The Figure of Stigma in Shakespeare's Drama

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This article theorizes a tradition in William Shakespeare's drama involving some of his greatest and most captivating characters, including, among others, Richard III, Aaron the Moor, Shylock the Jew, Edmund the Bastard, Falstaff, Thersites, and Caliban. With some rotations in the cast, this set of characters was first dubbed "the evil" by Bernard Spivack (1958), then "the strangers" by Leslie A. Fiedler (1972), and most recently "the villains" by Maurice Charney (2012) and "the outsiders" by Marianne Novy (2013). These characters point back to the Vice of earlier English drama, as Spivack observes, but Novy deserves special recognition for her argument that their identities are not fixed but relative. Shakespeare's outsiders become insiders, she points out, and some are outsiders among the other characters in the drama yet insiders with us in the audience, a characteristic inherited from the Vice.

Yet Novy's own use of the label "outsiders," like Fiedler's "strangers," gives the impression of a certifiable character type on par with the braggart soldier or the clever slave. If the identities of these characters are indeed relative, then we need a way to think about them not only as characters but also as components of cultural paradigms and artistic designs. In this article therefore I combine the literary historian Erich Auerbach's ([1946] 1953) account of "figural realism" with the sociologist Erving Goffman's (1963) theory of "stigma" to establish a vocabulary to explain how Shakespeare applied, rearranged, avoided, and dismantled what I call the "figure of stigma."

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While the figure of stigma extends well beyond Shakespeare's first and most famous stigmatized character, Richard III, my use of the term *stigma* hinges on this example. Shakespeare (1997, *2 Henry VI*, 5.1.215, *3 Henry VI*, 2.2.136)[1] twice used the word "stigmatic" to refer to the physically deformed Richard. He then used the dramatic strategy he developed with Richard to represent a series of other characters marked as different for reasons other than physical deformity. Characters such as Richard, Aaron, Shylock, Falstaff, and Caliban are all outsiders, sure, but they are also marked as such by some theatrical appendage. They are physically deformed, or racially different, or wear some costume identifying them as aberrant. They are sources of conflict, but they are also sources of humor and sympathy from the audience. They are consequently objects of fascination for critics, often upstaging the heroes who conquer, control, and kill or expel them at the ends of Shakespeare's plays.

My wager is that we can use the word *stigma* to describe Shakespeare's strategy for handling these characters, not only in the case of Richard III, who is explicitly called a "stigmatic," but also in the cases of the other characters who recall Richard's place and function in the drama even though they are not called stigmatics.[2] In other words, I am arguing that Shakespeare made stigma into a dramatic strategy, giving artistic form to a social phenomenon.

I. Stigma as Drama

As Goffman notes in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), stigma has traditionally been defined as an attribute. It began in ancient Greece with the practice of branding or tattooing slaves and criminals to identify them as such, making stigma a physical phenomenon. In the modern age, however, stigma evolved into a moral phenomenon, a "spoiled identity." For his part Goffman

1. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1997). Text references are to act, scene, and line of this edition.

2. This argument builds upon a foundation in Wilson 2017, esp. sec. 4, "From *Disability* to *Stigma*": "Goffman identified three kinds of stigma—physical ('abominations of the body'), behavioral ('blemishes of individual character'), and racial ('the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion'). But Goffman only detailed these different kinds of stigma in order to suggest that, while they are distinct in their origin and presentation, there exists a single system that governs them all because the stigmatized acquire meaning not from what they *are* but from what they are *not*, namely normal. Shakespeare's list of the different kinds of stigma is slightly different than Goffman's but, like Goffman, Shakespeare used a single system to think about and represent different kinds of differentness: physical deformity (as in the examples of Richard III, Falstaff, and Caliban), racial minority (as with Aaron the Moor and Shylock the Jew), and bastardy (as with Don John and Edmund)."

sought to redefine stigma as a social phenomenon, a relationship between "normals" and "abnormals." To Goffman stigma was an event, not an attribute, which led to two initial conclusions. First, stigma is constructed in culture, not given by nature. Second, "a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed" (3).

For example, Shakespeare's first great villain, Richard III, is "as crooked in [his] manners as in [his] shape" (*2 Henry VI*, 5.1.157). His next great villain, Aaron the Moor, "will have his soul black like his face" (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.205). His last great villain, Caliban, is "as disproportion'd in his manners / As his shape" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.301–2). Envisioning iniquity by likening morality to biology, these similes suggest a similarity between the abnormal body and abnormal behavior based on a common aversion to each. But the significance of these similes comes not in the meaning of physical deformity (which Richard and Caliban have but Aaron does not) or in the meaning of racial difference (which Aaron and Caliban have but Richard does not). Their significance comes in the relationship between normalcy and those deemed to be abnormal for whatever reason.[3]

Late in the twentieth century Shakespeare studies exploded with interest in his representation of people marginalized because of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, or ability.[4] These concerns are connected in literary criticism because they are connected in life. Patterns of discrimination and the experiences of those who stand apart from social norms resemble and signify each other, sometimes called "intersectionality."[5] Goffman (1963, 130) calls it "stigma" when he argues that "persons with different stigmas are in an appreciably similar situation and respond in an appreciably similar way." Stigmatized Shakespearean characters such as Richard III, Aaron the Moor, Shylock the Jew, Falstaff, and Caliban are quite dissimilar in their differentness, but they are alike in that

3. As Leonard Davis (1995) has argued, the word *normal* did not enter the English language until the mid-nineteenth century, and it is not a transhistorical concept. He associates it with industrialization and "late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation, and so on" (3). At the same time, Valerie Traub (2015, 36) is working on "a genealogy of the concept of 'the normal,'" what she calls "the prehistory of normality," which "trace[s] the possibility for the emergence of norms back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."

4. For example, on gender see Dusinberre 1975; on sexuality see Smith 1991; on religion see Shapiro 1996; on race see Loomba and Orkin 1998; on class see Howard and Shershow 2001; on age see Charney 2009; on ability see Hobgood and Wood 2009.

5. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality*, referring to multiple forms of bias, specifically racism and sexism, operating at once. On the transformation of this term to encompass parallelism and solidarity among people who experience different kinds of discrimination—including related to sexual orientation, disability, and class—see Bartlett 2017.

they never get to present themselves to others (including audiences) for unbiased interpretation. They are always already interpreted by cultural stereotypes. They can only define themselves through and against those stereotypes. Thus social prejudice becomes a mental struggle, a rhetorical joust, and an opportunity for the stigmatized character to either disprove or exploit preconceived notions. The scramble to define the identity of a stigmatized character, involving both himself and others, is one of the most powerful sources of dramatic and conceptual tension in Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, modern audiences tend to identify with the stigmatized characters, even though they are explicitly presented as "others," and these characters covet and dominate our interest and criticism.

Accordingly, there is an additional story to tell on top of the insights from Shakespearean criticism on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and ability. It is a story about how stigma—understood as the origin and operation of the process through which an identity is deemed to be inherently inferior—was both a dramatic opportunity and a dramatic strategy for Shakespeare.

II. Stigma as Figural Realism

In the Middle Ages classical Greco-Roman concepts related to the interpretation of ugliness and deformity—such as stigma, physiognomy, and monstrosity—were adapted and transformed in light of the Christian celebration of a just and good God.[6] In the fifth century, for example, Saint Augustine (1610, 581), here translated by John Healey, relied upon divine Providence to articulate the "reasons that wee can giue for this or that vnordinary shaped-birth amongst vs": "GOD made all, and when or how hee would forme this or that, hee knowes best, hauing the perfit skill how to beautifie this vniuerse by opposition and diuersity of parts. But hee that cannot contemplate the beauty of their whole, stumbles at the deformity of the part: not knowing the congruence that it hath with the whole." In the context of this Christianization of classical concepts, the word *stigma* emerged in sixteenth-century England (Shakespeare was one of the first to use it in English) in a new theological sense that differed quite profoundly from the original Greek sense of the term: "A person marked with some physical deformity or blemish."[7] By Shakespeare's time stigma was understood to be a

6. For readings of Shakespeare in the contexts of physiognomy and monstrosity, see, respectively, Baumbach 2008; Burnett 2002.

7. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "stigmatic," B2, citing Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI* as the first usage.

God-given mark of immanent evil evident in the physical body at birth. Richard III was the principal example.

Traditional criticism on the stigmatized bodies in Shakespeare's plays—usually considering only one play at a time, often *Richard III*—tends to start and stop at the idea of symbolism. For example, a pass through some of the sharpest readings of *Richard III* in recent years reveals a deformity that "encodes" (Garber 1987, 36), "inscribes" (Hunt 1999, 163), "embodies" (Besnault and Bitot 2002, 108; Charnes 1993, 30), or "personifies" (Marienstras 1995, 171; Moulton 1996, 258) some soul, mind, morality, or society that is unpleasant or undesirable.[8] In these readings Richard's deformity is what disability scholars call a "narrative prosthesis," "a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" (Mitchell and Snyder 2000, 49). As an alternative, disability scholars have called for readings that attend to physical and mental impairment not as a literary symbol but as a lived experience that affects the body, mind, and relationships of a character. For Allison P. Hobgood (2015, 24) *Richard III* "verifies how disability would have signified in definite material terms, not just metaphorical ones." As illustrated in the pages that follow, these two critical emphases—the symbolic and the realistic—respond to different elements that Shakespeare always tied together in a systematic dramatic strategy for representing stigma as tragicomedy.

Symbolism is a version of what Dante Alighieri (1973, 112) calls "the allegory of the poets" in contradistinction to "the allegory of the theologians," a distinction that, if unpacked, can open for us a new way of thinking about stigma in Shakespeare's plays. Both kinds of allegory—that of the poets and that of the theologians—included a concrete or literal sense and a symbolic or figural sense, but the theologians directed their allegory to one specific text, the Old Testament, and they subdivided the symbolic or figural sense into three categories: a typological meaning, a moral meaning, and an anagogic meaning. The literal sense

8. For "encodes," "His twisted and misshapen body encodes the whole strategy of history as a necessary deforming and *un*forming—with the object of *re*forming—the past" (Garber 1987, 36). For "inscribes," "Richard's unnatural shape inscribes the unnatural behavior of many of the play's characters" (Hunt 1999, 163). For "embodies," "The universality of evil [is] embodied here in the monstrous king" (Besnault and Bitot 2002, 108); "In *Richard III*, all the political monstrosity developed in the first tetralogy is 'embodied' in the deformed figure of Richard" (Charnes 1993, 30). For "personifies," "[Richard] personifies the evil and the violence spread throughout the nation and within the families" (Marienstras 1995, 171); "In the absence of strong masculine royal authority, English manhood, unruled and untamed, turns to devour itself. It is this unregulated, destructive masculine force that is personified in the twisted and deformed body of Richard III" (Moulton 1996, 258).

of the Old Testament was the sense in which it was historical fact; the figural senses added meaning to fact. First, typology treated events of the Old Testament as shadowy prophecies of the life of Christ recorded in the New Testament. The fall of Adam figured the crucifixion of Jesus, for example, and Cain's murder of Abel figured Judas's betrayal of Jesus, all events that, in and of themselves, paint a grim picture of reality. Adam and Cain ushered a death into the world that even the son of God must undergo, except that Jesus conquered death, ascended to heaven, and effectively reversed the significance of the earlier events. In Christian typology the literal sense of the Old Testament was not erased and forgotten but was confirmed and counterbalanced by the compensatory and restorative power of Christ. Typology therefore can be understood as a creative act of interpretation using some similarity between events in the Old and New Testaments to say that the former "figures" the latter and some difference between those events to say the latter "fulfills" the former. This is typology as Saint Paul preached it, but allegory as Dante understood it had more work to do. There were additional figural senses. The moral sense of the event was the abstract lesson taken from the typology, and the anagogic sense related the entire figure to Christian theology, especially eschatology, the study of end times. In fact as Auerbach ([1938] 1959, 58) argues in his essay "Figura," the surprising combination of the historicity of typology and the futurity of anagogy is what makes medieval allegory memorable: "Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events, yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event." This "something in the future" was a providential history up to and including salvation, which Auerbach's ([1946] 1953, 65) *Mimesis* describes as the "vertical connection, ascending from all that happens, converging in God." Thus after building a horizontal bridge between two historical events, the allegory of the theologians vaulted its interpretation heavenward to arch the allegory forward into a felicitous future marking the final fulfillment of all figures in the end of time.

From this rough sketch it is clear that Dante's "allegory of the theologians" was a method of historical interpretation, while his "allegory of the poets" was a style of literary composition. The concerns of the theologians were temporal, describing the rhythms and the providential patterning of history, while the prac-

tice of the poets was metaphorical, substituting one item for another. The poets led readers from concrete expression to abstract meaning, while the theologians took great pains to preserve the particular, historical, and literal sense of events even as meaning was enumerated outward.

His terms may be unfortunate, but Dante (1973, 99–100) says his famous epic, *The Comedy*, is not an "allegory of the poets" but a poetic version of the "allegory of the theologians." That is, he made the allegory that had been a method of scriptural interpretation into a style of literary composition that he presented in pointed contrast to what is commonly called "allegory" in literature. When untangling this terminological knot, Auerbach opts for the phrase "figural realism" to differentiate Dante's approach to literary composition from his approach to biblical interpretation (the allegory of the theologians) and the more common approach to literary symbolism at that time (the allegory of the poets). For his part Dante (1973, 99) says his epic is "polysemous," with multiple meanings operating on multiple orders of meaning, and this is the quality I would like to claim for stigma in Shakespeare's drama.[9]

In associating Shakespeare's representation of stigma with what Auerbach calls "figural realism" I am not suggesting that Shakespeare, a dramatist for the popular stage in a militantly Protestant country, directly drew upon theological notions of allegory from a doctrinally Catholic poet whose work was not widely read in early modern England. Instead, I argue (as Auerbach does) that Shakespeare was influenced by and further developed the mixture of figuralism and realism, of tragedy and comedy, of high and low styles, and of otherworldly and this-worldly concerns that appeared in the secularized version of allegory Dante invented—and that this quality of Shakespeare's art was particularly prominent in his representation of stigma.

To be sure, what I call the figure of stigma has its origin—like much early English drama—in the religious content and purpose of the Middle English mys-

9. While *stigma* as traditionally defined as an identifying mark relates to the stigmata of Christ in a complex way that I do not address here, I want to note that Lowell Gallagher (1997) has invoked Auerbach's account of figural realism to read the early modern exegesis of Christ's stigmata (by the likes of Martin Luther and William Perkins). Whereas Gallagher emphasizes the tension between typology and history as modes of interpretation, I would add that there is perhaps no greater instance of figural realism in Christianity than the stigmata of Christ. The creatural, grotesque, and tragic meaning initially conveyed is reversed in the resurrection, turning tragic catastrophe into the mythological conquest of good over evil and pointing in turn to the final fulfillment of that myth in the end of time, when God will judge the wicked and the righteous.

tery plays (which were performed until Shakespeare's childhood and which, many scholars believe, he saw at Coventry).[10] But my concerns in this article are primarily formal, not historical, so I do not want to wade too deep into the larger literary history of the representation of stigma in early English drama. (Specifically, the figural realism of Middle English drama positioned a series of villains—the devil, lesser demons, Cain, Judas, Herod, the Antichrist, the Vice—not only into traditional typological relationships with each other, e.g., Cain prefiguring Judas, Judas recalling Cain, but also within a figural reality that exploited the imagery of deformity, darkness, and difference such that physical appearance prefigured ethical action, action fulfilled appearance, and the coordination of physical and ethical abnormality was both controlled and conquered by a just and good God who established a sacred state at the end of time, wherein all manner of unpleasantness—whether related to bodies or behaviors—was eviscerated.) Instead, I want to emphasize that the marked bodies in Shakespeare's plays are *not* symbolic or allegorical in the pedestrian sense. They are not just metaphors, personifications, or embodiments of error, crime, sin, villainy, and evil. They are not simply symbols for undesirable souls, minds, moralities, or societies. Criticism that rests upon this "allegory of the poets" does not fully appreciate how Shakespeare developed a complex yet consistent system for representing stigma as a simultaneously figural and realistic phenomenon.

III. The Figure of Stigma in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy

As Auerbach describes it, figural realism is a compositional strategy for suggesting connections that unite seemingly discrete historical events in a world assumed to have been artfully written into existence. As such we could say that a *dramatic figure* (greater than trope, less than genre) is a set of discrete moments configured together often enough to create a recognizable convention involving a number of Aristotle's (1987, 1450a) six elements of drama: *mythos* or plot, *ethos* or character, *dianoia* or thought, *opsis* or spectacle, *lexis* or speech, and *melos* or music.[11] As I treat it, the figure of stigma in Shakespeare's drama is the frequent concurrence

10. On Shakespeare's indebtedness to the Middle English mystery plays, see, for example, Cooper 2010, 42–71, chap. 2, "Total Theatre."

11. I am not suggesting that Shakespeare read and thought in terms of Aristotle's *Poetics* (which is nevertheless useful for discussing the composition of Shakespearean drama). On the contrary, as I have tried to indicate, Shakespeare's representation of stigma is most immediately indebted to Middle English drama.

of abnormality as a kind of spectacle, villainy as a kind of character, irony as a kind of speech, and tragicomedy as a kind of plot, along with the competing kinds of thought that organize these elements and bring them into meaningful relationships with each other.[12]

The first and most elaborate example of the figure of stigma comes in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, where the deformed villain, the Duke of Gloucester, who later becomes Richard III, is both a comic and a tragic character.[13] Both *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* are titled "tragedies" in the quarto editions, but Shakespeare signals the "comic" resolution of this narrative (in the sense that Dante uses the term *comedy*) while in its midst by having King Henry VI foresee the future King Henry VII. Shakespeare's source for this episode was Edward Hall's (1548, ccxi) chronicle, where King Henry's comment is more polite praise than prediction. Shakespeare consecrates it as prophecy. In *3 Henry VI* King Henry summons the young Henry, Earl of Richmond, "Come hither, England's hope" (4.6.69), inaugurating a vaguely mystical event when he "*lays his hand on his head*" (4.6.69 s.d.). The king closes his eyes, tilts his head toward heaven, and accesses an occult knowledge of the nation's time to come, "If," he says, "secret powers / Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts" (4.6.69–70). Like Hall, Shakespeare exploits the episode to structure a certain "truth" into his history—the title pages of the quartos call *3 Henry VI* a "*true* tragedie"—but Shakespeare outdoes Hall by adding beauty to truth. He pens for the future Henry VII a series of isocolons that detail what is physically attractive in the man ("pretty," "looks," "head," "hand," "himself") to prophesy what is politically satisfying ("bliss," "majesty," "crown," "sceptre," "throne"):

> This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.
> His looks are full of peaceful majesty,
> His head by nature framed to wear a crown,
> His hand to wield a sceptre, and himself
> Likely in time to bless a regal throne. (4.6.70–74)

Adapting Hall's history, Shakespeare spikes King Henry's prophecy with physiognomy, the young Henry VII's beauty signifying both a virtuous nature and a felicitous future. For like the appearance of Christ in the figural view of life, the

12. The figure of stigma was first enumerated in a reading of Shylock in Wilson 2013, esp. 143.

13. While much recent scholarship has emphasized the collaborative aspects of the plays called "Shakespeare's first tetralogy," the scenes where stigma becomes central to the character of Richard III were all written by Shakespeare. See the summative chapter 25, "The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Works," by Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane, in Shakespeare 2017, 417–602.

appearance of Henry VII—literally his appearance, the way he looks—prefigures an ultimately comic conclusion into which the tragic elements of Shakespeare's first tetralogy flow. That is, Shakespeare uses the physical to manage both the moral and the temporal elements of his first tetralogy whether we are looking at the handsome Henry VII or the deformed Richard III.

Famously, Richard's physical abnormality—born with teeth, a crooked spine, a hunched back, a withered arm, and unequal legs—signifies his villainy. He murders his foes, friends, and family on his way to the English throne, but his abnormality signifies his villainy in various and competing ways. To Richard's enemies his unnatural birth is an omen of the evil he embodies and inflicts upon them and the entire English nation, a mystified reading of deformity that refers back to the demonization of Richard in the Tudor chronicles and the sixteenth-century discourses of physiognomy and monstrosity. In Shakespeare's first tetralogy the stigmatization of Richard's body is inseparable from a figural worldview that assumes that supernatural, spiritual forces are at work behind the world of matter marking the essential and eternal meanings of things. Just as Shakespeare's Lancastrians see Richard's deformed birth as a figure for his villainous life, Richard's first appearance at the end of *2 Henry VI*—literally his physical appearance—figures his actions in *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*. Spectacle points to character and plot, abnormality to villainy and tragedy.

Yet much of the narrative and conceptual tension in Shakespeare's first tetralogy stems from the juxtaposition of the Lancastrians' figural model of stigma, which treats abnormality as a sign of villainy, and Richard's own more realistic model, which sees abnormality as a cause rather than a sign. Richard sees himself as what Sigmund Freud ([1916] 1958) later called (with reference to Shakespeare's character) an "exception"—someone who has been slighted by nature, has suffered an unfair congenital disadvantage, something he did not deserve and something he uses to excuse himself from the laws and morals that govern civil society. So in a breathtaking conceptual slide, Richard vows to slash through his family and become the other kind of "exception" in early modern England, the king (see Charnes 1993). In other words, stigma is both figural—a theological, supernatural phenomenon that structures the world for the characters and the drama for the author—and realistic—a psychological, creaturely problem for the physically disadvantaged person. Shakespeare scrutinized the established, figural meaning of Richard's stigma specifically by having the character turn to the audience, speak directly to us, and bring us to sympathize with him. Thus

Richard's revisionist reading of his deformity is dramatically linked with his development as a character who, like the Vice of earlier English drama, can speak in soliloquies and asides to, with, and for the audience. In a fascinating dramatic transaction, Richard's deformity leads to disability in his life as a person but to a remarkable ability in his life as a character. Even as he suffers the disadvantages of deformity, he can surmount the confines of dramatic representation and jump outside the play. As such Richard's deformity is bound up with his complexity as a dramatic phenomenon that is both inside and outside the dramatic illusion and consequently with our ambivalent response to him. We feel a resistance to Richard as a character in the drama who commits horrible crimes and simultaneously an investment in him as a choral voice for the drama who confides in us and couples his intense suffering with an infectious irreverence.

It is hilarious, for example, in *3 Henry VI* at the Battle of Tewkesbury, when Richard tells Queen Margaret that she wears the pants in her marriage and her husband Henry the petticoat (5.5.23–24). Prince Edward leaps to his mother's defense with an allusion that epitomizes the proliferating surfaces of Shakespeare's Richard: "Let Aesop fable in a winter's night, / His currish riddles sorts not with this place" (5.5.25–26). Shakespeare's editors debate whether Edward says *churlish* or *currish*, for the line is a crack at the way Richard both talks like a churl and looks like a cur.[14] Like the Richard of the Tudor myth, the Aesop of the so-called Aesop romance was also "dyfformed and euylle shapen" (Planudes 1489, ii; see Lefkowitz 2008). But where the Tudor chronicles relied upon the power of the word *and* to connect Richard's abnormality and villainy, the portrait of Aesop pivoted on a *but*:

> He had a grete hede / large vysage / longe Iowes / sharp eyen / a short necke / corbe backed / grete bely / grete legges / and large feet / And yet that whiche was werse he was dombe / and coude not speke / *but not withstondyng al this he had a grete wytte & was gretely Ingenyous / subtyll in cauyllacions / And Ioyouse in wordez*. (Planudes 1489, ii; emphasis mine)

Born a slave without speech, Aesop was downtrodden and disabled, but he was still good-natured and kindhearted. When he showed kindness to a sojourning priest of Hestia, the Greek goddess of hospitality, the goddess gave Aesop speech and wisdom. Disability became ability. His linguistic ability allowed Aesop to overcome the stigma of deformity when he was put up for sale in the marketplace, where he impressed the philosopher Xanthus with his wit:

14. Samuel Johnson and George Steevens (1773, 493) were the first to suggest *churlish*.

> He asked what arte thow / And Esope ansuerd / I am of flesshe and bone / And Exantus sayd / I demaunde the not that / but where were thou engendrid And Esope ansuerd / in the wombe of my moder / And Exantus sayd / yet I aske the not that neyther / But I aske of the / In what place thow were borne / And Esope sayd / My moder neuer told / ne assured me / whether she was delyuerd of me in her chambre or in the halle. (vii)

With his equivocations Aesop offers an instance in which intellect and wit counterbalance the stigma of deformity, a version of what disability scholars call an "overcoming narrative" (see Titchkosky 2007). Aesop negotiates the stereotypes of stigma by cultivating a clownish persona, equivocating with Xanthus, befriending the philosopher, earning his freedom, acting as an emissary, and writing his famous fables.

Shakespeare would have known that Aesop's irony was always described in contrast to his physical abnormality: "Although he was deformed and ill shaped, yet Nature wrought in hym soche vertue, that he was in minde moste beautifull" (Rainolde 1563, cii). And Shakespeare would have recognized that an Aesop who was deformed in body but "beautifull" in mind complicated the purely tragic and simply symbolic version of stigma at work in the traditional Tudor representation of Richard. We might say that in *3 Henry VI* Prince Edward (the character) alludes to Aesop to reproach Richard's wit and denigrate his deformity but that Shakespeare (the author) makes this allusion to acknowledge that such wit can be endearing, as Aesop's was to Xanthus, and that physical deformity is not as simple and determinist as the Tudor treatment of Richard makes it out to be. Thus in *3 Henry VI* the evil Richard of Tudor lore whose monstrous body signifies his murderous behavior envelopes a jesting Aesop whose biological disadvantages prompts not hatred but humor.

Condemning both Richard's words and his body, Prince Edward proceeds to implore Richard's brothers to "take away this scolding crook-back" (*3 Henry VI*, 5.5.30). Then Edward assails the York brothers with a tricolon born from the figural interpretation of Richard's body: "Lascivious Edward, and thou perjur'd George, / And thou misshapen Dick" (5.5.34–35). Here Richard receives a physical denigration where the other brothers get moral condemnations, suggesting that Edward's word "misshapen" refers to Richard's body and behavior alike. In response the three York brothers slaughter young Prince Edward, for the first time fulfilling the figure supposedly cast by Richard's birth. His misshapenness is consummated in murder, and it is no accident that Shakespeare prefaces this event with Prince Edward's three references to Richard's deformity: "Aesop,"

"crook-back," and "misshapen." As Auerbach describes figural realism, the fulfillment does not cancel or annul the figure, which is what happens in Pauline typology. In figural realism the fulfillment recalls and confirms the historicity of the figure even as it adds meaning to fact. Thus Shakespeare makes sure that the fulfillment of the figure of Richard's abnormality—his villainy—actually recalls and confirms the concrete reality of that figure. Meaning does not forget fact.

But Shakespeare also retextures this moment of figural fulfillment by having Richard propose to continue on with Queen Margaret, which is oddly one of his funniest moments. "O, kill me too," she swoons with all the extravagance of an actress who has been waiting her whole life to deliver this line (5.5.41). Richard pauses, then shrugs, "Marry, and shall" (5.5.42). I laugh at this line every single time. Bizarrely, the stage direction "*Offers to kill her*" (5.5.42 s.d.) can be played for laughs. Richard has just murdered a child and is happy to murder the child's mother next, and I am not appalled but amused, entertained, even endeared. I have this surprising response because in this moment the tragic and the comic components of Shakespeare's treatment of Richard—his obviously evil actions and his surprisingly witty words—are both firing full blast.

In the next scene Shakespeare (following Thomas More) has Richard himself kill King Henry VI. Because this regicide represents the most heinous of Richard's crimes, Henry spends his dying words giving the play's most elaborate figural interpretation of Richard's birth, one that lumps it in with a series of other omens:

> The owl shriek'd at thy birth, an evil sign;
> The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time;
> Dogs howl'd, and hideous tempest shook down trees;
> The raven rook'd her on the chimney's top,
> And chattering magpies in dismal discord sung;
> Thy mother left more than a mother's pain,
> And yet brought forth less than a mother's hope,
> To wit, an indigested and deformed lump,
> Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree
> Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,
> To signify thou cams't to bite the world. (5.6.44–54)

Henry sees these events from 1452 as the obvious evidence that Richard would be a villain in 1471. Events unrelated by any immediate material cause—squawking birds, barking dogs, whirling storms, and a child's abnormal birth—are brought into a figural relationship on the basis of a divinely ordered universe. Concluding this catalog of evil omens with Richard's deformity, Henry suggests that it was

no less prodigious. In Henry's words Richard's body "signif[ies]." And specific deformities, like Richard's toothed birth, signify specific villainies, like his appetite for destruction, on the basis of a physiognomy that imbues our bodies with meaning.

The moment that Richard actually stabs Henry is the most evocative example of figural realism in Shakespeare's entire oeuvre. As Henry proceeds to list the other deformities that Richard had at birth, the evil said to be figured by that wayward birth is actually enacted:

> [*K. Hen.*] And, if the rest be true which I have heard,
> Thou camest—
> *Glou.* Die, prophet, in thy speech: *Stabs him.*
> For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain'd. (5.6.55–58)

As Auerbach describes figural realism, the figure prophesies the fulfillment, and the fulfillment recalls the figure. This is why Richard's enemies say so much about his deformities just before he murders them and also why Henry's list of those birth defects is overlain with the murderous evil they were said to signify. At the same time, however, Richard kills Prince Edward and King Henry *because* they are stigmatizing him. Stigma is both figural and realistic, both an artistic pattern and a lived experience.

Consider Richard's statement after he kills King Henry: "For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain'd." This line can support both the figural and the realistic versions of stigma, depending upon how the line is delivered. On the one hand, Richard could stay within the dramatic illusion, delivering the line resentfully, so that it spits the superstitious account of his body back in Henry's face as Richard stabs him: "For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain'd," *or so you say.* On the other hand, Richard could turn to the audience, acknowledge the fulfillment of the figure cast by his deformed birth, and with outstretched hands explain the providential logic behind the typological composition of this character: "For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain'd."[15] In either reading both the figure (abnormality) and its fulfillment (villainy) preserve their literal and realistic significance,

15. With the same word, "ordain'd," the same ambiguity exists in a subsequent aside when Richard vows to start killing his own family: "This shoulder was ordain'd so thick to heave, / And heave it shall some weight, or break my back" (*3 Henry VI,* 5.7.23–24). Is this the medieval Vice's explanation of its position in a providential history that has already been written? Or is this a modern villain's resentful citation of the retrograde theology that made him into a murderer?

do not become mere allegory. But by connecting them so closely, Shakespeare establishes a relationship between the two events.

With King Henry's murder, Shakespeare suggests a vertical connection to a providential order of time and space by way of Henry's "prophet[ic]" spirit—the same "divining thoughts" that saw virtue and prosperity in the "pretty looks" of the young Earl of Richmond. When, as Henry prophesied, Richmond becomes king by conquering Richard at the end of *Richard III*, Shakespeare includes, somewhat surprisingly, two allusions to Richard's physical abnormality. Richard's famous farewell, "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!" (*Richard III*, 5.4.6, 13), is usually seen as an acknowledgement of his resiliency in the face of defeat. It is just that, but it is also a pretty cruel joke about his body. Richard wants to go once more unto the breach, but his disability leaves him crying out for accommodation. Deformity is real in Richard's life even as it is figural in Shakespeare's play. It is figural when Richmond opens the next scene by announcing, "The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead" (5.5.2). Richmond is repeating the conceit of the first tetralogy's most vociferous stigmatizer, Queen Margaret. She always has an eye toward heaven when stigmatizing Richard as a "crook-back prodigy" (*3 Henry VI*, 1.3.75), a "foul misshapen stigmatic" (2.2.136), a "cacodemon," (*Richard III*, 1.3.143), and worse:

> Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!
> Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity
> The slave of nature and the son of hell! (1.3.215–17)

Shakespeare concludes Margaret's stigmatizing statements with a plea to heaven: "Dear God, I prey, / That I may live to say, The dog is dead!" (4.4.77–78). When Richmond defeats Richard and repeats Margaret's words, "The bloody dog is dead," the statement stands as the final fulfillment of the figure that Margaret had repeatedly made of Richard's body. Richmond's statement both recalls the tragic significance of Richard's abnormality and reverses that significance with a tragicomedy in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished. In the moment that Richard is defeated, Shakespeare refers back to the stigma that he originally established when Richard was first introduced and that he repeatedly returned to as Richard riffed on his body in soliloquies and asides. In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, in sum, the spectacle of abnormality when Richard first appears at the end of *2 Henry VI* signifies the villainous character who kills the king at the end of *3 Henry VI* and the tragicomic plot of Richard's fall and Richmond's rise that

concludes at the end of *Richard III.* All of this is in addition to Richard's ironic interlocution with us in the audience in the scenes along the way.

IV. The Figure of Stigma: Abnormality, Villainy, Irony, Tragicomedy

In sixteenth-century English drama before Shakespeare, the fusion of comedy and tragedy in the Vice allowed writers to represent the complexity of sin and evil, phenomena both alluring (in the carnal pleasure they provide) and disgusting (in the social harm they cause). At the very start of his career Shakespeare turned to the Vice to structure the complexity in his depiction of Richard III's physical deformity. In the years that followed Shakespeare returned to the Vice to structure his representation of Aaron the Moor's black skin in *Titus Andronicus* (1593–94) and Philip Faulconbridge's bastard birth in *King John* (1594–96), expanding the phenomenon represented from physical deformity (an aspect of Richard III's body) to social stigma (a feature of the abnormal character's situation in life).[16] The figure of stigma—abnormality, villainy, irony, and tragicomedy—then became the representational system in and against which many of Shakespeare's most enigmatic characters operate, Shakespeare variously employing, adapting, and resisting the figure of stigma over the course of his career.

There is not space here to detail the life of the figure of stigma across all of Shakespeare's works, but I do want to say a few words about each of its elements and its structure and logic. First and foremost, by *abnormality* I mean physical difference from some cultural norm, visible in a costume. I mean quite a bit more than deformity or disability. To name the most famous ones, Shakespeare's "abnormal" characters include Richard III, who is "as crooked in [his] manners as in [his] shape" (*2 Henry VI*, 5.1.158); Aaron the Moor, who "will have his soul black like his face" (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.205); Philip Faulconbridge the Bastard in *King John*; Bottom, who is literally an ass and is called a "monster" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2.6); Shylock with his Jewish clothes (and sometimes Jewish nose); Falstaff and his famous belly; Bardolph and his rosacea; Don John the Bastard in *Much Ado about Nothing*; Thersites, the first physically deformed person in Western literature, made a bastard by Shakespeare to boot; Malvolio, "a

16. On Aaron and the Vice, see Spivack 1958, 379–87. On Philip Faulconbridge and the Vice, see Weimann 1999.

kind of puritan" (*Twelfth Night*, 2.3.140); Edmund the Bastard in *King Lear*; and Caliban, a physically deformed, racially marked bastard "as disproportion'd in his manners / As in his shape" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.291–92). While quite dissimilar in their differentness, these characters all occupy a similar space in the drama and perform a similar function in their respective plays. They are "abnormal" because they take their significance not from what they *are* but from what they are *not*, namely, normal. This is the real sense in which stigma is relative in Shakespeare's drama, not only (*pace* Novy) because outsiders become insiders and vice versa but also because the meaning of abnormality is fundamentally relational. As indicated by the negative prefix of the word, *abnormality* only exists in relation to normalcy.

I can imagine two serious objections to the term *abnormality*. First, the fact that (per Lennard Davis [1995])[17] the word *normal* and the concept of normalcy did not gain currency until the eighteenth century is beside the point here because, as Goffman (1963, 129) put it in *Stigma*, "The general identity-values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast some kind of shadow on the encounters encountered everywhere in daily living." The cohesiveness of the concept of abnormality as an organizing characterological principal in Shakespeare's artistic vision testifies to the presence of normalcy in the early modern cultural milieu. Second, the term *abnormality* is stunningly capacious, including such disparate characters as a fat man like Falstaff and a puritan like Malvolio, but that is exactly the point. The fact that stigma is more about what someone is *not* than what someone *is* is what stretches the figure of stigma out to such a diverse cast of characters in Shakespeare's drama. Richard III and Bottom, for example, have significant differences in class, wealth, status, education, intelligence, self-control, and sense of humor, yet they perform a similar function in their respective plays. They both represent the force—which is focused in their physical abnormalities—that must be overcome if society is to function properly.

17. On the history of normalcy, see Davis 1995. It may be helpful to recall the history narrated by Michel Foucault (1999, 329) in his seminar *Abnormal* that details the trajectory of physical difference in Western culture as it went from "cases of criminal monstrosity . . . to the diagnosis of 'abnormal' delinquents": "The ambiguities of the human monster, which are widely diffused at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, are present, toned down and muffled, of course, but nonetheless firmly implanted and really effective in the problematic of abnormality and the juridical and medical techniques that revolve around abnormality in the nineteenth century and perhaps until the twentieth century. . . . The abnormal individual is essentially an everyday monster, a monster that has become commonplace" (57).

Richard is more tragic, Bottom more comic, but because stigma is necessarily tragicomic, it envelops them both, allowing for different iterations.

Thus like Shakespeare, I use the term *villainy* in two senses. On the one hand, a villain can be a character who is cruel, criminal, destructive, wicked, remorseless, diabolical, perfidious, cackling, loving evil for its own sake, viewing pity and honor as loathsome, which is the version of villainy that is most common in modern parlance. On the other hand, a villain can simply be a fool, a fop, or a clown, still morally inferior to the good and respectable characters but more annoying and irresponsible than wicked or evil. It is important to remember the semantic range of the word *villainy*, from the Latin *villa*, "country house." Etymologically speaking, *villainy* signals a lowborn and base-minded social inferior, although in literary usage the word has come to signify a more sinister character, an antagonist.[18] Thus comic characters such as Falstaff, Bardolph, Malvolio, and Caliban are just as "villainous" as tragic characters such as Richard III, Aaron, Shylock, Don John, and Edmund. Each is indeed referred to as a "villain."[19] Different versions of villainy are in play. Tragic villainy tends to surface in ambition, revenge, murder, rape, and deceit, while comic villainy takes the forms of arrogance, stupidity, hypocrisy, and ignobility. In both cases Shakespeare methodically made abnormality the sign, cause, or effect of villainy both in the thoughts and words of his characters and in the plots and themes of his plays. Moreover, Shakespeare often used abnormality as the occasion for a character's villainy (think of Richard and Edmund remarking on deformity and bastardy), and he often alluded to that character's abnormality when representing his villainy. Consider Miranda's attention to Caliban's appearance when she says, "'Tis a villain, sir, / I do not love to look on" (*The Tempest*, 1.2.309–10).

Throughout his career Shakespeare explored the relationship between abnormality and villainy through the feature of drama that Aristotle called *dianoia*, variously translated as "thought," "ideas," "themes," or "reasoning." Famously difficult to define, *dianoia* involves the structure of concepts and the relation-

18. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "villain": "Originally, a low-born base-minded rustic; a man of ignoble ideas or instincts; in later use, an unprincipled or depraved scoundrel; a man naturally disposed to base or criminal actions, or deeply involved in the commission of disgraceful crimes" (def. 1). The sense of "the character in a play, novel, etc., whose evil motives or actions form an important element in the plot" (def. 1.d) dates to 1822.

19. See *Richard III*, 1.1.30; *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.202; *The Merchant of Venice*, 2.8.4; *1 Henry IV*, 1.2.96, 2.4.314–16; *Much Ado about Nothing*, 1.3.32; *Twelfth Night*, 2.5.13; *King Lear*, 1.2.135; *The Tempest*, 1.2.309.

ships among concepts that are both motivation and explanation for the actions of characters (see Blundell 1992). In passages of *dianoia*, usually coming in the form of reflection in soliloquy or debate in dialogue, Shakespeare represents, by my count, five models of stigma over the course of his career. First, in a spiritual model an innate abnormality signifies inherent villainy and immanent tragedy in a divinely ordered universe. The best articulation of this idea comes in the treatment the deformed Richard III receives from his enemies, who see his body as an omen of evil. Second, in a psychological model abnormality is not the sign but the cause of villainy. A character's mental struggle with his aberrant body leads to frustration, anger, enmity, and crime. We can again think of Richard III and his insistence that his deformity bars him from love and leaves a life of hatred and destruction as his only viable option. Third, in a physiological model the logic is still causal, but abnormality does not cause villainy. Instead, villainy causes a physical abnormality to develop. Consider Falstaff's irresponsibility, as represented by his excessive eating and drinking, leading to his obesity, which leads in turn to his death. Fourth, in a legal model villainy again leads to abnormality, not naturally but because authorities mark or brand villains to identify them as such (harkening back to the original Greek meaning of *stigma*). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, Puck saddles Bottom with an ass's head to signify the character's stupidity. Finally, in what we could call a sociological model no necessary connection exists between abnormality and villainy. Instead, cultures and individuals create this connection, often retrospectively and inaccurately, in the various ways described by the other models of stigma. The best example of this model is Caliban, whose body becomes a canvas for various assumptions, attitudes, and anxieties about abnormality. But the sociological model of stigma pervades Shakespeare's entire career insofar as he habitually dramatized competing claims about physical difference by representing all of the different models of stigma and pitting them against each other to create dramatic tension in his plays.[20]

In the figure of stigma abnormality in a character's costume is a "figure," and villainy in that character's actions is its "fulfillment." This connection is not metaphorical: it is not an outside that signifies an inside on the order of the "allegory of the poets." Instead, the connection is temporal, and the concrete particularity of the character's body and behavior are preserved even as a connection between

20. For a full reading of Caliban from the vantage of stigma, see Wilson 2018.

them is asserted, as in the "allegory of the theologians." When a character comes onstage, abnormality in appearance points forward to villainy in actions, and as the drama unfolds that character's villainy points back to his abnormality. But abnormality also points to irony, which is the most complex and perhaps the most objectionable element in the figure of stigma.

I will say up front that I am not completely satisfied with the term *irony*. With this term I refer to the stigmatized character's humor and penchant for dissembling with others but also to the fact that he is an interlocutor with the audience who regularly attempts to change or mock the supposed meaning of his abnormality by breaking the dramatic illusion and addressing the audience directly with soliloquies, asides, and wordplay that wink in our direction. What I am after with the term *irony* is not simply that the words of the stigmatized character have multiple meanings, which they often do ("Like the formal Vice, Iniquity," Richard III says, "I moralize two meanings in one word" [*Richard III*, 3.1.82]). More radically, he has multiple ways of speaking to multiple audiences, sometimes simultaneously, some inside the drama, some outside in the audience. If we can say that most of Shakespeare's characters are "dramatic," remaining within the illusion of the story represented onstage, the stigmatized character is "theatrical"—both in the sense that he acknowledges and speaks directly to the audience and in the sense that he is often a writer of plots (Richard, Aaron, and Don John) and an actor who pretends to be someone he is not (Bottom, Falstaff, and Thersites). Drama scholars (see Elam 1980) sometimes make the distinction between drama that is representational, focused on the story being represented, and drama that is presentational, drawing attention to the act of representation. The stigmatized characters in Shakespeare's plays are presentational characters, but I use the term *irony* in an effort to capture the totality of (1) their equivocations with other characters, (2) their soliloquies and asides to the audience, (3) their theatricality, and (4) their attempts to change the meaning of their bodies. This sense of irony therefore ranges from Richard explicitly "descant[ing] on [his] own deformity" (*Richard III*, 1.1.25) to Aaron's insistence that "Black is better" (*Titus Andronicus*, 4.2.99); to Philip Faulconbridge's reconceptualization, "He is but a bastard to the time / That doth not smack of observation" (*King John*, 1.1.207–8); to Bottom's whiney, "This is to make an ass of me" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.1.121); to Shylock's plea, "Hath not a Jew eyes?" (*The Merchant of Venice*, 3.1.59); to Falstaff's account of himself as "a goodly portly man" (*1*

Henry IV, 2.4.422); to Thersites's reactionary pronouncement "I love bastards" (*Troilus and Cressida*, 5.7.16); to Edmund's irreverent inversion "Gods, stand up for bastards" (*King Lear*, 1.2.22). The stigmatized character's abnormality—whether physical, racial, or familial—is often the occasion and the subject of his witty soliloquies and asides.

In Shakespeare's drama the spectacle of abnormality, the character of villainy, and the language of irony remain distinct dramatic elements. But they occur together often enough that they start signifying each other, and all together they point even further forward toward something in the future, a plot that is, in a manner of speaking, anagogic. As Auerbach ([1946] 1953, 169) describes Dante's figural realism, it "consists precisely in integrating what is characteristically individual and at times horrible, ugly, grotesque, and vulgar with the dignity of God's judgment." Likewise, the figure of stigma integrates the creaturely phenomenon of physical abnormality with the promise of a just and good world (i.e., a just and good play), a promise represented by tragicomedy. The universal justice of Christian eschatology—virtue rewarded and vice punished by a divine judge—is the model for what the seventeenth-century critic Thomas Rhymer (1678, 23) called "poetical justice," what Aristotle (1987, 1453a) called "the second-best structure" or the "double structure" that "ends in opposite ways for the better and worse persons," and what Dante (1973, 99) called "comedy" but what Philip Sidney (1595, K2) called the "mungrell Tragy-comedie." In the words of Joseph A. Wittreich (1984, 83), "During the Renaissance, a tragicomedy was seen as a generic tradition emanating from, indeed sponsored by, the Book of Revelation." The figure of stigma is tragicomic because tragicomedies end with a representative of all that is good and normal (that is, a stand-in for the God of Christian eschatology) conquering, correcting, exiling, and/or killing the abnormal character (who assumes the status of evil). Just think of Henry VII killing Richard III, Lucius Andronicus burying Aaron the Moor alive, Henry V banishing Falstaff, Portia converting Shylock, Benedick torturing Don John, Edgar slaying Edmund, or Prospero leaving Caliban alone on his island. In both tragedies and comedies the character who finally establishes a secure society at the end of the play does so in part by eliminating the evil that is allegedly embodied in the abnormality of the stigmatized character, an abnormality often alluded to in the conquest of the villain who bears it—a pattern closely linked with the ritual of scapegoating.[21] As such stigma is bound up with the way order is reestablished at the end

of Shakespearean tragedy and comedy alike. This obsession with order at the end of Shakespearean drama, in the context of the disorder dispelled along with the stigmatized character, is easily recognized as a literary manifestation of the confinement, control, correction, and extermination stigmatized individuals often encounter in society—the so-called cure or kill phenomenon.

Thus in Shakespeare's drama physical abnormality is a mark, a mark on the character's body expressed by some innovation in costume but also a mark on the rhythm of the play. The connection between abnormality and villainy is both figural and realistic, because Shakespeare used it both as an organizational device in the superstructure of his dramatic vision and as a psychosocial problem his characters create and deal with. That is, stigma was both form and content for Shakespeare. Formally speaking, the figural connection between abnormality and villainy established the presence of tragedy much like the figure and its fulfillment in Christian typology. As Auerbach ([1946] 1953, 317) argues, however, "The Christian figural view of human life was opposed to a development of the tragic":

> However serious the events of earthly existence might be, high above them stood the towering and all-embracing dignity of a single event, the appearance of Christ, and everything tragic was but figure or reflection of a single complex of events, into which it necessarily flowed at last: the complex of the Fall, of Christ's birth and passion, and of the Last Judgment. This implies a transposition of the center of gravity from life on earth into a life beyond, with the result that no tragedy ever reached its conclusion here below.

In Shakespeare's plays (both tragedies and comedies) the connection between abnormality and villainy operates within an overarching narrative that is always fixed and ultimately felicitous, like the end of time in Christian eschatology. The spectacle (abnormality) and the character (villainy) involved in the figure of stigma may point to tragedy, but the plot is comic in the sense that Dante used the term *comedy*. Thus the earthly, temporal, "horizontal" relationship between the figure of abnormality and its fulfillment in villainy also displays what Auerbach calls a "vertical connection" to the grand being organizing this world (whether characters conceive of this being as God or readers recognize this being as Shakespeare) and to the controlled outcome of the play in the plot of tragicomedy. Just as Middle English dramatists made their devils comic fops to signal their ultimately impotent danger, Shakespeare, when working with stigma, signals the presence of comedy in the midst of his tragic narrative by attaching irony to the

21. The earliest and most powerful reading of the scapegoat in Shakespeare (building off Fiedler 1972) was René Girard's (1980) take on Richard III and Shylock.

character bearing an abnormality. Like the stigmatized character's villainy, his irony often recalls his abnormality. His soliloquies and asides are not about just anything at all. They regularly address his abnormality, his villainy, or the supposed connection between the two. In the connection between abnormality and villainy, the tragic significance of abnormality is confirmed, but that significance is also reversed in the connection between abnormality and irony, which brings tension and complexity to Shakespeare's plays by introducing comedy to tragedy. Specifically through the irony of the stigmatized character—through his soliloquies and asides—Shakespeare brings a degree of psychological realism to the figural patterning of his plays.

As I have sought to emphasize, the figure of stigma does not simply refer to the life of a character in the dramatized story. It refers also—in fact primarily—to the structure of the artwork itself and the theatrical experience we have. What we see in a character's costume points forward to what we think about him once we see his actions in the play. Spectacle points forward to character, and character points back to spectacle, but this connection, which is one of congruity in our responses to both physical and ethical deviance, is complicated by the addition of humor and sympathy conveyed through asides and soliloquies. The distance we try to place between ourselves and what we find objectionable is closed by the proximity of the stigmatized character to us in the audience. The earlier congruity between body and behavior comes into conflict with the added incongruity between our negative moral judgment and the extreme aesthetic pleasure that always comes along with the wit and verve of the stigmatized character.

As noted, the figure of stigma in Shakespeare's drama draws upon representational strategies at work in the Middle English devil, the Tudor Vice, and Elizabethan villains, such as Christopher Marlowe's Barabas. Before Shakespeare, however, stigmatized characters did not have a set representational scheme, and the scheme I have described was broadly associated with villainy, not specifically with stigma.[22] In Shakespeare's hands stigma came to be a literary figure. The figure of stigma gives life and energy to celebrated Shakespearean characters like Richard III, Aaron the Moor, Shylock the Jew, Bottom, Falstaff, Thersites, Edmund, and Caliban, but it also informs Shakespeare's treatment of lesser char-

22. If Shakespeare did indeed reconceive of villainy as stigma, then his drama may suggest something revelatory about social life. What is understood as a matter of villainy or enmity is actually often a moment of stigma.

acters, such as Philip Faulconbridge, Launcelot Gobbo, Don John, Bardolph, Malvolio, and Ajax. Almost all of Shakespeare's stigmatized characters exhibit all of the elements in the figure of stigma, and when they do not—most importantly in the case of Othello—it is because Shakespeare pointedly resisted this configuration. Moreover, there are no Shakespearean characters who fill the dramatic role I have described who are not in some way stigmatized with some theatrical appendage in their costumes, with the significant exception of Iago.

The problem with the case of Othello is that his story looks nothing like the figure of stigma as I have described it. Iago, not Othello, plays the part of a Richard or an Aaron, even though it is Othello, not Iago, whose body is stigmatized.[23] Like Richard and Aaron, Iago is a villain in the tradition of the Tudor Vice, a schemer and plotter with a "motiveless malignity" (to use Samuel Taylor Coleridge's [1930, 1.49] well-known phrase). Again like Richard and Aaron, Iago is a witty interlocutor with the audience, articulating his villainy with a wicked vitality, leading us to an unsettling intimacy with the evil man. Once more like Richard and Aaron, Iago is punished at the end of the play by the representative of good. Gratiano plans to torture him just as Richmond slaughtered Richard and Lucius executed Aaron. Unlike Richard and Aaron, however, Iago has no physical abnormality, although it is noteworthy that Iago's villainy, irony, and tragicomedy are all textured with the rhetoric of stigma. At the end of act 1 he calls his villainy a "monstrous birth" (*Othello*, 1.3.404). Othello sees him as a cloven devil at the end of the play, when the tragedy entailed in that villainy reaches its conclusion (5.2.286).[24] Obviously, Shakespeare did not have to use the system he had previously reserved for his stigmatized characters to shape the story of Iago, yet he chose to do so in the same play in which he represented another character who bears a stigmatized body, an exchange so surprising and bracing that it must be significant and pointed. Shakespeare's point seems to be that those like Othello, whose bodies have been stigmatized, still have the potential to fashion a course for their lives outside the figure of stigma, while those like Iago, whose bodies are seen as normal, can still attain the heights of villainy previously reserved for stigmatized characters.

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23. On Iago's indebtedness to the Vice, see Spivack 1958, 3–27, chap. 1, "Iago"; 415–54, chap. 12, "Iago Revisited."

24. On the application of monster imagery to both Othello and Iago, effectively equating the two allegedly opposed (in terms of both body and behavior) characters, see Jacobs and Jacobs 1989.

V. Stigma as Tragicomedy

A fascination with abnormality—understood in the most general sense as difference from established norms—has driven Shakespeare studies in different ways, from some of the earliest criticism, which wrestled with "the censure which he has incurred by mixing comick and tragick scenes" (Johnson 1765, xiii), to some of the most recent, which has tended to issues of social marginalization due to race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and ability. This article has argued for a connection between these two versions of abnormality—the one a *textual* or *formal* abnormality and the other a *social* or *thematic* abnormality—in Shakespeare's dramatic vision. I have suggested that abnormality was both form and content for Shakespeare and that the two are connected. He uses the mixed mode of tragicomedy to represent characters diverging from the early modern social ideal.

The commingling of tragedy and comedy in the figure of stigma ensures that, when stigma is in play, Shakespeare's tragedies are never fully tragic and his comedies are never fully comic. In the end what the figure of stigma in Shakespeare's drama suggests that was not previously evident was that stigma is constitutionally tragicomic and therefore, like Shakespeare's "problem plays" (Boas 1896, 344), never satisfactorily resolved, always vividly unsettling.[25] As Goffman (1963, 18, 19, 106) argued some four hundred years later, stigma is an "anxious," "uneasy," "ambivalent" event that is cognitively dissonant and fundamentally uncomfortable for all involved. Obviously, there is a tension between the stigmatized and stigmatizing characters in Shakespeare's plays, but there is also an uneasiness that emerges between the stigmatized characters in the plays and us in the audience, as evident in the alternately acerbic and apologetic ways we speak about them. We defend Richard III from his demonization in the Tudor myth, but we do not want to be seen as excusing his criminal actions. We condemn Shylock for his vengefulness, but we worry that when we do we obscure the anti-Semitism he has experienced. We despise Caliban for being a rapist, but we also

25. Frederick Samuel Boas (1896) includes *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Hamlet*. "All these dramas, introduce us into highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe unto rottenness," Boas wrote (345). "Throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome" (345). Significantly, the category of the "problem plays" is often expanded to include plays that feature a stigmatized character, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Henry IV*, and *The Tempest*.

despise Prospero for demonizing and dehumanizing Caliban. Above all, we often see ourselves in Shakespeare's stigmatized characters—we in the modern world find our stories in theirs—even though Shakespeare presents them explicitly as stigmatics, outsiders, and others.

Goffman describes the plight of the stigmatized individual: "He is told he is like anyone else and that he isn't. . . . This contradiction and joke is his fate and his destiny" (124). The stigmatized individual is both like and unlike those Goffman calls "the normals," for when one of Goffman's normals sees a stigmatized person, similarities and differences drive the normal's emotions in opposite directions. On the one hand, the stigmatized person looks or acts markedly differently than the normal does, which can incite the aversion we often express for things that are unfamiliar and foreign. On the other hand, both are human, and this identification can prompt the sympathy we feel for things that are like us. With the figure of stigma, Shakespeare coded our aversion to abnormality in the stigmatized character's villainy and our sympathy with the abnormal in the character's irony. Shakespeare made the stigmatized character outrageously villainous because normals retain a primal fear of and therefore antipathy toward abnormality. But he also made that character irresistibly hilarious because normals also hold an equally instinctual sympathy for and therefore camaraderie with the abnormal. For us in Shakespeare's audience, the desire for more of the vitality in the language of a Richard, an Aaron, or an Edmund and the desire for no more of the destruction in their actions are warring extensions of the sympathy and aversion the normal human being experiences simultaneously when confronted with a stigmatized person. The discomfort we feel when we encounter stigma in Shakespeare's drama is a literary manifestation of the abject fascination we display during, for example, the freak show, which both intrigues and repels us (see Fiedler 1978).

Individually and culturally, our responses to stigma are pulled between these opposites, so Shakespeare made the stigmatized character both repulsive and attractive, both someone we pull back from and someone we lean into, both tragic and comic. In other words, Shakespeare discovered a specifically dramatic way to express the ambivalent individual emotions and the inconsistent cultural customs we exhibit toward stigma. He transformed the ambivalence and inconsistencies inherent in stigma into a formal feature of his drama, resulting in an artwork that engenders a certain uneasiness in those who experience it. As such the figure of stigma transforms tension from one plane of human experience to

others—specifically, from a social to a textual to an emotional plane. The uneasy social situation of stigma Goffman describes became, in Shakespeare's text, the mixed mode of tragicomedy, which produces when viewed or read an ambivalent emotional experience in the audience, effectively re-creating the original uneasiness of stigma as it operates in society. At the same time, however, recent social scientific research (e.g., Couture and Penn 2003) has shown that direct, personal, meaningful contact between normal and stigmatized individuals—even if, or especially because, it is uncomfortable—leads to the reduction of stigma. By making his stigmatized characters into interlocutors with the audience, Shakespeare provided an artistic version of that contact.

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