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Henry James, George Santayana, H. D., W. H. Auden: Four Versions of Shakespeare Out of Context

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Shakespeare scholar James Shapiro's *Shakespeare in a Divided America*, a study of Shakespeare's impact in the U.S. since the 1830s, issues in Shapiro's sympathetic account of a 2017 production of *Julius Caesar* in New York. That production staged the play in terms of up-to-date conflict between Trump-allied Republicans and Clinton-allied Democrats. Shapiro's attachment of Shakespeare to current events is a sterling example of a prevailing mode of literary criticism, which ties the worth and relevance of literary art to its historical contexts, whether those contexts be present-day or historically past. But an alternative to the dominant critical mode is discoverable in meditations on Shakespeare by Henry James, George Santayana, H. D., and W. H. Auden. Although each author solicits contextual and historical dimensions of Shakespeare, each foregrounds Shakespeare's withdrawal from those dimensions. Perhaps these writers' emphasis on a de-contextualizing, de-historicizing component in Shakespeare – amounting to a retreat to what James calls "the blessed fictive world" – ought not to be overlooked or undervalued by literary and cultural criticism.

Keywords: Contextual literary criticism, Fictive world, Literature and religion, James Shapiro, Henry James, George Santayana, H. D., W. H. Auden

Shakespeare perhaps has influenced the course of American history – and for worse rather than for better. President Lincoln's assassination, the consequent collapse of post-Civil War Reconstruction, with its long legacy of race conflict, might be attributed to the poet-playwright's power. After all, Lincoln's assassin was a celebrated Shakespearian actor who identified with Shakespeare's Brutus. Arguably, the event in Ford's Theater in April, 1865, revived *Julius Caesar* to lasting effect on the nation.

Whatever the truth of the influence, the debt of the United States to actors who fuse politics and entertainment is undeniable – and Shakespeare too is an entertainer, even in the tragedies. In all his genres, he apparently shows an ability to inspire fusions of fictions with real life contexts. His fusing power is proposed and expounded in James Shapiro's *Shakespeare in a Divided America* (2020), a blend of advanced scholarship and address to a popular audience, named by *The New York Times* one of the year's ten best books. Shapiro, a leading American Shakespeare scholar, means to bring home to readers not only Shakespeare's appeal to Lincoln's murderer, but also Shakespeare's involvement, it seems, with every American crisis or controversy between the 1830s and the present. For example, in a chapter on a taste for Shakespeare among American generals prosecuting the war with Mexico in the 1840s, Shapiro writes: "[T]he performance of [Shakespeare's] plays forced to the surface the cultural tensions and shifts that otherwise prove so difficult to identify and might otherwise have remained submerged" (Shapiro 2020, 31). There was nothing submerged about the conflict into which the assassin John Wilkes Booth intruded his performance, but Shapiro evokes Shakespeare either as an identifiable material force defining and provoking our battles, or as a ghost permanently stalking them.

Shapiro's involvement of Shakespeare with social and political controversies is not only interesting for itself, but also for its sterling example of a prevailing pursuit in literary criticism, whether in America or elsewhere: a desire to claim the immediate relevance of the verbal arts. If Shakespeare (or any poet, dramatist, or novelist) can target and illuminate the news of the day, then, it would seem to follow, his cultural value, as well as that of literature generally, is assured. That desire for assurance seems to underwrite *Shakespeare in a Divided America*. In his introduction and final chapter, Shapiro recounts his ties with a production of *Julius Caesar* by the New York Public Theater in New York's Central Park in summer 2017. The production's director presented Caesar as a double for President Trump, and he added numerous provocative allusions to speak "directly to the political vertigo many Americans were experiencing" (xvi). The overall aim, according to Shapiro and to the director's publicity releases, was to represent all sides of the

"vertigo" for the sake of a dialogue; indeed, for the sake of fidelity to "Shakespeare's habit of presenting both sides of an argument" (xxvi). The immediate political opportunity for reinforcing Shakespeare's continuing authority seemed a no-brainer.

I begin this essay with Shapiro, and at its close I will return to him and to the result of the Central Park production, as an opportune framework for pursuing another side of another argument – and yet one in which Shapiro and my own critical perspective are embedded. That argument is about the literary-critical desire I've named above, and the possibility of a justifiable dissenting relation to it. As I absorb Shapiro's pursuit of relevance, despite its impressiveness, I have found myself thinking that the cultural value of literature might be better affirmed if it keeps a distance from obvious measures of immediate concern – the environing news of the day; and if it also be granted a suspended relation to past referents – not be exclusively tied to historical context. I therefore am soliciting *Shakespeare in a Divided America* as a foil for an alternative view of criticism's objects and interests. I find that alternative in the treatments of Shakespeare by the four figures named in my essay's title. Their writings about him solicit contexts and contextual relevances, but also move him and his works beyond contextualization. Thus, I think, they figure an important other model for literary criticism. In sympathy with their model, I range myself with recent challenges to the now decades-long prestige of suturing literary works to historical contexts[1]. Shapiro's suturing is masterful, but, as I follow the lead of my quartet of authors, I hope a contrastive value of de-contextualization comes into view for academic colleagues, and for non-specialist readers too (i.e., the same mixed audience targeted by Shapiro). Because I debate Shapiro's method largely in terms of his 2020 volume, I necessarily engage American particulars. But the literary-critical matter at issue transcends national containers. That James, Santayana, H. D., and Auden have only a loose attachment to American nationality resonates with my purpose.

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[1] For representative challenges, see Attridge and Staten 2015, Bové 2021, and Bronstein 2018, and my review of Bronstein 2018 (Caserio 2020). For my further dialogue with contexts, see Caserio 2019, esp. 25-57 and 205-46.

To prepare the ground for the plausibility of de-contextualization's value, and as a final preliminary, I want to make explicit a few doubts about the method of which Shapiro's critical practice is an exemplary token. His claim that Shakespeare "forced to the surface […] tensions and shifts that […] might otherwise have remained submerged" assigns Shakespeare a causal power that strains belief. One might want Shakespeare to have nation-shaping or nation-shaking power as part of one's passion for his texts. But Shakespeare in the middle of everything is at once powerful and powerless. John Wilkes Booth's passion for him, only nominally engaging *Julius Caesar*, confused Shakespeare with a drama in the actor's head. Lincoln was no Caesar, and his assassin, a die-hard pro-slavery Confederate, was no Brutus. The fusion and confusion of aesthetic and historical realms – taking the fictive for real, the real for fictive – was problematic in the past, and remains so. An 'American' Shakespeare, historically regarded, is one thread in an all but impossibly complex weave. A plethora of possible historical actors, offstage and on, congests any scholarly attempt to select cultural go-betweens who can be said to definitively determine and affect, and be affected by, what "otherwise prove[s] so difficult to" measure.

Given that plethora, when it comes to assessing the practical ramifications of artworks, an historicizing and contextualizing critic gains a simplifying advantage (simplifying for the sake of a critical argument's plausibility) if two things are done: the fixity of an author's identity is taken as a focal lens; and an intermingling of the writer's character, life, and work with a national context is assumed by the critic without an admission of a significant gap between work and context. But who better than 'Shakespeare' to resist the conveniences of scholarly analysis? On reflection after reading Shapiro, 'Shakespeare' in his book seems to be an identity as divided as the America he is 'in'. Did 'he', or his work, cause Booth's derangement, or cause the 1849 Astor Place Riot (about theater ticket prices and the challenged superiority of American actors), or were 'he' and his work innocent bystanders dragged into extraneous quarrels? An articulation of Shakespeare's constituent parts – is 'he' a text apart from its actors, is 'he' a center of meanings apart from occasions that 'illustrate' 'him'? – could have better

established, and left more open to debate, the impact Shapiro wants to claim for Shakespeare. Exploring historical cause and effect, Shapiro wonders: "Why has America embraced Shakespeare?". He answers: "All one can safely say is that Shakespeare took root in the United States because he spoke to what Americans cared about" (xi). If that is a 'safe' causal-contextualizing saying about what Shakespeare spoke to (or speaks to), it is a vague one.

Vagueness does not usually characterize the historicizing school of Shakespeare studies that Shapiro exemplifies. That school has so successfully pursued an intellectual positivism that it confidently reads Shakespeare's mind. In Shapiro's book about the genesis of *King Lear*, one finds causal explanations that penetrate Shakespeare's thought process: "[H]owever counterintuitive it might have seemed, Shakespeare saw that the best way for him to grapple with the present was to engage with the past, refurbishing an old and unfashionable Elizabethan plot" (Shapiro 2015, 26). Hence the meaning of the play depends on, and fuses, with up-to-the-minute political contexts. Shakespeare's increasing "steadier grasp of the forces shaping this extraordinary time" (7) was about the political division between England and Scotland – a division that *King Lear* supposedly allegorizes. Shapiro observes: "In pressing the case for Union [with Scotland], the Scottish monarch [King James] had foisted upon his subjects an identity crisis […]. What was proving unsettling for the culture at large proved to be a gift to a dramatist who had made a career out of exploring identity crises" (41). The historical Shakespeare, a man whose identity has been a center of crisis in the past, now appears to be a stable coherent self whose plays express his sure contemplation of the identity crises of others.

This current historical transit from mystery to assurance, this tight interweave of fiction and fact, has established itself hegemonically: a norm of literary and cultural criticism. The contrasts that I mean to bring forward from James, Santayana, H. D., and Auden don't resolve themselves into contextualizing certainty about what Shakespeare was thinking. That does not mean they altogether eschew the relevance of context. This is a group whose thoughts are complex. But for certain, although they at times approximate today's critical aims, they undermine facile

fusions of art and environment. For all four, whatever variants of 'division' in Shakespeare the author or his texts matter, they signify not something to resolve or cure, or with which to close a gap in relevance, but their own self-divisions, and an inevitable distance between fiction and reality. The distance remains for them an intellectual and emotional provocation that is vital: more vital for cultural memory of Shakespeare, I will wager in my final pages, than the critical currents underlying a politically-inspired revival of *Julius Caesar* in 2017.

1. "The blessed fictive world"

Henry James found Shakespeare to be unbearable – on stage. Over the course of twenty years, repeatedly voicing his aversion, especially to Henry Irving's productions of Shakespeare, James concludes in 1897 that "there is absolutely no representing him" (James 1949d, 288). "The more [the represented Shakespeare] is […] solidified, the less it corresponds or coincides […] with our imaginative habits" (287-88). "Solidification" for James apparently means making Shakespeare look 'realistic', and thus betraying what James in an 1889 critical dialogue calls "the blessed fictive world" of the drama (James 1949b, 226). When one leaves the playhouse, one undergoes "a horrid relapse into the real" (226).

Clearly, James wants sharply to distinguish "imaginative habits" from contextual reality's "ugly" "star[e] at you" (226). His intention would be dismissed as dated and illusionary by the critical assumptions I've associated with Shapiro's. But a dismissal would miss James's tireless testing of his own convictions, his approximation of historicist values. His career retains the 'blessing' in explicit conscious tension with its opposite, for example in his admiration of Ibsen. "I like Shakespeare better […] 'for reading'; but I like Ibsen better for […] the theatre" (James 1949d, 288-89). He likes Ibsen better for reality's sake: "[Ibsen's] ugliness of surface […] is a sort of proof of his fidelity to the real" (James 1949c, 248). But at the same time James values Ibsen's reality-as-context, he experiences Ibsen's fidelity as magic, as "the […] Ibsen *spell*", which provokes "the surrender of the imagination to [Ibsen's] […] confined but completely constituted world, in which, in every case,

the tissue of relations between the parts and the whole is of a closeness so fascinating" (James 1949d, 289). An Ibsen play provides, internally, in its interrelation of parts and whole, a model of contextualization that literary-cultural historians might envy. But what if such a model is only available, and only to be realized, as magic, which is to say, as fiction, in fiction? In real life contexts, James observes, things "happen clumsily, stupidly, meanly"; in the theater (and in fiction) they "happen" according to "symmetrical, satisfactory form, with unmistakable effect and just at the right moment" (James 1949b, 228).

In his writing about Ibsen, James expresses a dualism – reality and fiction are in conflict – and at the same time a unity: the two are not opposed. The unity is divided; the division is unified. Expressed in that shorthand way, however, the necessity for James and the difficulty for him of honoring the conflict, even while pursuing the conflict's resolution, is not adequately evoked. To take the conflict's full measure, one must turn to James's essay on *The Tempest* (1907) and to his parabolic fiction about Shakespeare, "The Birthplace" (1903).

The Tempest throws James into an agony of curiosity about the play's generating context and about its possible ultimate context, its author. This curiosity matches the impulse of our hegemonic critical norm. James endorses every attempt to extend the "supremely dim and few" facts that in 1907 "mock […] at our unrest" (James 1907, xxxi). First and last in his essay, he ticks off "the meagre circle of the items of our knowledge about it" (xiv), such as its composition in 1611 and its revival at court in 1613, the year of Shakespeare's retirement. His complaint is that Shakespeare the person seems to sit in front of the stage curtain as an "immitigably respectable person", about whom "there is nothing […] to explain" (xxv); whereas "the figure who supremely interests us, remains as unseen […] as our Ariel" (xxvi). But how can the man be detached from his work, in apparent confirmation of the "strangest of all fallacies, the idea of the separateness of a great man's parts" (xxvi)? Two questions especially torture James: what, he wonders, could have been "the effect on [the writer] of being *able* to write Lear and Othello" (xxviii); and "[w]hat manner of human being was it who *could*" simply stop writing in 1613, thereby taking

the "freedom to 'elect' […] to cease, intellectually, to exist". James "can accept" that stop "only in stupefaction" (xxiii-xxiv).

Like Shapiro, James wants to penetrate Shakespeare's mind. Yet James celebrates the work that incites his stupefaction. Although he complains that "we are dealing too perpetually with [Shakespeare] the artist, the monster and magician of a thousand masks" (xv), *The Tempest* remains for James a wonder of the fictive sphere. "It renders the poverties and obscurities of our world […] in the dazzling terms of a richer and better" (xix). That rendering depends on "imaged, creative Expression, the instant sense of some copious equivalent of thought for every grain of the grossness of reality" (xiii). Shakespeare "works" not "in the very elements of experience" but "*all* in the terms of the artist's specific vision and genius" (xix). A "momentous conjunction" is achieved "between [Shakespeare's] human curiosity and his aesthetic passion" (xvi). That "conjunction" is so 'momentously' rare that James, almost chillingly, likens Shakespeare and "his aesthetic passion" to a musician in solitude, performing for himself alone. Precisely that isolation is what makes it impossible for James to satisfy *his* "human curiosity" about the master of the music. Yet if a pathos of separation from "the very elements of experience" is the price art must pay for achievement of *The Tempest*'s kind, James endorses it.

But James, no less than Shakespeare, desires both sides of an argument. "The Birthplace" startlingly contrasts with James's endorsement of *The Tempest*'s aesthetic – and seems better to suit our historicist-critical temperament. James's story, one might say, knocks the stuffing out of Shakespeare, perhaps out of art too; for it suggests that if an artist cannot be available to contextual documentation, and becomes therefore an "historic void" (James 1903b, 207), then the artist cannot be posited as truly living – and the artist's work accordingly, whatever its quality, will lose its human relevance. Such certainly would seem to be the moral of James's narrative of Mr Gedge, a learned man elevated by a body of trustees of "the Birthplace" – which James insinuates is Shakespeare's natal house in Stratford – to exhibit that site of international renown to tourist "pilgrims" (193) and to represent to them the genius of "Him" (never referred to by any proper name) with an array of historical "facts" and artifacts. But as time goes by,

Gedge, who "know[s] the difference between realities and shams" (182), begins to doubt the evidence, to see it as "preposterous" (193). If there is no contextual witness of "Him", Gedge finds himself up against a vision of "Nothing!" (194). He will confess to a visiting American couple, who, unlike their gullible compatriots, signal a skepticism of their own, that "[p]ractically […] there *is* no author […]. There are all the immortal people – *in* the work; but there's nobody else. […] There was somebody […]. But They've killed him ["They" meaning especially the opinionated public, careless of "the difference between realities and shams" when it comes to a celebrity]" (207). Gedge's skepticism kills "Him" too, ironically. Out of guilt for his disbelief, Gedge steps up the showmanship with which he broadcasts to the pilgrims what he now knows are lies. His flair for performance makes him too a celebrity. The trustees and the public give his salary a desperately needed raise, so that he can keep what he calls "the 'Show'" (193) going. He keeps it going, and thus is locked into fiction doubly: into the fiction of the historical "Him", and into his own hyped-up substitute of 'Something' for 'Nothing'.

So far, I have read "The Birthplace" in alignment with James's agitation about the author of *The Tempest*. The story is an historicist's protest, in fictional form, against fiction. It negatively demonstrates a need to guarantee a fusion of imaginative texts with real contexts. But true to James's allegiance to art that is *not* founded on "the very elements of experience", I want to propose another way of viewing "The Birthplace". "[W]hen the curtain rises on Shakespeare", James wrote in 1889, "we are conscious of a certain divine dissatisfaction, or a yearning for that which isn't" (James 1949b, 233). This "that which isn't" expresses a contrast in value – and in substance – to Gedge's indignant, despairing "Nothing!". A religious aura pervades "The Birthplace". Gedge is described repeatedly as the priest of a temple, whose central room is the "Holy of Holies" (James 1903b, 192). The story's "Him" is virtually a founder of a global religion. In this way, James intertwines a satire on religious faith and service with a sympathetic account of a sorrowful loss of faith. Despite the loss, "that which isn't" still impends: in the "immortal" elements "*in* [His] work"; in a transfer

of a religious element to "the blessed fictive world", and to that world's detachment from the historical real one.

It is probably superfluous to note that the historicism of *Shakespeare in a Divided America* is a form of materialism; it does not engage such a transfer. Because H. D. and Auden will engage it, and because Santayana will consider the same phenomenon, I shall draw out James a bit more as a preface to his successors' negotiations.

The historicist side of James is part of *his* context. It is significant that the couple who share Gedge's disbelief in "Him" are Americans. The American Delia Bacon in 1856 initiated the identification of Shakespeare's writings with those of Francis Bacon. Even if 'Shakespeare's' writing figured "immortal people", for Delia Bacon and her supporters they would have to be caused by a bona fide mortal, and a more plausibly contextualized and educated person than a middle-class theater recruit from Stratford. The quest for the historical Shakespeare, belonging to the numberless waves of nineteenth-century historicizing researches, has a parallel in the quest for the historical Jesus, epitomized in Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863). Without doubting Jesus's existence, Renan reconstructs Jesus's environments to loan "Him" empirical credibility, and to support a realistically psychologizing revision of 'divinity' ("Sometimes", Renan writes, "one might have said that [Jesus's] reason was unbalanced" [Renan 1915, 315]). Fantastic now as some of the results of the researches might appear, they impressed major minds (Emerson, among Baconians; Freud, among Oxfordians) who shared a hunger for empirical reality. Aligned with their hunger, James (albeit the son of a Swedenborgian) assigns his characters a realist's psychology, detached from 'spirit'.

Nevertheless, a leading aspect of Gedge's (and James's) alliance with his American couple concerns his shared glimpse with them of a world apart from the world: a "good society […] of people to whom he hadn't to talk rot" (James 1903b, 208); a virtual utopia[2]. By the fatal turn of his talent for showmanship, Gedge is

[2] O'Hara's study of "The Birthplace" brilliantly expounds the implications for English studies of Gedge's idea of a "good society" (O'Hara 1995).

condemned "to talk rot" to the end of his salaried days. But for him and for James's reader, the sacred character of the temple, the antithesis of "rot", is not cancelled; it relocates itself in Gedge's alliance, through his pair of sympathizers, with "that which isn't", in a possible social good that compensates for divine dissatisfaction. A "good society", however small and secular, insofar as it is only minimally worldly, serves as the renewal of the religion implicitly invested in "Him" and "His" works. But that religious legacy also finds a match in another of what might be religion's descendants: the reality-redeeming "confined but completely constituted world" in which, as in an Ibsen play, "the tissue of relations between the parts and the whole" is modeled.

Suggesting that the "fictive world" (or the utopian one) is a religious holdover, James converges with Renan, whose reduction of Jesus to purely human terms means to preserve Jesus even as it undoes his supposed transcendent sanctity. But Renan wants to accommodate Jesus the fiction to Jesus the reality. According to the aspect of James's vision of "the blessed fictive world" that I trace as a contrast to our critical norm, a fruitful interdependence between the art of fiction and its context's 'ugly stare' is not always possible or desirable – even despite Ibsen. For James at his most severe as a judge of worldliness, reality is surrendered to "rot": increasingly to flim-flam substitutes for experience. Under economic coercion, and for profiteering reasons, art and intellect become "show"; and life itself, a simulacrum. A hollow mode of publicity and public relations covers it all. As the source of such assertions, I don't draw only on "The Birthplace". James's placement of his story as the penultimate entry in his volume *The Better Sort* (1903) is meaningful as a preface to the novella which concludes James's book, "The Papers". Together story and novella provide urgent reasons for extricating a latter-day equivalent of religious life or vision from modern environments – and from literary-critical adhesion to contexts.

In "The Papers", context matters for the reactive retreat it inspires. Its protagonists are two young journalists who have realized that truthful 'reporting' is indistinguishable from promotional entrepreneurship. But competition keeps them going. They decide to stake their rivalrous careers on the result of one of

them 'following' a mediocre novelist who craves celebrity and of the other 'following' a man of no character or importance who nevertheless is a celebrity because "the papers" have fabricated him as one – to indestructible effect. The outcome of the journalists' pursuits is terminal disillusion with the public sphere. They resign their jobs. A prospect of their marital union suggests that together they will build a miniature "good society" as a claustral defense against "rot". Their narrative's tissue of relations justifies their resignation. Yet the history of James's journalists is an imaginary history, juxtaposed by James with recognizable elements in historically real and recognizable communications media. If it were not for the imaginary part of the tale, however, no critical light – no "ironic passion" (James 1903c, 296), as the story calls it – would vitally estrange the reader from the non-fictional environmental givens. Those givens lock Gedge and "the papers" into permanent falsity or inauthenticity. Their alternative belongs to a version of truth that, albeit fictive, has for James the character and aura of a sacred place. Without discovering affirmative terms for such a place, literary criticism risks identifying itself merely with the news.

2. *"There was the way of stark reality and there was escape from that reality"*

Henry James wandered away from his 'birthplace'. Self-divided as an 'American', James's uncertain national identity perhaps is mirrored in his dual allegiances: to the representation, in his novels, of determining historical-national contexts; and to the supreme value of an autonomous fictive realm. Like James, the philosopher George Santayana exemplifies a like national indeterminism: is he 'American' or a citizen of elsewhere? And, resonant with James, but with full explicitness, Santayana involves his meditations on Shakespeare with religion and aesthetics. The overlap between religion and aesthetics is not part of *Shakespeare in a Divided America*, which engages only secular divisions. H. D.'s and Auden's engagements, in their lyric "commentaries" on *The Tempest*, are not as limited. Santayana sets the stage for them.

The philosopher finds Shakespeare almost unbearable – for reasons that echo James's. Santayana would quarrel with any attempt to make Shakespeare seem "real" to America in 1915 (Santayana 1998, 70). On the other hand, Santayana undertook such an effort, to comic effect. Inspired by an impulse worthy of today's contextualizing custom, Santayana's "Shakespeare: Made in America" translates the sonnet "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes" into contemporary American parlance. The translation reveals the poem's meaning to be clichéd and trivial. "I have not made the sonnet absurd on purpose", Santayana says; but "how much old finery there is in our literary baggage", he tartly concludes (71). Already in his "Hamlet" (1908) Santayana had guyed Shakespeare by pairing praise of the "expressive value" (Santayana 1956c, 125) of Hamlet's vacillation with trenchant criticism of the play's essential "incoherence" (135). His judgment entails a contemporary moral: we moderns esteem Hamlet, he says, because "the modern world […] is compacted out of ruins" of past historical orders. Identifying with Hamlet, we vacillate among the ruins, and are the heirs of "hereditary incoherence" (135). For better or worse, we are "content" to be so (136).

Santayana is not "content". For him the complacency, along with its social and political incoherence, flatters a literary and literary-critical disconnect. The "ruins" at issue are religious, first and foremost. In "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare" (1896), Santayana addresses this absence in the context of a literary tradition that stems from Homer, Greek tragedy, and Dante. Those authorities underwrote their work with systemic religious vision. Shakespeare has none. It is a lack that Santayana terms "a vice": "a vice in a dramatist, who has to render those passions to which the religious imagination has always given a larger meaning" (Santayana 1956b, 141). A "larger meaning" in Shakespeare is up for grabs. But this was not Shakespeare's fault, Santayana concludes, but a problem of his context: the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries effected a deadlock between religion and a poetic "wholeness", whose "value is not the value of truth, but that of victorious imagination" (147).

It is notable that Santayana finds it possible simultaneously to explain Shakespeare contextually and to honor "victorious

imagination". As for "truth", Santayana identifies it with his own systemic naturalism (the aesthetics of which he finds epitomized in Dickens and Proust). But if early modern religious strife blocked Shakespeare's way to what Santayana in "Tragic Philosophy" (1936) calls a "mastering living religion" or "philosophy" (Santayana 1956d, 269), nevertheless Shakespeare's art offers itself to be read in terms that can illustrate both Santayana's thought and Shakespeare's career. "Tragic Philosophy" describes religion as "a second life, native to the soul, developed there independently of all evidence"; and it attests that "such an inner fountain of life and thought is evidently akin to poetic inspiration" (273). "Poetic inspiration" for Santayana is not the same as "victorious imagination", however; it is headed to a tragic end, "for what is tragedy but the conflict between inspiration and truth?" (275). In the light of that question, Shakespeare could be classified among "inspired individuals, whose inspirations contradicted the truth and were shattered by it" (276). Shakespeare himself would thus be a tragic figure. Nevertheless, however shattered himself by truth, however 'incoherent' his art, the author endures, apparently, because "inspiration" suffuses his work. If Santayana is right, the suffusion occurred because Shakespeare withdrew into a version of "a second life": an interface between poetry and religion. He did so, perhaps, long before he retired to Stratford; he already had retired into his poems and plays. For criticism to bring him out of retirement to assign him worldly power might go against the grain of his genius.

H. D. warmly took up the puzzle of Shakespeare's retirement in *By Avon River* (1945-46; published 1949), involving it with a speculative history of Shakespeare's religious contexts and with a vision of his art's (and her own art's) autonomy. As if in answer to James's baffled curiosity about Shakespeare's 'stop', H. D. concludes (on her concluding page) that Shakespeare's love of his younger daughter Judith, the twin survivor of Hamnet Shakespeare (d. 1596), drew Shakespeare home. But the conclusion is more a sudden epiphany than a terminal proof. To arrive at it, H. D. pursues a strategy that might be recommended as a scholarly model – if, that is, a combination of poetry and prose, as well as a

gap between poetic inspiration and historical context, can be adapted for cultural analysis.

H. D. adapts it. Its form oscillates between divided alternatives. In Part 1 of *By Avon River*, three lyric sequences of poetry are focused on a character 'who isn't': Claribel, the daughter of Alonso King of Naples, and the sister of Ferdinand. She is a missing *dramatis persona* in *The Tempest*, although her wedding to the King of Tunis indirectly causes the action of Shakespeare's play, where it is reported. The third of the lyric sequences turns Claribel into a quest figure on a pilgrimage that is at once religious and aesthetic. In Part 2 of *By Avon River*, lyric gives way to a prose that exhibits H. D.'s narrative version of historical-contextual research.

The juxtaposition of genres on which H. D.'s form depends produces a pattern of disjunctive contrasts. Her form in the second part juxtaposes statements such as "We do not know what [Shakespeare] is thinking" (H. D. 1949, 34) with her momentary authoritative penetrations of his mind. In H. D.'s research mode – that is, as she gathers evidence for why Shakespeare "came home" (5) – the form collects sample lyrics of fifty-nine Elizabethan and Jacobean poets who are Shakespeare's immediate literary context. H. D.'s culling of specimen texts witnesses her purposeful objectivity. At the same time, however, she declares her reliance on inclinations and impressions: "it is better to follow one's own clues and have of each of these poets, a living and personal memory, rather than grow weary and confused with disputable facts about them" (43). Thus the fact-pursuing latter part of H. D.'s book – *her* quest for contextual causes – identifies an historical determinant of the poets' texts, against the simultaneous background of her search's first part, in which the end of Claribel's quest is offered us as an instance of "inspiration", indeed of "victorious imagination". These divisions exploited by H. D.'s form are explicitly described when she says that, wanting to know what Shakespeare was thinking, "[w]e wander through a labyrinth. If we cut straight through, we destroy the shell-like curves and involutions. Where logic is, where reason dictates, we have […] broad highways" (34); but where Shakespeare is, we have a complex maze, something like a knot garden that H. D. thinks he wanted to plant, with Judith, at New Place in Stratford.

How exactly does H. D. thread the maze in her book's second, 'historical', part, and how does she arrive at her conviction about Judith's role in Shakespeare's retirement? H. D.'s anthology of poems by Shakespeare's contemporaries emphasizes their common subject matter: the fragility, the untrustworthiness, the darkness of mortal life. To explain this, H. D. reads the work as the collective expression of the aftermath of a shattering historical context: religious schisms and wars, dissolution of the monasteries, martyrdoms, and ravages caused by plague: "unbearable actuality […]. From this mad world, there was no escape" (71). Historical environment rules.

And yet: "There was the way of stark reality and there was escape from that reality" (83). The escape route mapped by H. D. belongs to history; but to another, and alternative one – a history of poetry and poets. *By Avon River* proposes – and, I would say, reminds us – that the history of fictions is not identical with the history of events and facts; that the time of literature is transtemporal, and a contrast to the time and empiricism of conventional historiography.

H. D. assigns Shakespeare's time to earlier centuries as well as to his own: to the eras of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Provençal literary tradition, which, she says, had "sprea[d] the germs of deadly heresy, the worship of beauty […], disguised […] in terms of earthly passion. But this passion was never requited. In other words, the love of the troubadour was love of the Spiritual" (82). Because of the spiritual dimension, the female object of the poet's love "was set apart" (82). The poets themselves became "set apart". "The poet is always suspect […]. These heretics were […] martyrs, in that they […] were unconscious of the source of their inspiration. Reason […] was well within the intellectual range of each one of them. But love was stronger. The power of love built up a kingdom" (83). The kingdom, which H. D. figures as a "spiritual inheritance" from "love of the Spiritual", was a "dream greater than reality" (84). Although not fully conscious of this dream, the poets inhabited it. It was "a phantom more real than the incontinent world of cathedral and of court" (85). H. D. figures it as a space (as well as a time) withdrawn from the world, a "heretical church", yet one whose credo and congregation – the poets – harbored "no

schism and no dissension" (85). Sadly, some poets, unable to sustain their space apart, surrendered their lives to historical strife. H. D. pointedly notes that William Shakespeare, "this cautious citizen of Stratford" (86), "unlike Christopher Marlowe, unlike Walter Raleigh, stands aside" from political engagement (68). To underline Shakespeare's detachment, H. D. imagines him being offered – by Lord Bacon – a diplomatic post in Italy. Shakespeare declines it, to remain in H. D.'s "phantom" space, where "the seeds of the faith" (84), flowering as "heretical" poetry already for centuries, germinated again in him: "If Hell was implicit in court and city, there were flowers to sweeten the stench of death. There were flowers to heal" (67).

Having opened her account of Shakespeare to an alternative time, H. D.'s narrative toggles between transtemporal dimensions and empirical contexts. She plausibly supposes Shakespeare at New Place retrospectively considering flaws in his plays, in a self-divided state of mind (a condition matching H. D.'s research form), after he has spent an evening – a documented reunion, in fact – with Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton. His self-critical thoughts suggest that he did not 'stop' writing. H. D. also plausibly suggests that Judith drew Shakespeare "home", from one kind of retirement (he "[stood] aside") to another, because Judith made her father belatedly conscious of neglect of her. His "flowers" "sweeten[ed] the stench of death" elsewhere; they did not sweeten his daughter's long solitude succeeding the death of her twin brother. Shakespeare thus seems to have neglected philoprogenitive love: a version, arguably, of the "love of the Spiritual", at odds with the fleshly love that Shakespeare expended on the "*master-mistress of my passion*" (36). So, H. D. observes, "[h]e is planning the Knotte Garden" with Judith: "Judith understood what he wanted with the garden" (35-36). He wanted, H. D. gives us to deduce, a revitalized node of relation with her, "in the face of death, […] somehow turned to light" (65). That "turn to" the "light", H. D. also implies, resisted destructive male eros: the garden would not include "deadmen's-fingers" (88), whose "country name" (36) is "bull's pizzles".

Nevertheless, an empirical historical gloom hangs over H. D.'s presentation of the garden. Shakespeare's final ruminations occur when "Judith has gone away" (35). H. D. does not tell the cause of

that departure, but ordinary historians do: a few months before her father's death, Judith at age thirty married. Her husband was almost immediately revealed to be faithless. Shakespeare changed his will to protect his daughter from her spouse. Does that change exemplify the power of "flowers to heal"? Perhaps Shakespeare's inspiration for the new "Knotte" "shattered" on a sorry truth (as Santayana would say) that could not be mitigated. Yet H. D.'s last penetration of Shakespeare's thought discovers him in a moment that precipitates his awareness of his retirement-motivating love for Judith. He often thought of Judith in the past, H. D. posits, as a likeness of star-crossed Juliet: Juliet, waking from sleep, discovered her lover's death; H. D. thinks that Judith, waking from sleep, discovered her brother's death. But now Shakespeare is presented as having a vision: he inwardly sees Judith, Juliet, and Eleanor of Aquitaine as identities of one another. Shakespeare has come home to Judith, H. D. concludes, not only lovingly conscious of her, but newly aware of the "heretical church" to which he belongs, and in which he sees her saved from sadness.

In the visionary moment H. D. assigns to Shakespeare, she fuses her two kinds of history, the transtemporal and the temporal. But if this constitutes reliable history, I expect my historicist-contextualist readers will say impatiently, so much the worse. It is not rationally grounded in evidence; its conjectural tissue is weakened by idealizing 'religious' dimensions; and H. D.'s darting in and out of 'Shakespeare's' supposed consciousness scarcely comes up to the mark of Shapiro's mind-reading of the playwright. Such impatience, however, trusts to history as the all-mastering discourse, the coldest truth. In placing James, Santayana, and H. D. alongside Shapiro's historicism, I am reminding us that a different discourse, a truth of its own epitomized for these writers by Shakespeare's identity and work, cannot be mixed easily with what we take to be "stark reality". Given H. D.'s organization of her book, history as it is ordinarily understood and researched is a belated secondary aspect of something more primary. Its truth either succeeds inspiration or imagination or is starkly separated or declined from them. That secondariness is driven home by Claribel's vision quest in *By Avon River*'s first half. Claribel begins there as a mere name, "invisible, voiceless" (14), merely a name for

a distant daughter in *The Tempest*. But H. D. develops for her a character, linked to death-resisting flowers and herbs (rosemary especially), and to healing pacific "truce; / For strife / Is ended […] / Not after death / But now and here" (12). In the final lyric sequence, "Claribel's Way to God", Claribel solicits religious authorities for knowledge of divinity. But she cannot identify with their established thought and practices. She identifies instead with an alternative religious-poetic tradition, avatar of the place apart re-traced by H. D. in her book's second half. Three variants of a Holy Trinity satisfy the "divine dissatisfaction" (to echo James) that sends Claribel on her search. One variant, abetted by St Francis, conjoins "[t]he spoken and the written Word" with "Poverty" (19); one, Arabic in origin, allegorizes "Worship of light" as "[a] tale of passion and of beauty, / Disguised as Lover and as Lady, / To hide the ineffable Mystery" (23); one fuses "the Dream, the Dreamer and the Song" (25).

In a new edition of *By Avon River*, Lara Vetter's introduction celebrates the feminism of H. D.'s imagination of Claribel, but argues that H. D. also "denigrates" the retired Shakespeare, presenting him as a drinker with a failing memory (Vetter 2014, 24). His memory lapses mark his historical culpability: he is "indict[ed]" by H. D., Vetter says, "as a participant in the erasure of cultural memory", an "erasure" that is a "facilitator of […] continual cycles of warfare" (24). To be sure, Vetter says that H. D. is "[e]ver ambivalent" (24) about such matters; and one might assess the bipartite division of *By Avon River* as an expression of H. D.'s self-division, of her not trusting the certainties she seeks. Nevertheless, an 'indictment' of Shakespeare for causing wars by 'facilitating' them, and other indictments of his additional failures (he is a "plagiarist", he is a "misogynist" [24]), if they are there in H. D. rather than in Vetter, might render H. D.'s volume incoherent from its very start, where H. D. pairs Shakespeare's Ariel and her Claribel as figures who say "farewell" to "strife". But, it appears, for an historicizing mind to grant credence to Claribel's trinities, to H. D.'s "heretical church" of poets, or even to "the shell-like curves" of H. D.'s research method, would be for that mind to believe in airy nothings. If those nothings exist, they apparently do so only by the grace of their anchors in solidly material, empirical historical-

political contexts. Inasmuch as the historian, cultural or literary or both, might be like any character in *The Tempest*, the likeness would be to Prospero when he says farewell to Ariel, and retires from magic.

3. "Contrived fissures of mirror and proscenium arch"; or, Shakespeare in the Park

I have cited Vetter's account of *By Avon River* as another token, like Shapiro's, of a norm of critical approach to "the blessed fictive world" that is, paradoxically, less interested in the fictive world than in what James called reality's "stare". As I track a set of resistances to that "stare", I do not mean to denigrate critics or readers on the other side of the critical argument. "Opposition is true friendship", as William Blake says. Opponent-friends valuably sharpen important questions. Does "the blessed fictive world", magical or otherwise, have a special identity that divides it from its opposite number? Is it a mistake to pursue or advocate a divide, or at least a gap, between them? Can the art of poetry – and literary criticism – retire from magic, and exchange it for reality or 'context'? With these questions in mind, and to bring this essay full circle, I shall shortly return to the *Julius Caesar* in Central Park that insisted on the play's involvement with American politics, in effect on the play's subordination to current history, as if the less fictive the drama appeared, the better. But before I bring to that production the considerations expressed by the writers in my previous pages, it might be useful to add to them, briefly, answers to questions about art's identity in W. H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's "The Tempest"* (1944).

Auden's volume begins immediately after Shakespeare's play ends, hence with the re-shaping of Prospero's identity. Having renounced his fictive powers, Prospero will go home to Milan and be newly defined. His transition perhaps echoes – to sound a contextual note – Auden's wartime application for American citizenship during the writing of his "Commentary": a change of self from British to American. (It resonates with H. D.'s divided national self: is she American, or naturalized British?) Indeed, all the characters in *The Sea and the Mirror* are undergoing transitions

that are personal and political. They are self-divided changes because they measure their prospective selves against identities they now are leaving behind. Despite the self-divisions, however, the movement of most characters is toward unity and community, in contrast with the unchanging malevolent self of Prospero's kingdom-usurping brother, Antonio. His lyric refrains, darkly counterpointing the hopeful lyrics of his fellows, insist on his self-containment, his intransigent resistance to change and community.

Antonio's retirement from his fellows might be figured – by a self-divided Auden, I would say – as a likeness of art's intransigent divorce from its contextual surround. Auden's final segment of *The Sea and the Mirror*, under the heading "Caliban to the Audience", can be seen to confront and to work out this threatening possibility. Indeed the finale represents "the Audience" – in effect "The Audience to Caliban" – apparently demanding of art the same valuable separateness that I've traced in James and H. D. The audience asserts that there mustn't be an erasure of "prohibitive frontiers" (Auden 2003, 32) that separate fiction from reality. But this fear of erasure is not because art's identity matters to the audience members. Instead, they fear the loss of an anxiety-calming mirror, without which "we should never know who we were or what we wanted" (32). By soliciting its mirror image in art, by making art secondary to that image, the audience seeks confirmation of search-for-self as determining context[3]. "It is [the prohibitive frontiers] who donate to neighbourhood all its accuracy and vehemence. It is thanks to them that we do know with whom to associate, make love, exchange recipes and jokes, go mountain climbing or sit side by side fishing from piers" (32). If audience members would no longer be able to see themselves as they want to see themselves in the mirror, an "unrectored chaos" (29) would ensue.

Yet Auden makes chaos the very vehicle of the audience's complaint. The audience speaks to Caliban, not identifying with him, whom it thinks to be the 'unrectoring' agent. But Caliban's

3 Miranda's lyric refrain, "My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely" (Auden 2003, 25-26), suggests the consonance of her desire for Ferdinand with an audience's search for mirror images.

vocalization of the audience, simultaneously uttering a brief for the audience's search for identity, confounds that search by illustrating 'his' indefiniteness. He is himself, and he is also Henry James, in whose voice 'he' also speaks; and those voices are also Shakespeare's. These three – historical authors and fictive inventions – speak, in effect, at once, even as they articulate the audience's clamor for definition. But identities shift and multiply; this trinity expands. Caliban is said to be identical with Eros; Caliban and Ariel, who are opposites, appear to be one and the same. The resulting cacophony of voices underwrites the fusion of separately identifiable selves that Antonio rejects. The cacophony also makes telling text apart from context especially difficult.

Nevertheless, without discounting Antonio's extremism, Auden makes cacophonic confusion end in a final, finer drawing of the line between art and life, especially where that line affects art's mirror function[4]. Caliban-Ariel, who seem to conjoin "stark reality" and "the blessed fictive world", point out to audience members (including aspiring authors) that art may mirror them, but that it also will mirror changes not ministering to happy selfhood (and not ministering either, Auden implies along the way, to happy endings for fraternity, romance, or justice). Audience identity, in other words, will be disrupted, obscured, and humbled rather than justified or exalted in art's reflections of it. Caliban-Ariel concedes an inevitable "gap" (50). "[T]he dedicated dramatist" (50), they explain to the audience, tries to represent and to reveal the audience's (or an audience member's) true self, but in doing so, the dramatist must also render the alienating conditions that obstruct identity. "[W]hat other aim and justification has [the dramatist], what else exactly *is* the artistic gift which he is forbidden to hide, if not to make you unforgettably conscious of the ungarnished offended gap between what you so questionably are and […] the unqualified No that opposes your every step […]?" (50). Nor, Caliban-Ariel add, is "an awareness of the gap […] itself a bridge" (50). In Auden's "Postscript" to his "Commentary", self-divided Ariel sighs, longing for a permanent union with Caliban; but he

[4] Kirsch notes the "poten[cy]" for Auden of "schematic dualism" (Auden 2003, xiii).

must accept a melancholy "No" that goes along with an inevitable quest for resolved identity: for stable 'I'-ing, so to speak.

What is melancholy at one moment, however, is inspiring and inspired at another. Auden's final 'scene' of the "Commentary" exhibits Caliban and Ariel's humbled selves. Standing in front of the curtain, after yet another of their endless performances, they (and their dramatist) admit that artistic enterprise is an ever-inadequate business. At the point of that admission, however, Auden concludes his "Commentary" in a way that resonates with James and H. D.'s visions, and with Santayana's desire for a poetics that has a philosophical-religious underpinning. There is another context, indeed another world, Caliban and Ariel say at their curtain call because, suddenly, they hear sounds of a transcendent realm they name "the real Word", or a "Wholly Other Life", or "[t]he perfected Work which is not ours" (52). Art, as they try anew to grasp it, depends upon its tie to a new trinity (formulated almost at the same time as H. D.'s) of "Word", "Other Life", and "perfected Work", even though the sign of the tie is again a gap, complementary to the one between self-centered audience and resisting mirror. "[O]ur shame, our fear, our incorrigible staginess, all wish and no resolve", the artist-performers propose, are "all we have; only now" – now that they admit art's humbling, alongside selfhood's – "it is not in spite of them but with them that we are blessed by that Wholly Other Life from which we are separated by an essential emphatic gulf of which our contrived fissures of mirror and proscenium arch – we understand them at last – are feebly figurative signs" (52). To be sure, "[the perfected Work's] great coherences stand out through [art's] secular blur […]; its voice speaks through our muffling banks of artificial flowers" (52-53). "Feebly figurative" is not without communicative power. Still, "the blessed fictive world" is inseparable in Auden from an acceptance of "gulph" and "fissure". Acceptance of the "gulph" maintains art's 'separateness' (or to echo James and H. D., art's withdrawal) from the "stark reality" of the audience's hunger for self-possession; and, at the same time, maintains art's distance from an unqualified

merger with a doctrinal unworldliness[5]. Even "the real Word" is divided from explicit identification with Platonism or Christianity.

Art's apartness as I've traced it in Auden and the others implies a model for literary criticism: one that searches out, and dwells on, verbal artistry's resistance to contextualizing attachment, rather than thwarts the resistance. Unfortunately, the hunger for relevance overrides alternatives. For a measure of thwarting's efficacy, I return to Shakespeare in the Park, and its merger of scholarly emphasis on contexts with entertainment.

The Central Park production's director, Oskar Eustis, and Shapiro, acting as a production consultant, decided that "*Julius Caesar* is broken backed, the second half […] a letdown, never quite matching the drama of the buildup to Caesar's assassination" (Shapiro 2020, xvii). To exploit that "buildup", Eustis's Caesar imitated Trump; his Calpurnia imitated Melania Trump. Cassius "wav[ed] a RESIST banner", and wore a "pink 'pussyhat'", emblem of post-election feminist protest marches against Trump (xxii). Even before the rise of the curtain, the exploitation got under way. In an improv prologue, audience members were invited to write condolence messages to Hilary Clinton for losing the election. Thereupon "a group of white men wearing red MAKE ROME GREAT AGAIN baseball caps" (xxi) stalked the stage. But these men were hired extras. Later, to intensify further the play's contextual relevance, Eustis planted other extras in the audience who enacted Republican response to the assassination onstage with vociferous outbursts and threats of physical violence.

According to Eustis, his idea for the production, conceived a month after the November 2016 election, expressed doubts about Brutus and Cassius: "people who don't know how to take power", in contrast with the likes of Caesar-Trump, "who are able to take power […]. Power becomes an end in itself. And that of course is the destruction of democracy" (xvii). If one suspects Eustis's idea and his explanation for "the destruction of democracy" to be

[5] Zukofsky provides us with a variant of Auden's realm of "the real Word", which Zukofsky identifies with Shakespeare's insistent involvement of poetry with sight, love, and mind. For Zukofsky the only adequate context for Shakespeare's "real Word" is a vast atemporal and transnational constellation of poets, novelists, and philosophers (Zukofsky 1987).

banalities, one might suggest that sutures of the "contrived fissure[e] of mirror and proscenium arch" are bound to produce more of the same. The production yielded sutures aplenty, in which offstage opponents acted out their rigid political selfhoods, to the point of chaos. Right-wing media got illegal hold of video of the assassination scene, broadcast it nationally, and persecuted the Public Theater. At one performance, Republican non-actors burst onto the stage, phone-recording their assault, and bringing the stage business to a temporary stop. Death threats were sent to the director and actors. Subsequent performances required plain-clothes police to guard the theater. Is this what Eustis wanted? He is quoted as saying that "democracy depends on the conflict of different points of view" (xxviii). He aimed to stage that conflict. Shapiro comments that "[i]n an age in which so many were quick to dismiss the views on the other side that was a risky assumption" (xxvi); especially, one might add, when the sides were, and remain, inflexibly identifiable. To have focused on the assassination scene at the expense of the play's latter half was to already establish one point of view about the play to the prejudice of others. Lop-sided partisanships prevailed. Symptomatically, Shapiro notes, conservative critics were so self-centered that they missed an aspect of the production that mirrored their anti-leftism: "the production had unwittingly exposed the threat posed to American democracy by leftist agitators like Cassius" (206). But identity-based incapacity also affected 'the left'. According to Shapiro, "the Left found themselves ill-prepared to deal with the force of right-wing media and threats of violence" (204) – perhaps, to expand on Shapiro's remark about Cassius, because left identity and its media-mirrors have continually refused to note their likeness to right-wing media and right-wing threats of violence.

"Eustis ruefully admitted after the run was over" that "his staging […] played 'exactly into the great cultural divide we have right now' […] between those of us who believe in this democracy, and those of us who believe that this democracy has utterly failed'" (219-20). This admission was indeed belated. The context at issue long preceded 2017. The production aimed to sensationalize the contextual divide, not to mitigate it, in the way that equations of "democracy" with "the conflict of different points of view" suggest

mitigation. Eustis's production played to the left part of the divide – for which of us on that side did not wish at one time or another for delivery via assassination from the man "democracy" could not free us from, even though "democracy" had installed him? Yet if the wish had been fulfilled, the chaos thereafter would have been worse than any alternative. And why, if one seeks "different points of view", should the Public Theater in the context of an American history of presidential assassinations echo a version of Shakespeare's most insane effect on American theater, however 'provocative' "the papers" and their media descendants might judge it?

Shapiro calls Shakespeare a serviceable worker of effects, "a canary in the coal mine" "signaling" changing "fundamental[s] in the culture" (203). But perhaps it would be better for Shakespeare, for art, and for literary history and literary criticism not to be prescient historical canaries, and not to want to be. The problem in rigidly divided America – to limit the problem to a national locale – is that there is no alternative space to which Americans can retire from their contextualizing historical and political divisions, and in which space some equivalent of other "Words", or of a "Wholly Other Life", or of the "perfected Work" that is not ours might get a hearing and ease conflicts. Shakespeare, art, and literary criticism could provide that opportune alternative locus of reflection. The one division they would honor would be "the gap" that signifies their 'separateness' from topical media publicity, their heretical withdrawal from orthodoxies, their subversion of clamorous identities. Such, at least, is the suggestion offered by the four writers I've represented. Although I have made use of an American matter to represent them, their suggestion is offered to critics and readers anywhere, undetermined by context.

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