Neoclassical Protagonists in Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV*

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In early modern English drama, there is palpable tension between Christian moral ideals and the ethics inherent in the hierarchy of the monarchical order. Thomas Heywood's play *Edward IV, parts 1 and 2* (first performed in 1599) traces the domestic tragedy of Matthew and Jane Shore through the historic events of the War of the Roses and the rise of Richard III, ultimately linking the couple's plight with the emergence of the middle class from the prosperity of early modern London. In the play, King Edward occupies a mimetically desired centre, around which the peripheral potential protagonists Matthew, Jane, and Falconbridge gather and threaten to become rivals. Though his royal status necessitates his desirable centrality, Edward is not immune to lure of collectively desired centres, a fact which is illustrated in his fascination with the London Jewellers, Matthew and Jane Shore. Another example of the draw and potential permeability of centres of desire appears in the play's rebellion plot, where the rebel Falconbridge is drawn to the metropolitan centre of London, which functions as a synecdoche for royal power. Employing Gans's notion of the neoclassical aesthetic, I propose that Heywood's play illuminates the early modern version of the originary scene in its positioning of the characters Falconbridge, Jane Shore, and Matthew Shore in relation to King Edward. Heywood's play illustrates the influence of the Christian equality of souls in the class tensions of the early modern period by illuminating the dramatic trajectories of multiple protagonists emerging from the Christian moral ideal as it coexists with the ethics of feudal hierarchy.

In Gans's account of the historical transition from the classical aesthetic to the neoclassical aesthetic of the early modern period, literary protagonists become increasingly aware of their peripheral position on the scene of representation. The neoclassical aesthetic and its stymied protagonist emerge via the problematic "integration of Christian ethical values into the classical esthetic" (Gans 1993: 150). In foregrounding tensions within the social hierarchy, Heywood's *Edward IV* aesthetically manifests the ethical problems resulting from the sustained influence

of Christianity on the fading classical aesthetic and its strict hierarchies. In Heywood's neoclassical aesthetic, Mistress Shore takes on a sacral aura through her ambitious transgression of the centre, which prefigures her class-levelling beneficence, but also her tragic death. More's brief account of the historical Mistress Shore, in his *History of Richard III*, contains the seeds of the tragic pathos, manifest in the Christian critique of scapegoating, that Jane's literary character would foster throughout the 16th and into the 18th centuries. Another neoclassical protagonist appearing in part 1 of the play is Thomas Faulconberg—or Falconbridge—who is the bastard son of the 1st Earl of Kent, and a turncoat leader during the War of the Roses. In *Edward IV*, religiously propelled social levelling is complicated by the immediate reality of the monarch's coercive dominance over subjects daring to recognize their spiritual equality with royalty. Paradoxically, the Christian ethic, which exacerbates a commoner's resentment toward the elite and affects the disintegration of classical hierarchies, also provides the representational means of deferring the citizen's potentially violent resentment. Gans argues that belief in religious revelation, language, and its associated moral awareness of total reciprocity are the repetition of the circumstances of the originary scene, which allows each individual in the community to mirror the group's signification of an enduring sacred presence (1990: 26-27).(1)

In *Science and Faith*, Gans argues that Christian moral reciprocity resembles (while remaining distinct from) the rules governing the distribution of resources, or ethics. Gans explains: "Morality takes the originary scene as a self-sufficient model of human interaction, whereas ethics is concerned with its prolongation in the economic life of the society. Signs are infinitely reproducible; things are potentially scarce, and access to them must be regulated" (95). Systems for the distribution of resources are traditionally hierarchical, whereas Christian notions of moral reciprocity posit a radical leveling of society, which occurs in the idealized realm of language. With their individuated but equal souls, each Christian subject is on the same moral footing before God, who forms the organizing centre of the Christian scene of representation.(2) However, this shared moral consciousness—which is founded on the reciprocal exchange of signs—does not obviate ethical rules and hierarchies, which govern the distribution of resources. The centre of such hierarchies is typically dominated by a big man or king, whose apportionment of the community's wealth establishes a social order and affords him a great deal of influence. In the Christian societies of the middle ages and early modern period, where the history of Edward IV and its re-enactment in Heywood's play take place, the ethical and the moral orders existed in tension with one another. *Edward IV* takes up and explores these tensions in its examination of both the relationship of various characters to King Edward and the manifestations of those characters' Christian moral awareness.

The action of the play depends on the draw towards England's centre, King Edward, which is felt by the socially and politically peripheral protagonists Matthew, Jane, and Falconbridge. The play opens just after King Edward has married the commoner, Elizabeth Woodville, and when London is threatened by a siege led by the Lancastrian General, Thomas Falconbridge. The king is absent from London. Nevertheless, the city prepares to display its loyalty to the sovereign by denying the rebel army access to the city. Matthew Shore, a citizen-jeweller, successfully leads the city's defence. After the rebels' defeat, Edward returns and offers to knight Matthew as a reward for his efforts, Matthew declines, implying that he is either not worthy, or indifferent, to the honour Edward wishes to bestow. In the moments after Matthew's slight against the king, Edward's eye falls on Matthew's wife Jane. Eventually, the king seduces her. Matthew flees into exile to avoid the shame of his cuckolding. However, wartime events bring him back to London under an alias. He is imprisoned and nearly sentenced to death. In the meantime, Jane uses her courtly position as the king's mistress to help the common people of London and plead for the lives of the recently imprisoned sailors, one of whom is Matthew, though Jane does not recognize him. As the play draws to its conclusion, the ailing Edward dies, allowing Richard (Duke of York) to take the throne from Edward's murdered sons. Richard, wishing to obliterate all remnants of Edward's reign, has Jane banished from the city, where she and Matthew are reunited and tragically die of starvation in each other's arms. Their deaths amplify the pathos of their shared prayerful repentance, definitively drawing the audience's attention away from the play's royal centre to foreground London's common citizens.

Though at the beginning of the play King Edward occupies the play's coveted central space, he is not immune to the machinations of mimetic desire, which tend to imbue rivals and the objects belonging to rivals (common or not) with, what René Girard describes as an illusory—or metaphysical—excess of being (Girard 1987: 295, 297). Edward is gripped with resentment when Matthew Shore declines his invitation to be knighted. As a warrior expressing intense loyalty to London, Matthew arouses resentment in Edward by refusing to swear fealty to the king. That Edward does not easily command Matthew Shore's obedience is clear when Matthew refuses to adopt the posture of humble deference assumed by the city fathers. Matthew excuses himself by saying: "Far be it from the thought of Matthew Shore / That he should be advanced with Aldermen, / With our Lord Mayor, and our right grave Recorder" (1.10.233-35). Matthew's excessive humility is a means of tactfully indicating his resentment for the king. Matthew's resentment is a response to Edward's claims on the city's wealth, but also his absence from the battle, which Matthew fought, partly, on Edward's behalf. Despite these possible criticisms of the king, Matthew gives no overt—or identifiably treasonous—indication that he resents the king. Nevertheless, Matthew's refusal of the king's offer is experienced by Edward as a diminishment of his royal prestige—or metaphysical being. Edward's

resentment emerges in response to Matthew's evasion of his royal favour. It is upon his remembrance of this refusal at the Guildhall that Edward begins to fixate on Jane, who he wishes to control in order to re-establish his superiority over Matthew.(3)

The link between Matthew's slight against Edward and Edward's subsequent fixation on Jane is explicable in terms of mimetic desire. According to Girard, every subject desires according to the desire of another. The other is the model for the subject's desire. He designates objects for the subject. For the subject, attractive models are often those that demonstrate indifference toward the subject, since this posture indicates to the subject that the model is completely self-sufficient and therefore in possession of a wealth of metaphysical being (Girard 1987: 295, 297). In *Edward IV*, Edward is the subject and Matthew is the model. Matthew's great wealth of prestige (or metaphysical being) derives from his contentment with the life and wealth of the city. The king can never really experience this wealth of being except by having his subjects submit themselves to his authority and affirm the superiority of the king's position. Matthew refuses to do this, so the king must find another way to appropriate the prestige Matthew embodies. Matthew's indifference to him propels Edward's desire for Jane.

Jane Shore's chastity functions as a symbol of both Matthew's material wealth and his public prestige. Coppélia Kahn illuminates this dramatic trope in her analysis of cuckoldry in *Cymbeline*: she characterizes the objectification of women in cuckold plots as a way to embody and represent the metaphysical notion of a male character's prestige. As Kahn explains, "Iachimo draws Posthumus into betting on his wife's chastity . . . thus reminding the hero that her chastity is valuable to him because his honor and his status depend on it" (126). The exclusive possession of the female body is analogous to wealth and the ability to defend it. Similarly, Edward's cuckolding of Matthew functions as a counter-attack in the battle for prestige, where Edward's ability to defend his ostensive holdings, London, is undertaken by a commoner, who subsequently refuses to accept the knighthood.

Accordingly, Edward's cuckolding of Matthew is revenge for Matthew's indifference to royal honour—Edward takes Jane in retaliation for Matthew's refusal to cede London via his fealty. In this case, the oscillations of mimetic rivalry extend beyond the realm of violence and may be manifest in "sexual activity" (Girard 1979: 152). Edward's desire for Jane is mediated by Matthew, who represents the wealth and power of the city of London,(4) as evidenced in the following exchange:

> *Edward*. How? Mistress Shore? What, not his wife
> That did refuse his knighthood at our hand.

Mayor. The very same, my lord, and here he is.
Edward. What, Master Shore? We are your debtor still,
But by God's grace, intend not so to die.
And, gentlewoman, now before your face
I must condemn him of discourtesy—
Yea, and of great wrong that he hath offered you;
For you had been a lady but for him.
He was in fault; trust me, he was to blame
To hinder virtue of her due by right. (1.16.84-94)

Even if the king's condemnation is an attempt at humour through hyperbole, there is tone of bitterness in the repetitious indictment of Matthew's refusal. The king says Matthew is discourteous; that he wrongs his wife; that he is at fault; that he is to blame; that he hinders virtue. The rapid iteration of his condemnation before Matthew's wife and the Mayor amounts to an insult. The king is taking advantage of a public scene to dishonour Matthew in return for the way he has been dishonoured by Matthew when the latter refused to be knighted. The king's insult is part of his attempt to allay his resentment over Matthew's prestige and apparent self-sufficiency. A few lines later, the king admits his attraction to Jane, asking, "Had ever citizen so fair a wife?" (114). This jealous resentment is manifest in the king's inner comparison of himself to Matthew, where he wonders "What change is this? Proud, saucy, roving eye, / What whisperst in my brain? That she is fair? / I know it, I see it. Fairer than my queen?" (120-22). Such a comparison between his own wife and a subject's wife implies that king and subject occupy the same sphere. In imagining Shore's superiority to himself, the king undercuts his nobility before the audience and himself. Recognizing his ignoble devaluation of the Crown, the king inwardly condemns himself in a stagey monologue: "Down rebel! Back, base treacherous conceit" (125). The king does not succeed in overruling his treacherous desire. Instead, his resentment manifests itself in his obsession with—and eventual seduction of—Jane Shore.

In Gans's account of the historical transition from the classical aesthetic to the neoclassical aesthetic of the early modern period, literary protagonists become increasingly aware of their peripheral position on the scene of representation. According to Gans the classical aesthetic embodies a hypothesis of origin that represents "the scenic center at the expense of the scene *qua* scene" (1993-132). The scenes created in the classical aesthetic depict a hero who dominates the center without becoming self-conscious regarding his position relative to the covetous periphery. Gans defines the classical aesthetic in contrast with the neoclassical aesthetic, in which the hero becomes aware of his position on the periphery of a scene of desire. The classical hero stands alone in the centre,

uncomprehendingly suffering the violence its contested space attracts. Unlike the classical hero, the neoclassical hero imaginatively projects himself into the sacred centre, self-consciously reflecting to the audience his desire for the centre along with his resentment of its inaccessibility.(5)

According to Gans, the classical hero's domination of the centre depends on the audience's recognition that they have "an imaginary but not a real place in the central agon" (148). The classical scene, with its focus on an embattled king or prince, is upended by the advent of Christianity, "with its foregrounding of the moral equality of all" (148). In this new world, Hamlet can draw the audience's attention away from Claudius, the royal centre of attention, with his melancholy bearing and ironic asides. It is in the neoclassical world—where equal yet peripheral souls surround the sacred centre—that the common citizens and denizens of London can be imaginatively launched from the spectators' pit onto the stage of stately affairs. On the same early modern stage where a pagan Julius Caesar breaths his last, the contemporary apprentices, guildsmen, women, and citizens of London may also (despite their lower social status) live and tragically die encircled by their fellow Christian souls. The plots of domestic dramas and London city plays provided numerous examples of this trend throughout the period.(6)

In foregrounding tensions within the social hierarchy, Heywood's *Edward IV* aesthetically manifests the ethical problems resulting from the sustained influence of Christianity on the fading classical aesthetic and its strict hierarchies. The neoclassical period's resentful peripheral characters appear in the first scenes of the play, which opens on the Duchess of York chastising her son, King Edward, for marrying below his rank. Thus, the play's first problem occurs when a peripheral character (the commoner Elizabeth Woodville) insinuates her way into the kingdom's sacred centre. By focusing on this tension between noble and common—especially in the Shore plot—Heywood highlights the trend of social levelling that emerges from the medieval Christian critique of classical hierarchy, which—in the early modern period—rapidly extended the ideal of Christian equality. As Edward observes to his exasperated mother: the Britain of his day "'tis a stirring world" (1.1.15). Later in the play, Matthew Shore, a citizen of London, will out do Edward in defending the realm and dare to abstain from swearing fealty to the king. This subtle display of resentment towards a king, who lowers the weight of civil defence onto the shoulders of Londoners, allows a mostly common audience a fanciful journey toward the coveted royal centre. A citizen of London watching Matthew Shore decline the King's offer with high reasons, but veiled disdain, might be inclined to identify with the citizen-soldier, who is not so different from themselves. In the same way, Heywood's depiction of Jane Shore's seduction offers London's denizens an imaginative foray into the warm centre of courtly life. In this way, Heywood's theatre is, as Gans says of the neoclassical era, "characterized by a

new consciousness of the reciprocity between center and periphery and a concomitant intensification of resentment" (150). This new consciousness in the early modern period is distinct from the classical understanding of the centre's inviolability, since—in the preceding classical aesthetic—no peripheral subject had been able to challenge the hero's domination of the scene's centre.

In Heywood's neoclassical aesthetic Mistress Shore takes on a sacral aura through her ambitious transgressive movement toward the centre, which prefigures her class levelling beneficence, but also her tragic death. Considering that Heywood's Jane is a member of the wealthy merchant class growing up in London during this period, Richard Helgerson argues that Jane's tragedy is an important founding narrative in the emergence of England's bourgeoisie. Thomas More's mention of Mistress Shore, in his *History of Richard III* (1513), notes that she used her position to benefit the common people of London. In his analysis of More's history of Jane Shore, Helgerson claims that the Shores' story plays a small, but notable, role in the rise of the English middle class, as in it the historical figure of a tragic king is replaced with that of a tragic secular saint, with whom the majority of the audience might identify. Helgerson traces the history of Jane's pathos in poems and plays from More's *History* up unto Nicholas Rowe's *Tragedy of Jane Shore* (performed in 1714). Helgerson observes that Heywood's play creates out of the ditch in which Jane and Matthew Shore die a fanciful etymology for the suburban village of Shoreditch, where his theatre was located just to the north of London (2.23.71-4). This, Helgerson says, "associates the spectacle of Jane Shore's death with its theatrical re-enactment . . . . Watching the play, weeping over Jane Shore, Londoners in 1599 were made one with those beneficiaries of her merciful acts who, in defiance of King Richard's command, attempt to relieve her suffering" (467). *Edward IV* acts as a founding myth and appropriates Shoreditch as a memorial for Jane.

The aspirations of "Saint Jane" derive from the possibility of equality implicit in the Christian ethic, as evinced by her ambition along with her redistribution of royal privilege among the people. In order to keep Jane as pure as possible in the audiences' eyes, Heywood does not depict her directly considering Edward's adulterous proposal. Instead, Jane's desire for the monarchal centre is expressed in the council of Jane's confidant, Mistress Blage, whose advice Jane considers before leaving her husband for Edward. Expounding the potential benefits of Edward's interest, Blage tells Jane, "you yourself, your children and your friends, / Be all advanced in worldly dignity / And this world's pomp, you know is a good thing" (1.19.33-35). Invited by the king, Jane transgresses the sacred space of the monarchal centre, ultimately becoming a victim in the ongoing battle to secure it, while demonstrating the power of its draw for the peripheral neoclassical protagonist. By attending Heywood's theatre, and engaging the various literary re-

imaginings of Shore's life, England's middle class audiences pay homage to their saint, by whom they are at first scandalized and then partially constituted.

The literary tradition surrounding the rise and tragic fall of the historical Mistress Shore, to whom Heywood assigns the familiar appellative Jane, has its earliest version in an account authored by Thomas More. More's brief relation of the fate of Mistress Shore appears in his *History of Richard III* and contains the seeds of the tragic pathos. This pathos is especially legible in More's description of the humiliating penance assigned her by the new Protector, Richard. Heywood's play also describes the scene, in which Jane (as a convicted adulteress) is required to walk, clad only in an undergarment, from Temple Bar to Aldgate carrying a taper, before her final expulsion from the city. More notes the humiliating circumstances of this sentence, but also indicates that not all of the onlookers, who condemned her for her adultery, took pleasure in seeing her shamed. He writes:

> even good people who hated her faults pitied her disgrace rather than joying in it, since they considered that it had been arranged by the Protector not out of any real interest in decency but out of hypocrisy and malice. (425)

The pity Mistress Shore evokes from even those who hate her speaks to the widespread awareness that she was being forced to play the role of a scapegoat in the concluding turmoil of the country's long civil war. The performance of this penance, which is the prelude to her death in Heywood, is only the beginning of her destitution in reality. Shore was still alive at the time More wrote his history in 1513. It is likely he knew her, given the way he reflects on the great disparity between her former position as a royal courtesan and the poverty of her old age. Considering the generous way that she used her status to help the citizens of London, who approached her with petitions, More concludes his section on her by observing:

> [S]he was little inferior in authority and influence to any of those who at various periods had great power with their princes but who are known to posterity only for their crimes, the more scandalous their memory, the more lasting, as we record good deeds done to us in dust but the wrongs we have suffered in marble. But this very woman, so famous once . . . today ekes out a wretched existence by begging, although some are still living and pretending not to know her who would now be her partners in adversity had she not once salvaged their fortunes. (431)

These last lines highlight the generative nature that is attributed to the figure of the

sacred victim. Such a figure is viewed before her expulsion as a corruption, contaminating the community with violence, and after as a life-giving benefactor. Girard terms this effect, in which new life seems to emerge from the death of an apparent criminal, a “double transference”. The victims of ancient myth often become the gods that foster and watch over a nascent society (1986: 44). Jane’s victimization was productive of a body of literature, but also played a part in the emergence of early modern England’s middle class.

Another neoclassical protagonist appearing in part 1 of the play is Thomas Falconbridge, who is the bastard son of the 1st Earl of Kent, and a turncoat leader during the War of the Roses. Falconbridge is a type of Phaeton, who makes a speech referencing London’s mythic roots in the classical age, thereby highlighting the break between the hero of the classical aesthetic and the protagonist of the neoclassical aesthetic. His speech recalls the siege of Troy, in which he figures himself as the offended hero Menelaus come to retrieve a figurative Helen from New Troy (or London). He attempts to speak in the mode of a classical hero challenging his foe on the field of battle. However, there is something not quite classical in the way he presents himself. His challenge, instead of focusing unselfconsciously on his own achievements and power, reflects on equality—questioning the legitimacy of hierarchal authority. Rallying his troops, Heywood’s Falconbridge imagines Mile End Green as the classical plains of Troy, saying:

> Yet stand we in the sight of upreared Troy,
> And suck the air she draws. Our very breath
> Flies from our nostrils, warm unto the walls.
> We beard her bristling spires, her patted towers,
> And proudly stand and gaze her in the face. (1.9.1-5)

In these lines Falconbridge almost sounds like the heroic Achaean warriors, who are always certain of their own martial prowess and centrality. For instance, the rarely mentioned hero Euphorbus has no doubt of his pre-eminence. In a threatening speech against Menelaus he boasts:

> I was the first Trojan, first of the famous allies
> to spear Patroclus down in the last rough charge.
> So let me seize my glory among the Trojans now
> —or I’ll spear you too, I’ll rip your own sweet life away.
> (Homer 17.15-17)

Despite not actually having killed Patroclus, the vaunting Euphorbus claims his glorious centrality with conviction. Euphorbus occupies the central sacred space surrounding Patroclus's body with a certainty that does not require comparison with the other. He assumes his self-asserted dominance in a way that is rare in neoclassical protagonists, who are encumbered with the Christian notion of equality among souls. Falconbridge would sound more like Euphorbus if he did not articulate the overwhelming power of the city to dominate the centre, as it draws the air from the his and his army's bodies. Critic Richard Rowland notes how London, despite being unoccupied by King Edward at the moment of Falconbridge's attack, is still imbued with the presence of the King (102). This royal presence is a sacrosanct space, which the Lancastrian Falconbridge attempts to invade and usurp. In this way, the city is a synecdoche for royal power and centrality to which Falconbridge's army is a desiring periphery. The neoclassical insecurity and resentment inherent in Falconbridge's marginal position *vis-a-vis* Edward is more evident in the second part of the speech, where he says:

> Look on me, and I doubt not ye imagine
> My worth as great as any one of yours;
> My fortunes, would I basely fawn on Edward,
> To be as fair as any man's in England.
> But he that keeps your sovereign in the Tower
> Hath seized my land, and robbed me of my right.
> I am a gentleman as well as he;
> What he hath got, he holds by tyranny. (1.9.6-13)

Rather than reinforcing the impression of his equality to the king, Falconbridge's grasping self-comparison to Edward reminds the audience of his marginality. Falconbridge provides his listeners with an image of himself potentially fawning on the king, while he shrilly asserts his equality with the monarch. His attempts at confidence are troubled by his sense of equality, as when he wonders that Londoners don't see his worth at par with their own. He resents this position outside the king's presence and imagines a scenario where, after taking the city, "[t]he meanest soldier [will be] wealthier than a king" (1.9.21). These frustrated neoclassical sentiments, which conceive of the equality of each soul despite strict hierarchy, stand in contrast to the confident self-aggrandizement of even the most marginal heroes of Homer.

In *Edward IV*, religiously propelled social levelling is complicated by the immediate reality of the monarch's coercive dominance over subjects daring to recognize their spiritual equality with royalty. When Jane Shore is wooed by Edward, part of her

decision to give in to the King's seduction derives from her concern that he might use his power to harm Matthew if he is denied and humiliated. Another example is the understandable impotence Matthew feels regarding the possibility of exacting revenge upon a man who commands the realm's military and is constantly surrounded by a personal bodyguard. Realizing Edward has seduced his wife, Matthew has no recourse but the language of the sacred to smother his resentment: "I cannot help it. A' God's name, let her go / … / Where kings are meddlers, meaner men must rue" (1.20.77-79). Though Heywood positions Matthew in the sacred centre by casting him as the heroic vanquisher of the realm's enemies and imagining him degrade Edward by refusing his knighthood, Matthew's neoclassical heroism remains proscribed by the traditional ethics of hierarchy, which prohibit the violation of established worldly social orders.

Christianity's moral imperative, which exacerbates a commoner's resentment toward the elite and affects the disintegration of classical hierarchies, also provides the representational means of deferring the citizen's potentially violent resentment. Matthew's brief appeal to the name of God, as he recognizes his loss of Jane to the inaccessible royal centre, is a means of reproducing the structure of the originary scene, with its resentment-deferring effect. The invocation of the deity is repeated again in the Shores' final scene, where Matthew promises pray God's forgiveness on both his and Jane's sins:

> *Jane.* How can I look upon my husband's face,
> That shamed myself, and wrought his deep disgrace?
> *Shore.* Jane, be content. Our woes are now alike:
> With one self rod thou see'st God doth us strike.
> If for thy sin, I'll pray to heaven for thee,
> And if for mine, do thou as much for me.
> *Jane.* Ah, Shore, is't possible thou canst forgive me?
> *Shore.* Yes, Jane, I do.
> *Jane.* I cannot hope thou wilt:
> My fault's so great that I cannot expect it.
> *Shore.* I' faith, I do, as freely from my soul
> As at God's hands I hope to be forgiven. (2.22.73-83)

Registering the shame that accompanies the resentment-producing transgression enacted by herself and Edward, Jane states her inability to initiate an exchange of signs with Matthew: "How can I look upon my husband's face." In order for Mathew and Jane's morally sanctioned reciprocal desire to be reinstated in the eyes of the community (here the audience), Matthew gestures toward the sacred centre,

through which his and Jane's desires and resentments are mediated and deferred. As Jane admits the inimical quality of her erstwhile desire for Edward, so Matthew implicitly acknowledges the transgressive quality of his resentment: "If for thy sin, I'll pray to heaven for thee, /And if for mine, do thou as much for me." In the *quid pro quo* of penitent prayers, Matthew presents a possible reinstatement of enduring symbolic exchange between himself and Jane, which was interrupted when—mirroring her flight to Edward—Matthew chose to exile himself from English society in an attempt to become as the play's central victim—cast out by his wife's faithlessness. However, the central position in the play ultimately belongs to the Deity, whom Matthew imagines as a moral force meting punishment and forgiveness to himself and Jane, recognizing that they occupy equally peripheral and subjected positions relative to the sacred centre.

Gans argues that belief in religious revelation, language, and its associated moral awareness of total reciprocity are the repetition of the circumstances of the originary scene, which allows the community to conceive of an enduring sacred presence (1990: 26-27). He explains that "the ostensive sign is ambiguously directed both to the central divinity and to its worldly addressees, the other participants on the periphery. The repetition of the original sign designates the present divinity and thereby constitutes the central moment of the reproduced event" (1993: 92). Matthew's invocation of the divine ("A' God's name, let her go") in the moment when he is most vulnerable to resentment does not function as an empty pious platitude. Rather, it constitutes a speech act, which contains the possibility of reinstating peace of the originary scene, where the non-violent reciprocity created by collective recollection and repetition of the first sign defers violent resentment. However, Matthew's initial self-expulsion, in his removal from England, indicates his inability to peacefully abide the appropriation of his cherished object. Beset with violent resentment, Matthew seeks a cathartic resolution to his angst and humiliation by tearing himself from his London community. In the pathetic but magnanimous grief occasioned by his cuckolding, Matthew becomes, briefly, another of the play's multiple protagonists.

In *Edward IV* the audience's attention is routinely redirected from supporting character to supporting character, never resting for long on the play's king. In part one scene thirteen, the King leaves London and encounters Hob, the Tanner of Tamworth. Edward conceals his identity in order to question Hob on his political leanings as they pertain to the power struggle occurring among the divided Plantagenet household. Considering the scene's antecedents in Robin Hood and "king and the commoner" ballads, Rowland reflects that the King's disguise can affect "an evanescent leveling fantasy," wherein the noble is able to "converse on 'equal' terms with men of the same social status," after which "the revelation of true rank produces temporary and comic trauma, followed by the reabsorption of

the deceived into an unquestioned and benevolent hierarchy" (32-33). Though Hob does not displace Edward in the play's centre, as Jane and Matthew do, he does enter into an evasive and playful dialogue with Edward, hinting that—through his clever use of language—he might vie in wit with the monarch and win. As in Rowland's account of the familiar structure, however, Hob subjection is ensured by Edward's provision of a royal pardon for Hob's son. In a subtle movement of the neoclassical aesthetic, the focus of the play falls briefly on Hob but his resentment of royal centrality is never definitively articulated.

Throughout *Edward IV* the neoclassical aesthetic operates by foregrounding characters who in the classical aesthetic would be virtual nonentities, who exude far less metaphysical being than one of Sophocles' heroes. When Edward begins an affair with the married Jane Shore, he acts as a competitor in a game of mimetic rivalry against his subject, thereby allowing Matthew and Jane to occupy the sacred royal centre, where royal precedence in the ethically constructed hierarchy ensures his success. However, the Christian moral critique of his actions manifests in the eventual reconciliation and reunion of Matthew and Jane, whose resentment, guilt, and angst make them the likeliest candidates for the play's central character. In the cases of Jane, Matthew, and Falconbridge, desire for the centre is conflicted, as the centrality of deity and king entice them to a position of privilege, while simultaneously designating them as peripheral and equal. At the outset of the drama, Falconbridge's attempt to usurp authority through classical posturing betrays his awareness that, in the Christian context, all claims to absolute sovereignty are dubious. Ultimately, the class tensions in Heywood's play emerge from the dissonance between the ethics of hierarchy, manifest in the structure of early modern monarchy, and Christian morality, as it depends on the radical reciprocity existing between sign exchanging souls on the early modern stage.

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Notes

1. In *Science and Faith*, Gans explains how the scripturally documented phenomena of moral revelation (particularly the Mosaic and Christian) proceed from the originary scene. He explains, “[w]hat is revealed in the originary event is the organization of the collective as a peaceful community on the scene of representation. This revelation emanates from the center and its ethical content is realized *in actu* each time that men reconstitute the scene around a new center–each time, in fact that they use language” (1990: 26). (back)

2. Gans explains: “An ethic maintains a social order; morality, on the contrary, is indifferent to any such order. Morality is a vision of human relations derived exclusively from the reciprocal exchange of signs on the scene of representation” (94). Gans further claims that the reciprocity of signs, as the foundation of the moral order, is radicalized in the Gospels: “The moral utopia of the Gospels is based on perfect equality and reciprocity; there are on superiors and inferiors. In such a world resentment will be abolished” (96). (back)

3. The dynamic of resentment expressed between these two individual’s may also be considered a synecdoche of the resentment often latent between the wealthy city of London and the monarchy.Richard Rowland notes that in the poem by Michael Drayton, from which Heywood draws the Shore plot, “the Shores [operate] as a site of *economic* power which challenges the authority of the monarch” (46). It is interesting to observe that Jane, as the chattel of a citizen, is associated with the wealth of London, which was a taxable resource for the crown. (back)

4. Matthew’s seeming embodiment of the city’s prestige is due to his crucial, and successful, role in defending the city, in which Edward had no part (1.9.183-86). Matthew’s wealth, which is analogous to the wealth of the city, is symbolized in his occupation as a goldsmith who owns his own shop (Rowland 46). (back)

5. In the tragedy of the classical aesthetic, Oedipus is heroic and doomed because, as king, he occupies the central position of the Theban community. In the tragedy of the neoclassical aesthetic, Hamlet is heroic and doomed, as he aspires to kingship from the periphery of Elsinore’s court (152-53). Oedipus unselfconsciously struggles to maintain his position at centre, while Hamlet reflects at length on his inability to properly occupy the centre of the scene without nagging doubts about the legitimacy of his usurpation. (back)

6. City plays and domestic comedies and tragedies take middle and lower class subjects as their protagonists; examples include, among city plays: Thomas Heywood’s *The Four Prentices of London*(1592), Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1599), Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), Thomas Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), in domestic tragedies: Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), and in domestic comedies: Ben Jonson’s *Batholemew Fair* (1614 also a city play set in Smithfield) Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton’s *Patient Grissel* (1599). (back)