What's the Worst Thing You Can Do to Shak/x/espeare?

RICHARD BURT AND JULIAN YATES

Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to vnderstand him. And so we leaue you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can bee your guides: if you neede them not, you can leade your selves, and others. And such Readers we wish him.

—John Heminge, Henrie Condell
"To the great Variety of Readers"
The First Folio (1623)

BEFORE, OR PERHAPS AFTER, ALL, the worst thing you can do to Shakespeare is not to read him. Here, at the envoi-cum-media launch that was the First Folio, John Heminge and Henry Condell offer an economy of reading that threatens the putative reader-buyer with the "manifest danger" that "unreadability" might conjure. This rhetorical unreadability that reflects on you stands surety against a literal, prosaic nonreading of the book that would render it a media nonevent. Against this eventuality, Heminge and Condell recruit the "great variety of readers," "from the most able" "to him that can but spell." For it is upon our "capacities" (heads and purses) that the "fate of Bookes depends." As "readers," then, we are recruited to become the biocultural "wetware," the life-in-death preservers, that this book and the defunct "Shakespeare" require to prosper, to go mobile, to survive, *sur-vivre,* living on, in, with, and through our successive acts.[1] We become, in effect, the biosemiotic motor that enables "Shakespeare" to go viral and thereby make it possible for certain kinds of critical operations to count institutionally as doing something (worth doing).

Our aim in this essay is to open a space to think the unreadability Heminge and Condell deploy as a phenomenon, a specter, that has been haunting Renaissance and Shakespeare studies for some time

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now—and which has been conscripted to do all sorts of work, as the folio attests. We would like to pick up their modeling of readers as "wetware," the living component to media platforms, and think about what the labor of (not) reading entails.[2] Their sales pitch discloses the linkages between text, media, and reader that constitute the phenomenon that was, is, and will be "Shakespeare," reorienting us from the sense that a "play" or "plays" exist in the world as some self-identical entity to the plays as a mobile, conflicting, conflicted, and partial time-bound set of practices. What happens then, we ask, if we proceed on the assumption that historical fields of study such as "Shakespeare" and "Renaissance drama" refer not to a series of agreed-upon texts or performances but instead, as Heminge and Condell imply, a series of differently distributed fetish communities, each of which tunes itself to the shifting auratics of its chosen ritual objects as they are variously mediated—from manuscript to quarto to folio, on and off and back to the stage, the movie theater, and the home entertainment system—the ontology of the thing we study waxing and waning, constantly picking up and dropping actants as it goes?[3]

In this model, the labor of all such fetishists (ourselves included) stands in reciprocal relation to the past labors of reading, living, and dying that our work posits as "past." It is by our labors that readings and texts continue to circulate.[4] What would it mean to deactivate this reciprocity and dwell within the figural or stunt unreadability that Heminge and Condell deploy?

By posing unreadability as a question, we seek to interrupt the prevailing economies for managing the relation between reading and not reading in our various critical acts and so impede a return to business as usual. The structure of a question pertains for unreadability does not exist per se as a positivity but only as a shifting, partial effect of the process of reading itself. It might be said to unfold at the junctures or limits, as they are drawn, between reaction and response, the dead and the living, the automaticity of the machine and the immanence of the organism, and to resist the ontologizing of those limits. We regard unreadability as the uninvited guest to the surplus of "life" certain texts and authors are granted by their translation to successive media platforms and their sponsorship by such a great variety of readers.

We begin by offering a necessarily stenographic rendering of what we take to be some of the most brilliant contributions to the "New Textualism" and "history of the book," drawing attention to their

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sometimes delirious use of the rhetoric of unreadability. We then rewind the clock to 1983, as the soon-to-end Cold War paradoxically raised increasingly apocalyptic tones in literary theory and "nuclear criticism," to stare the "manifest danger" of Shakespeare's irrelevance and unreadability in the face. We conclude with an air-raid warning that calls for us all to leave our shelters, and with them the oddly regular announcements of critical apocalypse, and attempt to think unreadability.

Caution! "Media specificity" detected. "Your reading" will abort in three, two, one . . .

Heminge and Condell's rhetorical conversion of literal nonreading into rhetorical unreadability posits a conversion that keys unreadability to the success or failure of different media platforms. That is to say, competing models for managing, sorting, and organizing different iterations of texts by which their anteriority and referentiality is produced tend to rely on the specter of a breakdown to reading, a stalling or interruption. Media manifest in order to interrupt the process. The scene in which most of us encounter this order of stunt or figural unreadability might be the association of approaches to Renaissance drama that corral themselves within the "history of the book." Typically, they deploy media specificity to interrupt a reading process that they take to be routinized or reductive. Conjuring the book's presence as *thing,* "un-editing" exposes your reading to the vast array of other *historical*—which is to say, nothing more than *media-specific*—versions, inducing vertigo to reading that detaches readers from their textual moorings. The salutary effect of this media interruption tends to be that every aspect of the book becomes readable, including page layout, fonts, lettering, paper, binding, bibliographic codes, marginalia, paratexts, wormholes, animal hairs, the printer's urine, and so on. What gives us pause, however, is the way the media interruption, once deployed, becomes the occasion for an altered regime of description, merely, installing another, seemingly less problematic process of reading.

The quasi-messianic or apocalyptic coming or advent of the book as *thing* serves, in essence, as the staging ground for this or that narrative of "reading" become book use that can then serve as an input to

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yet more "readers" and the marks they leave in the margins of their books.[5] Even in its ostensibly antiredemptive guises, such as when the butt of the reading is some "Holy cow!" ideologeme of the field ("Shakespeare," the First Folio, or whatever) which we discover is the product of an immanent set of practices (compositor error or the like), the redemptive cast migrates to the immanent sanctity of labor itself. Such readings tend then merely to eventalize the performances of the critic, enabling us to point to our own labors of reading as somehow proof of life, our lives, your life, their lives as lived—"life" having become some universal abstract exchange value—the good(s). Media interruption serves as little more than a blanking out of unreadability, then, installing the figure of not reading as a crossroads or crux, which it then cuts as it passes back to producing a reading. Through a very curious set of operations, the media interruption flickers in and out of being to become the ground, say, for a recoverable materiality of a past world of book use or some other social/body/practice which manifests as if a referent. Close reading (itself always an exercise in reading and not reading) is displaced by the management of the archive, the shuffling, sorting, and necessarily the reduction of an ever-proliferating array of facsimiles or backups to whatever it was exactly that "Shakespeare" is said to have penned.

Reboot. Reading will resume in three, two, one . . .

Rewind to Randall McLeod's ph/fantastic essay "Un '*Editing*' Shakspeare" (1982), and you will see what we mean.[6] McLeod examines a posthumously published (and improperly edited, according to him) poem written by John Keats, "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Again." He points out that Keats wrote his poem in a portable facsimile edition of the First Folio (1804), perhaps the first unedited edition of Shakespeare since it had no notes or other textual apparatus. In a letter addressed to his brothers dated Friday, January 23, 1818, Keats transcribes his poem but drops the word "read": "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Again" becomes "On sitting down to *King Lear* again." A narrative of Keats's composition exists in the letters, but the media event of the facsimile edition disrupts this narrative for McLeod, leading him to posit a different narrative for the poem. He points out that the title page of the book may also be part of the title of Keats's poem

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he relates to Keats's signature written on the title page just above that of "Mr. William Shakespeare" and dated 1817.[7] McLeod reads the signature not as a sign of Keats's ownership of the book but as his will, his "signing over" his copy to Fanny Brawne. McLeod criticizes editors of Keats's poem for ignoring the facsimile as an icon, for following a "de-iconizing process of editorial transmission."[8] By contrast, McLeod resocializes the poem by unediting it, putting it back into the context of its "material" inscriptions and transcriptions. Yet McLeod's notion of unediting the social text depends on his turning facsimiles, reproduced in his essay sometimes as small parts of pages, sometimes of full pages of Keats's facsimile, into a blocking of one narrative to produce another narrative about the text in the age of "*photo*facsimiles."[9] The revelation of an earlier, Keatsian media interruption serves to naturalize another—McLeod's use of *photo*facsimiles.

If Keats disappears the word "read" from his poem, McLeod disappears the question of how to read that elision and its dependence on both a facsimile of Keats's poem and a quotation from Keats's letter. The typography of McLeod's neologism is itself symptomatic distraction: "Un *Editing*" severs the "un" by a different font, spacing, and quotation marks from the capitalized and italicized "*Editing,*" but the title is then subject to maiming or reforming in the table of contents of the journal that published it, and subsequent citations. Indeed, "un *Editing*," which refuses the irruption of white space, may be read as a condensed autoimmunizing antiaporia. But in the wake of McLeod's (non)reading of what he dubs "Keatspeare," readers and editors do not know where to begin reading or editing—with print or after the handwritten date? Nor do we know where to stop reading. The poem appears on the same page that ends *Hamlet* (*FINIS*)—it erupts between plays. And precisely because Keats's 1804 facsimile has not been edited, the blank space on the page usually taken up by notes becomes writable for a poem that is at the same time not publishable as a literary de/composition. Keats's poem becomes therefore excessively literary as its position within the facsimile edition renders its composition unnarratable, unreadable, and inedi(ta)ble—both "yum!" and "yuck!" How do we handle this irreducible "*thisness*"? Reduce the complexity of the fact/faux/simile and you lose everything. Try selling that.

In our view, McLeod pulls off a self-disappearing act even before he goes missing in the bibliographies of more recent scholars who

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clearly know his work: his essay goes missing because it quite corrosively exposes editing to a crisis by showing that the apparent difference between "editing" and "un *Editing*" cannot be kept in place by typography. Because Keats turns his Shakespeare facsimile into writing paper for his poems, composed in unpublished and unpublishable paratextual spaces, the resulting poem thus requires transcription and "facsimilation" in order to be assimilated into an edi(ta)ble narrative form—which is what McLeod does. And this "imagetexting" or "Bardoclash" derails any attempt to narrate and recover an uncorrupted, unedited "material" text written by Keats. All encryption models of the social text are wildly exceeded by the posthumographic status of "Keatspeare."

Fac/t/similes of (not) reading

Fast-forward to Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass's magisterial essay "The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays on Shakespeare's Commonplaces" (2008).[10] Lesser and Stallybrass show that the version of *Hamlet* in the 1603 quarto (the First Quarto, or Q1) is, much like that of the Second Quarto (Q2) of 1604/5, a literary text and not the record of a theatrical performance it is generally assumed to be. By "literary" they mean geared to a world of scholar-readers on the lookout for sententiae—a model of the "literary" that emerges out of what represents an emerging community of readerly interest.

At the end of the essay there appears an unpaginated "Authors' Correction" page. "One play," it seems, "was inadvertently omitted from Table 1," and Lesser and Stallybrass note that "we should have included this edition in our list." These things, it must be said, happen. Who really could point a finger? It seems fair to note, however, that their brief bibliographic and unpaginated paratext serves to fund a belief that the archive may be positivized, errors corrected, and what went missing restored, if not joined. Our aim is not necessarily to question their essay's modeling of a particular historical practice of (not) reading *Hamlet* (scrolling through the text looking for sententiae) so much as to call attention to a lingering symptom of the serious (and totally infectious) case of archive fever that their essay contracts. In a joyful moment, this delirium takes us shopping. We pause with

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Lesser and Stallybrass to hallucinate the positivity of the first and second *Hamlet* quartos into a scene of buying. We enter Nicholas Ling's shop (*Ding*-a-ling) in order to explain why he might have produced two very similar quartos instead of what always seemed like two very different quartos (and which therefore needed less explaining).[11]

Lesser and Stallybrass explain the apparent marketing blunder by imagining the scene:

> Ling's title pages have it both ways. A book buyer with enough interest in *Hamlet* to pay close attention will be alerted to the newer edition's superiority over the old—which, after all, such an interested reader could already have bought in 1603. This reader will thus be urged to buy the new version (as well). A more casual browser, on the other hand, might miss the distinction altogether, giving Ling a chance to sell off copies of Q1 (perhaps even at a discount) while still asserting the "new and improved" status of Q2. Ling's title page for Q2 thus seems an ideal solution to a particular, local problem: how should a publisher market a new version of a text he had printed only a year earlier, enticing customers to buy the new edition without driving them away from the old?[12]

The archive hallucinated here as a scene of book browsing provides a mirror image of the New Historicist anecdote. Instead of being derived from fiction in the archive, the archive itself is fictionalized, converted into a series of calculations the reader with "enough interest" will get back by converting his or her attentive reading into comparison shopping.

The scenography works, and artfully so. But this aesthetic judgment or justification discloses the way the essay itself serves as facsimile or backup, a sorting of textual data so as to summon up a past via the very great and much appreciated labor *qua* fetish work that Lesser and Stallybrass do but readers *then* did not. Lesser and Stallybrass produce their facsimile to narrativize the data of what is said to happen in textual production; that is, they posit, conjure, hallucinate a scholarly community of readers in Renaissance London who read and write the same way they do without ever actually doing so—the actual labor of reading then and now differs. The vast labor entailed to produce their essay stands in reciprocal relation to the much different processes of reading that they take to be and so constitute

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as a historical phenomenon. Q1 and Q2 of *Hamlet* are therefore re/constructed as a single and wholly reliable media platform for the delivery of sententiae. Value/use value for scholars in their imagined community is located less in the commonplace books and the literary tradition they are said to create than it is in the cut-and-paste operations that constitute them. The play text itself—or at least the texts of Q1 and Q2 of *Hamlet*—may be safely forgotten: Lesser and Stallybrass don't have to read *Hamlet* (and neither do we)—although in doing so we come strangely to resemble Polonius as he replays himself replaying the contents of his commonplace book in act 1, scene 3, almost making Laertes miss the boat he's been urging him to board. What a while ago Stephen Greenblatt called "the touch of the real" was, so we now discover, not only a desire for the referent but always already the "touched of the real," a happy hallucination of the referent and the past through the drug of writing seemingly purified through the buffer of facsimiles.[13]

Enter Thomas Middleton. Bio/bibliography as fact/faux/simile

Thus far we have treated two exemplary instances of media interruption in the hands of some of their most deft rhetoricians. We turn now to the labor of editing itself—understood, following Heminge and Condell, as a moment of recruitment, a moment at which it may be possible, by producing the correct bio/bibliographic object, to orchestrate an "event" that alters the gravitation of the field.

What does it take, for example, to launch an ideological counterweight to what Michael Bristol calls "Big-time Shakespeare?"[14] How do you create a fetish object that might compete, that might deliver on the threat of a literal nonreading of Shakespeare by recruiting readers to bear someone else? It takes perhaps, at very least, the double whammy of *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (2007) and *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture* (2007).[15] Tellingly, the editors inform readers that these editions are both like and unlike so-called complete or collected works of Shakespeare. A game is being played; a reorientation effected. *The Collected Works* begins by leveling the score and assuming the mantle: "Thomas Middleton

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and William Shakespeare were the only writers of the English Renaissance who created masterpieces in four major dramatic genres: comedy, history, tragedy, and tragic-comedy," "Middleton was the only playwright trusted by Shakespeare's company to adapt Shakespeare's plays after his death."[16] He also wrote the biggest "hit" performed by any company in London during the period. The narrative oscillates between affiliation and replacement, between the assertion of identity and a rupturing superiority.

Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture takes a different strategy. It crafts an editorial apparatus and approach that are not scripted by previous editions of Shakespeare's works. In the handy section titled "How to Use This Book," the editors reverse the temporality of the opening moves of *The Collected Works* to stage their project from the point of view of the reader. "Most modern readers of Middleton," they write, "will already have encountered editions of Shakespeare," acknowledging "Shakespeare" as a filter or model that might interrupt or arouse certain kinds of expectations that are unwelcome. They assert the "irrelevance" of many of the editorial choices that concern "Shakespeare." In describing the protocol for the inclusion of texts in *The Collected Works,* they note that it "contains texts of all Middleton's known surviving works, and brief descriptions of what we know about his lost ones. It includes works written by Middleton alone, works written by Middleton in collaboration with other writers, and works by writers which Middleton later adapted."[17] The strategy, then, which both is and is not the same as the one that produces the Oxford Shakespeare, subtly rewires the linkage between the figure of the author and his works to include everything that Middleton may reasonably be expected to have had a hand in. The logic makes fine sense but runs the (we think admirable) risk of counterclaims or objections over property rights that will be difficult to combat.

Implicitly, the historical Middleton serves here less as a retrievable bio/bibliographic origin than as *Ursprung,* or outpouring, the breathing and writing *bios,* the biological fact of an existence that requires remediation to render his textual corpus whole if not holy. *The Collected Works,* whose self-ruining completeness emphatically overcompensates for what is lost, proffers itself as a witting facsimile of an edition that claims to be *The Complete Works* but which is riven with writing gone missing. It registers its losses, the ash of the archive, as

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a series of descriptions that draw attention to the holes. One could, we suppose, choose to read this strategy as a compulsion to find signs of Middleton wherever and whenever is possible, and so to breathe life into him via the inflation of so many textual skins so that one day "he" may *live on*—but how could one not want to join in? How could we not understand this as part of a strategy to alter the ideological field of Renaissance drama and value it as the intensive labor of a particular fetish community that wishes us to apprehend the past differently? As bio/bibliography (the comaking of persons and books) the Middleton project provides no answers to the questions we seek to worry, but it offers a strategically different way of using texts and of conceiving of the edition as itself a "backup" or "backing up" to writing that maximizes its heft in our collective presents.

The nuclear option

Thus far, we have merely rehearsed an all-too-brief survey of some of our favorite media interruptions—which we read as deployments of unreadability in the service of an altered sense of the archive, the production of different effects of the past in our various presents. In short, they deploy a set of reading protocols that fundamentally do not change the Heminge and Condell business model of Renaissance drama. And so we come back to the question. What would it mean to confront a literal, brute unreadability and dwell within its yet-to-be-discovered limits?

A little while ago or almost no time at all, someone tried to do just that. He wondered whether or not there might come a time when "Shakespeare" might "cease to be literature."[18] "It is . . . quite possible," he writes, "that given a deep enough transformation of our history, we may in the future produce a society which is unable to get anything at all out of Shakespeare. His works might seem desperately alien, full of styles of thought and feeling which such a society found limited or irrelevant." And "in such a situation," he adds, "Shakespeare would be no more valuable than much present-day graffiti."[19] "And though many people," he concludes, turning the knife, "would consider such a social condition tragically impoverished, it seems to me dogmatic not to entertain the possibility that it might arise rather from a general human enrichment."[20] This is, of course, Terry Eagleton

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writing in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). As you recall, he is out to put "literature" under erasure, out to deface "literature" as a sort of liberal humanist gold standard or fetish object and with it the idea that reading made you a better person. Here he enlists Shakespeare's unreadability to his cause. Un-Shakespeare "Shakespeare," he implies, and you may picture what the future holds—a radical, blank future, it seems, a future that is not yet written but upon which you may like to project a future you'd prefer to the present. Deploying a rhetorical unreadability become literal nonreading, Eagleton leaves Shakespeare to be remaindered, moved to the library annex, put in the bin, or at least canceled from the ideological menu.

At the end of the book, in the chapter "Political Criticism," the stakes get even higher. Having taken us on a tour of theory, Eagleton asks, "What is the *point?* . . . Are there not issues in the world more weighty than codes, signifiers and reading subjects?"[21] Eagleton inputs the rhetorical launch codes and writes the following: "Let us consider merely one such issue. As I write, it is estimated that the world contains over 60,000 nuclear warheads, many with a capacity a thousand times greater than the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima. The possibility that these weapons will be used in our lifetime is steadily growing. The approximate cost of these weapons is 500 billion dollars a year, or 1.3 billion dollars a day. Five percent of this sum—25 billion dollars—could drastically, fundamentally alleviate the problems of the poverty-stricken Third World."[22] Eventalizing his own text with the pseudodeictic "as I write," Eagleton goes nuclear, and the future, or one version of it, dis/appears as a blinding flash of white light. But the trigger he pulls is a dummy. The nuclear moment passes and serves as a shock tactic by which an altered sense of the archive is installed. For his book is "less an introduction [to literary theory] than an obituary," and he ends by "burying the object we sought to unearth."[23]

The blast radius of Eagleton's going nuclear derealizes literature and its parasitic theories. His book, then, will have been a crypt, a closing off and down of a set of issues that might inaugurate a political orientation to the vast archive named simply "writing," from which various positive agendas might provisionally arise: emerging national literatures, working-class or ethnic literatures, and so on. But where there should be a blank, the future drawing a blank, leaving us much like

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Walter Benjamin's angel of history facing backward, gazing out upon the wreckage that remains, it turns out that redemption beckons.[24] Shakespeare, Eagleton tells us, lives. He did not, so it appears, have to die (again) for literature to die. The "Shakespeare" whose unreadability has been mooted was merely a body double for the pernicious "literature" that is now raining upon us as just so much fallout. "The liberation of Shakespeare and Proust," writes Eagleton, "may well entail the death of literature, but it may also be their redemption."[25] "Shakespeare" needed killing so that Shakespeare could live again. What needed killing was "literature"—and projecting Shakespeare's historical irrelevance was one of many rhetorical interventions in the ideological switchboard required to pull the trigger.

"*X* mar/s/ks the spots"

Eagleton's book may be read as already choreographing a particular dance between what is called "theory" and "history" and encoding thereby a set of strategies for prospecting or opening up new markets for "Shakespeare" (read "literary") reserves in a series of emancipated futures that are yet to be redeemed and which therefore offer the prospect of endless surplus values and (joint) stock options. In this sense, the book becomes readable as a moment of what Jacques Derrida might term "nuclear criticism," a set of moves which tax the present with the fabulation of a referent: either the mutually assured destruction of nuclear oblivion or the positivizing of textual traces in the name of "life"—an immanent ideology.

In "No Apocalypse, Not Now" (1984), Derrida rethinks unreadability as a question of "archivability." He links literature to the loss of a referent specific to total, nuclear destruction:

> Here we are dealing hypothetically with a total and remainderless destruction of the archive. This destruction would take place for the first time and it would lack any common proportion with, for example, the burning of a library, even that of Alexandria, which occasioned so many written accounts and nourished so many literatures. The hypothesis of this total destruction watches over deconstruction, it guides its footsteps. . . . Deconstruction, at least what is being advanced today in its name, belongs to the nuclear age. And to the age of literature. . . . The only referent

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> that is absolutely real is thus of the scope or dimension of an absolute nuclear catastrophe that would irreversibly destroy the entire archive and all symbolic capacity, would destroy the "movement of survival," what I call "survivance," at the very heart of life. This absolute referent of all possible literature is on a par with the absolute effacement of any possible trace; it is thus the only ineffaceable trace, it is so as the trace of what is entirely other, "*trace du tout autre.*" This is the only absolute trace—effaceable, ineffaceable. The only "subject" of all possible literature, of all possible criticism, its only ultimate and a-symbolic referent, unsymbolizable, even unsignifiable; this is, if not the nuclear age, if not the nuclear catastrophe, at least that toward which nuclear discourse and the nuclear symbolic are still beckoning: the remainderless and a-symbolic destruction of literature. Literature and literary criticism cannot speak of anything else, they can have no other ultimate referent. . . . If we are bound and determined to speak in terms of reference, nuclear war is the only possible referent of any discourse and any experience that would share their condition with that of literature. If, according to a structuring hypothesis, a fantasy or phantasm, nuclear war is equivalent to the total destruction of the archive, if not of the human habitat, it becomes the absolute referent, the horizon and the condition of all the others.[26]

With the destruction of the archive and the loss of referent, nothing remains. According to Derrida, the symbolic work of mourning therefore becomes impossible, for the "'survivance,' at the very heart of life," the orientation to the future, to the possibility that our playing will replay, is gone. Such a loss of the referent (of the very possibility of reference) is different from "an individual death, a destruction affecting only a part of society, of tradition, of culture may always give rise to a symbolic work of mourning, with memory, compensation, internalization, idealization, displacement, and so on. In that case there is monumentalization, archivization and work on the remainder, work of the remainder."[27] Derrida's turn from the unreadability of literature to what we would call its "un" or "an" "archivability" depends on a media-specific notion of the archive: Derrida's archive is a written archive made of printed texts that "are" traces of *archewriting.* In a sense, he confuses reference with the referent. Even in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* when he took stock of the impact of new media on the archive, Derrida did not theorize a shift in archive

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management from a referencing system with its retrieval and return protocols derived from a print archive and the assumed ontology of the book. The shift to a model focused by a facsimile archive, at a further remove from the textual referent, yet constituted so as to be capable of being processed as or mistaken for the referent, remains to be thought. The surplus value of the facsimile as both "fact-simile" and "faux-simile" constitutes the literary object, the book, always as an oscillating media event, an event that restitches unreadability in any act of reading. "Survivance," "the movement of survival," already, if you like, constitutes a winking in and out of being, a recrossing and cutting of the relations between the living and the nonliving, the organic, the machinic, and the inert. The backup of the facsimile is thus always in excess of the total destruction of any archive or paper machine.[28]

Here it seems important to recall that Eagleton's book resists itself and signs another road that it does not take. Against the move to liberation become redemption, Eagleton records but does not cite Marx in the *Grundrisse* worrying the "eternal charm" of Greek art[29] and, though Eagleton does not remind us, of Shakespeare. Marx writes that he will deal with Greek art first and then speak to the "relation . . . of Shakespeare to the present time" but never makes it back to him; forgets to do so; leaves him quite literally unread, citing him approvingly on the essence of money later in the text.[30] Greek art then does double duty. But the question of its charm is complicated. The relation between mythology as the "arsenal" to Greek art is interrupted by capitalism's growing technical mastery of the natural world. "What chance," writes Marx, aligning the Greek gods with their corporate equivalents, "has Vulcan against Roberts & C, Jupiter against the lightning rod, and Hermes against the Credit Mobilier"?[31] The problem posed by Greek arts and epic, then, and by an offstage Shakespeare, "is that they still afford us artistic pleasure."[32] Marx resolves this seeming contradiction by boxing it up in a narrative that reverses the genealogical cast to parenting. If parents derive pleasure from their children by reexperiencing their own childish naïveté, such is the pleasure afforded by Greek art, which serves up "beautiful unfoldings" summoned from "the historic childhood of humanity."[33]

By this inversion of genealogical time, our ancestors become our children. Interrupted by technological and media developments, their readability or retrievability is premised on the charm we derive from

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what is, in truth, their unreadability given our present situation and concerns. We recognize them, but they are not readable. We enjoy them, but that enjoyment manifests an apotheosis or exotic derivative of times past. The source of their attraction lies very precisely in how readily their readability is a given, gives itself to us so that it remains or goes unread. In effect, Marx retains the charm while boxing it up so that it may not speak to or of the future—which it cannot thereby infect. The judicious blankness to his model of the future speaks to us of the difficulty in knowing whether, when we speak, write, and read, we change scripts, and how to reckon with the good and bad ghosts of those who were on the scene but who have departed and yet remain.

Marx warns of this difficulty in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte": "The social revolution of the 19th century cannot create its poetry out of the past, but only from the future"—a process he describes as like learning a new language. "It is like the beginner," he says, "[who] always translates back into the mother tongue, but appropriates the spirit of the new language and becomes capable of producing freely within it only by moving about in it without recalling the old."[34] A crossing over, coded as a forgetting of the matrix/maternal language, as the speaker gains fluency in a language he or she cannot remember learning or by forgetting that he or she has forgotten the old one—a language that remains merely *next,* without origin/genealogical link to the father of his or her habits. As the emphasis on the materiality, difficulty, and potential failure of translation, reanimation, recalling, repetition, and so "renaissance" in Marx's brief narrative makes clear, the problem lies in discerning which phenomena are progressive and which retrogressive—a salvific lure for utopian energies that lead us to want to make good on an unfulfilled past that has been irretrievably lost. He posits the future therefore as constitutively unreadable and necessarily unwritable.

In our view, Marx's refusal to permit an archive of the future to cohabit with the archive of the dead and dying stands as a caution against dummy deployments of unreadability gone nuclear sponsored by media interruption or archival politics. Such deployments rely on the flare of white light generated by the advent or messianic arrival of media specificity to inaugurate their own reworking or sorting of the archive so as to recuperate this or that fabulation of a referent—call

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it "future" liberation, for presentists; call it "history" in the guise of a referent, for historicists. Torn between both impulses, blinded by the successive flares of white light and drugged up by their juicy referents, we find ourselves stranded in the nonspace where conversion occurs, the *X* that mar/s/ks the spot.

This is (not) a drill

"Warning!" "Media Interruption!" "Quick," everyone says, "no time to lose." "This is it." "Look! You better get moving. Put your book down and pick ours up. If you don't you'll just be a botched facsimile of a reader." "Hang on," we say. "Slow down. No need to worry or head into the bunker. But you may want to check your purse."

Forget the rhetoric of urgency—there'll be another media interruption along in a minute. This time, you don't have to listen to the sirens. This time, watch (out) for the blank space, the blankness that's drawn to loop the interruption and return to a reading that does not read. Elude the gerund. Stick with the finite. Blank out. If you can accept that iteration is all there ever was or will be—the effect of the "original" a retrospective causation of the facsimiles/backups and you its wetware—then what might we learn? Such a critical program would articulate the future as a fundamentally empty set that it is our job precisely not to fill because to fill it would merely be to fill it "againe, and againe" to keep canceling it out and cashing it in. And so, instead, we seek to dwell in the blank spots unreadability discloses and covers over and inhabit the question.

These blank spots are neither Marxian nor Derridean. They are best rendered as crossroads and cruxes—crossed out through data input operations that we perform all too quickly, hurried across by the "manifest danger" of apocalypse, the proffered hopes of redemption, or by a mode of academic production in which readings must be vendible. Yet the "danger" of reading is not something that we can secure ourselves against or safely avoid. In their address to "the great variety of readers," Heminge and Condell may seek to amass readerly "friends" and "friends of friends"—the First Folio already a prima facie Facebook page—but no friendly firewall can contain the danger of unreaderly "foes." The "friending" of readers (and friends of friendly readers) already enfolds and inscribes a politics of friend and foe, the

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reader as p/artisan who is directed to reread but whose rereadings are always after the missing manuscript that the First Foe/lio has apparently "left behind" in its salvific idealization of itself as Folio, as a print edition that leaves no archive of impressions.[35] Instead of Heminge and Condell's instructions for use, we wish to reiterate their iterative schema, "againe, and againe," and receive it as an invitation to play nonreading out as a blank check/ed.

To that end, we find ourselves embarked on a project of unreading, a project that focuses on sometimes barely visible, often minute manifestations of media-specific interruptions of reading in print editions, film adaptations, and so on, of Shakespeare and Renaissance drama. In this essay we have attempted merely to delineate this project. What it means to read (and not read) from our position necessarily remains to be seen.

Notes

This essay was not written on acid-free paper.

1. On survival as a surplus or living on, an "afterlife" lived by others as their lives (and deaths), see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *The Selected Writings of Walter Benjamin,* 4 vols., ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 1:253–63, and readings of this essay by Paul de Man, "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 73–105, and by Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," in *Psyche,* ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 195–225.

2. For a modeling of human users as "wetware," see Richard Doyle, *Wetwares: Experiments in Postvital Living* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For a reading of Shakespeare's sonnets as rhetorical software for readers become biocultural "wetware," see Julian Yates, "More Life: Shakespeare's Sonnet Machines," in *ShakesQueer: A Queer Companion to the Works of Shakespeare,* ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 333–42.

3. For an allied argument that treats the relation of performance studies to theater history as a melancholy misrecognition of their fetish objects, see William N. West, "Replaying Early Modern Performances," in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies,* ed. Sarah Werner (Houndmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 30–49. Focusing on the figure of "replaying" as a neutral relation to anteriority, West asks his readers to consider "performance . . . less an event than the management of a rhythm of repetition—a practice of filling an ordinary gesture, word, or phrase with meaning through iteration, spacing, and change" (35).

4. The choice is never between having a "fetish" or not but between competing fetishes. See Peter Stallybrass, "Marx's Coat," in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces,* ed. Patricia Spyer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 184. As William Pietz argues, any accusation of "fetish" refers only to an irreconcilable difference between

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competing systems of value; William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, 1" *Res* 9 (1985): 5–17.

5. See William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

6. Randall McLeod, "Un 'Editing' Shak-speare," *Sub-Stance* 33, no. 4 (1982): 28–55. Strangely, McLeod's still stirring essay seems to have fallen out of circulation and tends not to appear in bibliographies where one might expect that it should.

7. Ibid., 34.

8. Ibid., 36.

9. Ibid., 37.

10. Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass, "The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays on Shakespeare's Commonplaces," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 371–420.

11. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), especially his discussion of the hallucinated "recollection" of the impression as a "real" moment where pen hits paper, foot touches ground to produce a print.

12. Lesser and Stallybrass, "First Literary *Hamlet*," 373.

13. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 20–48. For a critical analysis of this chapter, see Richard Burt, *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media*, rev. ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 237–47.

14. Michael Bristol, *Big-time Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

15. Thomas Middleton, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), and *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

16. Middleton, *Collected Works*, 25.

17. Middleton, *Early Modern Textual Culture*, 19.

18. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 9.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 10.

21. Ibid., 169.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 178.

24. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:389–400.

25. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 189.

26. Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 27–28.

27. Ibid.

28. Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

29. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 10.

30. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: The Foundations of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Penguin Classics: London, 1993), 110–12. "The equation of the incompatible, as Shakespeare nicely defined money" (163) is how Marx invokes Apemantus's address to the gold in *Timon of Athens*, act 4, scene 3, lines 381–92.

31. Ibid., 110–11.

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32. Ibid., 111.
33. Ibid.
34. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx and Engels Reader,* 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 595.
35. We allude here to Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan,* trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos, 2007), and Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship,* trans. George Collins (New York: Routledge, 1997).

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