughly than Brontë no doubt, are products of the hegemony we perpetuate, of the forgetting which occurs when literary criticism sophisticates the reading procedures once used chiefly to educate women in the home. I catch embarrassing glimpses of my own complicity in this ongoing project of modern educational institutions. As literary criticism makes Shakespeare's texts speak a sophisticated psychological theory or articulate ever more carefully researched political conflicts, one tends to forget that Renaissance drama is nevertheless caught up and contained in our writing. Writing that induces such forgetting cannot help but use Shakespeare to produce a political unconscious even as we are discussing the politics of

Renaissance drama.⁵ It is in this respect that Shakespeare criticism resembles a novel.

This encounter with *Shirley* represents a moment in my ongoing relationship with Shakespeare, the moment of self-questioning which hatched this project. But let me hasten to add that it was not with the least bit of dejection I experienced such alienation from my education and work then in progress, even though, because of it, I gave up all possibility of being the one to corner "truth." The Shakespeare toward which criticism ordinarily aspires would obviously have to be a pristine figure, Shakespeare as he might have existed before he was written by the last three hundred years of criticism, and I am not after that Shakespeare. I never was. Just as I have been acculturated by the Shakespeare of the literary institution, I have also been well-trained to develop ever more sophisticated techniques for acculturating him. I understand my scholarly and critical task in this book, then, as something akin to wriggling out of my cultural skin, much as someone might wriggle out of a particularly close-fitting turtleneck shirt.

Behind this seemingly frivolous comparison lies a theory that hangs on from a period when I was intensely interested in psychoanalytic criticism. In his notion of cultural countertransference, the anthropologist George Devereux notes how often the procedures which social science has devised to protect against the contamination of data actually operate as elaborate defenses for just this – the appropriation of data by the observer's culture.⁶ Devereux is certainly not the only one to claim that under the illusion one has screened out any such bias, the social scientist invariably reclassifies cultural material, selects his data, and interprets symbolic behavior accordingly. Such distortion certainly occurs when areas of culture are turned into noise or primitivized, on the one hand, or when, on the other, another culture appears to offer no resistance to the observer's characteristic strategies for encountering reality. Devereux draws on Freud's notion of countertransference not to protect against such distortions so much as to use them to his own advantage. Using his countertransference, the analyst is supposed to turn himself into an object of knowledge, according to this later development in Freud's theory, so that he may enter into the communication situation fully capable of recognizing the difference between self and other.⁷ As Devereux notes, among even those psychoanalysts who write of this phenomenon, this tends to be an ideal rather than a real possibility to be achieved. In extrapolating this concept for anthropology, Devereux contends there can be no analysis of another culture that does not at some point include or – better – presuppose an analysis of our own. I would add but one