

Private Grief into Public Action: The Rhetoric of John of Gaunt in *Richard II*

by George D. Gopen

John of Gaunt's Deathbed Speech

- 31 Methinks I am a prophet new inspired
And thus, expiring, do foretell of him:
His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last,
For violent fires soon burn out themselves;
35 Small show'rs last long, but sudden storms are short;
He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes;
With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder;
Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself.
40 This royal throne of kings, this scept' red isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
45 This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
50 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
55 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son;
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,

- Dear for her reputation through the world,
 Is now leased out (I die pronouncing it)
 60 Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
 65 That England that was wont to conquer others
 Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
 Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,
 How happy then were my ensuing death!

(*Richard II*, II.i)¹

I

It is surprising to discover just how little has been written about this famous speech. Most of the references to it are brief and seem to assume that familiarity has bred understanding, and there is only one critical essay devoted entirely to the important matters of structure and progression.² The speech's popularity must have been instantaneous as well as lasting, its central portion (40–56) having been anthologized as early as 1600 in *England's Parnassus* and having served as national panegyric so often that it may be considered the prototype. That central seventeen-line portion, however, constitutes only the multi-appositived subject of a twenty-one line sentence, whose predicate, by powerful anti-climax, dwells on the corruption that has destroyed the glory described at such length, leaving the speaker, at the end, in seeming despair. That sentence is preceded by a nine-line introduction, a repetitive passage more concerned with form than substance, and is followed by an eight-line coda that unravels in variations on the substance of the anti-climax. Ironically, therefore, the great panegyric, memorized by so many generations of English schoolchildren under the guidance of their patriotic instructors, appears but a glance at glory in a speech of despair.

Just as the context provided by the speech as a whole alters the effect of its famous segment, so does the context of the Gaunt's other

¹ This text throughout is taken from the Pelican edition, ed. Matthew W. Black (Baltimore, 1957).

² Donald M. Friedman's "John of Gaunt and the Rhetoric of Frustration," *ELH*, 43 (1976): 279–99, is, to my knowledge, the only article devoted entirely to this speech.

appearances affect an understanding of the deathbed speech. This article will study the rhetorical structure of the deathbed speech in some depth and then place that speech in the context of Gaunt's rhetoric in the rest of the play.

Deathbed utterances, under English law, are accorded special significance, the concept being that one who has no more to gain personally and who will soon be called to a final accounting will speak only the truth. Gaunt is shown to be aware of this concept and therefore aware of the potential import of any statement he might make at this moment:

O, but they say the tongues of dying men
 Enforce attention like deep harmony.
 Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,
 For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.
 He that no more must say is listened more
 Than they whom youth and ease have taught to glose.
 More are men's ends marked than their lives before.
 The setting sun, and music at the close,
 As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last,
 Writ in remembrance more than things long past.
 Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear,
 My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear.

(II.i.5-16)

To this point in the play we have not seen Gaunt acting in the role of royal counselor; in fact, Gaunt's role in the play is so relatively small that we are not much tempted to consider his deathbed speech primarily as a key to his character. Rather he appears to be a convenient symbol for the old, established, traditionalist, and thoroughly medieval order, which, because of Richard's mismanagement of government, will fall into chaos and give way to the beginnings of the Renaissance, represented at first by Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke. The play begins with this symbol of the old order:

Old John of Gaunt, time-honored Lancaster,
 Hast thou, according to thy oath and band,
 Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,
 Here to make good the boist'rous late appeal,
 Which then our leisure would not let us here,
 Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

Gaunt's name here is linked to age, to tradition, and to sense of duty by the highly formalistic rhetoric, the convoluted syntax, and the slow pace. The play will end with Gaunt's son speaking in relatively straightforward syntax, making judgments that are more "humanistic" than conventional (pardoning and praising Carlisle, banishing and cursing Exton). The change is prefigured by the development (however slightly it might weigh in the plot) of the time-honored, time-honoring Gaunt who plays yes-man to Richard (I.i and I.iii) into a Gaunt whose judgment has become liberated enough to challenge his king (II.i.73ff.). That development is managed almost entirely through rhetoric, Gaunt's rhetoric, and the most significant moment of change is the famous deathbed speech.

Shakespeare also used that speech to introduce some of the major complaints that will later legitimize Bolingbroke's seizure of the crown, a dangerous undertaking for an author writing in politically volatile times (as his later arrest for having revived the play documents). The speech, therefore, had to be not only dramatically effective but also rhetorically persuasive, recognizing simultaneously the greatness of England, the sanctity of royal government, and the legitimate need for the deposition of Richard. Shakespeare's success in encompassing these tasks is attested to by the popularity of the speech, and the secret of that success lies in the compelling rhetorical structure he created.

II

This dramatic speech has a slow start. The first nine lines (31–39) form a self-contained unit both substantively and stylistically. Substantively they concern the future of Richard, whereas the rest of the speech concerns the present and future of England. Stylistically they are static, cerebral, repetitive, and consciously rhetorical, as the message is subordinated to the techniques of producing it; the rest of the speech is dynamic, emotional, and forward-moving, with its complex rhetoric increasingly in the service of the message being produced. The proverb-like phrases of lines 31–39 give way to the metaphoric analysis of the lines that follow. Such a formalistic introductory passage, blockish and unmoving, is commonplace both in oratory and music. This is the formal, non-melodic fanfare that gets the attention of the audience, announces the momentous quality of

the occasion, and establishes a tone, without developing the complex theme of the music to follow.³

The rhetorical key to the entire speech is line balance, but whereas in the well-known section (from l.40 onwards) the balances tend to lead us further on into the speech, the balances of the introductory passage (31–39) constantly lead to closure, to self-containment. This constant closure, coupled with the redundancy of the substance, creates the static quality that characterizes a speaker all too conscious of making a speech. This is John of Gaunt acting out the role of newly appointed prophet, marking the solemnity of the moment with a condescending formality.

In this opening eight-line passage everything balances—lines, half-lines, words, sounds—raising rhythmic expectations that are never disappointed. The first two lines act as preamble, the announcement of the role of prophet. The other seven lines, prophetic in sound and sense, are formed from a rigid symmetry of balances. Gaunt makes the same point five times—things that rage exhaust themselves quickly—each in the form of a neatly and noticeably balanced proverb-like phrase. The first and the last of these require two lines each (lines 33–34 and 38–39); the other three require one line apiece. Each of the five in turn contains an interior balance, thus establishing a larger symmetry made up of smaller symmetries, all based on syntax, meaning, and sound.

Figure 1

Proverb-like restatements of the same point

| <i>line #s</i> | <i>lines</i> | <i>balances</i> |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 33–34 | 2 | 1 + 1 |
| 35 | 1 | ½ + ½ |
| 36 | 1 | ½ + ½ |
| 37 | 1 | ½ + ½ |
| 38–39 | 2 | 1 + 1 |

Beyond these symmetries, there is a profusion of syntactic, semantic, and auditory balances and correspondences, peppered with a

³ It also resembles the slow introductory section of a French Overture, played again and again while the royal party was entering and being seated. When all were settled and attention was turned to the performance, the orchestra would move on to the *allegro* section, returning at the end to the slow introduction. Gaunt returns to his *adagio* at the end of his speech as well.

variety of classical rhetorical devices. It is a virtuoso performance in a baroque style.

The heavy-handed pun of the first two lines sets the tone and establishes the sense of symmetry for the whole eight-line introduction,

31 Methinks I am a prophet new inspired
And thus, expiring, do foretell of him:

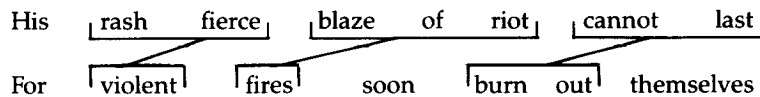
especially as the pun constitutes the inner pair of a chiasmus (prophet/inspired // expiring/foretell). Each of the proverb-like units that follow (see Figure 1) are so teeming with multiple balances and cross-correspondences that it is impossible to be aware of them all simultaneously; together they produce that sense of baroque virtuosity.

Lines 33–34:

His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last,
For violent fires soon burn out themselves;

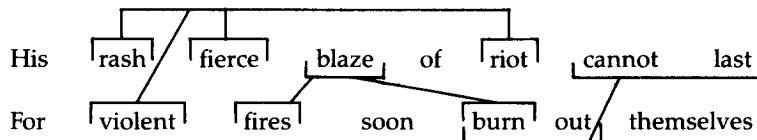
Each of the lines forms a complete clause balancing the other in length and weight and reflecting the other in meaning; this establishes two horizontal progressions with a dominant-tonic relationship, thus producing the proverb-like effect. But the rather simple horizontal organization is complicated by a set of vertical syntactic correspondences:

Figure 2 (Syntactic)



which is further complicated by a different set of semantic correspondences:

Figure 3 (Semantic)



and which is yet further complicated by a set of auditory correspondences:

Figure 4 (Auditory) [r, f/v, c/s, b, i]

His rash fierce blaze of r^oot cannot last
 = = = = = = =
 For v^olent f^ores soon burn out themselves
 = = = = = = =

All these function simultaneously to create a rhetorical density that seems to exist more for its own virtuosity than for the sake of persuasion. Similar correspondences can be found for each of the proverb-like units through line 39, together with a heavy dose of the rhetorical devices of polyptoton, parison, epistrophe, anadiplosis, and others. It is the rhetoric of a passive man, pleased to be allied to tradition, privileged to luxuriate in decorative repetition, trained to be content with self-containment, with the status quo.

All this has gotten John of Gaunt (and us) not very far at all. He is still clearing his throat, as it were, gearing up for the main assault. Peter Ure, in his edition of the play, suggests that lines 31–39 are an example of the rhetorical device of auxesis (amplification, emphasis built through extension).⁴ I hear these lines, to the contrary, as entirely self-contained, without direction or a sense of progression, and I would rather subscribe to Donald Friedman's coinage, "false auxesis":

Ironically enough, his prophetic inspiration in these lines is markedly short-breathed; the lines do not move smoothly and incrementally to a climactic point; they reach their concluding indictment, rather, by a way of succession of apothegms, almost entirely self enclosed, and in their proverbial diction contributing to our sense of impersonal, generalized evaluation.⁵

III

The true auxesis begins at l.40. Of the many, very many, rhetorical figures that appear in this speech, one particularly demands our attention—anaphora (the repetition of a word at the beginning of consecutive phrases or clauses). The repeated word "this" outlines for us the structure of lines 40–56, for each time it appears it indicates the beginning of a new appositive metaphor, all of which taken to-

⁴ Peter Ure, ed., *King Richard II* (London: Methuen and Co., 1961), 49n.

⁵ Friedman, 286.

gether form the subject of the sentence that lasts from 1.40 through 1.60. The anaphora here has two major effects. First, it helps build the tension of the speech, ever increasing the expectation that something significant is going to be produced by the long-awaited arrival of the sentence's predicate. Second, it demarcates units of balance, through which the tension of the auxesis is further increased.

The first effect is quite stentorian, hardly subtle, a common rhetorical ploy still in use by thousands who have never heard the Greek term that describes it: It raises an expectation of an important arrival, something towards which all the anaphoric repetitions are pointing. The longer the wait, the more dramatic the arrival. It is a particular favorite of nominators at political conventions: "I give you a man who . . . a man who . . . a man who . . .," building inexorably to the climax of the utterance of the candidate's name, at which the cheers rise and the balloons fall. It brings into existence the fact of candidacy just as God's uttering the name of light brings light into existence in the book of *Genesis*.

The second effect of this anaphora works in a far more subtle way, with a more complex significance, and it is almost solely responsible for the structure of the auxesis. Putting aside all the other techniques of balancing that the speech contains, consider only the line quantities that make up the separate metaphors, each of which begins with the anaphoric "this."

Lines 40–41:

This royal throne of kings, this scept' red isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,

Line 40 gives us two "this" phrases, separated by a caesura; line 41 again two more, again with the intervening caesura. By the end of line 41, then, we have it clearly in our ear that one half-line = one metaphor = one appositive phrase beginning with "this." The half-line unit is firmly established, and the caesura is expected.

Line 42:

This other Eden, demi-paradise,

This line fulfills our expectations at first, for it again begins with "this," again adds a new metaphor in apposition to the previous ones, and again leads to mid-line pause; but we find no "this" following the pause. "Demi-paradise," we perceive, is not an entirely separate metaphor, but rather part of a longer one-line metaphor,

"This other Eden, demi-paradise." The unit length has increased from a half line to a whole line.

This expansion in length brings with it an increase in rhetorical anxiety. We have already learned to take a "mental breath" when we see the word "this," and our foiled expectation of being able to breathe in the middle of line 42 has made us extend our mental tension one half-line longer than we were prepared to do.⁶

We might also start to wonder at this point when the verb will arrive. Two half-line metaphors are easy to hold in mind; another two, so neatly balanced against the first two, pose no great retention problem either; but to be handed another metaphor, twice as long as the others, begins to put some strain on our powers of retention, especially since we must now be wary, having once been surprised, of the expectations we develop concerning what will follow immediately.⁷

And what does follow?—another doubling of unit length, a two-line metaphor, the two lines breathlessly united by enjambement and by the lack of caesuras, extending our mental breathing powers perhaps to the limit. (Even the average physical breath tends not to last much beyond the reading of two lines of iambic pentameter.)

43 This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war

We learn quickly to form a new expectation, for we can now perceive a pattern forming: half-line, one-line, two-line metaphors. Should we not expect a four-line metaphor begun by "this"? Is increase of metaphor length not the rhetorical key to the structure of this speech?

We may take a bigger mental breath at the beginning of l.45, preparing for a four-line metaphor, but we find ourselves returned to

⁶ Please note that by "mental breath" I refer to a time unit in reading bound by a sense of inception at its beginning and a sense of closure at its end. The moment of closure may or may not be marked by punctuation; it depends instead on expectations raised in the reader's mind by a number of different clues in the text. "Mental breath," as I use it here, should by no means be confused with the physical breath it might take to utter a given unit of discourse.

⁷ This essay treats the speech as something to be read. An actor's interpretation can either emphasize or diminish the effects through timing and intonation. I would argue, of course, that an actor would do well to recognize the rhetorical structure and make it apparent to the audience through performance.

the original organization, back to two half-line “this”-begun metaphors, separated by a caesura:

45 This happy breed of men, this little world,

This return to half-line units acts either as a shock, further increasing the building tension, or as a momentary breather, a necessary stop for refueling; the next “this” (line 46) ushers in the four-line metaphor we had had good cause to expect. Since it is difficult to maintain momentum through four lines when that has not been the standard unit of the poetry, we therefore are in need of some rhetorical conveyance to help us along. Because three enjambements would tax even the hardest of breathers, the technique used to unite lines 43–44 will not work here. Instead we are given a convenient alliteration of “s” sounds throughout:

46 This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;

We can now better value the various possible effects of line 45 (the return to the half-lines that preceded the four-line unit). Dramatic tension can be increased by leading an audience to expect that a certain thing will arrive at a certain time. Prompt delivery will create a feeling of fulfillment, of closure, creating an impact similar to the arrival of the tonic at the end of a musical cadence; but a yet more striking effect can be produced by delivering something else at the critical moment, waiting a short while, and then delivering the previously expected fulfillment at a time when it is unexpected. We were prepared for a four-line unit at line 45; we were given instead two half-line units. Before we could recover from the effect of our expectation having been frustrated, we found ourselves burdened with the four-line unit for which we were no longer prepared. Shakespeare seems to have delighted in this delayed-delivery shock tactic, having used it as often as he did in the plays.⁸

⁸ Cf. *Hamlet*, I.ii, where Hamlet and his companions await the appearance of the Ghost with great tension. It is only when they have lowered their guard by falling into an irrelevant conversation that the Ghost is allowed to appear. Cf. also *The Tempest*, I.ii, where the audience’s expectation to see Caliban for the first time is momentarily disappointed by the entrance of Ariel disguised as a water nymph. Ariel’s quick exit

On the other hand, line 45 can be perceived not as a shock but rather as a breathing point, a refueling point, similar to the effect of the musical technique used by so many Romantic composers of interrupting a long crescendo with a *subito piano*, cutting back the volume abruptly only to crescendo to an even higher level immediately thereafter. (See the "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* for a striking example.) The build-up in Gaunt's speech, however, reaches not towards ecstasy but towards despair.

We have to hold fast to our sense of the anaphoric "this" because of the nature of appositives and because we have yet to reach the verb of the sentence. Four lines without a "this" has put a strain on our mental energy, and it would be almost beyond our syntactic capabilities as readers to withstand a further elongation of the next metaphor from, say, four lines to six lines; we are holding on to a great deal already. Line 50 comes, then, as quite a shock, especially in that it produces the high point of the speech without producing a climax.

50 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,

The unit of metaphor in line 50 is the quarter-line, and the anaphoric pounding of "this" builds to the moment of revelation, the uncovering of the identity of all these appositives, the naming of the thing

leaves the audience confused and unprepared for the previously long-expected entrance of Caliban.

Prospero

What ho! slave! Caliban!

Thou earth, thou! Speak!

Caliban [*within*]

There's wood enough within.

Prospero

Come forth I say! There's other business for thee.

Come, thou tortoise! When?

[*Enter Ariel like a water nymph*]

Prospero

Fine apparition! My quaint Ariel,

Hark in thine ear.

Ariel

My lord, it shall be done. [*Exit*]

Prospero

Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself

Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!

[*Enter Caliban*]

itself, England. Consider again God's articulation of "Let there be light" and the immediate existence of light upon its being named. Consider again the effectiveness of delaying the naming of the political candidate until the last moment of the speech, even though everyone across the country knows his identity beforehand—"I give you a man who . . . a man who . . . a man who . . . ladies and gentlemen—I give you—the next president of the United States of America—Alexander—P.—BAX-TER." Naming transforms the potential into the actual. It creates. Through anaphora and auxesis, Gaunt has brought England into existence momentarily as a character in the play (the heroine of this play, many have argued), not heavy-handedly personified as a participant, but rather as the more subtle referent of metaphor.

We are given twelve metaphors for England before England is named, as if no matter how long the speaker might try, no matter how complex nor how lengthy nor how compelling his metaphors might become, nothing could explain the concept of this greatness, this majesty, better than the simple invoking of the name England.⁹

The high point, but not a climax: the naming of the country proves here not to be the worked-for end but functions instead, curiously, almost as another in the series of metaphors, for it is immediately followed by yet another "this" introducing yet another quarter-line metaphor, followed in turn by the feared and burdensome six-line metaphor.¹⁰

- 51 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
55 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son;

This length gives us too much to bear in mind, it requires too much of one mental breath, and it forces us to do something destructive to

⁹ Professor Friedman interprets this moment differently: "Here again paraphrasis (or *interpretatio*) gives the effect of trying to define an essence by enumerating all its names, an attempt that fails because his understanding of the national essence goes no further than attaching the name to the earth itself" (p. 289).

¹⁰ Although this metaphor is technically only five and three quarters lines long, it functions like a six-line unit because there is no indication that we should take an unusually large mental breath after the first quarter-line unit of line 51.

the anaphoric auxesis so carefully constructed—it forces us to take a mental breath in the middle of a metaphor. This breakdown in rhetorical structure conveys a certain struggling grief on the part of the speaker, who by lengthening appositives has over and over again put off getting to the predicate, put off getting to the actual point of the sentence. The quarter-line metaphors appear his attempt to urge himself on to syntactic closure, just as a jockey whips his horse as the end of the race draws near, but the non-arrival at the obvious possibility for arrival (“this England”) indicates that the energetic attempt at closure has failed. “England” cannot be climactic because at this point it represents glory, whereas the point of the speech will concern despair.

Failure at closure is further manifested by the excessive length of the six-line metaphor that follows. Six lines might have been possible to handle mentally had their progression been linear, but we find ourselves burdened with several levels of modification that destroy linearity. Had lines 52–56 all modified “This teeming womb,” we might have been able to keep the “this” phrase in our ear as we waited for the next “this” (or for the verb) to appear; but lines 55–56 qualify “as far from home” and are even separated from it by the intrusive line 54. It is difficult enough a task to follow the interrelationships of lines 53–56 without having to subordinate all that effort to the attempt to keep “this teeming womb” in mind as the primary focus of the six lines. The ear, the mind, has too much to keep in order, and the whole structure begins to collapse.¹¹

The peculiar construction of this now-failing auxesis reflects what I have called the “struggling grief” of the speaker. He struggles against his helplessness to right the wrongs of King Richard and against his own approaching death, and both of these are manifested by his struggling syntactically against arriving at the predicate, against articulating the point he has in mind. Just as naming “England” brings it into existence in this speech in a way no metaphor can do, so naming the shame of the country will bring it into consciousness, with all the concomitant pain and with little hope for

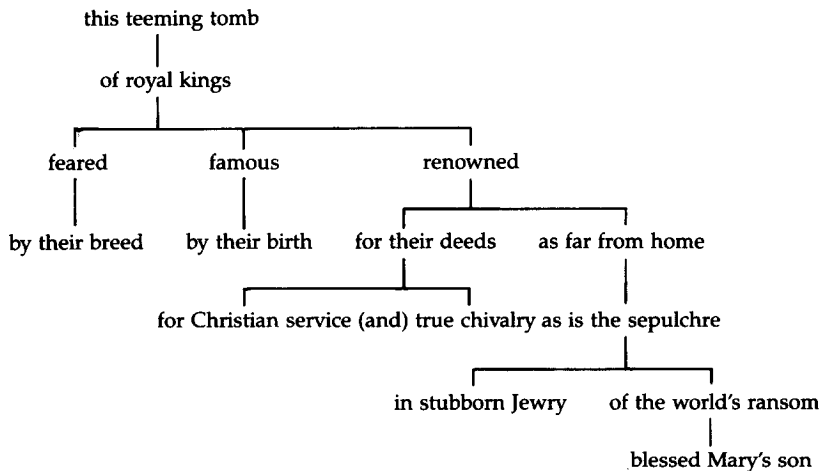
¹¹ The great syntactical complexity here results from the difficulty of keeping in order many appositives which contain no express lexical subordinates. The complicated diagram below mirrors the syntactical complications encountered in reading the passage linearly:

catharsis. The lengthening of the introductory panegyric, then, is, among other things, a stalling tactic.

At the beginning of line 57 we find another “this” introducing another metaphor, but this “this” sounds different from all the previous ones, for it is too far removed from the last “this” for an echo to have any anaphoric effect. Moreover, the length and peregrinations of the last six lines (51–56) have destroyed the sense that a single metaphoric thought accompanies each “this.” The structure has collapsed, and the anaphora that created it must collapse with it. With this protective device gone, Gaunt is forced to get to the point unless he can come up with yet other delaying tactics. He tries two of them, both of which quickly fail.

Gaunt exchanges anaphora for a combination of *ploce* (the speedy repetition of a word with few other words intervening) and *epizeuxis* (the repetition of a word with no other words intervening). In the process he modulates from using “this” as the repeated word to “dear”—a new word for a new rhetorical figure.

57 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
 Dear for her reputation through the world,
 Is now leased out (I die pronouncing it)
 Like to a tenement or pelting farm.



By the time we have arrived at “blessed Mary’s son,” we have wandered as far from the initial “this” as the Holy Land is from England.

Both plocé and epizeuxis, however, are more frantic techniques of repetition than anaphora and cannot be used for any length of time without exhaustion (which recalls Gaunt's own proverb, "Violent fires soon burn out themselves"); in two lines Gaunt again finds himself on the brink of getting to the point.

His final effort at delay is the feeblest of all—the insertion of a parenthetical phrase—mere interruptio. The main interruptive element is the use of the first person, the only such reference between the opening two lines and the closing two lines of the entire speech. Gaunt has so developed the sense of "other" (of England, of country) that this resurrection of the sense of "self" comes as a bit of a shock, reminding us that Gaunt is, after all, on his deathbed. In this interruptio he articulates his consciousness of the effect that naming England's shame will have upon him: "I die pronouncing it" indicates that finishing his long sentence will in part cause, not merely accompany, his own demise.¹²

With line 59 we finally arrive at the verb, for which we have waited twenty lines, but the arrival disappoints us. We look for such expectation to be rewarded with a verb of cohesion, of action, one that results in climax and leads to closure; we find instead a passive structure, "is leased out," which results only in anti-climax and settles nothing. Passivity, not activity, dominates. The England that used to do things to others is now done to by others, in a fashion unbecoming her. All the glory of the "royal throne," "demi-paradise," "fortress," and "blessed plot" is now reduced to "tenement" and "pelt-ing farm." "This England" has become indeed a metaphor for "En-

¹² Alexander Pope used the same techniques, with curious echoes of Gaunt's speech, in the penultimate paragraph of his "Moral Epistle 1: To Cobham": repetition to gain time, parenthetical interruptions, and a reluctance to pronounce names that will create a conscious change of state or status.

"I give and I devise," (Old Euclio said,
And sigh'd) "My lands and tenements to Ned."
Your money, Sir? "My money, Sir, what all?
"Why, —if I must—(then wept) I give it Paul."
The Manor, Sir?—"The Manor! hold," he cry'd,
"Not that, —I cannot part with that!"—and dy'd.

The fact that this too describes a deathbed scene, that "tenements" are mentioned, and that the interruptions completely obscure the poetic form (for who could tell at once that these lines are in heroic couplets?) all make one wonder whether Pope might not have had John of Gaunt's speech in mind.

gland"; for the country is no longer to Gaunt what it once was. Through his delaying tactics he has been able to separate by ten lines the pitiful words "tenement" and "pelting farm" from "this England," but now that he has uttered them, granting them existence in the conscious mind, he no longer needs to repress their connection to the name of his country. To underscore their degrading force, then, he juxtaposes them to the very word he had taken so much care to separate them from before:

This land of such dear souls . . .
 Is now leased out—I die pronouncing it—
 60 Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
 England, bound in . . .

The "England" of line 60 is not the same entity as "this England" of line 50; the degradation is complete. By the time it next is mentioned (65), it will have become "that England."

The tortured quality and the anti-climactic effect of the syntax in Gaunt's long sentence (40–60) rhetorically mirror the lack of harmony and proportion he perceives in Richard's government of England. Richard's own rhetoric is almost always painstakingly balanced, but the effect in his case is ironical: he is shown to care more about how his words appear than how his government runs. His functional imbalance, his creation of discord, are transferred to the rhetoric of Gaunt, his critic.¹³ The disappointment in the cadential resolution of lines 58–60 (the arrival of the verb phrase) is all the more poignant when we consider Gaunt's recent acknowledgement of the delights of cadential fulfillment: "The setting sun, and music at the close, / As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last," (12–13).

If we seem to have lost sight of the balancing of line lengths, it is because Gaunt seems to have done so as well. Their existence as units depended on the anaphoric boundaries of metaphors; the units

¹³ Some interesting work has been done on the concepts of harmony, proportion, time, and music in *Richard II*. Richard D. Altick attributes "the peculiar unity" of the play to the repetition and interweaving of particular words, images, and symbols; Karl Felsen extends that concept to the mirroring of interrelating scenes and events; and Leighton R. Scott finds Pythagorean proportions, even the "golden mean" of the Fibonacci series, both in Richard's Act V soliloquy and in the play as a whole. Felsen suggests (107) that the interweaving of scenes and events provides "an aesthetic balance and harmony in the play that brings out very forcefully the pathetic moral and political imbalance and discord of the characters and events within the play. An ugly

that follow line 56 are syntactic ones, sentences. The balances from line 40 through the end of the speech are represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5

| line #'s | balance lengths |
|----------|--|
| 40 | $\frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{2}$ |
| 41 | $\frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{2}$ |
| 42 | 1 |
| 43-44 | 2 |
| 45 | $\frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{2}$ |
| 46-49 | 4 |
| 50 | $\frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}$ |
| 51-56 | $(\frac{1}{4}) - 6$ |
| 57-60 | 4 |
| 61-64 | 4 |
| 65-66 | 2 |
| 67-68 | $2(1 + 1)$ |

As the anaphora, the auxesis, the syntax, Gaunt's spirit, and everything else broke down in lines 57-60, so did the sense of "unit" of line lengths; those lines do not sound like a four-line unit. Yet if we continue to calculate those units to the end of the speech, they still seem to have a function, albeit rather reduced in force. From the extreme of the six-line unit (51-56) we descended to the four-line anti-climax of syntactical closure. Gaunt then repeats the message of those four lines in another four-line unit (61-64) and then yet again in a two-line unit (65-66).

picture is made more ugly by a beautiful frame." Scott demonstrates that using the mathematics of the "golden mean" proportion divides Richard's soliloquy precisely at its point of dramatic interruption and change of focus ("Music do I hear? / Ha - ha - keep time!"), and that the same calculations used on the play as a whole lead us to III.iii.133-34, the very moment of Richard's collapse ("What must the king do now? Must he submit? / The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?"). I would add to this that the same calculations used on Gaunt's famous lines, beginning with "This royal throne of kings" (40) and ending with "How happy then were my ensuing death" (68), lead us to the anti-climax of the long awaited verb phrase, "Dear for her reputation throughout the world / Is now leased out . . ." (58-9). The entire play depends upon a complex combination of balances and imbalances, the greatest number of which are rhetorical. See Richard D. Altick, "Symphonic Imagery in *Richard II*," *PMLA* 42 (1947): 339-65; Karl Felsen, "*Richard II*: Three-Part Harmony," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 23 (1972): 107-11; and Leighton R. Scott, "Pythagorean Proportion and Music of the Spheres in *Richard II*," *Albion*, 10 (1978): 104-18.

- 61 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
- 65 That England that was wont to conquer others
 Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.

It seems that once he has brought himself to articulate the horror, he cannot stop articulating it, a phenomenon observable in many an intense verbal encounter that begins with denial and erupts into affirmation. Or perhaps his energy was running out, returning him to the man he was before inspiration grabbed hold of him; he slowly falls back to repeating his material in two-line segments, just as he had done in the introductory lines at the beginning of the speech.

We had to wait twenty lines for the verb structure of line 59. From line 61 to the end, every line but one has a verb structure; those verbs continue the effects initiated by the passivity of the anti-climax "is leased out." In lines 61–64 we find two identical passive constructions ("bound in," referring to England both times) and one active construction ("beats back," referring to the "rocky shore"), which together comment on the widespread sentiment that England's geographical isolation makes her impervious to defeat except from within; England cannot be conquered unless she conquers herself first.¹⁴ The passivity of England's "binding" here suggests exactly such a self-conquest, even while the island's geographical situation continues its active role, beating back attacks from without. The two passivities are formed of the same words, "bound in," but differ distinctly in meaning (the rhetorical device antanaclasis). The positive qualities of "bound in" (cf. England's strong navy and the Channel) have deteriorated to a negative, non-physical kind of binding, with shame, rotting laws, and insufficient protection of private property.¹⁵

We see the same kind of transition in the two-line unit of lines 65–66 (again depending primarily on antanaclasis):

¹⁴ The concept that England will be protected from foreign invasion unless it conquers itself first by its own misdeeds can be found in *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, in works by Churchyard and Borde, in the *Briefe Discourse* by G. D., and in Daniel's *Civile Warres*. See Friedman, 282.

¹⁵ Friedman, 292: "The inmost core of Gaunt's outrage appears to be not the dulling of national fame, but the fact that possession of the land has passed from the hands of its traditional owners." I agree. The short predicate ("is now leased out . . . pelting

- 65 That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.

The transitive verb structure of the first line becomes a reflexive structure in the second line, again emphasizing that England is in danger of doing to itself what no one else could do to her.

In the final two-line unit, Gaunt at last gives up the struggle.

- 67 Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,
How happy then were my ensuing death!

He had delayed naming the horror for as long as he could, had tried to exhaust or exorcise it by repeating it several times, and at the last is reduced to hoping it will disappear almost magically. He strikes a dominant chord with "life" in the penultimate line and resolves it with a final tonic on "death."

Gaunt's deathbed speech seems to precipitate his death, as if the energy required for the great outpouring of rhetoric was the last he had left to him, the momentary blaze of fire before extinguishment. In articulating so eloquently the demise of the England that he had known, he takes part in his own death. It is a kind of rhetorical suicide attempt, but the attempt turns out to be premature. He has work yet to do.

IV

It remains, then, to set this speech in the larger context of Gaunt's rhetoric throughout the play. We first see Gaunt in I.i, a scene of many long speeches in which he is given only three brief opportunities to speak, totalling less than five lines. It is a scene dominated by heightened rhetoric, in which not only does he speak unobtrusively and subserviently, in straightforward syntax, but he is the only one to do so.¹⁶ He agrees to do whatever Richard asks, and he proves

farm") must be invested with a great deal of animus to balance the length and weight of the preceding encomia. See also Richard D. Altick, "Symphonic Imagery in *Richard II*," *PMLA*, 42 (1947): 341-44. The slow and painful development of the concept of private property under English law is a surprising discovery to the uninitiated and explains the depth of concern indicated in Gaunt's speech. For an excellent and readable explanation of the origins of English property law, see Cornelius J. Moynihan, *Introduction to the Law of Real Property*, (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1962).

¹⁶ See Stephen Booth, "Syntax as Rhetoric in *Richard II*," *Mosaic*, 10 (1977): 89.

ineffectual when he tries to control his son, Bolingbroke. Here we see no orator and no man of action, but rather a man who knows his place and is committed to the avoidance of conflict: "To be a make-peace shall become my age."

In I.ii, his scene with the Duchess of Gloucester, he proves quite talkative, but only for the purpose of explaining why he is unwilling to act:

But since correction lieth in those hands
Which made the fault that we cannot correct,
Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven,
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth,
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads.

(I.ii.4-8)

God will take care of it all. The Duchess not only criticizes him but analyzes him—"Call it not patience, Gaunt, it is despair"—a line that points out the striking similarity between the states of mind that throughout Shakespeare's plays are portrayed as the highest and the lowest. They resemble each other because in neither case does the person affected actually do anything. But the two types of non-action differ significantly: Absolute psychological stability allows one the patience not to trouble about things that are beyond one's control (see Hamlet's praise of the stoical Horatio, III.ii.54ff.); total disintegration of that stability brings one to despair, a state of hopelessness in which one imagines that everything is beyond one's control. The Duchess calls Gaunt a coward for not speaking out about the murder of her husband, Gloucester; Gaunt replies that the divine nature of kingship makes impossible any action on his part against the king. He states his position quite explicitly, and we cannot tell whether it is based on dogma or on cowardice.

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy annointed in his sight,
Hath caused his death; the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against his minister.

(I.ii.37-41)

I.ii seems to exist primarily to set this conflict in motion. We care little about Gaunt in this play and far less about the Duchess of Gloucester; but it is in response to her charging Gaunt with coward-

ice and despair that Gaunt has the opportunity to articulate a conservative view of kingship which he will later bring himself to repudiate. His crossing of that line, from silent supporter to outspoken critic, prefigures the transition that his son will undergo, a transition that Shakespeare must have his audience accept as legitimate, without adopting anything like a radical stance that might threaten the system of monarchy itself.

In I.iii Gaunt continues his policy of not criticizing Richard's actions, even when those actions directly affect him. Richard shortens Henry's banishment not because of any articulated complaint from Gaunt but because he notices how badly Gaunt is looking. When Gaunt does speak up, his speech is filled with the studied kinds of repetition that later mark the introduction to his deathbed speech. In lines 218–22 he claims he will die before Henry returns; in 223–24 he repeats the idea. In supplying the second line of a rhymed couplet begun by Richard (226), Gaunt argues that kings have the power to curtail life but not to extend it; he repeats that thought three times over, each in a neatly balanced rhymed couplet (227–32).

King. Why, uncle, thou hast many years to live.
 Gaunt. But not a minute, king, that thou canst give.
 Shorten my days thou canst with sullen sorrow
 And pluck nights from me, but not lend a morrow.
 Thou canst help time to furrow me with age,
 But stop no wrinkle in his pilgrimage.
 Thy word is current with him for my death,
 But dead, thy kingdom cannot buy my breath.

He repeats the pattern a few lines later, responding to Richard by finishing a rhymed couplet and then varying the same theme three times; this time, however, he needs four lines to make his point the second and third time (see 235–46).

For Gaunt this kind of overstructured rhetoric that goes nowhere, that grinds away at different settings of the same thought, that relies on the impressive conclusiveness of aphorism, characterizes his avoidance of confrontation, his unwillingness to come forward as anything other than a "make-peace." His advice to his son on how to bear up under exile (275–93) differs from the interchange with Richard only in its lack of rhyme, which seems to be reserved for his royal conversations. The aphoristic repetition still dominates.

In the deathbed speech of the following scene, Gaunt and his

rhetoric undergo a transformation. After the introductory nine lines that sound so much like his previous style, he breaks away from repetitive couplets and forges ahead into the lengthy blank verse auxesis, turning from some of his earlier rhetorical nature and finding a voice of his own, not borrowed from collections of proverbs. As described above, the struggle to postpone syntactic closure (40–60) produces a painful anti-climax followed by a disintegration of sorts (61–68). At the end of that speech Richard enters and is surprised to find a confrontive Gaunt who shows no signs either of patience or of cowardice.

The first indication of change appears immediately (ll.73–83). “Aged Gaunt,” as Richard addresses him, usurps the kingly rhetorical prerogative, not only by holding forth for a relatively lengthy 11 lines, but by flailing away with puns. (Richard showed his delight in word-play as early as I.i.152ff. with the medical conceit that begins “Let’s purge this choler without letting blood.”) Of course Gaunt has had little practice in this and turns out not to be very good at it (punning painfully on “gaunt”), eliciting a surprised and disapproving response from Richard, “Can sick men play so nicely with their names?”

Gaunt is bold enough now to spar with his king using the rhetorical weapon of chiasmus (the repetition of two or more elements of speech in reversed order—in this case *xyzzyx*):

King. Should *dying* men *flatter* with those that *live*?
Gaunt. No, no! men *living flatter* those that *die*.

and then following immediately with spirited antanaclasis:

King. Thou, now *a-dying*, sayest thou flatterest me.
Gaunt. O, no! thou *diest*, though I the sicker be.
King. I am in health, I breathe, and *see thee ill*.
Gaunt. Now, he that made me knows I *see thee ill*.

(II.i.88–93)

Having gathered this full head of steam, Gaunt now dares to appropriate Richard’s own medical conceit from I.i and use it against its maker:

Now, he that made me knows I see thee ill;
Ill in myself to see, and in thee seeing ill.
Thy deathbed is no lesser than thy land,
Wherein thou liest in reputation sick;

And thou, too careless patient as thou art,
 Committ'st thy annointed body to the cure
 Of those physicians that first wounded thee.
 (II.i.93-99)

He then strikes out into metaphoric language of his own making, using a far more subtle and more striking form of chiasmus:

A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown,
 Whose compass is no bigger than thy head;
 And yet, incaged in so small a verge,
 The waste is no whit lesser than thy land.
 (II.i. 100-03)

(The first and fourth lines deal with largeness; the second and third lines deal with smallness.) Richard, never one to admit defeat in a bout of rhetoric, files these lines away for later embellishment. He manages to put the image to even better use, it is true (III.ii. 160-70);¹⁷ but the point here is not how well Gaunt is speaking, but rather that he is making the attempt to speak at all.

A few lines later there is no longer a question as to whether Gaunt is making an impression. He lets loose with direct accusation and treasonable prophecy, eventually calling Richard "Landlord of England . . . not king" (recalling for us the "tenements and pelting farms" of the deathbed speech), and even daring to use the word "depose." A dozen lines of this are more than Richard can stand, and he interrupts in great anger (115-23) with threats, ending with

Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son,
 This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head
 Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.

¹⁷

for within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king
 Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
 Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp;
 Allowing him a little breath, a little scene,
 To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks;
 Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
 As if this flesh which walls about our life
 Were brass impregnable; and humored thus,
 Comes at the last, and with a little pin
 Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!
 (III.ii.160-170)

Gaunt's reply is his finest moment:

O, spare me not, my brother Edward's son,
 For that I was his father Edward's son!
 That blood already, like a pelican,
 Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused.
 My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning soul—
 Whom fair befall in heaven 'mongst happy souls!—
 May be a precedent and witness good
 That thou respect'st not spilling Edward's blood.
 Join with the present sickness that I have,
 And thy unkindness be like crooked age,
 To crop at once a too-long-withered flower.
 Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee!
 These words hereafter thy tormenters be!
 Convey me to my bed, then to my grave.
 Love they to live that love and honor have.

(II.i. 124–38)

This is no aged make-peace speaking. His retort is direct and to the point, and he has found the courage the Duchess accused him of lacking to attack the king for the very crime of which she complained, the murder of her husband. Gone are the overly balanced rhymed couplets, the aphoristic atmosphere, and the tiresome repetition of material. Gaunt may not have lifted his arm against God's minister, but he has lifted his voice.

Richard tries to brush away Gaunt's tirade by chiasmatically reversing its final two lines:

Gaunt. Convey me to my bed, then to my grave.
 Love they to live that love and honor have.
 King. And let them die that age and sullens have;
 For both hast thou, and both become the grave.

But Gaunt remains the true prophet here in suggesting these words would hereafter be Richard's tormenters, for the verb of Gaunt's final order, "convey," returns to torment Richard at the end of the deposition scene:

Richard. Then give me leave to go.
 Henry. Whither?
 Richard. Whither you will, so I were from your sights.

Henry. Go some of you, convey him to the Tower.
Richard. O, good! Convey? Conveyers are you all,
That rise thus nimbly by a true king's fall.

(IV.i.313-18)

Gaunt's deathbed speech, then, seems to have freed him from inaction, from a mistaken sense of duty, and allowed him to articulate that which it was his duty as royal counselor to articulate: "Thy state of law is bondsman to the law" (II.i. 114), thus raising the fundamental question of the king's legal status, essential to any legitimate deposition of a person occupying the throne. To effect that kind of a change persuasively, Gaunt had to be put through the strain of the monumental *auxesis* that ended in anti-climax, through the painful process of pronouncing that which he had argued was unholy to pronounce. He was brought to the point of despair at the end of his great speech, but saved from it by the opportunity to put his new understanding to work. Had Gaunt been allowed to expire at the end of the deathbed speech, the speech would remain a splendid purple passage but function only as a minor character's self-serving and essentially pitiful attempt at expiation, the last words of a man who has realized the depth of his own inaction too late to do anything about it. But the continuation of the scene with the confrontation between Gaunt and Richard transforms the deathbed speech into the heroically patriotic speech it has always been taken for (although for the wrong reasons). Gaunt manages to take his private grief and transform it, through the power of rhetoric, into public action.

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