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Dust

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Dust

Geoffrey Bennington

Custom calls me to't.
What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd
For truth to o'erpeer. (*Coriolanus*, 2.3.113–17)

Dust is a very discreet motif in the work of Jacques Derrida. Ash and ashes are of course often invoked, sometimes as the very epitome of the remaining trace 'itself', and this notably calls for extensive commentary by Derrida himself on his own repeated use of the phrase 'Il y a là cendre'. But ashes' traditional companion, dust, *poussière*, appears very rarely in Derrida's texts, and is, to my knowledge, never thematised as such. The long meditations on the differences between inhumation and cremation in *The Beast and the Sovereign II* never mention dust at all. In cases where dust does appear at least somewhat thematically (as opposed to what we might be tempted to write off as merely idiomatic, somewhat automatic, not exactly countersigned instances, such as when Derrida in the wake of his exchange with Searle suggests that without an 'all or nothing' logic speech-act theory 'tomberait en poussière immédiatement'),¹ it most typically either functions almost synonymously with ashes, or else, in proximity with ashes, is associated with a dust or dusting of *words*, so that the more obviously privileged sequence 'il y a là cendre' can itself be described as 'cette poussière grise de mots', 'une poussière de mots qui sont la cendre même'.²

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Or else, memorably, mysteriously, and in fact somewhat inaccurately, in a biblical reference at the very end of 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', which closes with a summary of part of that lecture that has never been published in its entirety, which summary itself closes on the following very enigmatic paragraph:

Comment, par exemple, faire communiquer, sur la scène de l'histoire, l'écriture comme excrément séparé de la chair vivante et du corps sacré de l'hiéroglyphe (Artaud) et ce qu'il est dit dans les *Nombres* de la femme assoiffée buvant la poussière d'encre de la loi;³ ou dans *Ézéchiel* de ce fils de l'homme qui remplit ses entrailles du rouleau de la loi devenu dans sa bouche aussi doux que du miel?⁴

*

Earth, ashes and dust are not of course all quite the same thing, even though their association in the liturgy of the Anglican burial service (and its Latin antecedents) brings them close and allows for easy figural substitutions and exchanges.⁵ In terms of a phenomenology of the imagination, dust, unlike earth, is not fertile or sustaining; unlike ashes, which are produced by the visible activity of fire and which, although they always can be scattered, can also be gathered up, preserved and even treasured as a trace of what was burned in their production, dust is *essentially* scatter, matter with no inner principle of gathering or preservation, subject only to dispersion and loss, matter itself insofar as matter just is dispersion. Things may gather dust, but dust itself is not a principle of gathering at all, but at best lies only until the arrival of the breeze that will raise and scatter it to the four winds. Dust, then, may often stand in for ash or earth, but it also has a specificity as a kind of last term or final analysis of earth and ash. This 'final analysis' can then, however, disconcertingly take on apparently spiritualising features, as dust rises like smoke or even vapour. The *OED* begins its rather wordy primary definition of dust: 'Earth or other solid matter in a minute and fine state of subdivision, so that the particles are small and light enough to be easily raised and carried in a cloud by the wind', and, after tracking the etymology of the term through its English, Dutch and German roots, comments: 'All these go back to an earlier *dunst*, whence also German *dunst* vapour; the primary notion being apparently that which rises or is blown in a cloud, like vapour, smoke,

or dust.' The becoming-scatter of dust is the feature that makes it most attractive for a materialism, insofar as 'scatter' is the basic predicate of 'matter' in its philosophical determination.⁶ But the tendential confusion between dust and vapour would tend to complicate and perhaps short-circuit the confidence of such a materialist take on dust. The dust that things gather, the dust that settles and soils, can always be unsettled, disturbed, blown off or blown away, as when a reader blows the dust from his old copy of the works of Shakespeare:⁷ dust becomes most itself when airborne, suspended and sometimes even explosive, motes in the sunlight the figure of the scattered atoms,⁸ tendentially always figurable as what meteorologists sometimes call 'diamond dust', magical and apparently transfigured.

*

Derrida's Shakespeare, mostly *Hamlet* in his published work,⁹ is a Shakespeare of ghosts and disjointed time, an opening to the hauntology that is one figure of the logic of the trace. Shakespeare does not, to my knowledge, appear as part of Derrida's interrogation of the concept of sovereignty. And yet many of Shakespeare's best-known plays (including *Hamlet* itself) are also explorations of the paradoxes of sovereignty, of sovereignty's failings and fallings, vulnerability and perhaps unsustainability, worthy of serious philosophical attention alongside (or perhaps between) Bodin and Hobbes. Although these paradoxes are brought out in many plays (*King Lear* might provide the most obviously 'philosophical' example), in what follows I shall concentrate on *Richard II*,¹⁰ if only because it is the object of an influential chapter in Ernst Kantorowicz's celebrated *The King's Two Bodies*, to which Derrida does indeed on occasion refer in his work on sovereignty.¹¹

Kantorowicz's chapter consists in summary of and commentary on what he calls the 'three bewildering central scenes' of *Richard II* (i.e. Act 3, scenes 2 and 3, and Act 4, scene 1).¹² Here is Kantorowicz's initial presentation of those scenes:

It appears relevant to the general subject of this study, and also otherwise worth our while, to inspect more closely the varieties of royal 'duplications' which Shakespeare has unfolded in the three bewildering central scenes of *Richard II*. The duplications, all one,

and all simultaneously active, in Richard—‘Thus play I in one person many people’ (5.5.31)—are those potentially present in the King, the Fool, and the God. They dissolve, perforce, in the Mirror. Those three prototypes of ‘twin-birth’ intersect and overlap and interfere with each other continuously. Yet, it may be felt that the ‘King’ dominates in the scene on the Coast of Wales (3.2), the ‘Fool’ at Flint Castle (3.3), and the ‘God’ in the Westminster scene (4.1), with Man’s wretchedness as a perpetual companion and antithesis at every stage. Moreover, in each one of those three scenes we encounter the same cascading: from divine kingship to kingship’s ‘Name’, and from the name to the naked misery of man.¹³

After running through these scenes within this logic of duplication and nomination, Kantorowicz brings his chapter to a close by quoting lines, not from Shakespeare himself at all, but from a poem entitled ‘Majesty in Misery’ attributed to Charles I, and presumably written shortly before his execution in 1649, more than half a century after the writing of Shakespeare’s play. These lines end the chapter, with no further commentary from Kantorowicz:

With my own power my majesty they wound,
In the King’s name the king himself uncrowned.
So does the dust destroy the diamond.¹⁴

Kantorowicz, whose readings are throughout rather literal, says nothing at all about the last line here quoted, with its somewhat obscure and sententious analogy. In what sense does the dust destroy the diamond? In the absence of any familiarity with this seemingly quasi-proverbial utterance, we might be forgiven for trying to read the analogy the other way round, as it were: dust, one assumes on this approach, destroys the diamond in the same kind of way, or according to the same logic whereby the king is uncrowned in the name of the King in the previous line. Kantorowicz’s book made famous the logical framework within which that uncrowning is to be understood: the body natural of the king can die and be replaced in the name of the body politic of the King, the immortal King-ship that can come to be embodied in this or that particular mortal body. The lines from Charles I attempt to capture a paradoxical possibility of that logic, whereby it is at least

possible that one body of the king (the King, the body politic) *turn on* and perhaps destroy the other (the king, the body natural), in an operation that it will be tempting for us to refer to Derrida's late mobilisation of tropes of auto-immunity. In our attempt to use this logic to understand the final line of the Charles I poem, it would seem that the relation between the diamond and the dust said to destroy it must be more intimate than would be the case if the dust were here merely a figure for base matter in general, supposed to be far from the prestige and dignity figured by the diamond (giving rise, for example, to the now quite hackneyed image of 'diamonds in the dust'): if the uncrowning of the king is performed in the King's name, so that in a certain sense — as is literally the case in *Richard II* — the King uncrowns himself (even if that operation then be the object of regret and lament, as it is in *Richard II* and the two parts of *Henry IV*), then we must assume the diamond to be destroyed by not just any dust, but by diamond dust itself, by its own waste, as it were, perhaps by the dust generated when a diamond is cut and polished and made into a jewel. Just as — the thought would go — only the King has the power to 'wound' his own majesty (even if that wounding is in fact — still mysteriously — operated or induced by the 'they' of the first line of the tercet), so only diamond dust would be hard enough to destroy a diamond. The dust *is* the diamond. Only a special kind of relation of sovereignty to itself, we might then go on to say on this basis, can bring sovereignty down; or else sovereignty is always such that it tends toward its own destruction, according to a logic not just of 'paregicide', as Derrida has it in 'Psychoanalysis searches the state of its soul', but of 'paregisuicide'.¹⁵ In order to *be* sovereign, we might then suspect, the sovereign always already has to be somewhat *less than* or *other than* sovereign. Exemplarily in Rousseau's political thought (but implicitly throughout the tradition at least from Bodin), the sovereign, to *be* sovereign, must *do* something (let's say, with Schmitt, must *decide* something): but the very agency of that acting or doing (what Rousseau calls the government or the Prince, the executive arm of a sovereign that without that arm would not even 'be' sovereign, but an impossible, momentary and unsustainable self-presence, a kind of body without organs¹⁶) inevitably usurps the sovereignty it is supposedly expressing or enacting, by virtue of the mere fact of that expression or enactment. On this view, the logic of sovereignty is that it is always already usurped

and therefore usurping, tendentially tyrannical and despotic,¹⁷ and this aporia (which can then produce the ‘two bodies’ logic as a local effect, and the sovereign as also always split between ‘kingdom’ and ‘glory’, as in Agamben’s recent work¹⁸) is precisely what *Richard II* dramatises, and dramatises in part precisely by its mobilisation of the figure of dust.¹⁹

*

The non-specialist reader of Shakespeare, blowing the dust from his inherited 1906 Oxford *Complete Works*, will no doubt first remember ‘the way to dusty death’ from *Macbeth* (5.5.23), and the description of man as a ‘quintessence of dust’ from *Hamlet*,²⁰ and perhaps be inclined to refer the motif of dust quite rapidly to an ‘existential’ and all-but Beckettian Shakespeare that would resonate with Kantorowicz’s invocation of ‘the naked misery of man’, and look to late plays such as *King Lear* for confirmation of this view of Shakespeare.²¹ But as we shall see, this same motif of dust can give rise to a more specifically political reading, the more especially in *Richard II* and the subsequent plays in the so-called ‘Henriad’ tetralogy, where, in the narrative arc that goes from the phantasmatically true sovereign past of the reign of Edward III to the (supposedly) triumphantly recovered sovereignty of the end of *Henry V* (that sovereignty each time being confirmed by the conquest of France, a kind of over-reaching of sovereignty that is just part of the logic of sovereignty²²), dust will appear as a troubled and troubling figure of the internal conceptual crisis that is sovereignty itself. This ‘crisis’ is not merely a crisis in a historically-bound concept of sovereignty (as masterfully laid out in their rather different ways by, for example, Kantorowicz and Greenblatt), nor even merely a logical crisis in the concept of sovereignty itself *qua* concept, but a crisis in the conceptual order as such, a crisis within that politics of the concept that is habitually called philosophy: the dust of deconstruction.²³

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In Act 2, scene 1 of *Richard II*, after the death of John of Gaunt and Richard’s expropriation of his property (which will be the ostensible motif for Bolingbroke’s premature return from exile),

Northumberland, Ross and Willoughby agree to support Bolingbroke *in the name of* the traditional symbols of the majesty of the King, that Richard is taken to have betrayed or at least neglected: announcing the news of Bolingbroke's return expedition from France, Northumberland says:

If, then, we shall shake off our slavish yoke,
 Imp out our drooping country's broken wing,
 Redeem from broking pawn the blemished crown,
 Wipe off the dust that hides our sceptre's gilt,
 And make high majesty look like itself . . . (2.1.291–5)

Richard has allowed dust to settle and accumulate, to obscure the glory of the King, and that dust must therefore be removed, even on pain of rebellion against the current failed embodiment of that majesty (just a little earlier, Northumberland has said 'The King is not himself, but basely led/ By flatterers . . .' (2.1.241–2), where the motif of the 'base', also famously important in the play, will always communicate with that of dust). Richard's very extravagance as monarch, what he himself refers to as 'too great a court / And liberal largesse' (1.4.43–4), far from confirming the glory or majesty of his status as sovereign, has led to the compromise of that glory with the dust that is majesty's apparent opposite: the choric Gardener in Act 3, scene 4 refers to the 'wasteful King',²⁴ and elsewhere his profligacy is blamed for the putative ruin of the kingdom itself and thus also for, as it were, the Kingdom of that kingdom in the figure of the King's compromised majesty, as demonstrated by his need to 'farm our royal realm' (1.4.45). The dust that has gathered on the sceptre is thus in a certain sense the very refuse of that sceptre itself, the dust of the diamond that sovereignty is supposed to be, and the intention to 'wipe off the dust' is correspondingly a naive one, as the subsequent action of the play and the two parts of *Henry IV* will go on to show.

Indeed this is precisely the logic of Gaunt's all-too famous 'sceptr'd isle' speech, where the notorious uplifting sweep of images of England figures as a phantasy of immunity within what is a broader logic of auto-immunity, such that 'This fortress built by Nature for herself / Against infection and the hand of war' and which by extension 'was wont to conquer others', now 'hath made a shameful conquest of itself

by being 'leas'd out / Like to a tenement or pelting farm' (2.1.40–60). On our reading, this auto-immune process will always tend to turn England, that diamond ('This precious stone set in the silver sea') from being land ('This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land') or earth ('This earth of majesty', 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England') into mere dust. This transformation is not simply the result of an *insufficient* sovereignty, of Richard's being a 'bad king',²⁵ but precisely a result of too sovereign a sovereignty, Richard's 'rash fierce blaze of riot' being, in almost Bataillean fashion, the flaring and flaming out of sovereignty in the very instant of its exercise. This coincidence of the exercise of sovereignty with its ruin will complicate all the axes of rise and fall, of ascent and descent, that have habitually organised the most authoritative readings of the play. Where, for example, Marjorie Garber wants to see in Richard's sovereign interruption of the contest between Mowbray and Bolingbroke in Act 1, scene 3 (an interruption that is signalled by Richard's throwing his 'warder' down — the warder being a baton symbolic of the sovereign) a premonition of his coming fall in the downward trajectory of the warder, prefiguring for example his famous descent to meet Bolingbroke into the 'base court' of Flint castle in Act 3, scene 3,²⁶ we might want to say that this downward movement, this decline away from a supposedly solar apogee, just is an intrinsic part of sovereignty itself from the start, insofar as it is exercised in always singular *cases*, such that sovereignty *is* its own fall, and that, again in a figure that Bataille brings out most clearly, the supposed *de casibus* begins from the very outset.²⁷ This should affect our understanding of all the very many figures of rising and falling in the play, including Richard's famous image in Act 4, scene 1 of the crown as a well with two buckets that rise and fall, where the polarity of high and low is not straightforwardly decidable in terms of the locus of sovereignty, the higher, empty bucket 'dancing in the air' being deprived of any legitimate *gravitas* and dignity.²⁸ *Altus* also means deep, and nothing in these plays stabilises sovereignty in terms of either height or depth.

It is of course tempting, faced with rich and complex images of this sort, to describe Richard himself as a 'poet', perhaps even an 'exquisite poet' as does Walter Pater,²⁹ and perhaps to seek in his poetic accomplishments a point of contrast to his sovereign failings. Harold Bloom, for example, finds a nice pattern of compensation whereby Richard's loss of human dignity is matched by a rise in

what Bloom calls ‘aesthetic dignity’,³⁰ and can more generally say, a little condescendingly, that Richard is a ‘bad king’ but ‘an interesting metaphysical poet’.³¹ This view might, indeed, look for some support to Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, no less, in which Richard’s two-bucket speech figures precisely as an example of a kind of a character’s poetic liberation from inner passion and grief in the discovery of a simile based in some external object. In drama in general, says Hegel, as opposed to epic poetry, ‘it is the *dramatis personae* who appear as themselves the poets and artists, since they make their inner life an object to themselves, an object which they remain powerful enough to shape and form and thus to manifest to us the nobility of their disposition and the might of their mind’, this shaping and forming producing images that bespeak a ‘release from passion’s power’. In this context, Richard’s image of the buckets shows that ‘however much [Richard’s heart] secludes itself in its grief [it] yet retains the force to set it steadily before itself in new comparisons’.³² Once we decide that *dramatis personae* can be poets, then their relationship between the poetry they speak as the characters they are and the lines written for them by the dramatist becomes complex. Whatever we think of Richard, we are presumably not going to attribute to him *simple* authorship of the lines he speaks, and this means that however we are to understand Hegel’s point, it does at least mean that Richard is not a king and a poet at quite the same level of analysis, and so the supposed contrast between ‘bad king’ and ‘interesting poet’ that Bloom, Pater and Yeats all assume, becomes harder to construe. This difficulty is then peculiarly concentrated in that moment near the end of the play where Richard, now imprisoned at Pomfret, is explicitly presented as composing poetry in his solitude, or more accurately as commenting on his own unsuccessful efforts to compose poetry:

I have been studying how I may compare
 This prison where I live unto the world
 And, for because the world is populous
 And here is not a creature but myself,
 I cannot do it. (5.5.1–5)

And although Richard immediately goes on, ‘Yet I’ll hammer’t out’, and proceeds to generate a number of self-consciously ‘metaphysical’ conceits (to the extent that Bloom wonders if Shakespeare had not been

reading Donne in manuscript),³³ all these lines are a quite explicit *mise en scène* and thereby *mise en abyme* of poetry, that is then no longer simply poetry. Richard is a ‘poet’ in Hegel’s sense merely by virtue of being a character in the play and thus, at an elementary level of diegetical analysis, the speaker of his own words: it happens that in this case Richard is also worth calling a ‘poet’ at this second level, at which the character poetically represents himself as struggling to produce a poetry adequate to his situation.³⁴ Any ‘aesthetic dignity’ we may wish to ascribe to Richard at the first level, along broadly Hegelian lines, is at the very least unsettled by the *mise en abyme* effect generated at this second level, where Richard’s ‘aesthetic’ sovereignty is no more secure than is his political sovereignty at the first level, as dramatised here by his declared failure to make the conceits work. The ‘poetic’ sovereignty we may still feel inclined to attribute to Shakespeare, as author of the whole work (the one who really did ‘hammer it out’), remains as a question, but given this embedded scene of a poet struggling and rather failing to produce his conceits, that sovereignty would at the very least have to be carefully separated out from the political model of sovereignty that is falling into dust throughout the play, so that the kind of sovereignty we might after all be inclined to attribute to Shakespeare might look a little more like the kind of ‘sovereignty’ beyond sovereignty that Derrida associates with Celan, to which some negative access is provided by the demonstration of the intrinsic failing of political sovereignty at the thematic level.³⁵

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It is Richard’s sovereign profligacy that means that in order to finance his war in Ireland he must seize the property of Gaunt after the latter’s death, thus dispossessing Bolingbroke of an inheritance that, in spite of the latter’s exile, is consistently presented in the text as rightfully his.³⁶ As York points out to Richard, the latter’s not respecting the laws of inheritance that should allow Bolingbroke — here referred to as Hereford, and whose exile is temporary — to reclaim the inheritance of John of Gaunt, implicitly amounts to attacking his own inherited legitimacy, therewith his sovereignty, and in so doing invite the disaster to come. It is entirely characteristic of this play at least that Richard’s attempt to respond sovereignly, with a performative ‘we seize’, a

peremptory decision not to be further discussed, should again be a sign of sovereignty's parengisucidal or auto-immune structure:

YORK. Seek you to seize and gripe into your hands
 The royalties and rights of banished Hereford?
 Is not Gaunt dead? And doth not Hereford live?
 Was not Gaunt just? And is not Harry true?
 Did not the one deserve to have an heir?
 Is not his heir a well-deserving son?
 Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time
 His charters and his customary rights;
 Let not tomorrow then ensue today;
 Be not thyself, for how art thou a king
 But by fair sequence and succession?
 Now, afore God — God forbid I say true —
 If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights,
 Call in the letters patents that he hath
 By his attorneys-general to sue
 His livery and deny his offered homage,
 You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
 You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts
 And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
 Which honour and allegiance cannot think.
 KING RICHARD. Think what you will,
 we seize into our hands
 His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands. (2.1.189–210)

'Fair sequence and succession' is, however, just what sovereignty, more especially in its monarchic form, cannot ever quite secure: that tomorrow 'ensue' today will always in fact suffice to undo sovereignty even as it strives to be itself when it is itself, which is always today. At the beginning of *Henry V*, the long and involved argument supposed to establish Henry's legitimate claim on the throne of France (1.2.35–95) in fact bespeaks a sovereignty lost since ever, lost forever, and the exchanges between Hal and the dying Henry IV at the end of Act 4 of *Henry IV Part 2* hardly encourage a sense of stability in the transmission of sovereignty from father to son: even after the calming of Henry's initial indignation on his suspicion that Hal has stolen the crown in

eager anticipation of his death ('Only compound me with forgotten dust' [4.5.115]), his claim that the illegitimacy of his own accession to it will disappear with that death ('all the soil of the achievement goes/ With me into the earth' [4.5.189–90]) is less than convincing in the light again of an auto-immune logic, which dictates his immediate need to advise Hal to 'busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days' (4.5.213–5), those 'giddy minds' being the minds precisely of those who earlier advanced Henry's cause against Richard, 'my friends [...] / By whose fell working I was first advanc'd, / And by whose power I well might lodge a fear / To be again displac'd' (4.5.204–8).

*

After Richard has formally renounced his sovereignty in the third of the scenes that Kantorowicz analyses, we hear retrospectively from York the narrative of the diegetically prior arrival of Bolingbroke and Richard in London, and dust again appears (5.2). Here the dust generated by an excessive (sovereign) exercise of sovereignty does not simply accumulate on the symbols of that sovereignty, nor is it simply associated with the earth or land over which that sovereignty is supposed to be exercised; rather, in a figure striking enough for Shakespeare to find a way to use it twice here, and then recall it explicitly in *2 Henry IV*, the spectators to Richard's abject entry into London, in the wake of an already apparently solar and acclaimed Bolingbroke, *throw dust down from above* onto the sovereign's head.³⁷ The importance of this moment is emphasised by the fact that this is precisely the moment at which an ongoing narrative, to which the spectator has not been privy, was interrupted and is to pick up again, and immediately follows Richard's final separation from his Queen, and departure to imprisonment and death:

DUCHESS. My Lord, you told me you would tell the rest,
 When weeping made you break the story off
 Of our two cousins' coming into London.
 YORK. Where did I leave?
 DUCHESS. At that sad stop, my lord,
 Where rude misgoverned hands from windows' tops
 Threw dust and rubbish on King Richard's head. (5.2.1–6)

Riding after a Bolingbroke who is acclaimed by the crowd (but also, as is repeatedly stressed in the play, pandering to the crowd), this moment where the fictitious narrative had paused can then be narrated again, here not coincidentally after an extended figure of theatricality:

DUCHESS. Alack, poor Richard! Where rode he the whilst?
 YORK. As in a theatre the eyes of men,
 After a well-grac'd actor leaves the stage,
 Are idly bent on him that enters next,
 Thinking his prattle to be tedious,³⁸
 Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes
 Did scowl on gentle Richard. No man cried God save him!
 No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home,
 But dust was thrown upon his sacred head. (5.2.22–30)

The association that the earlier instance had established between 'dust' and 'rubbish' (but the word 'dust' also means 'rubbish', whence dustmen and dustbins) can then return in a hyperbolic and even quite lurid form when this episode is recalled by the Archbishop in *Henry IV Part 2* (Act 1, scene 3) where dust and rubbish line up thematically quite easily with other forms of waste and refuse, again in explicitly auto-immune terms, as Bolingbroke now suffers the failing of sovereignty:

The commonwealth is sick of their own choice;
 Their over-greedy love hath surfeited.
 An habitation giddy and unsure
 Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.
 O thou fond many, with what loud applause
 Didst thou beat heaven with blessing Bolingbroke
 Before he was what thou wouldst have him be!
 And being now trimm'd in thine own desires,
 Thou, beastly feeder, art so full of him
 That thou provok'st thyself to cast him up.
 So, so, thou common dog, didst thou disgorge
 Thy glutton bosom of the royal Richard;
 And now thou wouldst eat thy dead vomit up,
 And howl'st to find it. What trust is in these times?

They that, when Richard liv'd, would have him die
 Are now become enamour'd on his grave.
 Thou that threw'st dust upon his goodly head,
 When through proud London he came sighing on
 After th' admired heels of Bolingbroke,
 Criest now 'O earth, yield us that king again,
 And take thou this!' O thoughts of men accur's'd!
 Past and to come seems best; things present,
 worst. (1.3.87–108)

This quite striking figure allows for a more complex representation of the relationship between sovereign and subject than is often the case: here what is intuitively a figure of all that is base (dust as figure of the abject: earth, rubbish, even dog's vomit) paradoxically comes down from on high onto the high point (the crown of the head) of the most high (the Sovereign). The king (who at this point in the diegesis of *Richard II* is still the King) is subject, in an apparent inversion one might imagine the Bataille of *The Solar Anus* would have appreciated, to a kind of *debasement from above*. In *Richard II*, this figure clearly prepares the way for Bolingbroke's similar fate as Henry IV, and its initial statement at the beginning of the scene already contaminates the sense of the apparently contrastive picture of Bolingbroke's prior arrival in triumph, both in that the adulation he receives also comes from the same high windows from which the dust and rubbish are thrown on Richard, and in that his anticipatory display of sovereignty has him positioned *lower* than the neck of the horse he is riding (already down on his way up, as it were), a horse we subsequently learn was Richard's own:

YORK. Then, as I said, the Duke, great Bolingbroke,
 Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed
 Which his aspiring rider seemed to know,
 With slow but stately pace kept on his course,
 Whilst all tongues cried 'God save thee, Bolingbroke!
 You would have thought the very windows spake,
 So many greedy looks of young and old
 Through casements darted their desiring eyes
 Upon his visage; and that all the walls

With painted imagery had said at once
 'Jesu preserve thee! Welcome, Bolingbroke!
 Whilst he, from the one side to the other turning,
 Bare-headed, lower than his proud steed's neck,
 Bespake them thus: 'I thank you, countrymen';
 And thus still doing, thus he passed along. (5.2.7–21)

And this in turn has been prepared by the symmetrical narrative of the much earlier scene of Bolingbroke's departure into exile in Act 1, scene 4:

Ourself, and Bushy, Bagot here, and Green,
 Observ'd his courtship to the common people;
 How he did seem to dive into their hearts
 With humble and familiar courtesy;
 What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
 And patient underbearing of his fortune,
 As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
 Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
 A brace of draymen bid God speed him well
 And had the tribute of his supple knee,
 With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends';
 As were our England in reversion his,
 And he our subjects' next degree in hope. (1.4.23–36)

The dust thrown down on Richard's head, then, is part of a configuration that we might take to be a complication in the logic of sovereignty itself: Bolingbroke's ingratiating himself with the oyster-wench and the draymen figures, within sovereignist logic, a kind of incipient perversion of a sovereignty here unduly subjecting itself to its supposed subjects. This perversion, exploited by Bolingbroke as a means to achieve a henceforth always unstable sovereignty (subject as he is to being vomited up in his turn in *2 Henry IV*), is presented here as rather literally *befalling* Richard.

These scenes, which are not in Kantorowicz's explicit purview (and this is perhaps in part why he finds the scenes he does read 'bewildering'), in fact point to a logic of contamination that must be logically prior to the essentially dialectical patterns that Kantorowicz

brings out. This contamination can be confirmed by following further the associations between dust, earth, soil and land. When Bolingbroke returns and is confronted by his uncle York (to whom Richard himself has delegated power while he is at war in Ireland, such that York can, wholly in the official logic of the King's two bodies, assert that even though 'the anointed King is hence', nonetheless 'the King is left behind' in the person of York himself, his delegate or deputy), York, in a sequence that goes on to contrast Bolingbroke unfavourably with Richard's father, the so-called Black Prince (himself son of Edward III, who stands in the play as the absent figure of a true sovereignty now lost), angrily demands to know 'Why have those banished legs/ Dared once to touch a dust of England's ground?' (2.3.90–91).

This 'dust of England's ground' has our motif of dust communicate with some of the best-known moments of the play, beginning with Gaunt's famous 'sceptred isle' speech mentioned above. In this configuration, dust is both the ground or earth which on the one hand sustains vegetable growth and life in the privileged form of gardening and the reviled form of 'farming', and on the other is that in and to which the dead return, in a way that also brings dust back to the earth and ashes with which it is liturgically so close. As often in Shakespeare, earth as dust rises and scatters in the wind, most often in contexts of warfare and bloodshed, so that that dust can be 'laid' with tears or blood: here in *Richard II*, for example, in the Flint castle scene analysed by Kantorowicz, Bolingbroke, still apparently not claiming the crown but only his inheritance and the repeal of his banishment, by preterition evokes a scene of dust, earth and blood:

If not, I'll use the advantage of my power
 And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood
 Rain'd from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen;
 The which how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke
 It is such crimson tempest should bedrench
 The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's land,
 My stooping duty tenderly shall show. (3.3.42–8)

And a little later, Carlisle's impassioned protest against news of Richard's abdication gathers these figures again in a way that clearly shows the links to the logic of the two bodies:

And shall the figure of God's majesty,
 His captain, steward, deputy elect,
 Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
 Be judg'd by subject and inferior breath,
 And he himself not present? O, forfend it, God,
 That in a Christian climate souls refin'd
 Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed!
 I speak to subjects, and a subject speaks,
 Stirr'd up by God, thus boldly for his king.
 My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
 Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king;
 And if you crown him, let me prophesy-
 The blood of English shall manure the ground,
 And future ages groan for this foul act;
 Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
 And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
 Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
 Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny,
 Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
 The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
 O, if you raise this house against this house,
 It will the woefullest division prove
 That ever fell upon this cursed earth. (4.1.126–48)

*

The dust thrown down on Richard's head is also clearly enough a figure for the throwing of earth onto the coffin placed in the ground, during or immediately after the 'dust to dust' moment of the burial service.³⁹ But these associations of dust can then allow for some bravura conceits in one of Richard's more famous 'histrionic' speeches, where dust becomes the very surface of inscription on which the king-turned-poet-of-the-death-of-kings writes the narrative of the immanent death of sovereignty as theorised by Shakespeare:

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
 Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
 Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.

Let's choose executors and talk of wills;
 And yet not so — for what can we bequeath
 Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
 Our lands, our lives and all are Bolingbroke's.
 And nothing can we call our own but death
 And that small model of the barren earth
 Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
 For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings —
 How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
 Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping killed —
 All murder'd. 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 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, humour'd thus,
 Comes at the last and with a little pin
 Bores through his castle wall, and farewell, king! (3.2.145–70)

*

Make dust our paper. It is not that paper turns to dust, but that dust, the figure we have tried to link to an internal crumbling of the principle of sovereignty, becomes the possibility for that other, poetic, 'sovereignty' we were earlier suggesting we might, cautiously, want to attribute to Shakespeare. If, earlier, we were able to complicate the traditional 'aesthetic' view of Richard as a poet (a view, we might add, that connects seamlessly with an earlier tendency to condemn him for undue effeminacy or at least lack of 'manliness', supposedly the very mark of a 'bad king'), and to do so by pointing to the operation of a *mise en scène* as *mise en abyme* of poetry itself, then here that structure is itself brought to a kind of crisis point. It is not just that, still following Hegel, we might be inclined to say that in such images 'there lies at the same time the peace and inherent tranquillity of character by

which a man appeases himself in his grief and fall', so that (in Hegel's favourite Shakespeare example of Cleopatra's death) 'this image can itself be counted as an image for the gentle and tranquillizing nature of these comparisons'. Rather than the specific further, supplementary, image according to which that image of images (allegorised here as *telling* 'sad stories of the death of kings', so that Richard's own sad story is able to capitalise, as it were, on the stories of others it now includes within itself) is here linked to its own staging, allegorically as sitting on the ground and metaphorically as inscription with tears in the dust. Hegel moves straight from discussion of these images of death as images of the image in Shakespeare to the 'disappearance of the symbolic form of art' in general, meaning by 'symbolic form of art' that form where 'a complete reciprocal interpenetration of meaning and expression could not be thoroughly established'. The supplementary image of dust might then be taken to be precisely an image of that impossibility and a confirmation of Hegel's general position. But it could also suggest that that impossibility is not to be confined in this way, but is constitutive of anything like 'art' at all. On this reading, making dust our paper insists on an aspect of *Richard II* that not only blocks the redemptive quality Hegel ascribes to such images in general (and might also in so doing further confirm the difference of dust from earth and ashes) but in being a further image of Hegel's image of the image, suggests a persistence of an imbalance between 'meaning and expression' that will in fact be irreducible, dust in the eye of an idealism whose own tears might now themselves write a sorrow accessible to no sovereign at all, only thereby becoming readable at all, *cette poussière grise de mots*.

Notes

- ¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Postface: Vers une éthique de la discussion', in *Limited Inc* (Paris, Galilée., 1990), 217; trans. Samuel Weber as 'Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion' in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1988), 120: Weber translates 'tomberait en poussière' as 'would disintegrate'.
- ² Jacques Derrida, *Feu la cendre* (Paris, Des Femmes, 1987), 25 and 37: 'This grey dust of words', 'a dust of words that are ash itself' [my translation].
- ³ This appears to be a reference to *Numbers* 5, 11–31, where however the woman is not thirsty or parched, but accused of adultery by her husband: the process for determining her guilt or innocence involves her being obliged to drink 'bitter water' produced first by the priest's mixing water with 'the dust that is in the floor of the

tabernacle', and then using that mixture to 'blot out' a curse written in a book. But as we shall see, the association of ink and dust is not trivial.

- ⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris, Seuil, 1967), 293–340 (p. 340); trans. Alan Bass as 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978), 196–231 (p. 231): 'How, for example, on the stage of history, can writing as excrement separated from the living flesh and the sacred body of the hieroglyph (Artaud), be put into communication with what is said in *Numbers* about the parched woman drinking the inky dust of the law; or what is said in *Ezekiel* about the son of man who fills his entrails with the scroll of the law which has become as sweet as honey in his mouth?'
- ⁵ The quasi-proverbial phrase associating ashes and dust appears in the traditional Anglican burial service in a 'two-bodies' logic as follows: '... we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.' The biblical inspiration for these words seems most immediately to be *Genesis* 3:19: '... till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (see too *Ecclesiastes* 3:20 and *Job* 10:9), and was incorporated into Cranmer's 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* as a direct translation of the Latin 'terram terrae: cinerem cineri: pulverum pulveri' (see Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: the Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. xvi; a form of this sequence as 'terram terre; pulverum pulveri' appears for example in the 14th-century *Liber Pontificalis* of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter (ed. Ralph Barnes, Exeter, 1847), p. 272). The immediate association of dust and ashes can also be found in the Bible at, for example, *Genesis* 18:27 and *Job* 30:19 and 42:6. The sequence 'ground — earth — ashes — dust', linked to a 'two bodies' logic, is the matrix for everything that follows.
- ⁶ See Derrida's commentary on Hegel's remarks from the *Philosophy of History* in *Glas* (Paris, Galilée, 1974), 29a–31a.
- ⁷ For a discussion of some of the dangers of breathing the dust from old books, see Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002), especially pp. 19–27. Steedman, who begins her book with commentary on Derrida's *Archive Fever*, and discusses primarily nineteenth-century materials, including Dickens's monument to dust, *Our Mutual Friend*, ends up arguing that dust is *not* a figure of rubbish and waste, but of what

she thinks is the 'opposite' principle, namely one of 'circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone' (p. 164). This 'Philosophy of Dust' (p. 165) is then related to the very activity of writing history. I am less convinced than Steedman that these principles are really so 'opposite'.

- ⁸ 'The stuff of the universe, Lucretius proposed, is an infinite number of atoms moving randomly through space, like dust motes in a sunbeam...' (Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York and London, Norton, 2011), 5. The image can be found in *De Rerum Natura*, II, 114–17.
- ⁹ Not to forget the text on Romeo and Juliet, 'L'aphorisme à contretemps', in *Psyché*. Portia's famous speech on 'the quality of mercy' from *The Merchant of Venice* is the object of extensive commentary in the seminars on forgiveness. See too 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction relevante?', in Derrida cahier of *L'herne*, 2004, 561–76.
- ¹⁰ I quote *Richard II* from the edition by Charles R. Forker for the Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London, Methuen, 2002).
- ¹¹ See *Séminaire La bête et le souverain I* (Paris: Galilée, 2008), 39, 382, 393, 454; trans. Geoffrey Bennington as *The Beast and the Sovereign I*, 18, 285, 295, 342. I have pursued these references elsewhere: see 'Derrida's Dignity' (forthcoming).
- ¹² Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957), 26–7.
- ¹³ Kantorowicz, 27.
- ¹⁴ Kantorowicz, 41, where the quotation has a couple of slight discrepancies from the version given in Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry* (1765), itself apparently taken from Gilbert Burnet's 1677 *Memoirs of the Lives and Actions of James and William, dukes of Hamilton and Castleherald*: 'With my own power my majesty they wound, / In the king's name the king himself's uncrown'd; / So doth the dust destroy the diamond.' Hume commented that these were 'verses, which the truth of the sentiment, rather than any elegance of expression, renders very pathetic.' (David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, Foreword by William B. Todd, 6 vols. (Indianapolis, Liberty Fund 1983). Vol. 5. Chapter LIX. Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/792/67349> on 19 March 2012.
- ¹⁵ I proposed this term as an extension of Derrida's in 'Superanus', a paper first given in French to the Journées Philosophie-Psychanalyse de Castries in July 2001, published in English under the same title in *Theory and Event* 8:1 (2005), unpaginated e-journal.
- ¹⁶ In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau's sovereign body has no voice (Book II Chapter 6), whence the need for a legislator, and would be analogically 'paralytic' (Book III Chapters 1 and 11) without a government.

- ¹⁷ See the nice distinction Rousseau draws between tyrant and despot in Book III Chapter 10 of the *Social Contract*. In view of what follows, it is perhaps not irrelevant to recall that the historical Richard II was indeed explicitly accused of tyranny: see C.D. Fletcher, 'Narrative and Political Strategies at the Deposition of Richard II', *Journal of Medieval History*, 30 (2004), 323–41 (pp. 325–6). In Bodin, the tendential tyranny of the sovereign is obliquely the motivation for an argument that will reappear in Hobbes and Kant, namely that 'it is never permissible for a subject to attempt anything against a sovereign prince, not matter how wicked and cruel a tyrant he be' — Bodin's point is that if this *were* lawful, then almost any sovereign could be *called* a tyrant, and then killed on that pretext. See Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters from the Six Books of the Commonwealth*, ed. and trans. Julian H. Franklin (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 120.
- ¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa and Matteo Mandarini (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁹ I am indebted in what follows to Marie-Louise Mallet, whose essay 'L'aveugle et le souverain', in Fernanda Bernardo, ed., *Derrida à Coimbra* (Viseu, Palimage Editores, 2005), 107–30, traces detailed parallels between the undoing of Richard II's sovereignty and ipseity and Jacques Derrida's descriptions in his later work. On the relation of Shakespeare and Derrida on the question of sovereignty, I am very grateful to Mareile Pfannebecker, who kindly let me read a forthcoming paper entitled 'Cyborg Coriolanus: Monster body politic', which among many other virtues explores in some detail the relation with Hobbes, and an earlier unpublished paper on the language of the other in *Richard II*. More especially, I have learned most of what I know about Shakespeare and Derrida from Nicholas Royle, to whom this article is naturally dedicated.
- ²⁰ 'What a piece of work is a man — how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals. And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?' (2.2.269–74)
- ²¹ Dust is in fact a rather discreet motif in *Lear*: see however 4.2.31–2, where Albany says to Goneril 'You are not worth the dust which the rude wind / Blows in your face.'
- ²² See Stephen Greenblatt's helpful commentary in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988), 59.
- ²³ To that extent, the present analysis is looking toward the conditions of the historical configurations expertly laid out by Kantorowicz and Greenblatt, and notably of what the latter identifies, precisely in *Richard II*, as 'the representation of a

self-undermining authority' (*Shakespearean Negotiations*, 40). Pursuing this line of thought would rapidly bring us back to the important differences between a Foucauldian sense of the historical *a priori* and a Derridean sense of the quasi-transcendental.

- ²⁴ 'Bolingbroke/ Hath seiz'd the wasteful King. O, what pity is it / That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land / As we this garden! We at time of year / Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit trees, / Lest, being over-proud in sap and blood, / With too much riches it confound itself; / Had he done so to great and growing men, / They might have Ev'd to bear, and he to taste / Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches / We lop away, that bearing boughs may live; / Had he done so, himself had home the crown, / Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.' We shall see shortly that the motif of dust communicates both with that of the earth in which the garden grows, and with that of blood, here figured as sap (3.4.54–66).
- ²⁵ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York, Riverhead Books, 1998), 249.
- ²⁶ Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York, Random House, 2004), 243.
- ²⁷ Georges Bataille, 'Le sommet et le déclin', in *Sur Nietzsche: 'A sort of solar burst, independent of the consequences [...] Just as the summit is in the end merely the inaccessible, decline is from the start the inevitable'* (in *Oeuvres complètes VI* (Paris, Gallimard, 1973), 49, 57; my translation.
- ²⁸ See Charles R. Forker's note on this image, *Richard II*, ed. cit., 397, which also references Dr Johnson's reservations about the image. Forker also points out that in an earlier image in which Richard and Bolingbroke are described by the Gardener as being weighed on a scale, Richard is the higher of the two in his very lightness and vanity. This specific image is also the object of commentary by Hegel, in the section of the *Aesthetics* that deals with simile as a feature of 'symbolic' art: see note 32, below.
- ²⁹ 'One gracious prerogative, certainly, Shakespeare's English kings possess: they are a very eloquent company, and Richard is the most sweet-tongued of them all [...] an exquisite poet if he is nothing else [...] able to see all things poetically, to give a poetic turn to his conduct of them, and refreshing with his golden language the tritest aspects of that ironic contrast between the pretensions of a king and the actual necessities of his destiny.' Walter Pater, from 'Shakespeare's English Kings', in *Shakespeare: the Critical Tradition*, 296. See too Swinburne's acid comments on this aspect of Richard, *Ibid.*, 397, and Yeats's celebration of Richard along similar lines, *Ibid.*, 373–8.
- ³⁰ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 268–70.
- ³¹ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 249.

- ³² *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975), I, 418–21.
- ³³ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 253.
- ³⁴ See too the moment in Act 3, scene 3 where Richard develops a sequence of thought that moves again from the name toward earth and dust ('Or I'll be buried in the King's highway, / Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet / May hourly trample on their sovereign's head'), and seeing Aumerle weeping, generates a conceit (contested in the critical tradition) whereby their tears will make 'foul weather', ruin the crops and 'make a dearth in this revolting land', and then: 'Or shall we play the wanton with our woes / And make some pretty match with shedding tears, / As thus, to drop them still upon one place / Till they have fretted us a pair of graves / Within the earth; and, therein laid, there lies / Two kinsmen digged their graves with weeping eyes?' This ends with a self-deprecating rhyming couplet that again complicates our understanding of Richard as poet: 'Would not this ill do well? Well, well, I see / I talk but idly, and you laugh at me.' (3.3.155–71)
- ³⁵ See especially Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York, Fordham University Press, 2005). This would also be the point for discussion of the quite fraught relationship between *Richard II* and its 'precursor text' Marlowe's *Edward II*, where the poetic qualities of the two deposed sovereigns cannot but be read against the implied claim to poetic sovereignty of Shakespeare against Marlowe. The character of Edward III 'within' the *Henriad*, and indeed the play *Edward III*, now attributed in large part to Shakespeare, would be central to such a discussion. In our immediate figural context, see *Edward III*, lines 1213–15: 'Here flew a head dissevered from the trunk / there mangled arms and legs were tossed aloft / as when a whirlwind takes the summer dust / and scatters it in middle of the air.'
- ³⁶ For a demonstration that, legally speaking, the historical Bolingbroke was not in fact disinherited by Richard, even though a language of disinheritance was used to justify his return and seizure of the crown, see Fletcher, 'Narrative and Political Strategies', 340.
- ³⁷ This passage already attracted the admiration of Dryden in the preface to his own 1679 play *Troilus and Cressida*: 'the painting of it is so lively, and the words so moving, that I have scarce read any thing comparable to it, in any other language.' Quoted by Charles R. Forker, 'Introduction' to *Shakespeare: the Critical Tradition* (London, Athlone, 1998), 2.
- ³⁸ In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 266, Harold Bloom unaccountably cites these lines to support the claim that *Richard* has become a 'grand actor', whereas in York's simile it is Bolingbroke who is the 'well-grac'd' actor and Richard

the disparaged one who enters subsequently. Compare the more accurate account by Charles R. Forker in his 'Introduction' to his edition of the play (p. 40), where, however, as so often in literary criticism, the concept of 'irony' is rather easily invoked to bear the weight of all the aporias we are attempting to bring out here.

³⁹ See too Laertes's interruption of Ophelia's funeral in *Hamlet*, Act 5, scene 1, where he jumps into the grave and says, 'Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead / Till of this flat a mountain you have made / T'o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head / Of blue Olympus', these lines following shortly after Hamlet's own Yorick-inspired meditation on dust: 'To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole? [...] Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam (whereto he was converted) might they not stop a beer barrel?/ Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away. / O, that that earth which kept the world in awe / Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw! (5.1.192–205)