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Miracle Play

Nicholas Royle

— Unbelievable, Shakespeare, if I'm perfectly frank.¹ We were up in Stratford, a few moons ago now it was, saw *Henry IV* the so-called Part 1 one night, the so-called Part 2 the next. First days of August 2007 if I recall aright, the Avon still very high after the flooding from the previous couple of weeks, afternoon of the second day it absolutely tipped down, we parked just outside the church and waited for it to subside a bit. Great puddles, splashing our way down the tree-lined churchyard path as the sunshine started breaking through. Two pounds now, can you credit it, used to cost nothing, give it time and it'll be a thousand, to get access to the chancel and set eyes on the family gathering, William and widow and all, and the bust to the left of the altar, put up in her lifetime, as the bump stresses. 'Good friend for Jesus sake forbear, / To dig the dust enclosed here. / Blessed be the man that spares these stones, / And cursed be he that moves my bones.' Unbelievable. You were there.

— Me? Where?

— You were standing on the right side, close to the 1605 Geneva Bible they have on display, the one from which he would have heard readings during his visits to church in the last few years of his life, as the bump stresses. There's a door, to the right, in front of the altar, and sunlight was streaming in through a gap. A single padlock securing the thing. And you were thinking, God knows why, but people do, about what would be required in order to break in at night, lift the stone (it's not clear why it says 'stones', except for the rhyme, there's just the one slab,

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isn't there, but I suppose he wasn't to know), dig the dust and get some DNA — the deserts, the forests, the gypsies —

— You're mental, you are.

— We're both mental, you fool. Personally I was struck by the prosopopoeia, the voice-from-beyond-the-grave, the way I was being addressed as 'dear friend'. Shakespeare's a miracle.

— What do you mean? What is a miracle? And when? You remind me of something the bizarre narrator of Henry James's *The Sacred Fount* comes out with: 'I don't insist on the name. Nothing is, I admit, a miracle from the moment one's on the track of the cause, which was the scent we were following. Call the thing simply my fact.'²

— Your fact? Is that with an 'a' or a 'u'?

— I want to say —

— Tush, never tell me.

— I want —

— You're going to have to be quiet. You'll already have annoyed enough people as it is. You cannot write Shakespeare criticism in or for more than one voice: it's against all the monological, monophonocentric rules of scholarship and academic decorum.

— I —

— No more. Never never never never never. Remember what a certain philosopher says.

— Jesus wept. He groaned in the spirit. Anyway, who said this was 'Shakespeare criticism'?

— Precisely apropos Shakespeare, he says: 'There has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts — nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality.'³ He is meditating on Marcellus' plea in the face of the Ghost — 'Thou art a scholar, speak to it Horatio' (1.1.42). It's a question of the kinds of writing, thinking and life (yes, living, learning to live, living on) that follow the knowledge that 'address[ing oneself] to spirits ... is not only possible, but ... will have at all times

conditioned, as such, address in general' (SM 12). To be a philosopher worthy of the name, in this context, is to be someone 'mad enough to hope to *unlock* [open up or unbolt: *déverrouiller*] the possibility of such an address' (12/34).

— So the voice from beyond the grave —

— I told you to shut it.

— You just told me to open up.

— Incredible, Derrida. Yes, mad enough to hope. I could imagine someone writing at great length about hope in the work of this mad philosopher, the madness to hope, the madness of hope, a figure that he connects with Heidegger, for example, in the relatively early essay 'Différance',⁴ but that plays a perhaps somewhat subterranean role in so many other texts.

— Can you just clarify — am I to infer that I am dead? . . . I see. . . Not a mouse stirring. . . I see. . . In any case, I think first of all you need to be concerned about the word 'miracle'. You said it in the context of Shakespeare: I wasn't sure if you meant his work or his life, his having lived, or again his epitaph, his tomb and monument at Stratford, the force of *prosopopeia*, in other words his living on. It made me uneasy. I'm not at all sure whether the word 'miracle' is prudent. And then for a split-second I had the distinct feeling you were going to make a similar pronouncement about Jacques Derrida.

— Absolutely, you must have been reading my mind. But I'll say it anyway, for the benefit of the audience who otherwise might not believe it: *Derrida's a miracle*.

— I find all of this quite troubling. To say that someone or — more precisely, I suppose — someone's writing is a miracle is surely to subscribe to a religious and more narrowly perhaps a Christian kind of discourse. . . .

— It depends. There is miracle and miracle. Miracle play, dear friend. That is where we have to begin.

— Where we have to begin? That sounds like an allusion to the mad philosopher's answer to the question, in the form of that

emphatic and extraordinary sentence: ‘*Wherever we are*: in a text already where we believe ourselves to be [Quelque part où nous sommes: *en un texte déjà où nous croyons être*].’⁵ Rodolphe Gasché quotes this sentence from *Of Grammatology* in a recent essay on Derrida and wonder. (Perhaps you were citing him? Or perhaps you haven’t read it? If not, I recommend it.) Gasché considers the ways in which wonder lies at the origin of philosophy, whether for Plato in the *Theaetetus* or Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*.⁶ No philosophy without *thaumazein*. And yet, as Gasché goes on to say, despite its significance throughout the history of philosophy, up to and including the writings of Husserl and Heidegger, ‘explicit reference to the problematic of philosophical wonder is oddly absent from Derrida’s work’ (p. 332). Gasché suggests that one reason for this is that ‘*thaumazein* as the origin of philosophical thought contains... the outlines of a metaphysics of the subject, the conception of an anthropology, as well as the elementary features of humanism’ (p. 332). The point then, he says, is that, ‘as an integral part of the whole of philosophy, wonder cannot... escape deconstructive vigilance’ (p. 337). Derrida’s writings entail a thinking of wonder otherwise, as without single origin. Wonder itself will have been supplemented, overtaken, surprised. Gasché illustrates this by reference to that statement about having to begin ‘in a text already where we believe ourselves to be’. Alluding to Derrida’s emphasis (in the same section of *Of Grammatology* [157–8 / 226–7]) on the way in which language takes us by surprise, Gasché writes:

thinking, philosophical thinking, for example, is always necessarily ‘held within’ [*prise*] and ‘overtaken’ [*surprise*] by a language and a logic constituting a system which cannot be dominated by thinking: this system has always ‘sufficiently *surprising* resources’ to which discourse whatever is said is always otherwise than what is intended. The wonder that causes thinking, would thus be nothing less than an awareness of being overtaken by the resources of that in which one is caught. (p. 338)

Language always takes first prize. Indeed there’s no competition. As Sarah Wood once remarked, it’s a matter of trying ‘to undo the magic isolation of surprise as the property of somebody, or as an aesthetic

effect which merely blinds and binds the movement of writing'.⁷ Gasché's essay 'Thinking, Without Wonder' focuses on philosophy, on what he calls 'a certain irreducibility of the philosophical' (p. 333), and on the ways in which deconstructive thinking necessarily dislocates the philosophical. Gasché doesn't say anything as such about religion or literature. It's no wonder, you might think, he doesn't talk about miracle.

— Nor, if I may get a word in edgeways, would it be any wonder that Derrida doesn't much trouble himself to write about miracles. So far as I am aware, the word 'miracle' appears only rarely in his work.

— I'm not so sure about that.⁸ And of course it depends also what you mean by 'appear'. Miracles would always have to do with some kind of verbal apparitioning, wouldn't they?

— Anyway, I was saying... The funny thing is that the word does indeed crop up just when he is discussing that formulation, first published in *Of Grammatology* in 1967, about where we have to begin, viz 'Wherever we are: in a text already where we believe ourselves to be [Quelque part où nous sommes: *en un texte déjà où nous croyons être*].' It's thirty years later, in *Counterpath*, in some reflections addressed to Catherine Malabou, on 25 November 1997. Derrida writes:

I wonder whether today, at the end of a long road, I wouldn't make the word 'believe [*croyons*]' carry the whole weight of it. In the polysemy, indeed the homonymy of the verbs *croire* (*believe that* this can happen, *believe* someone's word, *believe in* someone, so many different things, but most often *possible*, likely, thus credible, and hence independent of *pure* belief [*la pure croyance*]), I would insist on that *other* belief, the credence par excellence — which is possible only by *believing in the impossible*. A miracle is in the realm of the ordinary for *pure* belief [*Le miracle serait l'ordinaire de la pure croyance*]. And the 'text where we believe ourselves to be', another name for this place, place in general, interests me only where the impossible, that is to say the incredible, encircles and harries it, making my head turn, leaving an illegible trace within the taking-place, there, in the vertigo, 'where we believe ourselves to be'... [*sic*] Place is always unbelievable to me, as is orientation.⁹

Miracle would be the ordinary of *pure* belief. 'Place is always unbelievable to me': it's making my head turn, it's vertiginous. This interest in the impossible, in the play of place and the theatre of the impossible, is what you find, for example, in his reading of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. It's a question of how, in Shakespeare, '*the impossible happens*'.¹⁰

— Ah, Shakespeare: I was beginning to wonder... So what are you saying exactly?

— I'm saying that miracle, in Derrida, has to do with writing, with a sense of place, with an experience of the impossible in the text wherever we are. Literature, in this context, has special significance as the space in which the dead return, where ghosts speak, where resurrection happens, but also where the most unbelievable things occur, the most miraculous coincidences, miraculous recoveries and miraculous escapes. Here, in a sense, the miraculous is the ordinary or everyday of literature. And when 'the impossible happens', as Derrida stresses in 'Aphorism Countertime', this has nothing to do with "objective reality" (as he calls it, in scare quotes: AC, p. 422). It is about Shakespeare's 'theatre of the impossible' (p. 422). At the same time, however, miracle would also be, in a differently exemplary fashion, the ordinary of deconstruction, if there is any. That's why, in the piece on *Romeo and Juliet*, Derrida goes on to declare, nevertheless, that 'The impossible... also tells the truth' (p. 422). If miracle is a question of text, writing or inscription, in the generalized sense in which Derrida has elaborated these terms (a situation, such as being in church, is a text; DNA is a text; etc), it is also about iterability.

— Hang on, I'm losing you.

— Come back. Come to. Be astonished. Miracles today—as if everything were absolutely new. Remember that strange verbless, perhaps subjectless sentence in Derrida's 1963 essay 'Force and Signification': 'Astonishment... by language as the origin of history [*Étonnement... par le langage comme origine de l'histoire*].'¹¹ OK, listen. Here are a few prompts or stage directions regarding the miracle or miraculous in Derrida and Shakespeare:

1. Iterability. Discussing that aphoristic text about *Romeo and Juliet*, the ‘tiny little text [*un tout petit texte*]’ called ‘Aphorism Countertime’, the mad philosopher stresses that one must ‘reconstitute in the most informed and intelligible way, if necessary against the usual history of the historians, the historical element in a play... not just the historicity of its composition by Shakespeare, its inscription in a chain of works, etc., ... but also what is historical in the play itself... This has to do with the structure of a text, with... its iterability, which both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualization. All this is historical through and through. The iterability of the trace (unicity, identification, and alteration in repetition) is the condition of historicity’.¹² My reading of the so-called first part of *Henry IV* (I will rename it shortly) is guided by this question of iteration and iterability. *Henry IV* has a unique position in the Shakespearean oeuvre for the analytical, theatrical and poetic stress it gives to what Falstaff calls ‘iteration’. Iterability, that strange logic that binds repetition and alterity, is traced in Shakespeare’s ‘iteration’; but iterability, like the trace, is not and cannot become an object of thought. Rather it entails what Rodolphe Gasché calls ‘a non-thinkable tear within what is’ (TWW, p. 334). If Derrida’s writing performs trapeze-artist effects, generates uncanny feelings or perceptions resembling the miraculous, transforming the scene of reading in ways that might seem magical (Plato’s *pharmakon* never the same again after Derrida, for example, likewise Rousseau’s ‘supplement’, likewise Freud’s ‘telepathy’, and so on), if (as Frank Kermode once remarked) Derrida can leave us with a sense that what he does is beyond the human or that what he requires of us ‘may not be humanly supportable’, as though indeed Derrida were not ‘of the same species’ as the rest of us,¹³ if Derrida does something with ‘life’, living on and spectrality that is new or unprecedented in the history of writing (this would be the Derrida that Hélène Cixous describes as ‘a buried-alive supernatural, who gets wind of a new definition of immortality through the magic of writing’: he ‘writes as he posthumes. The writing is his survivor, she [*l’écriture, f.*] survives him’),¹⁴ and if (as various commentators have observed) Derrida’s innumerable accounts of the trace, text, supplement, spectre and others in that long-established ‘non-synonymic chain of substitutions’ can themselves arouse feelings of wonder or astonishment, all of this must

be tempered in effect by the humility of the ordinary, the miracle as the ordinary.

2. Lazarus —

— Enough! I can do this just as well or badly as you. I'm doing Number 2. It's the number of the ghost. Number is the ghost, after all, as Derrida also suggests.¹⁵

2. *Lazarus, come forth*. That's what literature is about, according to Maurice Blanchot. In 'Literature and the Right to Death' he writes: 'Take the trouble to listen to a single word: in that word, nothingness is struggling and toiling away, it digs tirelessly, doing its utmost to find a way out, nullifying what encloses it — it is infinite disquiet, formless and nameless vigilance.'¹⁶ Literature, Blanchot suggests, has to do with the '*Lazare, veni foras* [which] summon[s] the dark, cadaverous reality from its primordial depths' (p. 326). At the same time, however, necessarily placing its hope in 'the materiality of language, in the fact that words are things, too', literature is also 'a search for this moment which precedes literature', it is concerned with 'the abyss, Lazarus in the tomb and not Lazarus brought back into the daylight, the one who already smells bad, who is Evil, Lazarus lost and not Lazarus saved and brought back to life' (p. 327). Blanchot's account of literature might serve as a sort of cautionary prompt to any quick-fix impulse simply to characterize literature as the space of miracle: if the literary work produces resurrectional effects, driven by the passion to let us hear the 'infinite disquiet' of 'a single word' (for example, 'miracle' or 'iteration'), it is also what encrypts itself, what wants to bury itself or be buried, buried alive, *before* the miracle, before 'Lazarus saved and brought back to life'. Blanchot's figure of Lazarus alerts us to the deep strangeness of literary language as well as to the complexity of a miracle motif that runs through all of Shakespeare's work, namely coming back or being brought back from the dead: literature as Lazarature. Jesus wept. He groaned in the spirit. If you were to let me have a little more time here I would like to elaborate further on the story of Lazarus, especially in terms of Freud, telepathy and what is called magical thinking. You see, for me, it starts with that strange sense of voice and place, that disorienting of what is called narrative voice or point of view, in the story of Lazarus: 'Jesus wept. He groaned in the

spirit.' In grief at the death of his friend, Jesus 'groaned in the spirit'. What is that groan? Can a groan 'in the spirit' be heard? Where, whose or what is this quasi-telepathic voice that apparently knows and tells us that Jesus groaned *in the spirit*? At issue here is the great question of magical thinking in the Bible. If you turn to Freud...

— I'm sorry. Not now. Number 3. Hélène Cixous. As I was suggesting, Jacques Derrida's writings contain little explicit or sustained reference to miracles or the miraculous. I know you wanted to quibble about that, but there is one particular author in relation to whose work he talks about the miraculous, namely Cixous, above all in his remarkable book *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say...*¹⁷ Here the notion of the miracle is, I think, surprisingly insistent. I will recall just four of the most striking examples.

The first concerns his discussion of how, quite differently from him, she 'writes by dream' (*HCFL*, p. 75). Derrida writes, he says, at the end of the night, 'when [his] awakening... begins by turning off the current of the phantasm and putting an end to the night' (p. 76). Cixous, on the other hand, writes 'by drawing energy as well as the figures of her writing from a phantasmoneiric flux that — and this is its miracle and its magic — is not interrupted by awakening' (p. 75). This 'phantasmoneiric flux' marks out her work, in Derrida's view, from all other work, at least from other writing in the twentieth (or twenty-first) century (see *HCFL*, pp.12–13). He remarks: 'I do not know any other example of such a miraculous alliance between day and night, between the mad turbulence of the dream and the calculating culture of the literal and literary realization' (p. 76). And he adds, as a sort of blinding proviso to this apprehension of the miraculous, that he 'believe[s] his eyes all the less, in front of this miracle', since he himself 'work[s] on the contrary by dream's interruption' (p. 76), by the light of day.

The second example has to do with Derrida's analysis of 'the mighty power of the *might*' in her writing, the way in which it sings, like a wire that would be as much a telepathic or telephonic thread as a telegraph wire, the way it connects what he calls 'the thought of magic' with 'life' and above all with the imperative 'Live [*vis*]'. This 'might' has to do with 'the magic of what, by a stroke of writing, does the impossible' (p. 107). Derrida declares:

the mighty power of the *might* of which we are speaking, as of Hélène Cixous's poetics in fact, is the enchantment, the arrival as if by an enchantment, where the poetic song, the charm, the *Carmen*, and magical power are allied to *kommen lassen*, make come in letting come... [this is the] formula of the miracle of a chant of enchantment, which is also a song of songs. (*HCFL*, p. 79)¹⁸

— Ah, the song of songs! —

— Not groaning but singing now, are you? Backing vocal, back on the song or track of the Bible, let me guess, you'd like to juxtapose, compare and contrast this miraculous song of 'making come in letting come' (this force of 'Live', *vis* of *vis* or live-force, this 'would that you might live' [*HCFL*, p. 77]), with Blanchot's markedly more sombre and deathly *Lazarus, come forth*.

— 'The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills...' ¹⁹

— The third occasion concerning the miraculous in Cixous is where Derrida speaks of the 'oceanic mood' he experiences when confronted with her writing. It's like a miraculous catch of fish. He says:

the oceanic mood I feel in front of this work is also reminiscent of what one feels about a miraculous catch. Magical, miraculous, and mystical: why? I ask myself why because, as a man of the Enlightenment, I would still like to give an account and reason for this miraculous, mystical magic — which must not be an act of witchcraft. An inexhaustible magic, however... [These] shimmering fish are not caught by her net. The mighty fish are born from the *net* in which they are caught. That is what I call the poetics of the event. It produces magically, miraculously, and quasi-mystically the very thing it nominates. It brings about what it catches. (*HCFL*, p. 97)

Here, perhaps more explicitly than anywhere else in the book, Derrida insists on this figure of the miraculous while also emphatically distinguishing it from any sort of witchcraft or supernaturalism. At issue in Cixous's work, rather, is a new 'poetics of the event' for which it would be necessary, as he says, to elaborate a new understanding of

what is meant by ‘magic’, ‘the soul or spirit of animism’, ‘telepathy’, ‘telephony’, ‘phantasm’, ‘omnipotence’ or ‘incantation’ (p. 76).

The final instance is specifically about the instance, the instant or instantaneity, the bounding miraculous speed of Cixous’s writing, in particular thanks to substitution. Derrida thus speaks of ‘the infinite play of substitution of letters that Hélène Cixous’s opus operates, she who knows how to replace everything, at full speed, including time and death, by the bond of an immortality’. He goes on:

Substitution is her top game, the power and magic of this writing, of what happens or takes place, miraculously through the mighty power of substitution, but of a substitution that leaves the living itself [*vivant singulier*] in place. Thus the latter is kept alive or given back to life through the grace of a bound. At an infinite speed, on the instant, in a single bound. (*HCFL*, p. 131)

It is in this context that Derrida speaks about ‘a speed of displacement in writing’ (p. 73), ‘a speed that, playing with time, outplays time’ (pp. 61–2).

Now I would like to say first of all that with these cases or instances that Derrida talks about — the ‘miraculous alliance between day and night’, between ‘dream’ and ‘literal and literary realization’, in short the ‘phantasmoneiric flux’; the miracle of the chant of enchantment and ‘the mighty power of the *might*’; the miraculous *catch* of the ‘poetics of the event’ which ‘brings about what it catches’; and the miraculous speed of substitution, a substitutability always affirming the living singular, living itself [*vivant singulier*], even as it ‘outplays time’ — with all of this that shimmers up before us in the book *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say* . . . , we are given an extraordinary account of the work of Hélène Cixous, a reading or countersigning of Cixous that is itself, it seems to me, in its own singular and singularly enlightening fashion, miraculous. To adapt a formulation suggested a little earlier, Cixous’s work might never be the same again. At the same time, however, and indeed in accordance with the mighty powers of literature and substitution about which Derrida writes and which he reads in her work and draws on for the energy of his own writing, everything that he says about the miraculous in Cixous might, with appropriate regard to

the irreplaceable that is replaced on the spot, be transposed to a reading of Shakespeare.²⁰

I will try to sketch at least the beginning of such a reading, focusing on a few appearances of the word ‘miracle’ or ‘miraculous’ itself, in particular with regard to *Henry IV*, though I do also want to say something about *Hamlet*, before concluding with... Are you back again?

—Yes, I haven’t been anywhere. You’re the one who drifted away. That’s where we have to begin, I’ve been saying, ‘miracle play’ — first of all perhaps as a sort of *hysteron proteron*: you have to reckon with the place of play, play’s displacing, ‘play’ before ‘miracle’, where *play* — or at any rate ‘play in a radical way’, as Derrida says — has to do with a kind of thinking that goes ‘beyond the activity of a subject manipulating objects according to or against the rules, et cetera.’²¹ It is a matter of thinking play in ways that are not ‘dominated by meaning’ or by ‘finality’, play as something no longer simply ‘in the world’ or the ‘activity’ of someone. As Derrida notes: ‘Philosophy has always made play into an activity, the activity of a subject manipulating objects.’²² To *miracle play*, you have to dream, cast off into the phantasmoneiric flux, think play anew. It has to do with the organization and disorganization of dreams and letters. This is one of the discoveries or conceptual breakthroughs that Derrida attributes to Freud, thanks to the ‘polycentrism of dream representation’.²³ I am citing his essay ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, which focuses on that tiny but fascinating Freud text ‘Notiz Über den “Wunderblock”’, usually referred to in English as ‘A Note Upon The “Mystic Writing-Pad”’, though you might like to imagine it as the note on the miracle pad, the miracle block or miracle book.²⁴ ‘We must be several in order to write, and even to “perceive”’ (FSW, p. 226), the mad philosopher says.²⁵ ‘The *sociality* of writing as *drama* requires an entirely different discipline’ (FSW, p. 227). That’s why drama, and Shakespeare above all, is so crucial to understanding what deconstruction, if there is any, is about. Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all, as Derrida has remarked: invention happens, if it happens, only in multiple voices.²⁶

—OK, that wasn’t what I was saying, but I think I’m with you. ‘Miracle play’: among other things, then, it’s a question of trying

to read or think backwards, preposterously as Puck would say. (You recall his words in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'And those things do best please me / That befall prepos'trously' [3.2.120–1].) Isn't that also what Shakespeare's plays are, things that work backwards, animal-machines that see their own futures? It's the very fabric of a play like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but it's also what makes the so-called history plays historical, even when they break with the usual historical account and invent (as in the case of Falstaff or more accurately perhaps, Falstaff and the other, all the others, a motley crew of hundreds including Prince Hal, the king in waiting). As the crazy 'I' narrating *The Sacred Fount* intimates, there's always something preposterous about a miracle, in the sense that 'one's on the track of the cause' as soon as the word 'miracle' is in front of you: you're already behind.

— Back, as you've been saying, back to backing and backtracking vocals, in a background that's right in front of us. You have to catch up. That's what is always going on with Shakespeare. As Harold Bloom says: 'As we read Shakespeare, we are always engaged in catching up.'²⁷ But let's recall the initial promise of the title for a moment: 'a title is always a promise', as Derrida stresses.²⁸ After all, for all the preposterousness of 'play' preceding or being the scene or staging of 'miracle', surely the phrase 'miracle play' will have been taken as primarily referring to 'A dramatization based on events in the life of Jesus or the legends of the saints, popular in the Middle Ages' (to give it in the words of the *OED*)?

— Yes, I imagine that may have led a few people astray, at least provisionally. And there are of course numerous links between *Henry IV* and medieval miracle, mystery or morality plays. There is the correspondence, for example, between Falstaff and the figure of Vice, an identification of admittedly limited value, and then there is the enigmatic place of a certain Nicholas as evoked by Gadshill (see 2.1.59), St Nicholas or Nick, patron saint of children, scholars and robbers, who in at least one version of a medieval play 'miraculously restores to life three slain clerics'.²⁹ But for me it's a question of a sort of palaeonymic deployment of the phrase: 'miracle play', in other words, *after Derrida*. Shakespeare's writings, all of their poetic theatre, irreducibly plural, together or alone, instantiate *miracle play*.

— In fact, you know, the term ‘miracle play’ does not appear as such until 1602.³⁰ It is as if anachrony were written into the term. And there is something funny going on, in any case, already with this word ‘miracle’ (and its cognates, including the adjective ‘miraculous’), something to which Shakespeare’s writing bears witness, while also in singular fashion meddling with it. There is a sort of dehiscence within the history of the word, where the religious signification sheers off, and ‘miracle’ appears simply as a word for . . .

— Simply? Did you say ‘simply’?

— Yes, the order of the day here is simply ‘simple’. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, under the entry for ‘miracle’, starts off with the quite charming, comical phrase ‘simple uses’. ‘Miracle’, we read: ‘**I. Simple uses. 1. a.** A marvellous event not ascribable to human power or the operation of any natural force and therefore attributed to supernatural, esp. divine, agency; *esp.* an act (e.g. of healing) demonstrating control over nature and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or divinely favoured.’ The earliest recorded appearance of the word in this ‘simple’ sense, according to the *OED*, is around 1160. Then, under sense 4, there is this other ‘simple use’ of ‘miracle’ (it is difficult, I confess, to refrain from slipping away here into a reverie on this venerable dictionary’s use of ‘use’, at once solemn and hilarious, the seemingly unmentionable use of ‘use’ as distinct from ‘mention’, the funny time one might have with undoing, precisely in the spirit of Shakespeare or Cixous, the demented instrumentalism of the dictionary and of all the institutions correspondingly believed to function on the basis of such instrumentalism, ‘believed’, what a word, no place apparently for that here, like a ghost, yes, it is to come back). ‘Miracle’, ‘simple uses’ number 4: ‘A remarkable, wonderful, or (in weakened sense) very surprising phenomenon or event; an achievement or occurrence seemingly beyond human power; an outstanding achievement.’ Now this sense of ‘miracle’, which crosses and crosses with the ‘use’ of sense 1a, doubles or iterates it, making it different from itself, above all in the veering off from the attribution to ‘supernatural, esp. divine, agency’ towards something less clearly or explicitly religious, marked by the word ‘seemingly’ (‘seemingly beyond human power’), this ‘miracle’ (and I will come back to that phrase, *this miracle*, it in turn is already a citation or iteration), the

phenomenon or event of ‘miracle’ in this sense, according to the *OED*, dates back to 1586. The dehiscence, the doubling or we might even say the counterfeiting of ‘miracle’ in this context is also evident in the *use*, as they say, of the adjective ‘miraculous’. Traced back to the mid-fifteenth century, and defined as ‘Of the nature of a miracle; produced or effected by a miracle; not explicable by natural laws; supernatural’ (sense 1a), ‘miraculous’ is subjected, in the later sixteenth century, to a discernible shift. It takes on a more ambiguous, less markedly religious sense, defined in the *OED* as ‘Resembling a miracle; so extraordinary as to appear supernatural; remarkable, astonishing’ (sense 2). The earliest recorded instance of ‘miraculous’ in this sense is Edward Fenton’s *Certaine Secrete Wonders of Nature* in 1569: ‘It may seeme miraculous & almost incredible, that fishes do flye.’ These fish, one might be led to imagine, fly for more than four hundred years, all the way into the writings of Cixous and Derrida. More generally, it could be said, what happens to ‘miracle’ and the ‘miraculous’ in the late sixteenth century strangely prefigures what is at issue in the emergence of the space of the ‘uncanny’ (‘uncanny’ as having to do with what resembles or is seemingly or apparently supernatural) some two hundred years later.

— Don’t get started on the uncanny. We’d be here all night. Stay focused. As for that shift in the sense of ‘miracle’, Shakespeare, of course, is onto it, mixed up in it, from the beginning. For one of the earliest instances of ‘miracle’ in the sense of remarkable, wonderful, very surprising, seemingly or apparently supernatural, the *OED* cites *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It is when Falstaff tells Ford, disguised as Master Brook, about how he ‘suffered the pangs of three several deaths’, the last of which was ‘to be stopped in like a strong distillation with stinking clothes that fretted in their own grease’: ‘It was a miracle to ’scape suffocation’, Falstaff says (see 3.5.86–94). The *OED* might just as well, however, or still more appositely have cited the so-called first part of *Henry IV*. But let’s stop calling it by this name, let’s follow Harold Bloom’s suggestion and call it *Falstaff’s Wake*.³¹ Either that or *Falstaff’s Miracle*. The *OED*, I was saying, could just as well have cited Falstaff, yes, him again. As if he might lay claim to some patent on the thing, ‘miracle’ in this sense is Falstaff’s: ‘miracle’ is Falstaffian. So much takes off from him, the one whom Bloom, in the course of a thirty-five page eulogy, more than once

calls precisely ‘a miracle’.³² Falstaff, writes Bloom, ‘is a miracle in the creation of personality’ (p. 313): he is ‘the signature of Shakespeare’s originality, of his breakthrough into an art more nearly his own’ (p. 278). With Falstaff, as a little later with Hamlet, Shakespeare creates an unprecedentedly powerful ‘illusion’ (‘if you want to call it “illusion”’, says Bloom) of ‘being a real person’. Falstaff, like Hamlet, is a ‘miracle’ (p. 287). This miracle, for Bloom, has to do with Shakespeare’s ‘astonishing ability to represent change’ (p. 280): ‘Falstaff, like Hamlet, is always transforming himself, always thinking, speaking, and overhearing himself in a quicksilver metamorphosis’ (p. 281).

— That’s good, if I may say so, *overhearing himself in a quicksilver metamorphosis*. But it’s not just a matter of that, of ‘self-overhearing’ as Bloom calls it.³³ There’s the mercurial magic of telepathic writing, a shivering of voice, irreducible play of voices in the voice, dissemination of character, vertigo of place, time out of joint.

— Catching up with Shakespeare is about the future as much as the past. Bloom seems to touch on that when he makes the apparently straightforward observation: ‘we want to hear what Falstaff will say next’ (p. 314). He stresses Falstaff’s satirical power, his irrepressible wit, as well as the sense that (in William Empson’s phrase) ‘Falstaff is the first major joke by the English against their class system’ (in Bloom, p. 293). Bloom admiringly recalls A.C. Bradley’s view that the ‘essence of Falstaff’ consists in ‘the bliss of freedom gained in humour’; Falstaff, says Bradley, ‘lifts us into the atmosphere of perfect freedom’ (cited in Bloom, pp. 296–7).

— If I can just butt in for a second: at the back of your mind, I know, you’re feeling strongly tempted to pick up here also on the characterization of Falstaff as a rogue, and to link it with Derrida’s discussion of the English and especially Shakespearean senses of the word ‘rogue’, in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*: Falstaff, in other words, *as* rogue state.³⁴ Everything you are in the process of trying to formulate regarding ‘miracle’ is also evident in that meddling imp of a word, ‘rogue’. It too bears a kind of Falstaffian mark or signature. I imagine you might start by working backwards from that marvellous four-word sentence he comes out with in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*:

'Reason, you rogue, reason' (2.2.12). Derrida cites the *OED* on 'rogue' but, a shade roguishly, neglects to say, chooses to hold back on the 'playful' sense, in which 'rogue' is 'a term of endearment'.³⁵ This is 'rogue' as 'One who is of a mischievous disposition': 'Common as a playful term of reproof or reproach, and frequently used as a term of endearment by 17th century dramatists' (*OED*, sense 3). Again, the word is identified with Falstaff in its first recorded usage in this sense. The *OED* quotes Doll Tearsheet in *The Second Part of Henry IV* addressing him: 'Ah, you sweet little rogue, you! . . . Ah, rogue, i'faith, I love thee' (2.4.213–16).

— Speak for yourself. For Harold Bloom, as I was saying, Falstaff is above all 'a teacher': he is 'the Socrates of Eastcheap' (p. 275): he 'instructs us in freedom — not a freedom *in* society, but *from* society' (p. 276). This freedom Bloom also characterizes as the miraculous 'blessing' which is encapsulated, for him, in the great Falstaffian phrase: 'more life' (p. 313). 'Falstaff teaches us *not to moralize*' (p. 297). He is 'neither immoral nor amoral but of another realm, the order of play' (p. 298). And this, concludes Bloom, is 'the essence of Shakespeare's dramatic art: the principle of play' (p. 299).

— I would subscribe to all of that, but would like to complicate and, I hope, enrich this reading. Bloom's account is character-based or, we might say, in a bloated neologism that perhaps does not deserve to survive beyond the end of this sentence, characterologicocentric. It is not only a question of Falstaff as 'a miracle in the creation of personality' or as an embodiment of 'the order of play', but also of trying to reckon with a thinking of play that goes beyond the subject, of play as play of dreams and letters, a sort of polycentric thinking of the mighty power of the *might* that might entail, in an instant, at any instant, a miraculous catch. One way of trying to do this might be in terms of the play of the word 'miracle' itself, of what this little changeling of a word is doing in Shakespeare's play. For it seems to me that it merits another reading, it summons up a strange supplementary dimension, a third sense to mingle and meddle irrevocably with those we have so far tracked through the *OED*. 'Miracle', in this other sense, has to do with a kind of laying on of hands, in particular the writing hand or hands of Shakespeare, where 'miracle' signifies the very phenomenon of play, the magical shimmering surface-depth of

drama, in which we, as readers or spectators, know *more than* Falstaff, and this on account of the structure of the text, its dramatic irony, its preposterousness, its exposition of magical thinking, its radical elaboration of 'iteration' and play within and beyond the play. 'Miracle' in Shakespeare is always already caught up in the poetic event that is itself, the net that is (in Derrida's terms) the nomination of itself.³⁶

— How would the *Oxford English Dictionary* deal with that?

— I know. It's a funny thought, isn't it? To define 'miracle', the *OED* would need to set out its play *within* the play or plays of Shakespeare, 'miracle' as self-remarking, irreducibly plural scenography that stages, in the same instant, the very ground of the authority of a definition, of any and every definition in the dictionary.

— Before coming to the moment in question, then, the place where Falstaff says (or Shakespeare writes) *miracle*, we need to track the context of this 'iteration'.

— You're about to nick my idea, I see. Bloom calls it *Falstaff's Wake*; you call it *Falstaff's Miracle*; I call it *The First Part of Henry IV*. In *The First Part of Henry IV* Shakespeare seems to me to make a kind of breakthrough not just with the miraculous 'creation of personality', but with the strange nature of 'iteration' as such. *The First Part of Henry IV* contains not only the remarkable instance of 'iteration' that I know you're about to quote, but also the first recorded instance in English of the word 'cital' (5.2.61), meaning 'citation' or 'calling of oneself to account', as well as the first recorded instance in English, and the only instance anywhere in Shakespeare, of the word 'misquote' (5.2.13).³⁷ The play is deeply preoccupied with the meddling, comical, magical, not to mention roguish or indeed devilish strangeness of iteration. Think of those references to the starling (1.3.223) and the parrot (2.4.97), Prince Henry's parroting of 'Percy's mind' (2.4.99-105) and all of that extended, rather brutal, comical but demented play on the word 'anon' as the Prince and Poins get the tapster Francis to repeat, over and over: 'Anon, anon, sir' (2.4.35ff). I am onto something with all of this, I am on, I'm sure: anon, anon.

— No, this was my idea in the first place. Anyway the two things belong together, that's the point. The breakthrough in creating

or counterfeiting what Bloom calls ‘a real person’ is indissociably entwined, entwinned, spinning out of the more narrowly textual or writerly sort of breakthrough you just evoked concerning the parrot.

— Did I say that?

— ‘Damnable iteration’: that’s a key to *Falstaff’s Miracle*. It’s one of the innumerable treasures that the mad philosopher lets you into: ‘everything is in Shakespeare’, as he says, but also anything in Shakespeare leads to everything, anything can be a key, starting with iteration or iterability which of course has already started.³⁸ That is the ordinary miracle of place. To iterate: that is, ‘to say, mention, or assert again or repeatedly; to repeat’ (*OED*, sense 2). Damnable iteration: for better for worse, there’s always more than one voice in the voice and no saying where it starts.

— Just ask yourself: What is going on in Shakespeare’s iteration of Biblical sayings? Who is iterating? Who is it iterated?

— I’m sorry. Did you say rated or iterated?

FALSTAFF [...] An old lord of the Council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too.

PRINCE HENRY Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets and no man regards it.

FALSTAFF O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over. By the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain. I’ll be damned for never a king’s son in Christendom.

PRINCE HENRY Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?

(1.2.80–95)

The Bishop’s Bible, not the one he’s later to listen to sitting in the church at Stratford, with only a little time to go (perhaps in a dream thinking back to Hotspur near the end of the play, presented with

some letters to read, sighing 'I cannot read them now /... the time of life is short' [5.2.80–1]: as Derrida stresses in that truly crazily recessive future anterior, *life will have been so short*³⁹) — but let's leave aside the question of iteration between Bibles, rating Bibles iterating or rating one another — the Bishop's Bible, the one scholars suppose Shakespeare is recalling here, at Proverbs 1: 20, reads as follows: 'Wisdom crieth without, and putteth forth her voice in the streets'; and verse 24: 'Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded.'⁴⁰ Where does the iteration begin? Is it with Hal as he iterates Jack who recalls being rated in the street without apparently realizing that he is iterating, or in effect being iterated by, the Bible? Or is it with Jack as he iterates, indulging in that 'parody of religious cant', the 'tedious and inane repetition' (as David Bevington puts it) of *homiologia*?⁴¹ Is there a subject of 'damnable iteration'? Who is who here, in these words, and where? 'Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing': supplementing the strange meddling of voice, this apparent inversion of character and narrative, history and identity (Hal teaching Jack, rather than vice versa), would participate in the logic of what you have elsewhere called the 'iteraphonic', what you propose as a 'term without term' for 'iterability in the voice', a kind of magical thinking in writing that goes 'faster than time' (*HCFL*, p. 63), to recall a phrase from the mad philosopher. It is a matter of what you call 'the meddling imps of words shared, inhabiting and traversing, as if magically or demonically'.⁴² Iteration, iterability, iteraphonia: they jump borders, they move faster than time, not only between one character and another (without knowledge), or between one scene and another, but also between one play and another, in the instant of the poetic.

—OK, I'll do my damndest not to repeat myself. Let's cut and thrust to Falstaff's 'miracle'. He's recounting what happened to him after he and three others stole 'money of the King's coming down the hill' (2.2.50–1), only to have it stolen from them in turn, moments later, without any fight, by others (in other words by Prince Hal and Poin who, speeding ahead, back to the tavern in Eastcheap, have been playing their game of 'anon' with the unsuspecting Francis). From one game of 'anon' to another. It is already, then, a play within the play, the

Prince and Poin in their own little theatre within the theatre, having played their several parts all the way from London to Kent and back (see, in particular, 1.2.173ff). This is where we encounter both the 'rogue' and the 'miracle'. The Prince asks him where the 'thousand pound' is.

PRINCE HENRY Where is it, Jack, where is it?

FALSTAFF Where is it? Taken from us it is. A hundred upon poor four of us.

PRINCE HENRY What, a hundred, man?

FALSTAFF I am a rogue if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have scaped by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose, my buckler cut through and through, my sword hacked like a handsaw — *ecce signum!* I never dealt better since I was a man. All would not do. A plague of all cowards! Let them speak. If they speak more or less than truth, they are villains and the sons of darkness. (2.4.154–65)

Ecce signum! Behold the sign. Falstaff's iteration of the Catholic Mass points at once to the singularity of the 'miracle' to which it would purportedly bear witness and into the phantasmoneiric flux of Shakespeare's writing, here the dreamy but miraculous displacement in particular perhaps of *hacking* into *hawking*, of Falstaff's 'hacked like a handsaw' into Hamlet's claiming to know 'a hawk from a handsaw' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.374), or of 'ta[king] a thousand pound' (2.4.153) while being asked to take Falstaff's word (else 'they are villains and the sons of darkness') into 'tak[ing] the ghost's word for a thousand pound' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.270–1). 'I have scaped by miracle', says Falstaff: behold the sign of this sword 'hacked like a handsaw'. This is a kind of 'damnable iteration' of 'miracle', a *miracle* play that meddles with the sense of 'miracle' at once as a 'marvellous event... attributed to supernatural, esp. divine, agency; *esp.* an act... serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or divinely favoured' and as a 'remarkable, wonderful, or (in weakened sense) very surprising phenomenon or event; an achievement or occurrence seemingly beyond human power; an outstanding achievement.' For the iteration goes beyond that: the miracle play of 'miracle' here also and above all includes the *ecce signum* of the play itself. The 'miracle' is self-remarking, already marked as

play, *in* a play, counterfeited, in a play within a play. Prince Henry and Poins know, and we know that they know, that Falstaff's 'miracle' is a fiction and that it is the effect of that play-within-the-play which Poins and the Prince have been at once directing and acting in. Falstaff's 'miracle' is always already ironic, preposterous, not his or anyone else's, a thing of the play in which the play's the thing.

— I know why you have been quoting *Hamlet* apropos this inscribing of 'miracle' in the play and of the play in 'miracle', thus of a play over and beyond any neatly enclosed 'play within the play', play no longer limited by the activities, language or representation of a subject but caught up already, in advance, in the nets of a kind of telephonic or telepathic scenario as a new thinking of the 'poetics of the event'. It is because of the way, as if by chance, that Hamlet, in soliloquy, draws on the word 'miraculous' (one of only three appearances of this word in Shakespeare's work⁴³):

... About, my brains. Hum, I have heard
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play
 Have by the very cunning of the scene
 Been struck so to the soul, that presently
 They have proclaimed their malefactions;
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
 Play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle. (2.2.541–9)

The play within the play in *Hamlet* is in effect already being specified here as the 'miraculous organ'. But of course we only know this on account of Shakespeare's dramaturgic consorting with telepathic or magical thinking, with the form of soliloquy as 'miraculous organ' in turn. It is not just self-overhearing (as Harold Bloom has it), it is a strangely private-public theatre, a sort of interior magic show that passes show, the exposure or exscription of a character's otherwise secret and unknown thoughts and feelings.

— I appreciate that you must feel as if you've been doing most of the talking, but I would like to say something — by way of finishing off —

about Falstaff's death, or at any event about Prince Henry's epitaph and Falstaff's—

— Finishing off, who's talking about finishing off? Cixous remarks and Derrida recalls: 'No dead person has ever said their last word.'⁴⁴ That's what makes drama the very counterfeit of life: no one in Shakespeare has said their last word, least of all Falstaff.

— Yes, this is why Bloom wants to call the play *Falstaff's Wake*. He talks about it as 'the most joyous representation of secular resurrection ever staged' (p. 305). Derrida's interest in *Romeo and Juliet* has to do with what he calls 'the theatre of the impossible', with the power of 'the simulacrum' (or the dramatic 'counterfeit', we might say) to reveal 'the theatre of the impossible' in which 'two people each outlive each other' (AC, p. 422). You have gone on elsewhere about Shakespeare's (and Derrida's) evident fascination with this miracle of double survival, in particular with regard to what W.H. Auden once called the greatest love poem in the English language, *Antony and Cleopatra*. But the figure of coming back from the dead, miraculous recovery or escape, is of course everywhere in Shakespeare. It's not just in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra* or even in those final plays such as *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* that are specifically designated as 'miracle plays', for example, by H.W. Fawcner.⁴⁵ When '*Falstaff riseth up*' (as the stage direction puts it: see 5.4.109), it is doubtless a parody of that coming back from the dead that is characteristic of medieval miracle plays, the sort of parody that is subject to attack in the celebrated Lollard polemic 'A Tretis of Miraclis Pleyinge', an attack doubtless impelled by what T.G. Bishop calls 'fear of blurred boundaries between authoritative and parasitic signs'.⁴⁶ But it is also immeasurably more and other than this. As Bishop observes:

Shakespeare's poetry does what medieval drama always threatened to do, what Aquinas indicated was always implied by the logic of a sacramental semiosis: it unbinds itself and its shaping power from the Church. At the heart of Shakespeare's drama is a power confident that words can incarnate lives before the eyes of an audience without the institutional apparatus of the Church to guarantee their orthodoxy, and without a structure of dogma external to the dramatic occasion.⁴⁷

What Shakespeare spirits up in *Henry IV* is a new kind of ‘scaping by miracle’, a new writing of miracle play.

— Why don’t you try to read this final passage then? Prince Henry addresses the dead Hotspur, whom he has slain, then notices ‘poor Jack’. You can be the Prince, I’ll be Falstaff.

PRINCE HENRY

Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,
But not remembered in thy epitaph!

He spieth Falstaff on the ground

What, old acquaintance, could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!

I could have better spared a better man.

O, I should have a heavy miss of thee

If I were much in love with vanity.

Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,

Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.

Embowelled will I see thee by and by.

Till then, in blood by noble Percy lie. *Exit*

Falstaff riseth up

FALSTAFF

Embowelled! If thou embowel me today, I’ll give you leave to powder me and eat me too tomorrow. ’Sblood, ’twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me, scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valour is discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life. (5.4.99–119)

— So much for dear friends. It’s all about the strangeness of soliloquy —

— I beg your pardon?

— I said the strangeness of soliloquy —

— In which Falstaff apparently returns from the dead (as Prince Henry says, in astonishment, on seeing him again a few lines later: ‘Art thou alive? / Or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight?’ [5.4.131–2]). This speech (as if by ‘miraculous organ’), witnessed by no one *in* the play, also plays on the fantasy of *our* eyesight, on a phantasmoneiric fiction that we are *not* witnesses ourselves (‘Nothing confutes me but eyes and nobody sees me’, as Falstaff goes on to say [5.4.124–5]). It veers at such incredible speed and in so many directions at once. Try to track and read, for example, the weird repetition of ‘counterfeit’ here, a word that appears repeatedly in reference to the king, just a little earlier (5.4.27, 34), but when Falstaff is not present, and that at the same prefigures the counterfeit ‘death’ of Henry IV in the so-called second part of *Henry IV*. Or try to trace the iteraphonic force of ‘life’ here (recall Falstaff’s great motto: ‘Give me life’ [5.3.59]), ‘life’ injecting itself after life, all the way up to and into the collected writings of Hélène Cixous. Or think on how this ‘wake’ is hauntingly inscribed in the ‘[scape] by miracle’ encountered earlier. It is what everything in the play will have been leading up to. Preposterous and magical, this is *miracle* strangely deferred, miracle iterated, miracle iterable. *Tableau*.

[*Exit*]

— Hang on. Where did you go? There was something else I had to say. A brief epilogue, that’s all. But you’re gone. How did that happen? You’re impossible. No one now but me . . . Talk about bad timing . . . You mentioned *Antony and Cleopatra* as a love poem. Cixous also speaks of it, I seem to remember, as a miracle. Yes: the ‘miracle’ of Antony and Cleopatra, she says, ‘is to have captured death at last, to have appropriated the enemy, to have put death into their enchanted bed . . . to have substituted forever for the unlivable absence an absolute embrace.’⁷⁴⁸ And then in ‘Aphorism Countertime’, when Derrida speaks about the theatre of the impossible telling the truth, it has to do with love, with the way in which any two lovers pledge to keep the other, interiorize the other, beyond death. As he remarks: ‘This double interiorization would be possible neither in monadic interiority nor in the logic of “objective” time and space. It takes place nevertheless every

time I love' (AC, p. 422). It makes me think of that line near the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*: 'Love wrought these miracles' (5.1.112). And then there is a certain sonnet, which links love, the name of love, the act of nomination, with the miracle of writing, 'this miracle'. This is the *might* of miracle play, as if it had already dreamt while dreaming itself up for 'the mighty power of the *might*' of which Derrida writes and which he finds in Cixous:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
 O how shall summer's honey breath hold out
 Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
 Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays?
 O fearful meditation; where, alack,
 Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid?
 Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
 Or who his spoil or beauty can forbid?
 O none, unless this miracle have might
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright.⁴⁹

Notes

¹ References to Shakespeare are based on the following editions: *Henry IV Part One*, ed. David Bevington (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987); *Henry IV Part Two*, ed. René Weis (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London, Routledge, 1979); *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. David Crane (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003); *Macbeth*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Tempest*, ed. David Lindley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. H. J. Oliver (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982); Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, ed. with an analytic commentary by Stephen Booth (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977).

² Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (New York, New Directions, 1983), 187.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, Routledge, 1994). Further

- page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text, preceded by 'SM' where appropriate. References to the original French text, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), are given parenthetically, where appropriate, following a slash.
- ⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1982), 27.
- ⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 162; *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 233. Further page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text.
- ⁶ Rodolphe Gasché, 'Thinking, Without Wonder', *Epoché*, 10:2 (Spring 2006), 327–40: here, in particular, 328. Further page references to this essay are given parenthetically in the main body of the text, preceded by 'TWW' where appropriate.
- ⁷ See Sarah Wood, 'Surprise in Literature', *Angelaki* 1:1 (1993), 58–68: here, p. 60.
- ⁸ It is one of our concerns here, indeed, to suggest how numerous and significant the miraculous 'pockets' in Derrida are. Besides *H.C. for Life, That is To Say* and other texts we go on to cite here, we might note at least the following additional references: *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, Chicago University Press, 1992), 123; *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998), 20, 23, 72, 93; 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone', trans. Sam Weber, in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998), 63–4; *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (with Maurice Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death*), trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000), 75; "'Above All, No Journalists!'", trans. Samuel Weber, in *Religion and Media*, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001), 76; and *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (Jacques Derrida with Bernard Stiegler), trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge, Polity, 2002), 117. In happy corroboration of our concerns here, see also Michael Naas's brilliant study, *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2012), a copy of which reached us, as if by what Mark Twain calls mental telegraphy, just as this special issue of *OLR* was going to press. In answer to the question of how to understand the word *miracle* in Derrida's work, Naas observes: 'As is always the case with Derrida's terminology, it must be read both in relationship to its traditional meaning and as a radical interruption of that meaning' (p. 97).

- ⁹ Jacques Derrida, in Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida, *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida*, trans. David Wills (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004), 147 (trans. slightly modified); *Jacques Derrida, La Contre-allée* (Paris, La Quinzaine Littéraire — Louis Vitton, 1999), 147.
- ¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime', trans. Nicholas Royle, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 414–33: here, p. 422. Further page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text, preceded by 'AC' where appropriate.
- ¹¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 4; 'Force et signification', *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 10.
- ¹² Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London and New York, Routledge, 1992), 63.
- ¹³ See Frank Kermode, 'Endings, Continued', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York, Columbia University Press, 1989), 73.
- ¹⁴ Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (New York, Columbia University Press, 2004), 58–9; *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* (Paris, Galilée, 2001), 56–7.
- ¹⁵ 'One can neither classify nor count the ghost, it is number itself, it is numerous, innumerable as number, one can neither count on it nor with it': see *Spectres of Marx*, 138.
- ¹⁶ Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995), 300–44: here, p. 326. Further page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text.
- ¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrecter (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000). Further page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text, preceded by 'HCFL' where appropriate. References to the original French text, *H.C pour la vie, c'est à dire...* (Paris, Galilée, 2002), are given parenthetically, where appropriate, following a slash.
- ¹⁸ For a recent critical exposition of this 'might', see Mark Dawson, 'Of Force and the Future — Hélène Cixous's Poematic "Might"', in *Oxford Literary Review* 33:2 (2011), 151–65.
- ¹⁹ The Song of Solomon, 2:8.

- ²⁰ As Derrida puts it: 'The example is not substitutable; but at the same time the same aporia always remains: this irreplaceability must be exemplary, that is, replaceable. The irreplaceable must allow itself to be replaced on the spot.' See *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (with Maurice Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death*), trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000), 41.
- ²¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York, Schocken Books, 1985), 69.
- ²² See *The Ear of the Other*, p. 69, and cf. Derrida's remarks about play regarding *Romeo and Juliet* in 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', 64.
- ²³ See Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 196–231: here, 217. Further page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text, preceded by 'FSW' where appropriate.
- ²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'A Note Upon The "Mystic Writing-Pad"', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey (London, Vintage/Hogarth Press, 2001), vol. 19: 225–32.
- ²⁵ Concerning 'the fundamental property of writing', that is to say *spacing*, Derrida writes: 'diastem and time becoming space; an unfolding as well, on an original site, of meanings which irreversible, linear consecution, moving from present point to present point, could only tend to repress, and (to a certain extent) could only fail to repress. In particular in so-called phonetic writing. The latter's complicity with logos (or the time of logic), which is dominated by the principle of non-contradiction, the cornerstone of all metaphysics of presence, is profound. Now in every silent or not wholly phonic spacing out of meaning, concatenations are possible which no longer obey the linearity of logical time, the time of consciousness or preconsciousness, the time of 'verbal representations'. The border between the non-phonetic space of writing (even 'phonetic' writing) and the space of the stage (*scène*) of dreams is uncertain... A certain polycentrism of dream representation is irreconcilable with the apparently linear unfolding of pure verbal representations' (FSW, 217).
- ²⁶ See Jacques Derrida, 'Psyche: Invention of the Other', trans. Catherine Porter, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007), vol. 1, 1–47: here, pp. 23, 47.
- ²⁷ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London, Fourth Estate, 1999), 271.
- ²⁸ See, for example, *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler and Eduardo Cadava (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), 115.

- ²⁹ See Bevington, p.163, n. 00.
- ³⁰ The *OED* cites Robert Carew's *Survey of Cornwall*: 'The Guary miracle, in English, a miracle-play, is a kinde of Enterlude, compiled in Cornish out of some scripture history, with that grossenes, which accompanied the Romanes *vetus Comedia*.'
- ³¹ *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 305.
- ³² See Bloom's chapters on *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in his *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 271–318. Further page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text.
- ³³ Elsewhere in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, for example, Bloom asserts that '*overhearing [one]self speak*... is not just a question of rhetoricity or word consciousness; it is the essence of Shakespeare's greatest originalities in the representation of character, of thinking, and of personality' (p. 423). His wording here seems at once to assume and underscore thinking *as* character-based or personality-centred. The interest of 'Miracle Play' is rather in figures and ways of thinking that catch up, exceed or fall short of 'self', reinscribing 'self-overhearing' in a Shakespearean practice of telepathic writing.
- ³⁴ For Derrida's discussion of the senses of 'rogue' see *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005), 93.
- ³⁵ In correspondence at any rate with this usage of 'rogue' in English, of the French 'voyou' [rogue, rascal] he remarks, at the beginning of section 8 of 'The Reason of the Strongest (Are There Rogue States?)': "'Voyou!' [...], I neglected to say, can be turned with the right intonation into something tender, affectionate, maternal (when I was little, my maternal grandmother would sometimes say, pretending to be angry with me, "Voyou, va!" [You little rascal!])'. See *Rogues*, 76.
- ³⁶ See, in particular, *H.C. for Life*, p. 97.
- ³⁷ For the first recorded use of 'misquotation', *OED* cites Thomas Heywood, in his *Apology for Actors* in 1612, writing about 'Infinite faults', such as 'misquotations, mistaking of sillables, misplacing half lines, coining of strange and neuer heard of words.'
- ³⁸ See 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', 67.
- ³⁹ See Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying — awaiting (one another at) the 'limits of truth'*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993), 49; 'A Silkworm of One's Own', in Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, Stanford University Press 2001), 33; and *passim*.
- ⁴⁰ Quoted in Bevington, 138.
- ⁴¹ See Bevington, 138.

- ⁴² We have been unable to establish satisfactorily the exact provenance of this quotation.
- ⁴³ The word ‘miraculous’ also occurs in a passage in *Macbeth*, Act 4 scene 3, concerning the King’s Evil: in lines that are quite possibly not Shakespeare’s, Malcolm refers to ‘A most miraculous work in this good king, / Which often since my here-remain in England / I have seen him do’ (4.3.149–51); and in *The Tempest*, Antonio says of Gonzalo: ‘His word is more than the miraculous harp’ (2.1.82), i.e. what he says is better than the mythical harp of Amphion which was said to have built the walls of Thebes. Gonzalo can make ‘impossible matter... easy’ (2.1.84), Antonio goes on to observe.
- ⁴⁴ Hélène Cixous, *OR, les lettres de mon père* (Paris, Des Femmes, 1997), 25. Cited by Jacques Derrida in *H.C. for Life*, 124.
- ⁴⁵ See H.W. Fawcner, *Shakespeare’s Miracle Plays: Pericles, Cymbeline and The Winter’s Tale* (London, Associated University Presses, 1992).
- ⁴⁶ ‘A Tretis of Miraclis Pleyinge’, in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 196–202; T.G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 45.
- ⁴⁷ Bishop, 87–8.
- ⁴⁸ Hélène Cixous, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays’, in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986), 125.
- ⁴⁹ Sonnet 65, in Booth, 58–9. Booth is one of the few commentators to note the suggestion of play in ‘might’ here. His gloss is worth citing in full: ‘*might* [:] power, efficacy (the strength of the word is appropriate to the metaphors of violent attack in the preceding lines, but *might* is idiomatically ill-suited to its clause; the usefulness of *might* as a rhyme presumably recommended it, and so, perhaps, did its homonym, the verb “might”, which enables the line to embody the shadow of an alternate construction: “except if this miracle might occur”: note the presence of *may* in line 14)’ (Booth, 247).