

“Inverted Rites”: Reading Girard reading Pater reading Shakespeare

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The discipline of literary criticism is built, in part, on a network of citations, a matrix of references which functions to authorize an author, permitting them to present their opinions and analysis to the other members of a discourse community within a complex system of mutual recognition. Deference is due to the past, to those critical giants of literary history on whose shoulders we stand; or at the very least, a proper name is invoked in order to maintain one's distance, to allow the critic to distinguish more precisely their position from what has come before. There is a kind of bargaining here from the outset of any literary critical enterprise, where the author cites other figures in order to acknowledge their debts, and thereby take their place as a member of this discourse community. This bargaining, this structure of indebtedness, already speaks of a kind of anthropological event: it appears to be endlessly mimetic, a structure of displacement, where authority functions through a system of deferrals. Or perhaps this bargaining is rather like a kind of Faustian pact, the author invoking the proper name as a sorcerer invokes the daemon, in the hope that it will aid them in their hour of need.

What is the status of the proper name for a writer such as René Girard? As a critic, he wrote extensively on Shakespeare, not only in *A Theatre of Envy* (1991), his book on the Renaissance playwright, but in chapters in other works, such as *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) and *To Double Business Bound* (1978). But in his writings on Shakespeare, Girard seems to partly stand aloof from the kinds of disciplinary conventions outlined above. Where are the references to prior works of literary criticism in his critical writings on Shakespeare? In other words, what does Girard's approach to Shakespeare tell us about the proper level of deference due, the appropriate authority which should be invested in, the great names of the critical tradition?

The answer to this question is not entirely straightforward. In a recent piece published in

Anthopoetics on 'René Girard's Shakespeare', excerpted from his book on *Shakespeare's Big Men* (2016), Richard van Oort quotes the introduction to *A Theater of Envy* to begin to interrogate the knowing strategies that Girard adopts in seeking to justify his revolutionary approach to the Shakespearean canon.[1] Girard's position is founded from the outset on the premise that 'Shakespeare' itself is a proper name; indeed, perhaps 'Shakespeare' is *the* proper name of the literary tradition, canonical in the sense in which we may also speak of 'Homer' or 'Dante'. For Girard, Shakespeare transcends his age, and in justifying his radical approach, he foregrounds the 'modernity' of Shakespeare as 'an original thinker centuries ahead of his time, more modern than any of our so-called master thinkers'. [2] But Girard's preface eschews standard scholarly practice in appealing not to proper names, but simply to a theoretical fulcrum, his theory of 'mimetic desire'. This theory of mimesis is all the authority he (claims that he) needs, an approach so revolutionary that it supposedly 'solves' the problems of the problem plays. We should, of course, be circumspect: Girard's preface is, after all, a paratextual form of positioning, with prefacing a rhetorical technique in its own right, one which frames, sometimes artificially, but always strategically, the text which follows. In this case, the carefully crafted strategy he adopts allows Girard to present himself as though he were 'writing in a vacuum', as van Oort puts it. [3] Girard portrays himself, at least here in his preface, as though his readings of Shakespeare were peerless, in every sense of this word.

But is this to say that Girard's treatment of Shakespeare is wholly unprecedented? Even without a detailed knowledge of the contours of Shakespearean scholarship between the early 1970s and the early 1990s, most observers are likely to see antecedents in Shakespearean criticism for many of the positions that Girard will propose. Van Oort explicitly poses the question:

Is Girard as original as he claims to be? What is to distinguish Girard's reading of Shakespeare from, for example, Francis Fergusson's reading of the ritual origins of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, or John Holloway's remarks on the sacrificial origins of Shakespearean tragedy? More generally, can't we see a connection between Girard's ideas about sacrifice and the work of James George Frazer or Émile Durkheim in the early twentieth century, both of whom were highly influential among critics of the early and mid-twentieth century? What about the ironic, late-romantic readings of Shakespeare by Wilson Knight or Harold Goddard? Finally, don't Girard's ideas about tragedy sound very similar to Kenneth Burke's? [4]

In what follows, I will take up van Oort's point by focusing on another of Girard's precursors which he passes over here, the late nineteenth century aesthetic critic Walter Pater. [5] In interrogating the idea that Girard's Shakespeare has no critical antecedents in literary history, this essay will begin to unpack Girard's use of Pater and the ways in which Pater's reading of the play might inform an anthropological approach.

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While *A Theater of Envy* is 'almost totally devoid of references to previous scholarship', as van Oort points out,[\[6\]](#) a brief if suggestive reading of Shakespeare's *Richard II* in *Violence and the Sacred* is attended by a nod to Pater's essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings' (1889). The citation occurs in the final chapter, entitled 'The Unity of all Rites', in which Girard's concern is to show that:

There is a unity that underlies not only all mythologies and rituals but the whole of human culture, and this unity of unities depends on a single mechanism, continually functioning because perpetually misunderstood - the mechanism that assures the community's spontaneous and unanimous outburst of opposition to the surrogate victim.[\[7\]](#)

The chapter links sacrificial rites with rites of passage to show both alike have a root mechanism. Considering, in this context, the idea of the Divine Right of Kings, and the rites associated with it, Girard turns to Shakespeare, whom he claims as master of the paradox of the way in which the king can be considered a kind of sacrificial victim.[\[8\]](#) For Girard:

The dethronement scene in *Richard II* can be seen as a sort of coronation performed in reverse. Walter Pater described it as an inverted rite, but all rites demand that moment of inversion. The king acts as his own sacrifice, transforming himself by quasi-religious means into a double of all his enemies and their surrogate victims as well. He is himself a traitor, in no way different from those who do him violence.[\[9\]](#)

Before diving in to unpack this citation, we should linger for a moment or two longer with Girard, because it will be important to recognize some of the rhetorical moves that Girard will make immediately after this citation of Pater. First and foremost, Girard continues by immediately quoting Richard's speech in Act Four Scene One by way of evidence:

Mine eyes are full of tears; I cannot see.
And yet salt water blinds them not so much
But they can see a sort of traitors here.
Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,
I find myself a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul's consent
T'undeck the pompous body of a king[.] (4.1.244-50) [\[10\]](#)

Now, immediately following this quotation, itself immediately following the allusion to Pater's reading of *Richard II* as an 'inverted rite', Girard cites Ernst Kantorowicz's book, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957). Girard commends Kantorowicz for while 'he does not touch directly upon the question of the surrogate victim, he gives an excellent description of the dual nature of the Shakespearean monarch'.[\[11\]](#) It is this 'dual nature' which interests Girard, this 'doubling' or 'mirror' structure which had also interested Pater.[\[12\]](#)

Today's reader may be slightly confused to see a reference to a writer such as Walter Pater at this point of Girard's text, particularly given the dearth of other proper names from the history of Shakespearean criticism elsewhere in his work. What caused Girard to turn at this moment to a figure such as Pater, best remembered today for his role as the leading figure in the British aestheticism movement? On the surface, at least, one would imagine there would be more in common between Pater's stylized take on the play's protagonist and the 'romantic aestheticism' (the term is van Oort's) which typifies the approach of a critic such as Harold Bloom than might be found between his works and Girard's anthropological approach to Shakespeare.^[13] Even more curiously, why did Girard turn to this particular text of Pater's? The essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings' in question dates from relatively late in his career, with Pater dying five years later. From his letters to Arthur Symonds, we can date the beginnings of its composition to around November 1888, and the essay was first published in *Scribner's Magazine* in April 1889, before being reprinted in Pater's collected volume of *Appreciations* later that same year.^[14] The essay is something of an oddity in Pater's career, languishing today in the critical shadow of his more famous texts such as his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), with its infamous conclusion, or his historical novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), or his short stories, *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), or even his more famous essays, such as those on 'Wordsworth' (1874) or 'Style' (1888), or those on Greek mythology, philosophy and religion, published posthumously in *Greek Studies* (1895). Indeed, while Girard gives the citation in English, it is worth noting here that Pater's essay has—to the best of my knowledge—still not been translated into French, so that Girard's reference in *Violence and the Sacred*, dating from 1972, becomes all the more curious.^[15]

In point of fact, a closer analysis of the passage in which Girard quotes from 'Shakespeare's English Kings' may give us cause to question the extent of his knowledge of Pater's essay; indeed, such an analysis may perhaps even give us cause for doubting whether or not Girard had read Pater's essay at all. As we have seen, in the same passages of *Violence and the Sacred* Girard also cites Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*, and it seems more than likely that he would have first encountered Pater from this source. In his chapter on *Richard II*, Kantorowicz writes:

The scene in which Richard 'undoes his kingship' and releases his body politic into thin air, leaves the spectator breathless. It is a scene of sacramental solemnity, since the ecclesiastical ritual of undoing the effects of consecration is no less solemn or of less weight than the ritual which has built up the sacramental dignity. [The scene] has attracted the attention of many a critic, and Walter Pater has called it very correctly an inverted rite, a rite of degradation and a long agonizing ceremony in which the order of coronation is reversed.^[16]

Kantorowicz then proceeds to quote from the very same passage (4.1.203-11) which Girard had quoted immediately after citing Pater in the relevant passage of *Violence and the*

Sacred, a passage which had itself immediately preceded his citation of Kantorowicz. It seems reasonable, in this context, to assume that, at the very least, Girard turned to Pater prompted by Kantorowicz.

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If these passages of Kantorowicz offer the hidden context for Girard's interest in Pater's essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings', and for his approach to *Richard II*'s 'inverted rites', we must still consider Pater's own analysis of the play and the ways in which such an aesthetic analysis might inform an anthropological approach. These issues seem to be of particular significance given the ways in which Girard seeks to mobilize the authority of Pater's proper name in these passages of *Violence and the Sacred*. As the title of Pater's essay suggests, 'Shakespeare's English Kings' aims to consider the English history plays taken as a whole, a series which 'needed but the completion of one unimportant interval to possess the unity of a popular chronicle from Richard the Second to Henry the Eighth'.^[17] In spite of these pretensions, however, Pater's interest as the essay progresses comes to be more and more focused on one play in particular, *Richard II*. His argument has two strands: one formal, the other aesthetic. It is not surprising that Pater, who was a leading spokesperson for British aestheticism in the late 1880s, focused on Shakespeare's poetry and was the first critic to propose a reading of Richard as the poet-king, a point which nearly every reading that followed Pater has also accentuated. Pater was also the first to associate Richard's *hamartia* with his physical beauty, an aspect which has become canonical in performance, even while there is no evidence for this theme in Shakespeare's text itself. Perhaps on these grounds, which is to say, on account of its aestheticism, Pater's essay was not particularly well received at the time of its publication. Margret Wilson Oliphant, the influential Scottish critic, wrote in a review in *Blackwood's Magazine* that the study was 'a little too subtle',^[18] and even Pater's biographer Arthur Benson wrote in 1906 that:

The essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings' is rather a slight performance, and the analysis of a somewhat superficial kind. Pater, for instance, almost fails to realise the magnificence of the conception of *Richard II*, the tragedy of which consists in the fact that, at a sudden crisis, a prompt force and vigour are demanded of a ruler whose nature is full indeed of wise and fruitful thoughts, but whose position calls for a bluff and cheerful energy, when all that he can give is a subtle and contemplative philosophy.^[19]

There is a subtle coding in this term 'subtle', charged seemingly with approbation, connoting a kind of effeminacy on the part of Pater's criticism; it is opposed to the 'manly' and active qualities of 'force', 'action' and 'energy'.^[20] Regardless, what is clear is that this 'subtlety' marks a supposed sense of distance separating Pater from his subject, with Benson concluding that 'one feels like [Pater] does not enter the humanity, the profundity,

of Shakespeare'.[\[21\]](#)

Benson's analysis is instructive, for while it is nearly wholly misjudged in its evaluation of the supposed limitations of Pater's remarkable essay, he happens upon the central interest of the text in the context of our discussion of Girard: he catches sight of that formal innovation which lies at the heart of Pater's reading of 'Shakespeare's English Kings'. In Pater's critical essay, as is the case elsewhere throughout his corpus, the question of critical distance (an idea derived in part from the Kantian category of 'disinterestedness') is linked to the question of 'irony', one which divides the critic from the subject he is in the process of offering an appreciation of.[\[22\]](#) But in 'Shakespeare's English Kings', Pater does not simply mobilize critical irony in his own practice of aesthetic 'appreciation'; rather, he sees that this formal structure also underwrites Shakespeare's history plays. The 'irony' in question, then, is not simply Pater's, but also Shakespeare's. For Pater, Shakespeare's history plays focus on 'the irony of kingship—average human nature, flung with a wonderfully pathetic effect into the vortex of great events'.[\[23\]](#) Kingship itself then is not only subject to ironies, Pater maintains, but is itself endlessly ironic. Indeed, Richard, Pater argues, is 'the most touching of all examples of the irony of kingship'.[\[24\]](#) This irony links the king to his subjects indelibly, both insofar as the king is simply another man whom the irony of great events has turned into a king, and insofar as king and subject end up in a kind of inverse relationship.

It was precisely this kind of innovative approach to the irony of Shakespeare's history plays which led Jeanne T. Newlin to include Pater's essay in her volume of *Richard II: Critical Essays* (1984). For Newlin, the publication of 'Shakespeare's English Kings' was a watershed moment in the play's 'rags-to-riches story', and perhaps *the* key moment in the history of *Richard II*'s critical reception, one which allowed the play to emerge from the shadows of its more famous Shakespearean relatives.[\[25\]](#) Newlin's high estimation of Pater's essay built upon foundations laid almost half a century beforehand by John Dover Wilson, who, in his introduction to his edition of the play for the Cambridge Shakespeare (1939), argued that Pater's 'Shakespeare's English Kings', alongside his earlier essay on 'Love's Labours Lost' (1878), constituted 'the only critique with any understanding [...] which appeared in the nineteenth century'.[\[26\]](#) We should pause with Dover Wilson's rediscovery of Pater's essay, because his analysis is significant to our attempt to unpack Girard's citation in *Violence and the Sacred*.[\[27\]](#) In his introduction, Dover Wilson quotes from 'Shakespeare's English Kings' at some length, and while he bemoans Pater's aestheticized style, which 'may strike the modern ear as itself too flowery',[\[28\]](#) he lauds the essay's formal analysis of *Richard II* in celebratory terms. For Dover Wilson, as for both Kantorowicz and Girard somewhat later, Pater's fundamental insight relates to 'the ritualistic character of *Richard II*'.[\[29\]](#) Once again, Dover Wilson regards the core insight of Pater's essay as lying in that 'remarkable passage' which treats Richard's coronation as an 'inverted rite'. This passage

goes to the heart of the play, since it reveals a sacramental quality in the agony and the death of the sacrificial victim, as it were of the god slain upon the altar, which we can to-day only begin to understand by reading a book like *The Golden Bough*.[\[30\]](#)

In this final allusion, associating Pater's approach to the play to the anthropology of his contemporary James Frazer, Dover Wilson's analysis links back, indirectly, to van Oort's comment on Girard's originality. If we peel away the 'flowery' language, Dover Wilson maintains, then Pater's approach is revealed to be ultimately anthropological, and in its treatment of the sacrificial victim it anticipates Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890), a work published only a year after Pater's essay.

Dover Wilson highlights the sense in which 'Shakespeare's English Kings' draws attention to the sacrificial aspect of *Richard II*, an idea which, as we have seen, also lies at the heart of Girard's appeal to Pater's proper name in the relevant pages of *Violence and the Sacred*. But in point of fact, the term 'sacrifice' never appears in the course of Pater's essay. Instead, his discussion of the 'inverted rites' of *Richard II* originates, in another move which foreshadows Girard, in the course of a discussion of Richard's 'over-confident' belief in Divine Right.[\[31\]](#) For Pater, the coronation ceremony must be understood as mimetic of the initiation rite of baptism. Richard feels that divine right is 'sealed to him [...] as an ineradicable personal gift by the touch—stream rather, over head and shoulders—of the "holy oil" of his consecration at Westminster'.[\[32\]](#) Indeed, Pater notes the way in which Richard's coronation sets an aesthetic precedent 'by the pageantry, the amplitude, the learned care, of its order'.[\[33\]](#) The aesthetic approach, then, is not an ornamental distraction in Pater's essay, with the real substance his formal analysis, as critics such as Dover Wilson maintained; rather, the aesthetic approach fundamentally in-forms his formal insights.

In the case of *Richard II*, the coronation is double, Pater argues, so that the 'singular rites' are simultaneously 'supplementing another, almost supernatural, right'.[\[34\]](#) Pater links Richard's sense of Divine Right to his narcissism, referring here to the 'mirror scene' (that is to say, Act Four Scene One). 'The sense of "divine right" in kings' in *Richard II*, Pater continues, 'is found to act not so much as a secret power over others, as of infatuation to themselves',[\[35\]](#) and he reiterates the point later in the essay when he 'associate[s] Richard's two fallacious prerogatives, his personal beauty and his "anointing"'. [\[36\]](#) It is in this context, then, that Pater introduces the idea which Girard latches on to:

In the Roman Pontifical, of which the order of Coronation is really a part, there is no form for the inverse process, no rite of 'degradation', such as that by which an offending priest or bishop may be deprived, if not of the essential quality of 'orders', yet, one by one, of its outward dignities. It is as if Shakespeare had had in mind some such inverted rite, like those old ecclesiastical or military ones, by which

human hardness, or human justice, adds the last touch of unkindness to the execution of its sentences, in the scene where Richard 'deposes' himself, as in some long, agonising ceremony, reflectively drawn out, with an extraordinary refinement of intelligence and variety of piteous appeal, but also with a felicity of poetic invention, which puts these pages into a very select class, with the finest 'vermeil and ivory' work of Chatterton or Keats. [37]

One notes in passing here the characteristic style, in the face of which Dover Wilson graciously saw fit to promote Pater's essay. In this passage, the intricate syntax of the second sentence, full of subordinated qualifiers, and mobilizing Keatsian assonance in the 'long, agonising' precision of its terms, are mimetic of this 'reflectively drawn out' 'inverted rite' itself. It is careful crafting such as this that serves to put these pages of Pater's prose, as much as Shakespeare's poetry, 'into a very select class'. [38]

Pater's point is originally intended to speak to Shakespeare's originality: since there is no such 'inverted rite' in reality, it is 'as if' such a rite were in his mind. But for Girard, Pater's conjunction 'as if' misses a deeper mimetic structure, a unity underwriting all 'rites' as such because, as he immediately interjects, 'all rites demand that moment of inversion'. [39] It is not, Girard argues, that Richard's reversed coronation is remarkably different, as Pater seems to him to be maintaining, but rather that this 'mirroring' shows a truth which underwrites every rite as such. According to Girard, the rite which consecrates the subject as king simultaneously translates this king into both his enemies and their victims: his Divine Right turns him into a Dionysian figure, both God and sacrificial victim. Indeed, while Girard doesn't say as much, we may go further. As Slavoj Žižek has argued, in psychoanalytic terms, the conjunction 'as if' signifies disavowal (*Verleugnung*): it allows us to set up the real in the form of the Imaginary, under the sign of fantasy. [40] Girard's point in immediately undercutting Pater is similar: the 'as if' here lets Pater think that this 'inverted process' is a Shakespearean invention, whereas, in point of fact, it reveals the anthropological structure at the heart of all rites.

But perhaps Pater's point is a little more 'subtle' than Girard seems willing to give him credit for. Readers of 'Shakespeare's English Kings' who would privilege its 'aesthetic' approach to the figure of Richard as poet-king must keep in mind that Pater's essay, in spite of its own 'romantic aestheticism', was written at the end of a decade or so of extensive philological work on ancient Greek mythology and culture. Beginning in earnest with his essay on 'Demeter and Persephone', first published in the *Fortnightly Review*, January-February 1876, Pater's essays dating from this period demonstrate a nuanced anthropological approach to his various topics, and 'Shakespeare's English Kings' shows the marks of this scholarly interest. Pater, after all, was one of the first Anglophone critics to take onboard the insights of contemporary German thought, as demonstrated by his essay 'A Study of Dionysus', first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in December 1876. [41] There, Pater demonstrates the ways in which the God Dionysus is always already 'twofold', 'a

Döppelgänger’ who, like Persephone, ‘belongs to two worlds’ simultaneously.[42] In this essay, as elsewhere, Pater shows a nuanced understanding of the ways in which mythological figures and the rites which commemorate them are always ‘double’, open to inversion and reversal. In ‘A Study of Dionysus’, Pater links such duplicity explicitly with sacrificial rites, and Dionysus with the figure of sacrificial victim:

And now we see why the tradition of human sacrifice lingered on in Greece, in connexion with Dionysus, as a thing of actual detail, and not remote, so that Dionysius of Halicarnassus counts it among the horrors of Greek religion. That the sacred women of Dionysus ate, in mystical ceremony, raw flesh, and drank blood, is a fact often mentioned, and commemorates, as it seems, the actual sacrifice of a fair boy deliberately torn to pieces, fading at last into a symbolical offering.[43]

Many years before Girard, then, Pater had made the question of the sacrificial victim central to his understanding of the foundational myths of Western culture, emphasizing the ways in which these sacrificial rites were mimetic of an originary event which had been forgotten, and which served a social function in preventing the contagion of wider violence which in turn would threaten the wider body politic.

Indeed, Pater also understood instinctively something else: that the corollary of the mimetic crisis is the sublimation of desire into resentment, that ‘theatre of envy’ which Girard finds at work in Shakespeare’s tragedies.[44] For Pater, the ‘irony’ of the history plays lies in the way in which Shakespeare reveals that these seemingly great men are revealed to be weak:

Shakespeare’s kings are not, nor are meant to be, great men: rather, little or quite ordinary humanity, thrust upon greatness, with those pathetic results, the natural self-pity of the weak heightened in them into irresistible appeal to others as the net result of their royal prerogative. [45]

Pater’s language, of course, skirts the hopelessly self-occluded Malvolio of *Twelfth Night*, who holds himself as one shortly to ‘*have greatness thrust upon them*’ (2.5.142), in another masterly moment of Shakespearean dramatic irony.[46] It reveals a vision of Shakespeare’s kings as human, all too human, and if my phrasing here implies Nietzsche, this is because there is something of *ressentiment* in Pater’s discussion, both in its topology, its displacement of reactive forces, and its typology, its reversal of values.[47] But more broadly, the weakness of Shakespeare’s great men speaks to an essential reversibility in the figure of the king, where the monarch’s humanity reveals that sovereign and subject are inextricably linked.

It is this insight, ultimately, that lies at the heart of Pater’s reading of the ‘inverted rites’ of *Richard II*. Contra Girard, Pater does indeed understand that Richard’s rite was ‘inverted’, and not simply insofar as it performs another non-existent ritual ‘as if’ it existed, but because all rites are eminently reversible. The weak become great, the great—always

having had their greatness thrust upon them even if, by an accident of birth, they happen to have been born great—become weak: this is what Pater reads into the ‘inverted rites’ of *Richard II*. It is this ironic distance that he maintains that allows him to see the ironies of history for what they are: the ‘inverted rite’ here lays bare the ways in which the plays taken as a chronicle narrate less the triumph of the Tudor line than the hidden *ressentiment* which propels this narrative, the melancholic loss that lies as the hidden corollary of this history of England. On the basis of passages such as these, one might hazard the following suggestion: if Girard did not actually read Pater’s essay on ‘Shakespeare’s English Kings’ when he wrote *Violence and the Sacred*, then he should have done so: he would have found much of interest, here as elsewhere in Pater’s work, in his approach to the question of those ‘inverted rites’ which found the social order as such.

Notes

[1] See Richard van Oort, ‘René Girard’s Shakespeare’, *Anthropoetics*, 21:2 (2016), online at <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2102/2102vanoort/>, excerpted from *Shakespeare’s Big Men: Tragedy and the Problem of Resentment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 188-199. I give page references to the book version of the essay.

[2] René Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6. The ‘modernity’ of Shakespeare is, of course, a common critical trope, although Girard’s specifically anthropological take on this question is different in emphasis. Compare, for instance, Matthew Arnold’s famous critical humanist approach in his discussion of Hamlet’s ‘dialogue of the mind with in his preface to *Poems* (1853), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R.H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-78), 1: 1-15 (p. 1); for his influential neo-historicist approach, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from more to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1980]); and for a poststructuralist approach, see Harold Bloom’s *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).

[3] van Oort, *Shakespeare’s Big Men*, 190.

[4] van Oort, *Shakespeare’s Big Men*, 190.

[5] Although van Oort does briefly allude to Pater’s essay in an earlier piece: see ‘Shakespeare and the Idea of the Modern’, *New Literary History*, 37:2 (2006): 319-339 (p. 331).

[6] van Oort, *Shakespeare’s Big Men*, 190.

[7] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Continuum, 2005 [1972]), 315.

[8] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 319.

[9] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 320.

[10] Girard cuts line 245 of the speech when he quotes it; note also that the speech is taken from act 4 and not act 5, as is given in the reference in the English edition of Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*. References to *Richard II* are taken from Charles R. Forker's edition for the Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[11] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 320.

[12] For a development of Girard's analysis of *Richard II*, see Naomi Conn Liebler, 'The Mockery King of Snow: *Richard II* and the Sacrifice of Ritual', in *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and his Age*, ed. Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 220-39.

[13] van Oort, *Shakespeare's Big Men*, 188.

[14] See *The Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. Lawrence Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 89, 90, 93.

[15] For a history of French translations of Pater up to 2004, see Stephen Bann, ed., *The Reception of Walter Pater in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2004).

[16] Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1957]), 35-36.

[17] Walter Pater, *Appreciations with an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1944 [1889]), 192.

[18] R.M. Seiler, ed., *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1980), 214-19 (p. 219).

[19] Arthur C. Benson, *Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan, 1926 [1906]), 155. That Benson was critical at all here is of interest: published in Macmillan's English Men of Letters series, there was a financial incentive for the publisher (also Pater's publisher) to promote Pater's works to his readers. On this point, see Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender, and Literature in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 188-215, and *Print in Transition: Studies in Media and Book History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 53-66.

[20] On the question of the complex discursive response of the aesthetes and decadents to the question of effeminacy, see Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5-31.

[21] Benson, *Walter Pater*, 156. Benson also takes issue with the essay's ending, which he feels strikes a bathetic note, in language again critical of Pater's 'subtlety' - it constitutes 'a subtle passage, not fully worked out' (*Walter Pater*, 155-56). In point of fact, this passage, although peripheral to our current discussion, is anything if not 'fully worked out': it constitutes a major statement of Pater's new aesthetic theory, one which takes issue with the dominant dialectical approaches to the history of poetics, and the relative status of lyric and dramatic poetry within these traditions, as developed by Schlegel and Hegel.

[22] For a discussion of Pater and irony in a different, classical context, see my 'Pater's Heraclitus: Irony and the Historical Method', in *Pater the Classicist*, ed. Stefano Evangelista, Charles Martindale and Elisabeth Prettlejohn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 261-73.

[23] Pater, *Appreciations*, 193.

[24] Pater, *Appreciations*, 196.

[25] Jeanne T. Newlin, *Richard II: Critical Essays* (London: Garland, 1984), xii.

[26] William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951 [1939]), xiii. Pater's essay on 'Love's Labours Lost' dates from much earlier in his career, written in 1878, although first published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, December 1885. It would be republished alongside the later essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings' in *Appreciations*, with the two essays separated by another on 'Measure for Measure', first published in the *Fortnightly Review*, November 1874.

[27] Perhaps Dover Wilson's edition was the one used by Girard, offering this as an alternative source for his knowledge of Pater's essay, although given the similarities between the relevant passages of *Violence and the Sacred* and *The King's Two Bodies*, noted above, Kantorowicz remains the more likely source.

[28] Dover Wilson, ed., *Richard II*, xiii.

[29] Dover Wilson, ed., *Richard II*, xv.

[30] Dover Wilson, ed., *Richard II*, xvi.

[31] Pater, *Appreciations*, 203.

[32] Pater, *Appreciations*, 203.

[33] Pater, *Appreciations*, 204.

[34] Pater, *Appreciations*, 204.

[35] Pater, *Appreciations*, 205, and on Divine Right compare Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 319.

[36] Pater, *Appreciations*, 210.

[37] Pater, *Appreciations*, 205-206.

[38] Compare, for instance, the famous final line of the second stanza of Keats' 'Ode on Melancholy', 'And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes' (l. 20), where the assonance draws out the line seemingly beyond its own metrical limits.

[39] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 320.

[40] See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2009 [1989]), 32, and *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London: Verso, 2005 [1994]), 91.

[41] On Pater's assimilation of recent German scholarship, as well as other pertinent material both classical and contemporary, during the period of composition, see Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater and his Reading, 1874-1877* (London: Garland, 1990), and on the significance of his turn to anthropology during the mid-1870s, following the negative critical responses to his *Renaissance* (1873), see Inman, 'The Emergence of Pater's *Marius* Mentality: 1874-75', *English Literature in Transition*, 27 (1984), 100-23.

[42] Walter Pater, *Greek Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1908 [1895]), 44. That Pater's treatment of Dionysus in certain ways prefigures that of Girard is a point made by Albert Heinrichs in 'Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 88 (1984), 205-40. For a Nietzschean approach to Pater's Dionysus, see Robert and Janice A. Keefe, *Walter Pater and the Gods of Disorder* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1988). Elsewhere, I address the question of Pater's Dionysus in my *Aestheticism and the Philosophy of Death: Walter Pater and Post-Hegelianism* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 93-100, although here I distance Pater's approach to the God, at least as the figure appears in his imaginary portrait 'Denys L'Auxerrois' (1886), from that adopted by Girard.

[43] Pater, *Greek Studies*, 47-48.

[44] For a development of Girard and Gans on the problem of resentment in Shakespeare, see van Oort's *Shakespeare's Big Men*.

[45] Pater, *Appreciations*, 207.

[46] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Keir Elam (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[47] That Pater's treatment of this 'inverted rite' should turn on something approximating to the mechanism of *ressentiment* may be less surprising given the ways in which, as I have shown in my *Aestheticism and the Philosophy of Death* (103-107), Pater's thinking in the 1880s came to focus on a series of Nietzschean insights, with his collection of short stories, the *Imaginary Portraits*, published the same year that Nietzsche published his *Genealogy* (1887), and only two years before the essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings'. It is worth noting here in passing that Girard addresses what he considers to be the weakness (so to speak) of Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment* in *Violence and the Sacred* (199-200), although somewhat unconvincingly, since Girard, in reading Nietzsche here alongside Freud, seems to conflate the idea of *ressentiment* with that of resentment; which is to say, since Girard seems to understand the concept only topologically, rather than as simultaneously topological and typological. On the typological and topological in *ressentiment*, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2005 [1962]), 104-09.