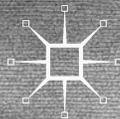


EDITED BY
PAUL MEGNA, BRÍD PHILLIPS,
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Hamlet and
Emotions

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PROLOGUE TO THE OMEN COMING ON

R. S. White

It has often been said facetiously that *Hamlet* is ‘full of quotations’ (or even clichés, so familiar do they sound).¹ These are phrases acting as ‘sound bytes’ so instantly suggestive and memorable that they are ready-made as titles of novels and movies. Some can be grouped around emotive themes which point to genres in the play and conceptual pre-occupations. For example, it is a play about crime involving murder, and has produced phrases that have named other murder mysteries, or could in future: ‘poison in jest’ (3.2.222), ‘*The Mousetrap*’ (3.2.225), ‘that sleep of death’ (3.1.68), ‘These words like daggers’ (3.4.85), ‘dead men’s fingers’ (4.7.143), ‘the foul crimes done in my days of nature’ (1.5.12), ‘Prenominate crimes’ (2.1.43), ‘With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May’ (3.3.81), ‘so crimeful and so capital in nature’ (4.7.7), and others. We have quotable gothic expressions of murderous intent of the kind used by Mrs. Radcliff as chapter headings in her novels, quotations more attributable to Macbeth than the student of philosophy back from Wittenberg University for his father’s funeral:

’Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. (3.2.377–381)

Emotions driving revenge are obviously at the heart of the action: ‘revenge his foul and most unnatural murder’ (1.5.25), ‘sweep to my revenge’ (1.5.31), ‘the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge’ (3.2.242), ‘O, this is hire and salary, not revenge!’ (3.4.79), ‘spur my dull revenge!’ (4.4.24), ‘revenge should have no bounds’ (4.7.101), and so on. Similarly, a stench of corruption pervades the atmosphere: ‘rank corruption, mining all within/ Infects unseen’ (3.4.139), ‘shall in the general censure take corruption/ From that particular fault’ (Q2 only, 1.4), ‘Something is rotten in the state of Denmark’ (1.4.67), ‘the primrose path of dalliance’ (1.3.50), and ‘stewed in corruption’ (3.4.83). Pricks of conscience too: ‘conscience does make cowards of us all’ (3.1.85), ‘the conscience of the king’ (2.2.607), ‘to thine own self be true’ (1.3.78), ‘all my sins remembered’ (3.1.92). And, of course, madness, whether feigned or real: ‘Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t’ (2.2.208), ‘I am but mad north-north-west’ (2.2.380), ‘a crafty madness’ (3.1.8), ‘a document in madness – thoughts and remembrance fitted’ (4.5.178), ‘antic disposition’ (1.5.173), ‘a counterfeit presentment’ (3.4.53). These do not even include the most frequently appropriated phrases of all, ‘To be, or not to be’ (3.1.58), ‘undiscovered country’ (3.1.81), ‘outrageous fortune’ (3.1.60), ‘that sleep of death’ (3.1.68), ‘Perchance to dream’ (3.1.67), ‘this mortal coil’ (3.1.69), ‘the rest is silence’ (5.2.30), and ‘good night, sweet prince’ (5.2.312), each having its own emotional aura. At some stage or other in the voluminous history of *Hamlet* criticism, all these phrases and the genres they invoke have been used to open windows of perception on the play as a whole, and most have an emotional charge that invites exploration.

What have not been so often noticed are phrases which not only implicitly but explicitly deal with singular rather than generic emotional categories, and when they are recognised and brought to analytical contemplation the subject of emotions itself in *Hamlet* becomes still more insistent and comprehensive. Critics for some generations may have been frightened off such recognitions by the stern advocates of critical rigour warning against ‘the affective fallacy’, however, in the case of *Hamlet* these are not imposed by commentators but explicated in the play.² Recent literary historians ploughing the field of history of emotions are becoming less reticent in speaking of ‘affective’ content in works of fiction and drama, acknowledging as they do that literature is nothing if

not emotional in its very nature.³ There are, for example, vestiges of Elizabethan humours theory as a medical paradigm, as when Hamlet punningly diagnoses Claudius as ‘distempered’ or ‘dis-tempered’, his humours thrown out of balance by an excess of yellow bile causing ‘choler’ and requiring ‘purgation’:

GUILDENSTERN The king, sir, –

HAMLET Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN Is in his retirement marvellous distempered.

HAMLET With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN No, my lord, rather with choler.

HAMLET Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to his doctor; for, for me to put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far more choler. (3.2.286–293)

There are also, of course, many emotional areas in the play that go ‘beyond the humours’⁴: grief, love, fear, sympathy, wonder, doubt, anguish, hope, jocularly, and the list goes on. The play begins to seem like a work *about* emotions, in the context of Elizabethan theories and also in terms of the avalanche of works which over the centuries have come, and continue to come, in the wake of Shakespeare’s play. One of the most famous quotations of all, ‘hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature’ (3.2.22), has paradoxically become a culturally self-fulfilling prophecy of the play’s own ontological status, guiding the ubiquitous and influential afterlife of *Hamlet*, as though in some uncanny way nature is mirroring and following Shakespeare rather than the other way around. With its tantalising mix of familiarity and estrangement, the play has changed not only the way we think, but the ways in which we *feel*, or at least conceptualise our feelings.

Of the particular emotional states, one thing everybody knows about Hamlet’s is that he is melancholy. We know because he tells us:

[...] The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power
 T’assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy –
 As he is very potent with such spirits –
 Abuses me to damn me. (2.2.600–605)

And because Claudius diagnoses him thus, using as an image a bird incubating its eggs:

Love? His affections do not that way tend,
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger [...] (3.1.165–170)

Ophelia's description reads like a textbook case listing outward signs of love-melancholy through his dishevelled clothes, distracted appearance, and formulaic gestures:

OPHELIA My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.
LORD POLONIUS Mad for thy love?
OPHELIA My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.
LORD POLONIUS What said he?
OPHELIA He took me by the wrist and held me hard,
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As a would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And, to the last bended their light on me. (2.1.78–101)

Gertrude, in the ornithological image of a bird with new-hatched chicks suggested by her husband, speaks of the apparently fluctuating, manic-depressive swings in her son's emotional behaviour:

[...] This is mere madness,
 And thus a while the fit will work on him.
 Anon, as patient as the female dove
 When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
 His silence will sit drooping. (5.1.282–284)

But melancholy in Shakespeare's time was not understood quite as tepidly as it is today, as anybody who has waded through the 1400 pages of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1604) will know. According to the prevailing Galenic, humoral model of physiology and psychology, it was a specific illness with myriad sub-divisions, a pathology so broad and deep in its potential symptom pictures that it encompasses whole areas of what now we call not melancholy but mental or emotional illness—'mere madness' in Gertrude's phrase.⁵ Erin Sullivan's book *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* is the latest (and arguably best) in a long line of historical studies dealing with the subject, though Hamlet does not feature here in as much detail as Jaques in *As You Like It*.⁶

In Hamlet's case, all the evidence suggests that the initial cause of his melancholy is understandable grief for his father who died less than two months before the play starts, so recently that the son has not had an opportunity for proper mourning. His grieving is then complicated and worsened by extra circumstances, especially the rapid remarriage of his mother causing an inevitable rift with her, a prompted suspicion that his father was murdered by the old king's brother, Hamlet's uncle, and the disruption of his budding love relationship with Ophelia. But grief is the prior, dislodging element, despite his mother's attempted consolatory thought that every person loses a father at some time, and her reminder that 'all that lives, must die':

HAMLET Ay, madam, it is common.
 QUEEN GERTRUDE If it be,
 Why seems it so particular with thee?
 HAMLET 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
 Nor customary suits of solemn black,
 Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
 Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
 Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief
 That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem',
 For they are actions that a man might play;
 But I have that within which passeth show –
 These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.72, 74–86)

A whole familial spectrum of grief pervades the play from start to finish: a son has lost his father and, it seems, his mother in her role as the husband of his biological father; a lover loses in love and then her father dies at the hand of her lover; a brother loses his sister (Laertes' feelings of justified grief and anger are often overlooked in accounts of the play and minimised in performance); and finally a mother loses her son and two husbands (one posthumously). The play is saturated in grief, though the only actual tears are shed by an actor playing the role of Hecuba. It was this play that Sigmund Freud used tacitly to generate his distinction between 'mourning and melancholia' since here some of the characters lose another, while Hamlet and Ophelia lose themselves in distraction (the word literally meaning 'drawn apart', in these cases from each other and also internally and individually).⁷

At the same time, however, Hamlet is capable of encompassing emotional opposites, 'The violence of either grief or joy' (3.2.187). If the heart he wears on his sleeve bears 'the trappings and the suits of woe' (1.2.86), yet we have glimpses of the opposite 'within', 'words of so sweet breath composed/ As made the things more rich' (Ophelia, 3.1.100–101), his 'music vows' now 'like sweet bells jangled out of tune' (3.1.1610)—in fact both women in his life, as well as his closest friend Horatio, address him as 'sweet'. This side of his personality is manifested in the quality of 'infinite jest' which he nostalgically recalls learning as a child from Yorick, the official court jester now long dead. His jokes, sometimes aimed at himself as one of 'we fools of nature' (1.4.35), are most often at the expense of Polonius's pomposity and bureaucratic dim-wittedness ('You are merry, my lord', concedes Polonius [3.2.116]) and the 'dressy' courtier Osric, but they reveal a more wryly amused self than we see in any other Shakespearean tragic protagonist, and an emotional resilience at odds with his outward melancholy.⁸ It predisposes him to notice such discrepancies in others, in particular the hypocritical, noting sardonically 'That one may smile and smile and be a villain' (1.5.109). The smiling assassin referred to here gives himself away in a

set of images where ‘the most heterogeneous ideas [...] are yoked by violence together’ (T. S. Eliot’s phrase describing metaphysical poetry),⁹ so glib and forced that they seem less like the mixed emotions assailing Hamlet as ‘a sea of troubles’ (3.1.61), and more like two-faced emotional fabrication and witty rhetoric than authentic feelings:

[...] as ’twere with a defeated joy,
 With one auspicious and one dropping eye,
 With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
 In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
 [...] (1.2.11–14)

Hamlet’s sarcastic observation on the incongruously proximate events seems more to the point, and reveals something of his own emotionally conflicted state, hovering between disgust and bitter amusement in a black joke: ‘Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats/ Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables’ (1.2.179–180).

There are a host of other emotions expressed in *Hamlet*, such as ‘affections’ in the word’s early sense (feelings which are *affected* by, or caused by encounter with another person or event), unrequited love, ‘wonder’ imitating Aristotle’s *admiratio* as a desired ‘affect’ of drama generated by pity, grief, and fear: ‘What is it you would see? / If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search’ (5.2.316–17)¹⁰ and ‘It harrows me with fear and wonder’ (1.1.42). Other emotional states are represented in phrases: ‘It would have much *amaz’d* you’ (1.2.234), ‘He waxes *desperate* with imagination’ (1.4.64), ‘I have been so *affrighted*’ (2.1.76), ‘And I, of ladies most *deject* and *wretched*’ (3.1.158), ‘With *tristful* visage, as against the doom, / Is *thought-sick* at the act’ (3.4.49–50 [all italics mine]). Other examples include states which can be described as paradoxical ‘mixed emotions’: ‘Blasted with Ecstasy’, / ‘More grief to hide than hate to utter love’ (3.1.163), and sometimes written on the face: ‘HORATIO A countenance more in sorrow than in anger / HAMLET Pale or red? / HORATIO Nay, very pale’ (1.2.229–230). In the meta-theatricality of Hamlet’s addresses to the players, he emphasises that emotional states are the stuff of drama and must be awakened if a play is to succeed:

HAMLET He that plays the King shall be welcome; his majesty shall have tribute of me. The adventurous Knight shall use his foil and target, the Lover shall not sigh gratis, the Humorous Man shall end

his part in peace, the Clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled o' th' sear, and the Lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city. (2.2.320–330)

It is emotional expressiveness that Hamlet admires in the Player's speech personating Hecuba with palpably wet tears in his eyes. One thinks also of the emotional crescendos built up in scenes, such as the pathos and poignancy of Ophelia's madness, Hamlet's lacerating recriminations directed at his mother, and the howls of grief uttered by both Hamlet and Laertes over her grave. Significantly, the one who shows little emotion is the one who has most feelings to hide is Claudius, and even he is driven to break into startled 'choler' at the player Queen's 'In second husband let me be accurst; / None wed the second but who killed the first', drawing from Hamlet a bitterly muttered 'Wormwood, wormwood' (3.2.170–171), and leading towards the King's abrupt departure from 'The Mousetrap' set up to catch him out.

In offering this brief introduction to some of the diverse affective territory to be covered in this book, I finish with consideration of a word with broad emotional range in early modern English, here given a Shakespearean twist. 'Passion' rings through *Hamlet* some fourteen times in strong positions and with a revealing consistency. Interestingly, however Shakespeare deploys it in a limited sense and without its primary, early modern meaning. Passions were said to be 'of the soul', internal, driving motivations which compel action. Deep-seated in an individual's mind and located in the soul, passions were generally invoked in religious contexts. The prime reference was back to the 'passions' of Christ, and the narrative of his sufferings during the last days of his life. The linkage to the various senses is through the idea that one must be overwhelmingly controlled by a single feeling which compels one to face appalling suffering as a mark of martyrdom, which in turn is also a referent for the word 'passion'. However, surprisingly, in this play (which elsewhere is steeped in Christian imagery) Shakespeare uses the word more often in a pre-Christian, classical sense, as a term of rhetoric, 'the passion', used to describe certain literary constructions, set-piece passages expressing strong feelings (*OED*, 'passion', 2.6d), which are calculated to persuade auditors to share them. The genre of the 'female complaint poem' (such as the possibly Shakespearean poem 'A Lover's

Complaint’, or for that matter the Player in *Hamlet*) was a contemporary example of how ‘the passion’ is used in this sense, without religious reference. Aristotle, obviously in a pagan context before Christ’s suffering, includes passion as a function of *pathos* which he sees as an appeal to an audience’s emotions, ‘putting the audience into a certain frame of mind’, and a means of persuading auditors into sympathising with a suffering subject. In Book 2 of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle provides a list of emotions which can be raised, including anger and its opposite calm; desire; friendship and its opposite enmity or hatred; fear; shame and shamelessness; kindness and unkindness; pity; indignation; envy; emulation. It would be perfectly possible to trace examples of each in *Hamlet*. The principal actor in Shakespeare’s company, Richard Burbage, was adept at delivering ‘passions’ in his various roles, and Hamlet was one of his most famous roles. In their book, *Shakespeare in Parts* Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Sterne quote eye-witness reports, one of which ‘talks of Burbage as a man who strips to his shirt and then “Much like mad-*Hamlet*, thus [at] Passion tears”’. Another observer, Richard Bancroft, recorded in poetry that ‘*Burbage* [...] when his part/ He acted, sent his passion to his heart’, noting how he switched emotions from love to wrath.¹¹ This kind of ‘transitioning’ in emotional states, according to Palfrey and Sterne, was especially valued by Elizabethan audiences, and accords with the comments from both Claudius and Gertrude in the passages quoted in this chapter, to Hamlet’s sudden changes from violence to extreme docility, as though from one passion to its extreme opposite.

In musical terminology we find the pre-Christian and Christian meanings fused, for example in the title of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* where the word refers to both a subject and a genre. In *Hamlet*, ‘passion’ occurs several times in this aesthetic context, with special reference to theatrical monologues and used with almost technical precision in the craft of play-making: ‘the cue for passion’ (1.1.537), ‘tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings’ (3.2.12), ‘a tow’ring passion’ (5.2.81), ‘Come, a passionate speech’ (2.2.435). We find it in a rare stage direction within the play-within-play’s dumb-show indicating what is to be seen, ‘makes passionate action’ (3.2.125). Despite the word’s traditional link with Christ’s passion and with the soul, we find passion linked only occasionally and obliquely with religion: ‘any passion under heaven’ (2.1.106), ‘passion in the gods’ (2.2.521), and with feelings likened to equally generic spiritual states such as

‘thought and affliction, passion, hell itself’ (4.5.186). We find it also as an overriding, compulsive pressure which we would call an obsessive or even neurotic state in any suffering individual—‘passion’s slave’ (3.2.70) and ‘the whirlwind of your passion’ (3.2.10) without religious associations and referring to strong emotions stirred in secular contexts. It is also interesting that the other secular ‘turn’ in the word’s fortunes towards meaning strong sexual attraction was initiated by early modern writers, Spenser (‘shee grew Full of soft passion [...]’ [*The Faerie Queene* Book III, Canto 5, Verse 30])¹² and Shakespeare himself (‘passion lends them power’ [*Romeo and Juliet* 2. Chorus. 13]). It might bear further analysis that in *Hamlet* the playwright chooses primarily to draw attention to the rhetorical and secular meaning of the word.

The play as a whole might conceivably be described as ‘Shakespeare’s passion’, an artistically ordered and framed cry from the heart expressive of profound grief which is not articulated through an authorial voice but realised as a play about inter-generational loss. In 1600, Shakespeare must have been starkly contemplating the imminent death of his seventy-year-old father (it came a year later), and no doubt beginning to realize how much unfinished business would be bequeathed to the next generation, perhaps by way of revenge over his father’s enemies; and he must have carried residual grief of losing his son Hamnet, Judith’s twin brother, at the mature age of eleven, just four years earlier. Critics have always been intrigued by the similarity of names, especially since we know Hamnet was named after Hamnet Sadler whose first name Shakespeare in his will spelled as ‘Hamlet’.¹³ Whether or not there had also occurred some blighted love relationship, perhaps of a ‘dark lady’, is purely conjectural, but part of a possible emotional maelstrom in the writer’s mind which produced this ‘dream of passion’ (2.2.554) which continues to haunt the world.

NOTES

1. *Hamlet*, ‘Additional Passages’ at 1.1.121. Quotations of and references to Shakespeare in this chapter are from William Shakespeare, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
2. W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, ‘The Affective Fallacy’, *Sewanee Review*, 57.1 (1949): 31–55; and W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

3. For example, the following, though the list is far from exhaustive: Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Patrick Colm Hogan, *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, ed. Katherine A. Craik, and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge University Press, 2013); *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Early Modern Literature and Culture*, ed. Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (Manchester University Press, 2014); Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Alison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
4. The phrase adopted by Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, eds, *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2014).
5. See Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan-State University Press, 1951). Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). J. B. Bamborough, *The Little World of Man* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 146. Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (University of Chicago Press, 2004). Also *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004). See also Matthew Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
6. Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Erin Sullivan, 'A Disease unto Death: Sadness in the Time of Shakespeare', in *Emotions and Health 1200–1700*, ed. Elena Carrera (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 159–183.
7. Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 14, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1914–1918).
8. See R. S. White, 'The Spirit of Yorick, or the Tragic Sense of Humour in *Hamlet*' *Hamlet Studies* 7 (1985): 9–26, and Indira Ghose, 'Jesting with Death: Hamlet in the Graveyard', *Textual Practice* 24 (2010): 1003–1018.
9. T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), 105–114.

10. The phrase has been used as title of a book by J. V. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearian Tragedy* (University of Denver Press, 1951).
11. Qtd. in Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Sterne, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 311–312.
12. Edmund Spenser, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 168.
13. Of course, there is no question of the play being named after Shakespeare's son, but his son may have been named after the earlier, lost play known as the *Ur-Hamlet*.

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‘In a Dream of Passion’: Introducing *Hamlet and Emotion*

Brid Phillips and Paul Megna

In the midst of his anguished, ‘O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!’ soliloquy (2.2.485–540),¹ Hamlet appositively equates ‘a fiction’ (specifically the First Player’s monologue recounting Pyrrhus killing Priam) to ‘a dream of passion’ (2.2.487). On first glance, Hamlet seems to use ‘dream’ here to highlight the inconsequential nature of fiction: how, he wonders, can the Player summon passionate tears for the long-dead Hecuba when his own (ostensibly) non-fictional situation engenders in him a dearth of avenging passion? In posing this question, *Hamlet* hints at one of the most central questions to the study of literature, emotion, and ethics: is literature monstrous in its capacity to elicit actual passion for inconsequential circumstances? But Hamlet himself is less worried about literature’s monstrous passions than he is about his own monstrous lack of passion. He launches into a self-deprecating tirade in which he scorns himself as a ‘John-a-dreams’ (i.e., ‘a person given to

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daydreaming or idle meditation' [*OED*, 'John-a-dreams']) for failing to avenge his dead father (2.2.503). Again, dreams are depreciated. Despite his agony, Hamlet cannot (or will not) simply guilt himself into conjuring an avenging passion and killing Claudius, since he worries that the ghost's account of Claudius' treachery might itself be a fiction designed to damn him to eternal horror in the dreams that may come in the sleep after death (2.2.533–538). Hence, Hamlet delineates a plan 'to catch the conscience of the king' (2.2.539–540)—a plan that hinges on fiction's ability to activate affective signifiers of Claudius' guilt that have been otherwise concealed. In posing his plan, *Hamlet* hints at the following political question: can literature be used as a sort of lie detector test on those intent on concealing guilt? Hamlet's capacity to leap quickly from a monumental question about literature, emotion, and ethics to a much more obscure, but equally fascinating question about literature's capacity to function politically by cutting through concealment is indicative of *Hamlet's* distinct interest in a host of philosophical and practical questions about emotion, expression, performance, and interpretation.

But let us give pause here for a moment. Perhaps Hamlet's description of a fiction as 'a dream of passion' is not simply a pejorative way of characterising literature, and our passionate attachments to literary characters, as inconsequential. After all, dreams, like literature, can make a huge impact on the 'real world'. Indeed, Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he could count himself 'a king of infinite space' despite being 'bounded in a nut shell' if not for his 'bad dreams' (2.2.252–254).² Refuting Guildenstern's subsequent assertion that 'the substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream', Hamlet posits that 'A dream is but a shadow', though he neglects to say what casts the shadow-dream (2.2.255–258). In *Hamlet*, dreams are often shrouded in uncertainty, as when Hamlet wonders what dreams might come after death (3.1.63–68), or when he asserts that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy (1.5.165–166). Likewise, Hamlet's comments on the player's 'dream of passion' are replete with uncertainties. According to the First Player's dramatic account of Pyrrhus killing Priam, Hecuba's grief at seeing her husband so brutally slain '(Unless things mortal move them not at all) / Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven / And passion in the gods' (2.2.454–456). In expressing uncertainty as to whether divine beings deign to empathise with mere mortals, the speech reflects *Hamlet's* wider preoccupation with the interpretive pitfalls inherent

in any attempt to discern another's passion. Indeed, barring unusual circumstances in which a person's pain causes the sun and the stars to signify divine compassion by crying, it is impossible to definitively determine whether divine beings grieve with us or sadistically revel in causing our pain à la 'flies to th' wanton boys' (*King Lear*, 4.1.35).³ Such uncertainties abound: it is unclear whether the Player weeps out of genuine compassion 'for Hecuba' (as Hamlet seems to think [2.2.493–495]), or resorts to thinking of a more personal memory or fantasy to conjure tears; it is unclear whether the Player's words and appearance effect in Polonius a 'compassion fatigue' that causes him to beg the Player to stop, or Polonius does so out of scorn for the Player's poor performance; and finally, as Indira Ghose notes in her chapter in this volume and elsewhere, 'there is no evidence that Claudius' reaction to the play-within-the-play is provoked by guilt rather than alarm at a thinly veiled threat delivered by his own nephew'.⁴ Of course, similar uncertainties haunt any work of narrative art, but *Hamlet* is, as Kathryn Prince argues, thematically concerned with 'confusion – especially regarding emotions as they are perceived, expressed and received'.⁵

Despite the play's thematic preoccupation with emotional uncertainty (or perhaps, somehow, because of it), *Hamlet* has long been celebrated for its capacity to elicit emotion. Writing in 1711, the Earl of Shaftesbury calls it

[t]hat Piece of his [i.e., Shakespeare's], which appears to have most affected *English* Hearts, and has perhaps been oftenest acted of any which have come upon our Stage, is almost one continu'd *Moral*; a Series of deep Reflections, drawn from *one* Mouth, upon the Subject of *one* single Accident and Calamity, naturally fitted to move Horror and Compassion.⁶

Shaftesbury is an early participant in the critical tradition on *Hamlet* and emotion that provides the foundation upon which this volume is built.⁷ Much more recently, the play has been at the centre of many important discussions on early modern emotion and 'emotionology'.⁸ For example, Gail Kern Paster cites *Hamlet* in support of her well-known argument for the prevalence of a materialist understanding of emotion in early modern England,⁹ as do scholars like John Lee who argue that Hamlet finds 'the materialist theories of his age unsatisfactory'.¹⁰ Of course, many critics have explored the emotional dynamics of the play itself, often focusing on specific emotional states including grief, melancholy, and dread.¹¹

Other scholars have speculated on how the author's emotional state is reflected in the play.¹² Some focus on what *Hamlet* can tell us about the emotional mores of early modern England (and vice versa),¹³ while others explore *Hamlet's* widespread, trans-historical emotional impact.¹⁴

Like the scholarship preceding it, this volume bears potent testimony, not only to the dense complexity of *Hamlet's* emotional dynamics, but also to the enduring fascination that audiences, adaptors, and academics have with what may well be Shakespeare's moodiest play. Its chapters explore emotion and emotionology in *Hamlet*, as well as the myriad emotions surrounding *Hamlet's* debts to the medieval past, its relationship to the cultural milieu in which it was produced, its storied performance history, and its profound impact beyond the early modern era. One of the strengths of this volume, to our minds, is that its component chapters are *not* unified by a single methodological approach. Some of its chapters deal with a single emotion in *Hamlet*, while others analyse the emotional trajectory of a single character, and still others focus on a given emotional expression (e.g., sighing or crying). Some of its chapters ask us to rethink how *Hamlet* inherits and shapes the emotional dynamics of its predecessors, while others seek to change the way we see Shakespeare's emotional art in relation to that created by his contemporaries, and still others illustrate how modern *Hamlet* adaptations reproduce some of the play's emotional elements and radically alter others. Some of its chapters bring modern methodologies for studying emotion to bear on *Hamlet*, others explore how *Hamlet* anticipates modern discourses on emotion, and still others ask how *Hamlet* itself can complicate and contribute to our current understanding of emotion. Although certain methodological approaches to the study of the history of emotions are employed in several chapters,¹⁵ this volume demonstrates the variegated ways in which we have always studied emotion and literature.

The collection is broken into four parts, Part I of which is entitled 'Between who?' Influences and Inter-texts. The first three chapters in this section (by Indira Ghose, Michael Barbezat, and Catherine Belsey) deal primarily with the premodern traditions upon which *Hamlet* draws; while the last two (by Jane Rickard and Richard Meek) focus primarily on *Hamlet's* relationship to contemporary works of early modern English drama. Ghose's chapter focuses on the metadramatic moments in *Hamlet*: specifically, Hamlet's aforementioned response to the First Player's speech and the court's reaction to *The Mousetrap*. Engaging with classical dramatic theory by Plato, Aristotle, and Horace, as well as

early modern works by Thomas Heywood and Sir Philip Sidney, Ghose argues that *Hamlet* is more sceptical about whether tragedy necessarily makes anything happen in the world than either Platonic anti-theatrical discourses or Aristotelian pro-theatrical discourses. By portraying a range of audience responses to its embedded dramas, *Hamlet*, Ghose argues, draws our attention to the 'indeterminacy of literature' and the unpredictable, multifaceted character of any tragic performance's effect on the world.

Barbezat's chapter explores how *Hamlet* recalls the medieval discourse on purgatory famously set down in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*. Tracing the influences on the *Tractatus* back through the theological writings of Hugh of St. Victor and Augustine of Hippo, Barbezat shows how it incorporates and anticipates doubts about the veracity of its contents. Following Greenblatt's landmark work on *Hamlet* and purgatory,¹⁶ Barbezat argues that both Hamlet's initial, manic conviction that the ghost with whom he converses is an honest one and his later worries that the ghost is actually an agent of demonic trickery stem from a long-standing medieval tradition of carefully theorising what one actually sees when one is granted a vision of purgatory.

Just as Barbezat's chapter shows how *Hamlet* is haunted by long traditions of doubt and belief in purgatorial visions, Belsey's argues convincingly that Shakespeare's portrayal of Old Hamlet's ghost owes less to the spectres of Senecan revenge tragedy than it does to the 'corporeal, threatening, and [...] shape-shifting' revenants populating medieval winter's tales. While Senecan ghosts elicit horror, they lack, Belsey argues, the eeriness of both Old Hamlet's shade and the ghosts of medieval fireside tales. Moreover, where Seneca's ghosts and their early modern descendants prefer 'prologues and monologues to interaction with the other characters', the ghosts of medieval lore, like Old Hamlet's ghost, actively engage other characters, who, Horatio-like, express 'fear and wonder' at their presence (1.1.43).

Moving from Shakespeare's earlier influences to his contemporary milieu, Meek's chapter considers the many forms of emotional mirroring in *Hamlet*, as well as the many ways in which *Hamlet* itself imitates and emulates its predecessors and contemporaries (even as the latter imitate it). Starting from Hamlet's sympathetic statement to Horatio (in the First Folio) that in 'the image' of his own cause he sees 'the portraiture' of Laertes' cause (5.2.78),¹⁷ Meek goes on to explore a variety of Elizabethan literary texts that likewise employ pictorial metaphors

to offer ‘different models of artistic mimesis’ that reflect ‘different ideas about the self and the other’. Among Meek’s many intriguing interventions is his exploration of the complex intertextual relationship between *Hamlet* and Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, which he sees as a ‘source, analogue, and perhaps also offshoot of *Hamlet*’.

Like Meek’s, Rickard’s chapter probes the intertextual resonances between *Hamlet* and an early modern analogue. Rickard’s argument stems from a striking archival find in one of the copies of Ben Jonson’s Folio *Workes* held at the Huntington Library, in which the pages containing the First Act of Jonson’s Roman tragedy *Sejanus* reveal a marginal note left by an eighteenth-century hand next to a speech bewailing those who ‘smile and betray’ that cites Hamlet’s observation that ‘one may smile and smile and be a villain’ (1.5.108). Rickard neither discounts nor unequivocally endorses the supposition that *Sejanus* bears *Hamlet*’s influence. Instead, she uses the two plays’ shared interest in the concealment of emotion as a jumping off point to reconsider not only the relationship between Shakespeare and Jonson, but also Jonson’s interest in emotion, which has been vastly underrepresented in recent scholarship on emotion in early modern English theatre.

The three chapters in Part II—‘I know not “seems”’ Expression and Sensation—each offer a deep discussion of emotional expression and/or sensation in *Hamlet*. In so doing, all three draw us into the play’s obsession with the difficulty of expressing and interpreting the inner emotional lives of self and other. Indeed, it is perhaps not a coincidence that each of these chapters cite Hamlet’s speech to his mother (1.2.76–86), in which he denigrates all expression of grief as merely ‘the trappings and suits of woe’ (1.2.86), which are utterly incapable of representing the emotion itself. As these chapters demonstrate, *Hamlet* (for all its protagonist’s scepticism about the signifying power of emotional expression) is markedly preoccupied with exploring non-verbal emotional expression through verbal means. Dympna Callaghan’s chapter focuses on lachrymosity in *Hamlet*. Like Meek’s, Callaghan’s chapter hinges on an extended meditation on a few lines in *Hamlet*. For Callaghan, Hamlet’s stated desire that his ‘too too sallied/solid/sullied/grieved flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew’ suggests that, ‘on one level at least, Hamlet wants the emotional release of tears’; a release which entails ‘the capacity to dissolve into tears the lumpen, icy burden of unbearable sorrow’. Callaghan concludes by suggesting that Hamlet’s desire for deliquescence in Act 1 meets its converse

in the later play's obsession with flesh's post-mortem putrefaction and decay.

Also concerned with the physical expression of emotion, Naya Tsentourou's chapter explores *Hamlet's* striking preoccupation with breath and sighs in particular. By unpacking the surprisingly prevalent discussions of breathing and sighing scattered throughout *Hamlet*, Tsentourou reveals both the extent to which the play is influenced by physiological accounts of sighing—e.g., Claudius' simile (extant only in Q2) in which delayed action is compared to 'a spendthrift's sigh' that consumes some of the sigher's blood and vital energy (4.7.120–121)—as well as its tendency to foreground the epistemological gap between such outward displays of emotion and emotion itself, as when Hamlet lists 'the windy suspiration of forced breath' among 'the trappings and suits of woe' that are unable to truly denote his inner feelings.

Like Tsentourou's, Bríd Phillips's chapter contextualises *Hamlet* by exploring early modern scientific discourses on emotion, though Phillips focuses on sensation (particularly sight), rather than expression. Early modern theorists of sight were acutely attuned to vision's unreliability. Nevertheless, theorists like Helkiah Crooke understood the eyes as 'the chiefe seate of the Soule',¹⁸ thereby suggesting that those who use vision to scrutinise the eyes of the other gain privileged access to the inner workings of the other's emotional soul. Insofar as it contains both moments in which characters question what they or other characters see, and instances in which characters look into other characters' eyes to interpret their emotions, *Hamlet* reveals the unreliability of sight as intimately bound up with the indeterminacy of the interior emotional lives of others.

Part III, entitled 'this quintessence of dust' Character, contains three essays that focus on the emotional makeup of a particular character, or, in the case of Bradley J. Irish's chapter, the emotional dynamic between two characters. Jeffrey R. Wilson's chapter explores Horatio's character, particularly his dual and related roles as stoic and storyteller. Although he does not succumb completely to the temptation to consider Horatio the play's sole avatar for Shakespeare himself, Wilson intriguingly suggests that Horatio, like Shakespeare, is a 'poet of the other', meaning he 'takes his cue from stoic rationality' insofar as he responds 'to the sceptical crisis by attempting to know, understand, and represent the ideas, feelings, and experiences of others', rather than focusing incessantly, as Hamlet does, on the emotional life of the self.

Lisa Hopkins' fascinating chapter explores Claudius' character, paying particular attention to the usurping king's capacity for empathy. Although she does not deny that Claudius is the play's villain, she suggests that he is also, like Hamlet, a tragic figure insofar as he is able to glean the emotional interiors of other characters, but unable to comprehend or manipulate his own emotional life. 'In the language of modern corporate life', Hopkins writes, Claudius 'is a man who exhibits emotional intelligence'. Perhaps the most pertinent lesson of Hopkins' chapter is that Claudius' character reveals how empathy and ethics are often at odds: 'In a modern corporate environment, Claudius might be a rather good manager, but he is also a murderer, an adulterer, and a usurper. None of these contradictory qualities is in the least diminished or negated by its co-existence with the others'.

Irish's chapter focuses on the affective atmosphere of dread that pervades *Hamlet*, especially as it defines the contours of the relationship between Hamlet and Claudius. Beginning with a careful philological exploration of the auto-antonymic signifier, or 'Janus word', 'dread' in Early Modern English, Irish goes on to trace dread's prominent role in two modern fields of thought—Terror Management Theory (TMT) and existential philosophy—both of which retain the Janus-like quality of early modern 'dread' by conceptualising dread simultaneously as a subjective, inward-facing emotion and as a social, outward-facing emotion. For Irish, dread is at the heart of the inter-personal conflict that acts as 'the engine of the play'—that between Hamlet and Claudius, who, according to Irish's reading, 'are locked in an affective feedback loop [...] linked by the respective dread that they each inspire in the other'.

Part IV of our collection, 'Remember me' Performance and Adaptation, contains four essays on the emotional dynamics of performances, adaptations, and performed adaptations of *Hamlet*. Kathryn Prince's chapter focuses on the complex relationship between emotion and memory in *Hamlet* itself before delving in to a discussion of *Hamlet Live*: a version of *Hamlet* staged for tourists visiting Kronborg Castle in Helsingør, Denmark, which is presented to audiences of *Hamlet Live* as 'Shakespeare's Elsinore'. For Prince, memory is the 'actantial object' of *Hamlet* and various productions play with the play's obsession with memory by remembering (or misremembering) earlier productions, including the original ones held at the Globe Theatre, or the historical root of the Hamlet myth upon which Shakespeare drew.¹⁹ By misremembering the events of *Hamlet* taking place in Kronborg Castle, *Hamlet*

Live syncopates both time and space to provide its audience an experience that, according to Prince, approximates the emotional logic of historical re-enactment more than productions of *Hamlet* at London's Globe Theatre.

Dealing with both performance and adaptation, Stephen Chinna's chapter focuses on emotion in three modern adaptations of *Hamlet*: Howard Barker's *Gertrude—The Cry* (2002), Heiner Müller's *Hamlet-machine* (1977), and Chinna's own *When Salome Met Hamlet* (2005). Chinna draws on personal experience with his chosen plays, all of which he has directed student productions of at the University of Western Australia's Dolphin Theatre. In discussing the choices he made in staging *Gertrude—The Cry* and *Hamlet-machine*, Chinna offers compelling insights into how both adaptations not only pick up on and strategically alter the emotional dynamics of Shakespeare's play, but also how they, like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (and all plays), demand a plethora of interpretive choices from the directors and actors bringing them to life. As both author and director of *When Salome Met Hamlet* (which he wrote when he was simultaneously directing a production of Oscar Wilde's 1891 play *Salome* and lecturing on *Hamlet*), Chinna is able to furnish even more insights into the process of adaptation and performance, including the impetus and implications of his decision to compose and stage a Hamlet who performs 'almost nothing but emotions that rarely lead to meaningful action'.

Like Irish's chapter in the preceding part, Paul Megna's explores existentialism's relation to *Hamlet*. Where Irish argues that the Janus-faced notion of dread permeating *Hamlet* anticipates modern existentialism's fascination with dread, Megna focuses on the ways in which Hamlet fails to live up to his reputation as a proto-existentialist hero and, in some ways at least, embodies an emotional trajectory at odds with the most well-known forms of existentialism. In the second half of his chapter, Megna goes on to posit that Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* picks up precisely (if unintentionally) on Hamlet's leap from 'un-existential anguish' to 'un-absurdist happiness' by imbuing in his Guildenstern a tendency to leap back-and-forth from a happy complacency in being a free agent in a random world to anguish at recognising himself as a character in a preordained world.

In the volume's final chapter, R. S. White probes the emotional worlds created in two *Hamlet* spinoffs: Richard Coen's *Horatio: Loyal Friend of Hamlet* (2008) and Ian McEwan's *Nutshell* (2016). Picking up

where he left off in *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Stage, Text, Screen*, wherein he argues ‘that *Hamlet* itself is an inherently avant-garde work, which helps to explain why it has fuelled so many experimental works and revolutionary concepts over centuries’,²⁰ White explores how Coen’s and McEwan’s novels experiment with *Hamlet*’s already-experimental treatment of emotions. For White, Coen’s novel endows Horatio with an inner life complete with ‘vivid dreams’ that undermine ‘the generally unemotional certainty of his outlook’. In his discussion of McEwan’s experimental novel—a re-writing of *Hamlet* as a murder mystery told from the perspective of a foetus in his murderous mother’s womb—White suggests that *Nutshell* reveals some hitherto under-discussed experimental (or avant-garde) aspects of *Hamlet* itself including its status as a precursor to the detective novel.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume reveal *Hamlet* to be not only emotionally engaged with both the past and the cultural milieu in which it was composed, but also endlessly emotionally engaging for future generations. Although they advance many conversations revolving around *Hamlet* and emotion, these essays hardly exhaust all there is to say on this topic but, instead, point to the enormous amount left to be explored. If the subject of this volume is unusually narrow insofar as it focuses on one topic in one literary work (and some of its notable descendants), one could imagine even more focused books (e.g., *Hamlet, Gender, and Emotion*, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*, or *Hamlet, Madness, and Emotion*), which would nevertheless fail to exhaust scholarly discussion on their even narrower topics. We hope, then, that the present volume adds another layer of foundation upon which future studies of *Hamlet* and emotions can be built, taking its own small place among the multitude of evidence documenting the monumental impact of Shakespeare’s ‘dream of passion’.

NOTES

1. Unless specified otherwise, all in-text citations of *Hamlet* refer to William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
2. These lines appear in neither Q1 nor Q2, but only in the First Folio. Quotations from the First Folio are taken from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

3. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1308.
4. Indira Ghose, 'Shakespeare's Legacy of Storytelling', in *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies: Artists, Writers, Performers and Critics*, ed. Paul Edmondson and Peter Holbrook (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 165–177.
5. Kathryn Prince, 'Drama', in *Early Modern Emotions*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 142.
6. Anthony, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 171(n).
7. This scholarly tradition is far too immense to survey here, but some recent work on emotion in *Hamlet* includes Emily Anglin, "'Something in Me Dangerous': *Hamlet*, Melancholy, and the Early Modern Scholar", *Shakespeare* (2014): 1–15; Christy Desmet, "'The Dread of Something After Death': *Hamlet* and the Emotional Afterlife of Shakespearean Revenants", *Actes des Congrès Société Française Shakespeare* 36 (2018): 1–13; Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion's Slaves* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Ross Knecht, "'Shapes of Grief": Hamlet's Grammar School Passions', *ELH* 82, no. 1 (2015): 35–58; Stéfán Laqué, "'Not Passions Slave": Hamlet, Descartes and the Passions', in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 267–279; Eric Levy, 'The Problematic Relation Between Reason and Emotion in *Hamlet*', *Renascence* 53 (2001): 83–95; Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, eds., *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 144–175; Kristine Steenbergh, 'Emotion, Performance and Gender in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*', *Critical Studies* 34 (2011): 93–116; and Warner, Marina. "'Come to Hecuba": Theatrical Empathy and Memories of Troy', *The Shakespeare International Yearbook* 11 (2011): 61–87.
8. For a discussion of 'emotionology' as 'the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains towards basic emotions and their appropriate expression', see Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813–836.
9. Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25–76, esp. 45–60.

10. John Lee, 'Shakespeare, Human Nature, and English Literature', *Shakespeare* 5 (2009): 184. See also Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, eds., *The Renaissance of Emotion*, 1–25.
11. See, for example, Emily Anglin, 'Something in Me Dangerous'; Christy Desmet, 'The Dread of Something After Death'; and Ross Knecht, 'Shapes of Grief'.
12. See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet', *New York Review of Books* (October 21, 2004), adapted from Greenblatt's *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York, NY: Norton, 2004), 288–322.
13. See, for example, Lynn Enteline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*; and Stefan Laqué, "'Not Passions Slave'".
14. R. S. White, *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2015).
15. For example, both Prince and Tsentourou productively engage with Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220.
16. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
17. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*.
18. Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man. Together with Controversies Thereto Belonging. Collected and Translated Out of All the Best Authors of Anatomy, Especially Out of Gasper Bauhinus and Andreas Laurentius* (London, 1615), 646.
19. Prince draws from Ann Ubersfeld's theorisation of the actantial model in theatre semiotics, according to which an abstraction, such as memory, can function as an actant. Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins, ed. Paul Perron and Patrick Debbèche (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 37.
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PART I

‘Between who?’ Influences
and Inter-texts



Hamlet and Tragic Emotion

Indira Ghose

Among a myriad of other things, *Hamlet* is a play about plays. It is about our relation to drama, and the emotions it evokes. To be sure, meta-theatricality is a typical feature of revenge tragedy. Usually, however, meta-theatrical devices in revenge plays are integrated into the plot, and are often the vehicle for the revenge.¹ *Hamlet* deploys its meta-theatricality with a difference. The play is saturated with self-reflexive allusions to contemporary theatre politics, instructions to actors, observations about styles of acting, eavesdropping scenarios, and even slips in an in-joke about star actor Richard Burbage's previous role as Brutus in *Julius Caesar*.² After a brief outline of the theoretical debate about drama, I will be focusing on two specific moments in the play in which the characters engage with dramatic illusion—the Player's speech and the play-within-the-play. These scenes do little to propel the action of the plot. Instead, they explore the way different spectators react to dramatic fictions, and thus comment on the interplay between tragic action and audience response. In a way, the play is as much about us as it is about Hamlet.

The scenes in *Hamlet* that reflect on the effect of dramatic art shed an interesting light on early modern debates about literature. In his

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Apology for Actors (1612), Thomas Heywood, the only literary playwright of the early modern theatre apart from Shakespeare to become a founding sharer of a theatre company, the Worcester's Men, sets out a vigorous defence of the theatre.³ His plea runs counter to a flurry of virulent attacks on the theatre that appeared in print pamphlets from the 1570s onwards. Heywood presents a series of arguments, ranging from the venerable tradition of the theatre, reaching back into antiquity, to the indispensable role of acting in the study of rhetoric, which, he claims, in lines that echo those of Hamlet, teaches a student to 'fit his phrases to his action, and his action to his phrase, and his pronunciation to them both'.⁴ The theatre is an ornament to London and a magnet for foreign visitors, he asserts, and the theatre industry has led to a marked refinement in the English language. The most important case for the theatre is its didactic value. Plays inspire us to virtue by presenting noble role-models, and arouse us to abhor vice. This exalted mission is best fulfilled by tragedy. As Heywood puts it, 'If we present a Tragedy, we include the fatal and abortive ends of such as commit notorious murders, which is aggravated and acted with all the Art that may be, to terrifie men from the like abhorred practices'.⁵ The emotional impact of drama is so powerful that the theatre can serve as a forensic tool. Heywood relates the anecdote of a woman in a town in Norfolk watching the performance of a play about the ghost of a murdered man returning to haunt his guilty wife. She immediately confesses her own crime, which had lain shrouded in secrecy for seven years. A similar incident occurred during the tour of a troupe of players in Holland.⁶ The theatre, Heywood contends, is an establishment for the reform of erring humankind. He sums up, 'What can sooner print modesty in the soules of the wanton, then by discovering unto them the monstrosnesse of their sin?'⁷ Hamlet is fired by the same idea. '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' (3.1.507–511), he muses. He determines to use a play to 'catch the conscience of the King' (523–524).

The antitheatricalist polemics of the late sixteenth century were partly the distillation of hostility between poets and players, in particular the resentment of a generation of young, often university-educated playwrights of the dominance of the acting establishment by what they regarded as ignorant and presumptuous players.⁸ Nonetheless, the arsenal of arguments they employed were forged in a debate that has shadowed

the history of the theatre from antiquity onwards. As early as in the Hellenic period, Plato refers to the ‘old quarrel between philosophy and poetry’.⁹ The controversy took a different shape in different periods, but central to the dispute was the role that the dramatic arts played in stimulating the passions. The question of Plato’s aesthetics is complex, and only a brief outline is attempted here. His theory of art is grounded in the notion that all representation (or mimesis) is at a third remove from the truth, which is only accessible in the realm of ideal Forms. While a craftsman attempts to emulate an ideal in his work, the representation of an artefact is always only the imitation of an imitation.¹⁰ Plato subsumes all types of literary fictions under poetry.¹¹ He is scathing about the degrading images of the gods and heroes that abound in poetry, which have a noxious effect on the young.¹² But it is dramatic poetry that Plato singles out for opprobrium for its deeply corrupting influence on human nature through the seductive illusions it creates.¹³ Drama gratifies our lower natures, and encourages us to give free rein to the emotions instead of attempting to master them. Even those of us who attempt to employ restraint in our private griefs give way to an outpouring of feeling when watching the tragic fate of fictive characters. What we do not realise is that the emotion for others we indulge in seeps into our own life; by wallowing in illusory sorrows we lower our threshold of self-control and are susceptible to similar outbursts of passion in our own lives.¹⁴ Acting itself is a perilous undertaking, and can infect one with the traits one is impersonating. Paradoxically, despite his dismissal of the arts as merely illusory, *The Republic* is haunted by the dangers they represent.

Plato’s elucidation of the contagious effect of emotions would have a lasting impact on the way both actors and spectators were regarded. His ideas stemmed from a categorical division between reason and the passions; the latter represented the irrational part of human nature and needed to be controlled by the exercise of reason. Aristotle’s radical innovation was to recuperate the emotions for an ethical life by positing a cognitive element in the passions.¹⁵ Aristotle connects emotions to judgement and belief. Our emotional response is based on the evaluation of a situation, which for its part is shaped by our beliefs. Since beliefs are responsive to reason and amenable to change, emotions can be steered by means of education. He affirmed that self-control was not an adequate condition for ethical behaviour—emotions too were instrumental in inspiring us to live a virtuous life. For Aristotle emotions are bound up in social interaction, and are not just an irrational impulse.¹⁶

Aristotle did not only demonstrate that emotions were an intelligent form of behaviour, and indispensable for virtue. He took up the gauntlet for a defence of poetry that Plato had thrown down at the end of *The Republic* with his words, ‘we should give her defenders, men who aren’t poets themselves but who love poetry, a chance of defending her in prose and proving that she doesn’t only give pleasure but brings lasting benefit to human life and human society’.¹⁷ In the *Poetics* he justifies the salutary effects of tragedy on the spectator. His definition of tragedy became a critical commonplace for centuries: ‘Tragedy, then, is mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections; employing the mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions’.¹⁸ In these cryptic lines, Aristotle uses medicinal imagery to suggest that tragic drama has a therapeutic effect, cleansing us of excessive emotion by means of a homeopathic process. In the *Rhetoric* he defines fear as a kind of pain ‘derived from the imagination of a future destructive of painful evil’.¹⁹ Showing that characters greater than us have suffered arouses fear in the audience,²⁰ while depicting suffering that afflicts those who do not deserve it arouses our pity.²¹ As he makes clear, both emotions relate to our own sense of vulnerability.

While Aristotle’s emphasis on curbing tragic emotions seems to contain a concession to Plato, other precepts in relation to drama are perhaps more illuminating. Mimesis, he declares, is a part of what makes us human. Human beings are the most imitative creatures in the world. We learn through imitating others, and we delight in images. His answer to the knotty question as to why we take pleasure in painful sights is to point to the instructive value these images provide. For a core tenet for Aristotle is the belief that we take pleasure in learning.²² His redemption of pleasure for didactic purposes was embraced by generations of thinkers, both for aesthetic and rhetorical theory. Cicero’s dictum of the threefold function of rhetoric, namely to instruct, delight, and move,²³ became axiomatic, as did Horace’s definition of the aims of poetry, to instruct and delight.²⁴ In the Renaissance Platonic thought had been transmitted via Augustine, whose *City of God* was an attempt to emulate the *Republic* in Christian form, and by means of the translations and commentaries of the Florentine Neoplatonists. The *Poetics*, on the other hand, although available in a distorted version in a twelfth-century commentary by Averroes, was only rediscovered by scholars in the late fifteenth century. It was disseminated through a sequence of commentaries

by Italian theorists.²⁵ In the most important work of literary criticism to appear in England during the early modern period, *A Defence of Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney offers a summation of the standard thought at this time: ‘Poesy therefore is an art of imitation [...] that is to say, a representation, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight’.²⁶

THE PLAYER’S SPEECH

Hamlet is clearly an aficionado of the theatre. Rosencrantz speaks of the players as a troupe he was ‘wont to take such delight in’ (2.2.291–292). When he hears that they are on their way to Elsinore, he bombards his former school friends with questions, hungry for theatrical gossip. He warmly welcomes the travelling actors, and immediately requests a demonstration of their professional skill. In fact, he has a specific play in mind—not a crowd-puller, but one that might have been staged only once. This play, he announces, is an exquisite work of art, and proceeds to flaunt his expertise as a literary critic. Even if the play was disdained by the masses, it was much lauded by the discerning few, into whose ranks he ostentatiously inserts himself, written in a style ‘as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine’ (382–383). In other words, it was both edifying and delightful, as recommended by the leading literary theorists of the time, without being contrived. Hamlet then launches into his favourite speech, one that he apparently knows by heart.

What we hear, however, is a sample of fusty, bombastic rhetoric, revelling in gratuitous gore. The handful of lines Hamlet declaims narrates how Pyrrhus (or Neoptolemus), son of Achilles, embarks on a murderous rampage during the fall of Troy. The passage lingers over his blood-stained appearance, piling on sensationalist descriptions with relish. In a bathetic melding of terms from heraldry and lowly trades, the hero is depicted as ‘total gules’, as ‘tricked’ with blood which has been ‘baked’ and ‘impasted’ in the heat of the burning city, and, in a word borrowed from plastering and painting, ‘o’ersized’ with gore (395–400).²⁷ In a perceptive analysis of the scene, Colin Burrow points out that a number of the words in the speech are found nowhere else in Shakespeare, and indeed, are not common in the period. As he notes, the passage is stylistically cordoned off from the rest of the play, drawing attention to its old-fashioned flavour. The First Player’s speech is a parodic pastiche

of Virgilian, Senecan, and Marlovian rhetoric, and might be intended as a joke at Marlowe's expense; by using a register that was outdated by the time Shakespeare wrote his play, what it does do is establish his own modernity.²⁸

The speech itself, narrated from Aeneas' point of view, graphically spells out how Pyrrhus massacres Priam, King of Troy, at the foot of the altar in his palace. It is an amalgamation of details taken from various sources, which differ slightly in their emphasis. Virgil relates how Priam reviles Pyrrhus, comparing his outrageous deeds with the magnanimity shown him by Achilles, while Marlowe elaborates on Hecuba's frenzied attack on the murderer of her husband.²⁹ As Rhodri Lewis points out, probably the only Shakespearean contribution are the lines that describe a momentary hush in the orgy of slaughter, when the collapse of the walls of Troy distracts Pyrrhus from carrying out his work: 'So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood, / Like a neutral to his will and matter / Did nothing' (418–420).³⁰ Interestingly, Shakespeare telescopes the events delineated in the *Aeneid* to insert an instance of hesitation, a theme of such sweeping significance in *Hamlet*. In Virgil Ilium only comes crashing down a handful of lines later, after Aeneas has seen the vision of his mother who urges him to save his family and seek safety.³¹

A small but select group of spectators watch the First Player perform the dramatic scene. These consist of the other members of the troupe, three courtiers, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius, and the Prince of Denmark. How do they react to the extravagant fragment about the bloodthirsty avenger hacking 'reverend Priam' (417) to pieces and the passionate grief of the distraught queen of Troy? As regards the fellow actors and Hamlet's erstwhile friends: they say nothing. Polonius and Hamlet, on the other hand, keep up a running commentary on the quality of the performance, seeming to vie with each other to demonstrate their critical nous. First Polonius objects that the description is too long-drawn-out. Hamlet retorts with a barb about his lack of taste: 'he's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps' (438). Both concur in applauding the choice wording of the play, enthusiastically voicing their approval of the term, 'the mobled queen' (440), an obscure word meaning 'muffled'.³² Finally, Polonius interrupts the Player, remarking that he seems to be carried away by passion. Hamlet shares this impression—it is precisely the virtuosity of the player's acting with which Hamlet is preoccupied in his soliloquy.

Critics have often commented on the fact that Hamlet appears more interested in the performance than in the play.³³ Curiously, no one else in the audience seems to respond to the content of the play, either. The observations made by both Polonius and Hamlet reflect a detached sense of aesthetic judgement. The passage might have incited a range of emotions: revulsion, indignation, compassion. The words of the text none too subtly hammer home the savagery of Pyrrhus—‘rugged’, ‘hellish’, ‘malicious’ (390; 401; 451) are only a few of the epithets liberally bestowed on him within the space of a few lines. The barbarity of butchering an old man (of ‘milky head’, as the play points out) might have roused the bystanders to show some reaction, as might the spectacle of regicide. Alternatively, the lengthy presentation of the passionate grief of Hecuba might have been expected to evoke sympathy for the suffering queen. For all its melodramatic quality, the plot the play narrates, the story related in the *Aeneid* and in countless other fictions, conforms to the characteristics of tragedy Aristotle outlines in the *Poetics*, and dramatises a tale of human vulnerability and pain. But there is no sign of anyone present being moved by the show—apart from the actor.

The *Aeneid* itself goes on to recount how at the gruesome murder of Priam, Aeneas is reminded of his own father. Catching a glimpse of Helen, he is briefly overcome by a surge of vengeful passion directed at the woman he blames for the catastrophe that has befallen Troy, before the vision of his mother recalls him to his duty towards his family. Parallels to Hamlet’s own story abound, but these do not seem to have crossed the Prince’s mind. The play might have activated an array of responses on his part too, either eliciting a wave of pity for an old man and his wife facing a pitiless murderer, or anger at the assassination of a king, or identification with an avenging hero, be it Pyrrhus or Aeneas, or guilt at the heroic *pietas* that the figure of Aeneas exemplifies. At the least, it is surprising is that he does not pounce upon the sorrow of a queen at the assassination of her husband, lavishly embellished by Shakespeare in comparison to his sources, to fan the flames of his anger towards his reprobate mother. In a brilliant new reading of *Hamlet*, Rhodri Lewis argues that Hamlet is unable to respond to the events depicted in the Player’s speech with either *pietas* or avenging fury, because in reality he feels little of either emotion in relation to his dead father. His fetishising of the actor instead of the play is an evasive tactic to conceal his yawning emptiness inside.³⁴

A 'DREAM OF PASSION'

Once he is alone, Hamlet vents his resentment and envy of the actor, whose grief and anger at the fate of a mythological character appear more authentic than does his own reaction to his father's murder.

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit
 That from her working all the visage wanned
 – Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 Within forms to his conceit – and all for nothing –
 For Hecuba? (2.2.486–493)

Hamlet is referring to the early modern theory of acting, which was closely linked to the art of oratory. Both were grounded in classical physiological doctrines about the passions.³⁵ As is well known, Galenic thought attributed the passions to the balance of humours in the body—excessive humours such as choler or black bile bred the emotions of anger or melancholy respectively. Less familiar to us is the thought that the passions affected the humours, too. Central to this concept were the ideas articulated by Aristotle in his *De Anima*. The soul, he states, 'never thinks without a mental image'.³⁶ What we perceive through the senses influences our emotional response, but so do images in our mind—irrespective of whether these are imagined objects, or memories. A simplified view of the workings of the mental images might go as follows: the images in the soul activate spirits which suffuse the blood and stir up the humours, giving rise to various passions and their corporeal expression. In other words, the passions might derive from the humours, but owe their existence to sensory, mnemonic or imaginative functions of the mind. These notions had radical implications for the profession of acting. The actor was able to exert control over his humours and their bodily articulation simply by conjuring up the appropriate mental image. This would activate the passions the character he was playing was meant to be feeling, and that he was expected to convey. Hamlet speaks of the Player's 'conceit' influencing his soul—all by means of a fiction. Secondly, since felt emotions were thought to be contagious, by experiencing the passions he had evoked in himself, the actor was able to stimulate the feelings of the spectators.

To a modern theatre-goer, analogies to Stanislavskian method acting are striking.

In classical rhetoric, acting and oratory were seen as inextricably bound up with each other. One of the five elements of rhetoric was delivery or *pronuntiatio*, which involved appropriate gesture (*actio*), posture, facial expressions, voice modulation, and so forth.³⁷ The relationship between orators and actors was an uneasy one, and rhetoricians were at pains to point up the difference between their arts. Cicero speaks of ‘an extremely insubstantial and trivial art’,³⁸ while Quintilian states categorically, ‘I do not want my pupil to be a comic actor, but an orator’. Oratory, he reminds us, is a real activity, not an imitation.³⁹ At the same time, classical rhetorics are suffused with references to acting; the writers admonish their readers to model themselves on actors, and Cicero’s admiration for the famous Roman actor, Roscius, is patent. At the heart of how to deliver a forceful oration was the question of how to stir powerful emotions in the audience. ‘The life and soul of oratory’, as Quintilian puts it, ‘is in the emotions’.⁴⁰ By analogy with the actor, the solution mooted was to actually feel the emotions that one wished to arouse. If the orator aimed to instil anger or grief in the jury, the best way to do so was to incite these emotions in oneself, Cicero advises.⁴¹ This made for the most effective courtroom performance. Quintilian’s counsel is the most explicit. The main problem, he admits, is that the orator often fails to share the emotion he wishes to inspire in the jurors. How can we kindle our own emotions? The answer is to apply ourselves in using our imaginative faculties, to press into service ‘the quick forge and working-house of thought’ (*Henry V*, 5.0.23).⁴² ‘The person who will show the greatest power in the expression of emotions’, Quintilian declares, ‘will be the person who has properly formed what the Greeks call *phantasiai* (let us call them “visions”’, by which the images of absent things are presented to the mind in such a way that we seem actually to see them with our eyes and have them physically present to us’.⁴³ These visions create such a vivid impression in our minds that, as in a day-dream, we succumb to the illusion that we are feeling the same emotions that we intend to evoke in others. As a result, our words will be intensely evocative, and will produce a sense of *enargeia*, a term that refers to a visually powerful description. Quintilian explicitly alludes to actors who are so moved by their own performance that they leave the stage overwhelmed by tears.⁴⁴ It is precisely this set of ideas that Hamlet gestures towards with the phrase, a ‘dream of passion’ (2.2.487).

‘WHAT’S HECUBA TO HIM, OR HE TO HER?’

Hamlet, however, does not break into a rhapsody about the player’s consummate art. The Player, he implies, is a liar. ‘What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her, / That he should weep for her?’ (494–495), he demands. It is hard to overestimate the shock value of these lines. At one stroke, Hamlet calls the entire Humanist rationale into question. For rhetoric had long been divorced from the role in civic life that Cicero had envisaged for it. As early as Quintilian the emphasis had shifted from political oratory to acquiring eloquence as a skill in the sphere of public life.⁴⁵ The cultivated gentleman was expected to have a command of rhetoric. Quintilian was an educationalist, and the recovery of the complete text of the *Institutio Oratorio* in the early fifteenth century fuelled the Humanist educational programme of inculcating virtue through the classics. Literature and rhetoric were seen as twin arts, and school-children were meant to undergo a rigorous regime in both fields. Both were regarded as means to move an audience to virtue by appealing to the passions.⁴⁶ The school curriculum prescribed exercises in *ethopoiea*, which involved creating orations written from the viewpoint of a historical or mythological character. Since education in the art of oratory included mastering the skill of declaiming a speech, these exercises were in effect a training in acting.⁴⁷ By deriding the tradition of seeking to identify with dead or fictive classical figures in order to move one’s auditors, Hamlet is denouncing the tenets of Humanist thought as a house of cards, built on a foundation of lies. For the Prince, there is a rigid divide between seeming and being, between ‘actions that a man might play’ and ‘that within which passes show’ (1.2.84–85). Like Plato, he disparages illusions as derivative; instead of borrowing emotions from cultural models, one should look into one’s own heart to ascertain one’s authentic feelings.

As Lynn Enterline astutely notes, the question Hamlet poses consists of two parts.⁴⁸ By asking ‘What’s Hecuba to him?’ he is implicitly querying the basic premise of Humanism that the classics are a trove of wisdom and that by imitating texts or figures of antiquity, whether historical or mythical, we learn to be ethical beings. By ostensibly identifying with the emotions of a woman he has never met, and who might never have existed, the actor, he insinuates, is faking it. By asking ‘what’s he to her?’, Hamlet expands the scope of his reflections to ponder upon the wider relationship between fiction and emotional reality. What part

do imaginary archetypes play in shaping our feelings? How do we know when we are being authentic, and when we are acting out other people's emotions? And what does this mean for our relations with our fellow beings? His conflicted feelings reflect the struggle raging in early modern culture about the ethical implications of the theatre, and, in a broader arc, the opposition between feigning and sincerity.

For the two are indissolubly entwined. In the rhetorical tradition recommendations to identify with the passion one wishes to convey segue into the acknowledgement that this is only a technique that the orator is adopting for strategic purposes. More important than feeling emotions is the ability to display them. In stressing the importance of delivery, Cicero has his speaker, the eminent orator, Lucius Crassus, point out, 'reality always has the advantage over imitation. Yet if reality by itself were sufficiently effective in delivery, we would have no need for any art at all'.⁴⁹ It is the priority of producing a persuasive performance that makes the rhetoricians avail themselves of mental images. But does this mean that the orator or actor is simulating what he purports to feel? Or has he been successful in his willed self-deception? Quintilian sums up his discussion of self-persuasion by remarking, 'I have certainly often been moved, to the point of being overtaken not only by tears but by pallor and a grief which is *very like* the real thing' (emphasis mine).⁵⁰ How does the speaker gauge whether what he is feeling is authentic emotion, or merely a simulacrum of the real thing? More to the purpose for this essay: can the audience tell the difference?

At the end of his soliloquy, Hamlet voices his distrust of the testimony of the ghost. 'The spirit that I have seen / May be a de'il', he admits (2.2.533–534). To ferret out the truth, the only solution he can think of is to have recourse to the theatre. Like Plato, his suspicion of dramatic art is coupled with a strong belief in the power of illusions to sway the spectator. I wish to suggest that he himself attests to the effect of images—although perhaps not quite in the way one might expect.

HAMLET AND REVENGE TRAGEDY

As I have mentioned, there seems to be a critical consensus that Hamlet is less moved by the play than by the player. But what if Hamlet has in fact been paying attention to the play? It is one of his favourites, he tells us—he knows entire handfuls by heart. There is no need for him to

expatiate on the play when he is alone. His soliloquy in Act 2 has been held up as evidence for his inwardness, for his possession of an authentic self. The speech is steeped in self-loathing; beginning with the line, ‘O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!’, Hamlet proceeds to berate himself for his inaction, calling himself a ‘dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak / Like John-a-dreams’ (2.2.485; 502–503). His self-abasement escalates steadily: he demands of himself whether he is a coward, and imagines an unknown opponent impugning his honour—only to conclude that he would be forced to accept the truth of the allegation, since he is indeed ‘pigeon-livered’ (512) and craven. The proof lies in the fact that he has not carried out the revenge imposed on him by his father. He even contemptuously compares himself to a whore, whose only weapons are words.

Ironically, to express his revulsion at his lack of heroism, he too falls back on a classical model. Emrys Jones has drawn attention to the reverberations between Hamlet’s second soliloquy and a speech in the Senecan drama *Thyestes*, in which the tyrant Atreus reproaches himself for his tardiness at taking revenge on his brother for the latter’s treachery.⁵¹ In the translation of 1560 by Jasper Heywood the second act begins with the following lines:

O Dastarde, cowide, o wretche, and (whiche the greatest yet of all
 To tyrants checke, I counte that maye in waightie thyngs befall,)
 O unrevenged: after gilts so greate, and brothers guyle,
 And truthe trode downe, dooste thou provoke with vayne com-
 playnts the whyle
 Thy wrathe?⁵²

In creaking fourteeners, Heywood’s Atreus castigates himself for unpacking his heart with words rather than taking action. By now, he goes on to claim in hyperbolic rhetoric, he should have set the world ablaze with his revenge and made it resound with the clash of weapons. Not only does Hamlet’s self-laceration echo these lines, the exorbitant language is mirrored in the string of epithets he brandishes to describe his uncle—‘blood, bawdy, villain, / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain’—and in his frenzied wish that he had cut the King to pieces and had ‘fatted all the region kites / With this slave’s offal’ (514–516). Reprinted in Thomas Newton’s collection of ten of Senecan tragedies in 1581, the play would have been familiar to many members of the early modern audience from their time at school.⁵³

Full of bloodthirsty avengers is Hamlet's mind. Whether it is the figure of the bestial Thyestes, or Pyrrhus, or the intermittently vengeful Aeneas, Hamlet has absorbed the entire panoply of emotions evoked by Senecan revenge tragedy and its early modern offshoots. His later lines reveal as much:

'Tis now the very witching time of night
 When churchyards yawn and hell itself breaks out
 Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
 And do such business as the bitter day
 Would quake to look on. (3.2.378–382)

The example of Nero and his vicious behaviour towards his mother springs to his mind, although he sets it aside as excessive. Revenge plays revelled in sensationalist violence and sadistic cruelty. They are populated by protagonists caught in the manic throes of bloodlust and revenge, and depict a harsh world in which the gods seem to be indifferent to the agony of the characters. Much of this scenario shapes Hamlet's own bleak vision.

Perhaps, the play suggests, it is not Aristotelian purgation of passion or ethical instruction that tragedy produces, but a far less salubrious outcome. Perhaps Plato was right—role models in literature leach into us, and the emotions inspired by fictions overpower our rational faculties. For all his visceral dislike of Socrates, Nietzsche would have agreed. In a comment on *Macbeth* in *The Dawn of Day* he points out that the influence of the theatre was anything but moral. Whoever believes that the sight of Macbeth on stage instigates us to shun the evil of ambition has succumbed to a fatal illusion, he claims. Quite on the contrary—for the spectator who was in thrall to ambition, seeing his mirror image on stage was a source of intense pleasure, and watching the protagonist brought to destruction through his passion only increased the pungency of his pleasure. Heroes like Macbeth, Nietzsche argues, exude a demonic attraction, inviting us to emulate them. Similarly, characters like Tristan and Isolde exert their appeal not despite, but precisely because they are doomed—and their creators are in love with the passions, just as Shakespeare is. Far from providing a warning against adultery, the lovers make it appear intensely glamorous. Tragic poets like Shakespeare and Sophocles urge us to take part in the adventure of life, and entice us with the allure of this exciting, dangerous, dark, and often sun-soaked

existence. They speak to us ‘from a restless and vigorous age, half-drunk and stupified by its excess of blood and energy – an age that is more evil than our own’.⁵⁴ Hamlet seems to have soaked up some of the dark thoughts disseminated by revenge tragedy, or to have persuaded himself that the role models it offered were what he should pattern himself on. To what extent he is successful is another question entirely.

THE MOUSETRAP

In this endlessly discussed play, *The Mousetrap* is probably one of the most debated scenes, so I will only sketch the bare outlines. Let us look at the performance from the point of view of the spectators. Once again, an assortment of responses are presented. Ophelia is at a loss to understand the action. The Queen is not impressed: ‘The lady doth protest too much, methinks’ (3.2.224). Judging by Hamlet’s comments—‘That’s wormwood!’, ‘If she should break it now!’ (3.2.175; 218)—he seems almost more interested in catching the conscience of his mother than of Claudius.⁵⁵ For his part, the King remains impassive in the face of a dumb show that depicts a carbon copy of his crime. Hamlet informs the court that the murderous protagonist on stage is Lucianus, nephew to the king—not duke, as he stated earlier. When he announces that the villain on stage is poisoning the king ‘for his estate’ (257), Claudius rises and breaks off the play. Hamlet is jubilant, convinced that he has extracted an admission of guilt from his uncle. Horatio remains non-committal throughout.

As I have briefly argued elsewhere, there is no evidence that Claudius’ reaction to the play-within-the-play is provoked by guilt rather than alarm at a thinly veiled threat delivered by his own nephew.⁵⁶ This suspicion would have been reinforced by Hamlet’s reference to his ‘estate’ and his earlier observation comparing himself both to a chameleon crammed with empty promises and a capon or castrated cock, a barbed remark carrying a broad hint at the prince’s resentment of his political impotence (3.2.89–91). When we next see Claudius he is busy devising a plan to get rid of the troublesome prince by dispatching him to England, informing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that ‘The terms of our estate may not endure / Hazard so near us’ (3.3.5–6). The guilt that he expresses when alone is only a repetition of what he has articulated before, immediately after Polonius’ sententious statement about ‘pious action’ to ‘sugar o’er’ a devilish deed’ (3.1.47). ‘How smart a lash

that speech doth give my conscience!', he laments, sighing, 'O heavy burden!' before briskly making preparations to spy on his step-son (49, 53). His obsession with 'the primal curse' (3.3.37) is apparent as early as his first stage appearance, where he links the death of his brother, Old Hamlet, to 'the first corpse' (1.2.105).

And yet: what if Hamlet were right, and the play-within-the-play gave an added propulsion to Claudius' pangs of conscience, inspiring him to confess his crime, precisely like the women Heywood described? In arguing for the reformatory function of tragedy Sidney writes that it 'openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue' and 'maketh kings fear to be tyrants'. Tragedy, he claims, exposes hidden crimes and conduces to self-knowledge even on the part of tyrants. By way of illustration he relates an anecdote: 'how much it can move, Plutarch yieldeth a notable testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus, from whose eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood [...] yet he could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy'.⁵⁷ Sidney's story is taken from Plutarch's *Life* of the Theban hero Pelopidas, where the tyrant Alexander of Pherae, whose hobbies include burying people alive and dressing them in the skins of bears to be torn to pieces by hounds, is described as melting into a flood of tears at a theatre performance of Euripides' *Trojan Women*. In the *Lives*, to cite Sir Thomas North's translation (1579), Alexander is anxious to allay the fears of the actors, reassuring them about the aesthetic quality of the show: 'he went out of the Theater, and sent word to the players notwithstandinge, that they shoulde go on with their playe, as if he had bene still amonge them: saying, that he came not away for any misliking he had of them or the play, but because he was ashamed his people should see him weepe, to see the miseries of *Hecuba* and *Andromacha* played, and that they never saw him pity the death of any one man'.⁵⁸ He explains that he left the theatre to avoid anyone seeing him weep. In the *Moralia*, where Plutarch treats the same incident, Alexander is less charitably inclined towards the actor in question, who only narrowly escapes punishment.⁵⁹

What emerges from all versions of the story is that Alexander enjoyed a good cry over invented stories as much as the next man, but was anxious not to jeopardise his image as pitiless strongman. Whether in addition he drew pleasure from the weeping of fictive women is not recorded, although Holland does speak of the art-loving tyrant

succumbing to ‘a certain tickling delight’.⁶⁰ (Perhaps this inspired Sidney’s phrase ‘sweet violence’. Nietzsche would have approved.) But even Sidney is powerless to draw a link between Alexander’s tragic emotion and action. For the end of knowledge was not simply increased understanding, but right behaviour, as Sidney never tires of pointing out. In a passage in which he alludes to the Platonic maxim ‘Know thyself’, he reiterates that self-knowledge serves ‘the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only’.⁶¹ Here he and in fact all Humanist thinkers are on firm Aristotelian ground. For the author of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is not what is at stake. As he makes clear, the end of knowledge is action, i.e., the virtuous life.⁶² Sidney is forced to concede that the only consequence of Alexander’s visit to the theatre was that the tyrant decided to withdraw from the performance. Unlike Claudius, however, he does not abort the event.

Even if *The Mousetrap* has exactly the result that Hamlet predicted, and sets off a bout of guilt in the King, who turns to prayer to unburden his soul, Claudius is explicit that he has no intention of changing his life. He is torn by contradictory impulses—to repent or not to repent. Both Platonic and Aristotelian thought shared the assumption that humans tend towards the good, and that if they acquired knowledge they would choose the virtuous life. What we see, however, is how insight is only one of the forces acting on human beings, and that conflicting desires shape our behaviour. There is, the play suggests, no intrinsic link between the instruction meted out by drama and the way we live our lives.

TRAGIC EMOTION IN *HAMLET*

As in a burning glass, *Hamlet* scrutinises the workings of the theatre and the emotional interaction between characters and audience. How do the theories about how dramatic fictions influence us illuminate the theatrical situations presented in the play?

In both scenarios, the Player’s speech based on the *Aeneid* and *The Mousetrap*, we see a variety of reactions to the dramatic fictions on offer. Some characters are uncomprehending, some reject the play, some remain unmoved. Both Claudius and Hamlet are affected by the plays they witness, which induce virtuous thoughts in the King and violent emotions in the Prince. It is by no means clear that it was the play-within-the-play that first triggered Claudius’ impulse of remorse,

however, nor that it was the extract about Pyrrhus and Aeneas that incited Hamlet's homicidal feelings. In both cases, the emotions unleashed by the fictions do not translate into action. In the world of *Hamlet*, the notion that art serves a didactic function and persuades its audience to virtue simply does not hold. Artworks are charged with ambiguity, and offer scope for a multitude of readings. And human reception of art is freighted with our own desires: we see what we want to see, the play implies.

For the ancients, discussion of spectatorship melds into discussion of acting—the term *mimesis* suggests both representation and imitation. In the *Poetics* Aristotle admits that ‘the truest distress or anger is conveyed by one who actually feels these things’—and accordingly advises the actor to perfect his range of gestures to enkindle the appropriate emotions in himself.⁶³ This raises the question when self-manipulation shades into feigning—the distinction between the two remains fraught with ambivalence. This was, of course, one of the most vexed issues of the early modern age, and *Hamlet* does not provide an answer. Instead, it points up the difficulty of drawing apodictic conclusions about the role of fiction in our lives. Ironically, as the second soliloquy shows, even Hamlet's most self-conscious lines cite other texts and draw on pervasive literary paradigms. There is, it appears, no escape from fictions. For all his obsession with authenticity, Hamlet himself is the product of all the plays and stories he has imbibed. He is the embodiment of all the cultural myths circulating in his age—about *pietas*, the duty to revenge, the corruption of womanhood—rough-hew them how he will. As Aristotle points out, *mimesis* is a part of human nature. We understand the world through images, and we are creatures of imitation.

What, then, does the tragedy of *Hamlet* tell us about how tragedy works? Martha C. Nussbaum has adapted the Aristotelian model to offer a subtle and rich analysis of the emotional value of literary artworks.⁶⁴ For Nussbaum too, emotions are suffused with intelligence, and crucial for ethical practice. While adopting the Aristotelian and Stoic view of emotions as value judgements, she admits that the judgements in question might be good or bad guideposts to action. However, there is no way in which we can ignore them. What she stresses is the role that the imagination plays in our emotions. A crucial source of ethical knowledge, she argues, is literature. She implicitly concedes that the catharsis model is too limited. Instead, she argues, literature gives us a denser understanding of a range of emotions, and hence serves as a tool for

self-knowledge: 'the reader or spectator of a literary work is reading or watching the work, but at the same time reading the world, and reading her self'.⁶⁵ Like Aristotle, she believes that the pleasures we gain from the suffering of others lie in acquiring understanding about the world. Nussbaum admits that some artworks cater to sadistic or voyeuristic pleasures. But in general, she argues, literature creates forms of sympathy with fictive characters, a sympathy that spills over to embrace all of humanity.

Martha Nussbaum offers us a perspicacious analysis of the ethical potential of literature. What is elided in her concept of tragedy, however, is the idea that the knowledge that fictions offer might be knowledge about the dark sides of human nature. The problem is not only that art might fail to persuade to the good; it might persuade to evil, or at least, convey the seductive allure of evil. Literature gives us access to the vast array of human life, in all its diversity. Nietzsche's views about the dangerous power of imagination seem to be borne out by Shakespeare's tragic universe. Above all, what the play points to is the indeterminacy of literature. The paradigm put forward by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz might offer a useful way of thinking about tragic emotion. In his landmark essay, 'Deep Play', Geertz describes his fieldwork in 1958 among the Balinese studying their fascination with cockfights.⁶⁶ He describes how in Balinese society burning issues of status rivalry, anger, and envy were vicariously worked through in the form of play. He draws the conclusion that all humans use cultural performances to impose a framework on our tensions and desires, in order to dramatise our collective stories. Grappling with the question as to why we gain pleasure from the pain of others, A. D. Nuttall goes a step further. The suffering of tragic characters, he argues, takes place in a fictive world, one under our control. Hence tragedy caters to our desire for mastery, however limited. Furthermore, an artwork such as a Shakespearean tragedy unsettles the assumptions underpinning normative cultural solutions, and offers us an insight into the contingency of all answers.⁶⁷

Aristotle was right: we go to the theatre to learn about the world; we go to see *Hamlet* to watch how a confused, profoundly lonely young man reacts in an extreme situation. We savour the aesthetic pleasure of a play that has become a rich storehouse of allusions and familiar phrases, and whose cultural cachet is shared by a global community. But Shakespeare achieved more with *Hamlet* than simply a reservoir of cultural references. Sir Philip Sidney puts it most aptly. *A Defence of*

Poesy has become famous less for its originality than for its wit and the impression of effortless style it evokes. But perhaps the most interesting thought Sidney adumbrates is in the lines in which he describes the relation between fiction and reality. The poet, he writes, ‘doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew’, and adds, ‘freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit’.⁶⁸ The poet is not necessarily concerned with mirroring reality. Instead, he constructs a new reality. To be sure, Sidney goes on to define the poet in Neoplatonic terms, as a maker of golden realms for us to emulate. But his text briefly articulates the notion that the artist does not merely reflect reality, either fallen or ideal, but can at times create a prototype, a new cultural narrative that becomes part of the common stock of stories. By fashioning a reluctant, tormented revenger who breaks the mould of the revenge hero, Shakespeare produced a template for generations to identify with. We create ourselves in the image of fictive characters, or define ourselves against them, just as Hamlet does. There is a smack of Hamlet in us all.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (1589), John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (1602), and Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1607).
2. *Hamlet* 3.2.99–100. All quotations from the play taken from *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson Learning, 2006).
3. See Bart van Es, *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125–126, 206–208.
4. Heywood, Thomas, *Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), sig. C4^r.
5. Heywood, Thomas, *Apology for Actors*, sig. F3^v.
6. Heywood, Thomas, *Apology for Actors*, sig. G1^v–2^v. This anecdote is also described in a speech in the anonymous *A Warning for Faire Women*, a domestic tragedy performed by Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, in 1599. I have modernised u’s and v’s in early modern spelling throughout.
7. Heywood, Thomas, *Apology for Actors*, sig. G1^v.
8. See van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, 37–55.
9. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 607b.
10. Plato, *The Republic*, 595a–602b.

11. Plato, *The Republic*, 394c.
12. Plato, *The Republic*, 377a–392c.
13. Plato, *The Republic*, 605b–605c.
14. Plato, *The Republic*, 606a–606b.
15. See W. W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion: A Contribution to Philosophical Psychology, Rhetoric, Poetics, Politics and Ethics* (London: Duckworth, 1975). Also see David Konstan, ‘Rhetoric and Emotion’, in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Oxford: Blackwell), 411–425.
16. See Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy, 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.1–11.
17. Plato, *The Republic*, 607d.
18. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Stephen Halliwell, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1449b24–28.
19. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1382a.
20. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1383a.
21. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1385b.
22. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b3–18.
23. Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, trans. James M. May and Jacob Wisse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.115
24. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, trans. H. R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 333–334.
25. See Brian Vickers, ‘Rhetoric and Poetics’, in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 715–745.
26. Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poesy*, ed. J. A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 25.
27. See Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65–66.
28. Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 69.
29. Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 2.506–558; Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe, *Dido, Queen of Carthage, The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 2.1.224–259.
30. Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 187.
31. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.624–631.
32. Note to 2.2.440 in the Arden edition.
33. See, for instance, David Scott Kastan, ‘“His Semblable Is His Mirror”’: *Hamlet* and the Imitation of Revenge’, *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1988): 111–124.

34. See Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*, 184–194. I am indebted to his insights throughout.
35. See Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (1985; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 23–57, on whom I draw in the following. Also see F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 162–178.
36. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. W. S. Hett, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 431a.
37. Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 3.213–227.
38. Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 1.129.
39. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, trans. Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11.3.181–182.
40. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, 6.2.7.
41. Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 2.189–196.
42. *King Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik, The Arden Shakespeare (London: A&C Black, 1995).
43. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, 6.2.29–30.
44. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, 6.2.35.
45. See Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
46. See Vickers, 'Rhetoric and Poetics'.
47. See Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
48. Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, 133. I am indebted to her path-breaking work, although my reading differs somewhat from hers.
49. Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 3.215.
50. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, 6.2.36.
51. Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 22–24. Also see Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 173–177.
52. Seneca, *The Second Tragedie of Seneca entituled Thyestes*, trans. Jasper Heywood (London, 1560), sig. Av^v.
53. See Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 175.
54. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröte [The Dawn of Day] 240*, *Werke in drei Bände*, ed. Karl Schlechta, vol. 1 (München: Hanser, 1954), 1171. The paraphrase and translation are mine.
55. See Dympna Callaghan's discerning reading of the gender dynamics of the play in her *Hamlet: Language and Writing* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 151ff.

56. 'Shakespeare's Legacy of Storytelling', in *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies: Artists, Writers, Performers and Critics*, ed. Paul Edmondson and Peter Holbrook (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 165–177. Also see Lewis' incisive discussion of the 'Mousetrap', 214–219, 229–234.
57. Sidney, *A Defence of Poesy*, 45.
58. Plutarch, *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1579), sig. 2Ei^r, italics in the original. Also see Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 236–237.
59. Plutarch, *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the Morals, written by the learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), sig. 5P1^r.
60. Plutarch, *The Philosophie*, sig. 5P1^r.
61. Sidney, *A Defence of Poesy*, 29; also see 39.
62. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1095a5–6.
63. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1455a31–32.
64. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For another nuanced approach that draws on a cognitive view of emotions to offer an ethical reading of the play see Kevin Curran's 'Hamlet's Unreasonable Judgements', Unpublished paper. I am grateful to Kevin Curran for sharing his work with me.
65. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 243.
66. Clifford Geertz, 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 435–473.
67. A. D. Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
68. Sidney, *A Defence of Poesy*, 23–24.

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A Conjunction of Patrick: A Legacy of Doubt and Imagining in *Hamlet*

Michael D. Barbezat

Hamlet first sees his dead father, or so he thinks, in his ‘mind’s eye’ (1.2.185).¹ It is only after he shares with Horatio how this inner vision seemed for a moment to spill over into his awareness of the outside world that Horatio reveals that he, Marcellus, and Bernardo all saw the dead king too the night before. After Hamlet seeks out the spirit seen by his friends and speaks with it, his companions ask him to tell them what it said. In his refusal to give them a direct answer, Hamlet calls upon St. Patrick:

Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is Horatio,
And Much offense too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you. (1.5.142–144)

With these famously ambiguous words, Hamlet invokes a Catholic Irish saint in response to the sight of his father’s ghost. In this invocation, critics have seen a reference to a specific cultural and literary tradition regarding a specific place.² This place is a cave, called St. Patrick’s

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Purgatory, on an island in Lough Derg within the modern Irish county of Donegal, and according to tradition a living person could climb down into the afterlife through it while still within their body.³ There, the traveller could see with their own eyes the torments awaiting the sinful and the joys prepared for the just. The Irish door to the Other World at Lough Derg was first made famous throughout Western Europe in the twelfth century through the Latin-language *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, which recounted the journey of the knight Owein into the afterlife, and St. Patrick's Purgatory remained well known for centuries.⁴ Accounts of Owein's voyage, and those of other pilgrims at the site, spread in many languages and different literary genres up to and after the time of Shakespeare.

According to the anonymous medieval author of the *Tractatus*, the sensory experience of the afterlife should provoke an emotional conversion in living visionaries. While it is initiated by empirical observation, the transformation of the visionary's emotions, in particular doubt and love, unlock a deeper kind of connection to and knowledge of God that transcends the living senses. The realignment of the visionary's interior self relies upon the imagination and its privileged position to merge inner and outer realities in the human mind. In this formulation, God, as the ultimate reality or truth from which all of existence descends, can be most meaningfully approached through the human imagination and the emotions that participate within it. The preface to the vision explains that while visionaries may see things in the Other World that appear just as vivid as the sights of the living world, these are not necessarily material realities. Instead, these sights might be only images in the mind's eye, or the imagination, without matter, the apparent likeness of material things representing spiritual realities. These images function as signs and must be read symbolically or allegorically to reveal what they signify, like the words of a text. As explained in the *Tractatus*, the things Owein saw at St. Patrick's Purgatory, properly interpreted, can tell living people about a non-material world that they otherwise could not know through the bodily senses. In other words, through this visionary mode, the imagination helps to unlock a deeper reality than empirical knowledge derived from regular life.

In addition to the centrality of the imagination, the preface makes another claim that might seem at odds with it: while most of what Owein as visionary saw in the cave were immaterial images, some of them, especially fire, were not. These parts of the Other World were

materially present, just like they appeared. In these two claims, the *Tractatus* places imaginary or spiritual sight on the same stage as bodily or corporeal vision, blurring the boundary between the two. It is in the queering of this fundamental dichotomy between the sight of objects present to the senses and imaginary images that the *Tractatus* becomes a compelling text from the past dredged up by Hamlet's invocation of the tradition it founded.

In his *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt capitalised upon Shakespeare's reference to St. Patrick's Purgatory and the larger literary tradition of which it was a part.⁵ Stories of living human beings travelling to the afterlife provided him an opportunity to explore 'the centrality in doctrine and practice of the poetic imagination'.⁶ Such an opportunity to chart the role of the imagination in history was all the more appealing due to the supposed novelty of Purgatory as a medieval innovation. According to Jacques le Goff, the *Tractatus* itself played a decisive role in the twelfth-century invention of Purgatory as a distinct third place between Heaven and Hell.⁷ Greenblatt took up Le Goff's thesis regarding the novelty of Purgatory as a central plank in his *Hamlet in Purgatory*, arguing that Purgatory was 'an innovative work of the imagination' haunted from its medieval beginnings by 'the spectre of disbelief'.⁸ After the Middle Ages, Protestant theologians and polemicists argued that the medieval, Catholic Purgatory was nothing more than 'a vast piece of poetry'.⁹ Viewed in the light of Purgatory's supposed novelty, this line of attack, to Greenblatt, is built upon a core of truth. He argues that protestant polemicists, however, brought with them an assumption about the relationship between poetry and truth that Shakespeare's plays, and *Hamlet* in particular, did not follow. These polemicists, in their attacks upon Purgatory as an edifice of the mind viewed 'the imagination as the diametrical opposite of the truth'. Shakespeare's plays critiqued and complicated this view, suggesting that what begins as a dream might itself harden into the reality of history.

I will argue that there are some important nuances missing in this picture, especially regarding the medieval history of Purgatory and medieval ideas regarding the imagination and truth. Specialists have been keen to point out issues with Le Goff's claim that Purgatory was a twelfth-century 'invention'. Le Goff claimed that the abstract noun, *purgatorium* first appeared, likely in the work of Peter Comestor, between 1170 and 1180, and that this neologism indicates the first emergence of Purgatory as a distinct, third place for the souls of the dead.¹⁰

While Le Goff's analysis is an important study of changing conceptions regarding the otherworld and scholastic interest in its details, some of these details are flawed. He was wrong in his dating for the first occurrence of the noun *purgatorium*.¹¹ More importantly, however, some scholars have argued that he was also wrong in his emphasis upon radical innovation and dramatic rupture.¹² The idea that some sins could be removed or purged after death was a very old one in the Christian tradition, and the slow otherworldly purgation of the dead as a concept did not require the noun *purgatorium*. Instead of a rupture with the past caused by a new discovery or innovation of the mind, Purgatory represented a stage in the evolution of doctrines and ideas over a very long time. Along with innovation and rupture, we should also tell histories of evolution and continuity.

Just as the supposed invention of Purgatory was more nuanced than it may at first seem, so too were medieval conceptions regarding the human imagination and the relationships between its workings and truth. The medieval tradition regarding St. Patrick's Purgatory, and its founding document, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, are examples of this complexity. What Greenblatt sees as Shakespeare's resistance to a Renaissance dichotomy between imagination and truth is very close to the medieval sensibility that molded the early literary tradition regarding St. Patrick's Purgatory. Just as the emergence of Purgatory in the twelfth-century represented continuity as well as change, so too can the resistance of a dichotomy between imagination and truth in Shakespeare represent a point of continuity between the medieval and the early modern.

The medieval tradition of St. Patrick's Purgatory suggested a particular intermingling between fantasy and reality in the twelfth century, and through Hamlet's invocation of Patrick this older tradition haunts the play as the ghost of this medieval permeability. Greenblatt explains that he came to write about Purgatory as part of a planned project on 'Shakespeare as a Renaissance conjurer',¹³ a conjurer who called up different apparitions who bore with them 'the burden of history'. This chapter explores Patrick's Purgatory as one such apparition. From its very beginning in the European literary tradition during the twelfth century, accounts of St. Patrick's Purgatory have complicated a simple differentiation between imagination and truth. Such a complication is not an innovation or realisation of the Reformation; it is in fact profoundly medieval. The first text to introduce the Purgatory at Lough Derg, the

twelfth-century *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, directly proposes a set of relationships between truth, the human imagination, and doubt about the afterlife, suggesting that stories regarding life after death fundamentally rely upon the imagination. The centrality of the imagination in the medieval tradition of Patrick's Purgatory makes its haunting of the scene in *Hamlet* so powerful. Upon a Renaissance and post-Reformation stage, it is one more way that time is out of joint.

SEEING AND NOT-SEEING IN THE *TRACTATUS* *DE PURGATORIO SANCTI PATRICII*

The *Tractatus* tells the story of the Irish knight Owein, who, in the time of King Stephen of England, descended into St. Patrick's Purgatory to expiate all of his many sins at once before his death. Before granting permission to enter the Purgatory, the local bishop and the canons, who were the guardians of the site at Lough Derg warned Owein that many men had descended into the cave never to return. Undeterred, the knight climbed down into the cave and soon found himself within the vast spaces of the Other World. After a brief conversation with otherworldly guides dressed like Cistercian monks, Owein encountered a group of demons, who remarked upon his unusual choice to enter the Other World while still within his body before taking him through a series of torments awaiting sinful souls. After braving these terrors with divine help, Owein eventually made his way to the Earthly Paradise. The souls there explained to him that the dead made their way through many of the torments he had witnessed in order to purge their sins until they arrived in paradise. This paradise was not the true Heaven, but rather a place of respite just on the edge of it. After glimpsing the gate of the actual Heaven, Owein returned triumphantly to the mouth of the cave and the world of the living, bearing his story with him. The *Tractatus* explains that Owein later told his tale to Gilbert of Louth, a Cistercian monk, who later told it to another Cistercian, known only as H. of Saltrey who put it in writing as the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, between 1184 and 1188.¹⁴

In his presentation of Owein's story, H. of Saltrey explained the role played by the imagination in visionary tales of voyages to the afterlife. He did so in his preface to the vision that aimed to situate the reader. While the main tale of the *Tractatus* itself is not a work of elite scholastic theology, H. drew his preface from exactly that genre, re-arranging

un-acknowledged excerpts from Hugh of St. Victor's *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, or *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* to create it.¹⁵ Hugh (c. 1096–1141) was a major figure in the history of early scholasticism in the schools of medieval Paris.¹⁶ In these centres of learning, attempts to better understand religious doctrines through inquiry and debate were ways of life.¹⁷ His *De sacramentis*, composed in the 1130s, was a compendium of dogmatic theology, a kind of early summa. His work influenced later thinkers who wrote their own summae, from his possible student Peter Lombard to later scholars who worked within the genre he helped create such as Thomas Aquinas.¹⁸

H. perhaps turned to the genre of high theology in response to the unusual claim at the heart of the plot of the *Tractatus*: the Irish knight Owein descended into the Other World while fully conscious and still within his living body. When he wrote the *Tractatus*, the protagonists of most other contemporary visions travelled while dreaming or as souls out of their bodies, and Owein's assertion that he walked into the Other World through a hole in the ground stood alone.¹⁹ H. perceived that the knight's claim could imply that there was a literal parallel world under the earth in which everything Owein saw was materially present as he described, and he turned to a section of Hugh's *De sacramentis* that had confronted and rejected exactly that possibility.

In a section of the *De sacramentis* dedicated to life after death, Hugh analysed how visionaries described an afterlife that appeared to be a copy of the regular world of the living. They claimed to have crossed bridges over rivers, climbed mountains, and entered houses. These visionaries had also seen themselves as embodied and the souls of the dead as embodied, reporting being dragged by the neck or guided by a hand. Hugh argues that:

If we believe that all these things exist there visibly and corporeally, besides other absurd things that arise, we confess truly that that the souls themselves even separated from bodies are bodies composed of members in the likeness of bodies and yet distinct.²⁰

Hugh finds the conclusion absurd that there is a parallel world under the earth, or that souls are given some kind of temporary body during a visionary episode.²¹

According to Hugh, what visionaries see in the Other World are really the immaterial images of worldly things used as signs to represent

indescribable spiritual realities. ‘Certain signs similar to the corporeal are presented’ to the souls of visionaries outside their bodies ‘for the demonstration of the spiritual’. The spiritual world needs this kind of demonstration because those ‘living in bodies and knowing only corporeal things’ could neither understand the totally spiritual and immaterial Other World as it really is nor describe their experience of it to others as a story.²² Visions, to Hugh, are really theatrical manipulations of sensory experience designed to convey information about a reality that cannot be directly experienced through the senses of the body. He suggests that those who truly die and never return to the world of the living experience the Other World differently, because they do not have to return and tell their tales.

While Hugh argues that visionaries mostly see ‘signs similar to the corporeal’ presented ‘for the demonstration of the spiritual’, not everything in his Other World is incorporeal. Further on in his discussion of the afterlife, he asserts that the fire of Hell is a material fire, which torments immaterial spirits, and that this corporeal fire must be in a corporeal place.²³ In making this assertion, he drew upon the general consensus in the medieval theological tradition regarding hellfire that held it to be actual fire and not a spiritual image or an allegorical description.²⁴ For the *Tractatus*, Hugh’s analysis of the afterlife makes two useful assertions: most of what visionaries see in the afterlife does not have to be corporeally present, but some of it can be. It seems that it was this loophole that appealed to the author of the *Tractatus*.

In the preface to the *Tractatus*, H. of Saltrey rearranges unacknowledged portions of Hugh’s argument, suggesting that Owein’s experience at St. Patrick’s Purgatory demonstrates them all.²⁵ He includes Hugh’s analysis of the seemingly corporeal nature of visionaries’ experience, but, before Hugh’s original conclusion that visionaries see signs, H. emphasises the unknowable nature of the Other World and the commonly held assertion that there is a material fire that torments immaterial spirits in the afterlife. Owein’s bodily descent into the afterlife demonstrates these points, presumably not only because he reported the presence of fire in the Purgatory but also because this body is not a unique intrusion of corporeality into a spiritual space, because there was a material fire there before. It is only after establishing all of these points that H. replicates Hugh’s conclusion that visionaries see ‘signs, similar to material things’ that ‘are intended to represent spiritual things’, which the living could not understand in any other way.²⁶ ‘That is why, in this account, a mortal

and material man tells how he saw spiritual things under the aspect and form of material things'.²⁷ In the interpretive preface to the *Tractatus*, immaterial signs in the mind, signifying unknowable spiritual realities, possess an equality of a kind with sensory impressions arising from the presence of material realities to the bodily senses; experientially, they are the same.

The account of visionary epistemology that H. took from Hugh of St. Victor is ultimately drawn from Augustine's category of spiritual vision, outlined in his *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*. Augustine outlined three types of vision: corporeal, spiritual and intellectual.²⁸ Corporeal vision is the sight of corporeal objects, often simply called bodies, physically present to the senses. Spiritual vision, in contrast, is the sight of the images of absent bodies. This second mode of vision covers a vast range of experiences, describing memory, imagination, dreams, and the majority of otherworldly visions. Intellectual vision, unlike the first two, is a form of knowledge that surpasses all images and is provided by the divinity itself.²⁹ Through spiritual vision a separate soul could have an experience in which it seemed to be in material places while still within a living body, but the sensory impressions it encounters are really signs that signify immaterial realities. Augustine's world of experience for a separate soul, in the form of his second category of vision, is imaginary in the literal sense, in that it consists of images, but imaginary should not be confused with mendacious. Most importantly, the effect that these images produce experientially for souls is not false. As Augustine stresses, 'the joy and vexation produced by a spiritual substance are real'.³⁰

That visionaries saw immaterial signs through something like Augustine's category of spiritual vision was an assumption held in the twelfth century beyond Hugh's *De sacramentis* and the portion of the *Tractatus* modeled upon it. A comment added to the end of a miracle story, which circulated in twelfth-century collections regarding the Virgin Mary, illustrates the wide reach of the interpretive suggestions made in the *Tractatus*.³¹ The story recounts Mary's unlikely intervention on behalf of a monk from St. Peter's in Cologne. This monk had lived a wicked life and even fathered a child despite his vows. Immediately after drinking a potion, supposedly for his bodily health, he became dangerously ill and died without having the chance to make confession for his sins or to take final communion. The devil awaited him in the Other World, ready to carry him off to the 'infernal cloister'. Saint Peter, his monastic patron, carrying the great key to Heaven, arrived

and attempted to intervene on his behalf with God to no avail. Next, the holy angels and the saints begged the Lord to free the monk from damnation. God still replied that the monk did not deserve salvation and had died with all his sins unforgiven. Finally, Mary, the Mother of God, and her host of virgins intervened. Christ, unwilling to refuse his mother, allowed the monk to return to life and make amends for his sins. At the news of this divine clemency, Peter immediately threatened to strike the Devil with his key, frightening him off and leaving the monk free.

At the end of this short miracle of the Virgin, there are a couple interpretive suggestions. One regards Mary's seemingly preeminent place among the saints. The other focuses upon St. Peter's key:

But if someone objects about the key of St. Peter, with which he terrified the enemy, he should remember that incorporeal things cannot be described to corporeal beings except through corporeal things.³²

Here, is the same point, articulated by Hugh of St. Victor and asserted by the author of the *Tractatus*. Material images seen in visions often symbolise indescribable spiritual realities. The story ends, however, with one final caveat: 'nevertheless nothing is impossible to God'.³³

DOUBT AND THE IMAGINATION IN THE MEDIEVAL ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY TRADITION

The sights seen by visionaries may largely be immaterial signs, designed to mediate between the immaterial spirit and human beings who know and understand only corporeal things, but their mediation occurs in a context heavy with doubt. The *Tractatus* locates the origin of St. Patrick's Purgatory in a response to doubt. Before he tells the main story of the knight Owein, H. describes how God revealed the Purgatory to Patrick in response to the disbelief of the still-pagan Irish. As Patrick taught them about the rewards and punishments of the afterlife, the pagan Irish supposedly refused to believe in anything they could not see. In response to the saint's prayers, Jesus appeared to Patrick and showed him the Purgatory inside which a living man could 'see not only the torments of the wicked, but also, if he acted constantly according to the faith, the joys of the blessed'.³⁴

In the tradition of the *Tractatus*, St. Patrick's Purgatory originated in response to doubt, and Owein's unusual embodiment plays a convenient

role in taming the less trustworthy aspects of the visionary imagination. Around the time H. wrote the *Tractatus*, intellectuals, especially under the influence of Aristotle, were paying new attention to the possible physiological causes for dream-like phenomena.³⁵ Likewise, the devotional activities that were possibly utilised within religious communities to invoke visionary experiences came under greater scrutiny.³⁶ Owein's embodiment disables these concerns. Freed from such liabilities, in one respect, seeing is believing, but there always remains a limit on what, exactly, is actually seen. For example, the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach, in what is now Germany, suggested that those who have doubts about Purgatory should travel to Ireland and enter St. Patrick's Purgatory, after which they will not 'doubt the pains of purgatory anymore'.³⁷

Of course, resolving doubt in the pains of Purgatory is not the goal, but a stage in a far more important process. In this tradition, doubt in what cannot be seen appears natural, and of course the ability to doubt was essential for the cultivation of religious faith.³⁸ Owein does not see the real Heaven, and he does not see the God who dwells there. God, like the spiritual world, could not be known, as He truly was, through corporeal imagery but instead through a mediating faith, a belief in things not seen.³⁹ Worldly images could only participate in this mediation. As in the response of believers to the Incarnation of Christ, worldly observation, in the process of belief, had to be paired with an inner spiritual progression that could offer a closer connection between the divine and the human. Simple belief is never enough, and it must be part of a process.

As explained by H. of Saltrey, St. Patrick's Purgatory can only dispel doubt and reorient the individual to more meaningful questions through the involvement of both the senses of the body and the powers of the imagination. Some of what a pilgrim sees is materially there and much of it is not, but experientially there is no difference. Furthermore, one does not actually see the spiritual world that is like God, only a proliferation of signs that must be interpreted in order to achieve some semblance of what the spiritual world is. That these signs appear indicates that there is a transcendent reality to seek, and that is the value of Owein's embodiment during his vision. He does not dream or fall into an ecstasy, both states that could indicate the more problematic and less truthful aspects of the imagination, but rather sees signs through his imaginative faculty while wide awake that are unambiguously miraculous, clearly a communication between him and a spiritual reality that must therefore exist.

The alleviation of existential doubt leaves the believer with a greater task still ahead, and this task can only be completed in light of the emotional catharsis prompted by the alleviation of doubt. The real object of belief, the God who is the source of everything, still remains unseen and very imperfectly known. The visionary, and the readers of his story, are ideally prompted into a state of frustrated desire for what remains unseen. It is the stoking of this desire and love for God that is the actual aim of the text, and it is only reached through a coupling of absences.⁴⁰ Doubt in the unseen is taken away by the act of seeing, but what one really wants to see remains unable to be captured in sight. As outlined in the *Tractatus*, what a visionary perceived could not be passively received; it had to be interpreted and then put into action.

In the tradition that informs Hamlet's reference to St. Patrick, seeing the dead and the afterlife is not a final revelation of truth in itself. After he sees, a visionary must then interpret correctly what he has seen within the limitations of his current weaknesses and failings as a human being. The next step demanded of a medieval visionary can inform our understandings of *Hamlet*. Hamlet himself continues to nurse his doubts about the actual identity of the thing that claims to be his father's ghost. It might, in fact, be a demon, pulling the strings of what Hamlet recognises as his own 'weakness and my melancholy' (2.2.602). This doubt is not resolved in the play, and Hamlet does not make a definitive interpretive decision. Far from taking a stand, he becomes lost, in a way, in the mediating images that lie between him and the truth he seeks and never comes directly to know. In this fashion, he is like the many pilgrims who supposedly descended into the Purgatory of St. Patrick never to return or, more figuratively, like the many living men who do not come to know God in this life and achieve salvation.

This dubious atmosphere is linked to the remarkable metatheatricality of the play. Hamlet nurses his doubts about the apparition while planning *The Mousetrap* play-within-a-play. This placement provides another opportunity to consider how the mere images of things interact with reality and what this interaction demands of spectators who become aware of it. St. Patrick's Purgatory was a place where the living could see both the dead and the reality of the afterlife revealed. Of course, the purpose of this revelation was to provoke a confrontation with one's own sins; its main aim is inner transformation. The Purgatory merges inner and outer realities. It blurs the lines between images only in the mind and the imagery of material objects present to the senses. It also dissolves

the division between the inner moral state of a visionary and the external environment. Within the Purgatory, a visionary fights their own sinful state as a fallen being, and the *Tractatus* warns its readers that many lose.

The experience of Shakespeare's stage for an audience could be, in some ways, like a descent into the distant Purgatory of St. Patrick because it too merged the inner and outer realities of spectators. Shakespeare himself acknowledged how theatrical performance, like the sight of spirits, drew together 'spirit and flesh, illusion and reality' as audiences beheld the actors upon the stage.⁴¹ These actors as the representations or likenesses of other things, despite the obvious artificiality of their mimesis, nevertheless, participated in reality and altered it. As if following the medieval axiom that 'what is received is always received according to the mode of the recipient',⁴² audience members' own inner states, particularities, and predispositions participate in their reception of a performance, and in this way a 'mere' illusion can be dangerously powerful indeed, conveying truths upon which one acts well or badly. Just as Augustine found the joy and vexation provoked by a spiritual substance upon the mind to be real, so too are the emotional effects of theatre upon its audience. In the otherworld and on the stage likenesses of things become so real that the distinction between what is matter and what is not becomes irrelevant to the main task at hand, and this main task of interpretation and inner transformation remains dangerously prone to failure.

CONCLUSION

A consideration of the preface to the *Tractatus* illustrates the centrality of the imagination in the approach to truth within the tradition referenced by Hamlet in response to the sight of his father's ghost. In this influential medieval text and in the context of the contemporary theories regarding visionary experience into which it fit, experience in the imagination and experience in the living body were often indistinguishable and equal participants in a difficult and incomplete process of knowing. In such a process, the reaction to seeing was actually the most important element, because it was the reaction to the sign, the reading of it, that could bring the visionary closer to the signified. A deeper engagement with the role of the imagination in the medieval tradition regarding St. Patrick's Purgatory reveals more continuity than dramatic rupture between Shakespeare and some of his medieval inspirations. In particular, both *Hamlet* and the *Tractatus* resist drawing a clear dichotomy between

imagination and truth, suggesting that mimetic representation can provoke true transformative experiences through its very artifice. This artifice leveraged the power of the imagination and the human emotions that it could galvanize, indulging doubt to later alleviate it and conveying knowledge of a thing that is never seen beyond a flawed and imperfect copy.

Hamlet's invocation of Patrick called up a tradition in which belief in purgatory and the experience of the afterlife were not doctrinaire exercises in unquestioning belief based upon the elaboration of a newly invented idea. The medieval text lurking at the root of the tradition Shakespeare referenced suggested that in St. Patrick's Purgatory a living man encountered a permeable and swerving boundary between imaginative representation and fundamental truths, which, much like Shakespeare's later plays, complicated a clear division between imagination and truth. On such shaky ground, the dream-like could harden into a kind of knowledge based upon the reaction to what is seen, possibly, only in the mind's eye.

NOTES

1. For a longer and more specialised discussion of the issues explored in this essay, see Michael D. Barbezat, "He Doubted That These Things Actually Happened": Knowing the Other World in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, *History of Religions* 57, no. 4 (2018): 321–347. All references to Shakespeare's plays in this essay are from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 4th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
2. Robin Bates, *Shakespeare and the Cultural Colonization of Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2008), 89.
3. There is an extensive literature regarding St. Patrick's Purgatory and the pilgrimage traditions associated with it. See Shane Leslie, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Record from History and Literature* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1932). See also Michael Haren and Yolande de Pontfarcy, *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory: Lough Derg and the European Tradition* (Enniskillen: Clogher Historical Society, 1988); and Carol G. Zaleski, 'St. Patrick's Purgatory: Pilgrimage Motifs in a Medieval Otherworld Vision', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 4 (1985), 468–469.
4. For the modern edition, see Robert Easting, ed., *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, in *St. Patrick's Purgatory: Two Versions of Owayne Miles*

- and *The Vision of William Stranton Together with the Long Text of the Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1991). Hereafter cited as T. There is an English translation of a slightly different version of the text: Jean-Michel Picard, trans., *Saint Patrick's Purgatory: A Twelfth-Century Tale of a Journey to the Other World*, with an Introduction by Yolande de Pontfarcy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1985).
5. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
 6. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 49.
 7. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 193.
 8. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 76. For Purgatory and the imagination, see 85.
 9. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 47.
 10. Le Goff placed the first use of the noun in the work of Peter Comestor in his *Birth of Purgatory*, 157.
 11. For one example among many, see Robert Easting, 'Dialogue Between a Clerk and the Spirit of a Girl *de purgatorio* (1153): A Medieval Ghost Story', *Mediaevistik* 20 (2007): 163–183.
 12. Graham Robert Edwards, 'Purgatory: "Birth" or Evolution?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 642.
 13. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 3.
 14. For analyses of possible dates for the text and its different phases, see Yolande de Pontfarcy, 'Le *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* de H. de Saltrey: Sa date et ses sources', *Peritia* 3 (1984): 464; and Robert Easting, 'The Date and Dedication of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*', *Speculum* 53, no. 4 (1978): 779. Beyond the presentation in the text, Robert Easting has argued that the *Tractatus* is likely based upon the experience of a real person at Lough Derg that was 'embellished' by its clerical mediators. ('Owein at St. Patrick's Purgatory', *Medium Ævum* 55, no. 2 [1986]: 162).
 15. Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, ed. Rainer Berndt (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 2008). Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1951). The preface (T, 121–123) contains parts of *De sacramentis*, 2.16.2–5. This dependence on the *De sacramentis* of Hugh of St. Victor was first noted by Herrad Spilling, *Die Visio Tnugdali: Eigenart und Stellung in der mittelalterlichen Visionsliteratur bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Arceo-Gesellschaft, 1975), 209–210.

16. For more information on Hugh, see Paul Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
17. The atmosphere of medieval scholastic humanism offers a stark contrast to its portrayal by Renaissance polemicists. Regarding medieval ‘scholastic humanism’, see R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995–2001).
18. On Hugh and Peter Lombard, see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1:17–20.
19. For discussions of this difference in context, see Robert Easting, ‘Send Thine Heart into Purgatory: Visionaries of the Other World’, in *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 186; and Eileen Gardener, ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York: Ithaca Press, 1989), 250.
20. Hugh, *De sacramentis*, 2.16.2. 552; 436. ‘Que Omnia si ita illic uisibiliter et corporaliter esse credimus. praeter alia que absurda nascuntur ipsas utique animas etiam a corporibus separatas corpora esse. et ad similitudinem corporum membris compactas. atque distinctas confitemur’. I have changed Deferrari’s translation of ‘alia absurda’ from ‘incongruous things’ to ‘absurd things’.
21. That visionaries were given temporary bodies, perhaps made of air, during their experiences was a surprisingly unpopular explanation for visionary stories, and is only found in a couple examples, such as the seventh-century *Vision of Barontus*. See Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà d’après la littérature latine: V–XIII Siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994), 178–180.
22. Hugh, *De sacramentis*, 2.16.2. p. 553, ll. 16–19; 437. ‘Hoc quidem commemorare uoluimus. ne mirum uideatur si animabus a corporibus egressis signa quedam cororalibus similia ad demonstrationem spiritualium presentantur. quia nisi in talibus et per talia ab animabus corpore exutis uiderentur. nullo modo ab eisdem ad corpora reuersis in corpore uiuentibus et corporalia tantum scientibus dicerentur’.
23. Hugh, *De sacramentis*, 2.16.3, 554.
24. For the tradition, see Michael D. Barbezat, ‘In a Corporeal Flame: The Materiality of Hellfire Before the Resurrection in Six Latin Authors’, *Viator* 44, no. 3 (2013): 1–20.
25. For a fuller analysis of these borrowings and their arrangement, see Barbezat, “‘He Doubted That These Things Actually Happened’”, 321–347.
26. T, 122–123. ‘Ab eis tamen, quorum anime a corporibus exeunt et iterum iubente Deo ad corpora redeunt, signa quedam corporalibus similia ad demonsrationem spiritualium nuntiantur, nullo modo ab eisdem, ad

- corpora reuersis, in copore uiuentibus et corporalia tantum scientibus, intimarentur'. Compare to Hugh's original in Note 20 above.
27. T, 123. 'Vnde et in hac narratione a corporali et mortali homine spiritualia dicuntur uideri quasi in specie et forma corporali'.
 28. For a study of Augustine's visionary system, see Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"? The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture', *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 1–43. Steven Kruger offers another summary in his study of medieval dreaming, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 36–39. See also, Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 37–38.
 29. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 28, s. 3 pt. 2 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894); Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Newman Press, 1982). Augustine's system of vision is outlined in the twelfth book of his *De Genesi ad litteram* in the context of an explanation of 2 Cor. 12.2–4, or Paul's journey to the Third Heaven. This biblical passage provided the basis for the influential *Visio Pauli*. Spiritual vision corresponds to the Second Heaven, or the heaven of corporeal similitude. In particular, spiritual vision is summarized in 12.23.
 30. Augustine, *De Genesi*, 12.32, 427; 224. 'Sunt tamen et uera laetitia est et uera molestia facta de substantia spiritali'.
 31. The version I cite comes from Peter of Cornwall's *Liber revelationum*, or *Book of Revelations*. Lambeth Palace Library MS 51, 1.169 (112^{va}–113^{ra}). For more on this collection, see Robert Easting and Richard Sharpe, *Peter of Cornwall's Book of Revelations* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013). For this story in collections of miracles of the virgin, see Harry Leigh Douglas Ward, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Printed by Order of the Trustees, 1961), 604.
 32. MS 51, 1.169 (113^{ra}) 'Si uero obicit de clauae sancti Petri, qua terruit inimicum, meminerit quia incorporalia corporeis nisi per corporea narrari non possunt'.
 33. MS 51 1.169 (113^{ra}) 'Verumtamen deo nichil est impossibile, cui sit gloria in saecula saeculorum'. See also Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37.
 34. T 123; 48.
 35. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, esp. Chapters 4 and 5.
 36. Barbara Newman, 'What did It mean to Say "I Saw?"', 5.
 37. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Caesarii Heisterbacensis Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange (Cologne: J. M. Heberle and H. Lempertz and Co., 1851), 347.

38. See the discussion in Steven Justice, ‘Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?’, *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1–29.
39. See Hebrews 11:1 ‘Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not’.
40. The long version of the *Tractatus* makes this suggestion explicit through an excerpt from Anselm of Canterbury’s *Proslogion*: T, 145–148, ll. 918–1041; *Proslogion*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, in *S. Anselmi Catuariensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1946), 1: 117–122.
41. Sarah Outterson-Murphy, “Remember Me”: The Ghost and Its Spectators in *Hamlet*, *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34, no. 2 (2016), 5.
42. For an example, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Q. 75, Art. 5, ed. Rubeis and Billuart (Turin: Marietti, 1938), 1: 471.

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Fear and Wonder: Shakespeare's Ghost in the Fireside Tradition

Catherine Belsey

I

Modern directors of *Hamlet* tend to see the Ghost as a problem to be solved by complicated lighting effects.¹ For twenty-first-century audiences, Old Hamlet seems altogether too stately, too voluble, and much too corporeal to be truly frightening: we prefer our phantoms translucent and insubstantial and it is hard to share Horatio's 'fear and wonder' at the apparition (1.1.47).² But the same directors often acknowledge the mounting suspense, as the Ghost twice vanishes without explanation and, at its third appearance, beckons Hamlet to a more remote place before revealing its mission. Solid it may be, but the Ghost knows how to make itself uncanny by remaining silent and unaccountable until the moment when it brings the prince face-to-face with mortality.

No lighting effects were available in the afternoon at the Globe theatre. What, then, were the expectations of Shakespeare's first audiences? Earlier dramatists seem to have drawn their spectres mainly from Seneca's plays. Their on-stage ghosts preferred prologues and monologues to

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interaction with the other characters. They called bitterly for vengeance; they complained of torments in the underworld; with some relish, they promised playgoers mounting bloodshed to come. Senecan ghosts generate horror; they are not, however, eerie. But there was another tradition. By winter hearths, storytellers (old wives, by convention) terrified their auditors with tales of the troubled dead. Winter's tales, far-fetched narratives of supernatural interventions, include ghost stories and the genre has its own history. Medieval fireside ghosts are corporeal, threatening, and prone to shape-shifting; they appear without warning and they invite the shiver that acknowledges an entity from outside the categories that define what we know. Buried and yet walking, from the past but present, at once there and impossible, the ghosts that feature in these winter's tales provoke 'Thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls' (*Hamlet*, 1.4.56). The heritage of popular fireside stories, I believe, transformed Seneca's shades into Shakespeare's uncanny spectres, beginning with the ghost of Caesar in 1599 and reaching Banquo in 1606. In between, in 1601 or thereabouts, Old Hamlet is the most fully developed apparition. When the guards and Horatio sit down on the ramparts, Barnardo embarks on a winter's tale that comes to life in the telling (1.1.33–42).

Enlightenment philosophy attributed ghost stories to Catholicism. After the defeat of the Catholic James II in 1688 and the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745, sectarian conflict remained raw. When Old Hamlet talked of his own purgation by fire, he fed the story, still current in some quarters, that ghosts were the product of medieval popery. But in practice the fireside tradition reaches right back into pagan Europe and some extant examples bear witness to the way the church took possession of existing tales, while adding others of its own. Most of the popular, oral narratives are inevitably lost but we have fragmentary access to material that retains enough vernacular elements to demonstrate their survival into Shakespeare's time and beyond.

For example, many people in the Middle Ages would have had their visual image of ghosts confirmed by the legend of The Three Living and the Three Dead so widely painted on church walls. In the story three richly dressed kings are out hunting, pursuing the most carefree of wealthy pastimes, when they are confronted by three emaciated corpses. The Dead admonish the Living, 'As we are, so you shall be'. Depictions of the revenants, bony figures naked but for the tattered remnants of their shrouds, vary only in the degree to which worms inhabit their entrails or cling to what is left of their flesh. Even now, painted traces

of this medieval encounter are to be found on the walls of more than a dozen English parish churches, as well as one domestic property.³

In at least two instances the wall paintings appear to be copied directly from the rendering in the Arundel Psalter of Robert de Lisle, or a shared original.⁴ The manuscript version is in excellent condition and thus gives an idea of how parishioners were invited to interpret the legend. Above the Living kings, each skilfully depicted as the glass of fashion and the mould of form, are three utterances: 'Ich am afert'; 'Lo whet ich se'; 'Me thinketth hit bey develes thre'. And the three Dead reply, 'Ich wes wel fair'; 'Such sheltou be'; 'For godes love be wer by me'.⁵ Below the picture a French dialogue poem dramatises their exchanges in more detail. The first Living king trembles for fear: these figures he faces are strange and hideous, rotten and worm-eaten. While his equally appalled companion resolves to amend his life, the third Living king wonders why man was made so lowly that he must suffer such loss and so brief a joy. His Dead similitude declares that, though he too was once a king, now even the worms disdain him.

These figures are material, substantial, and decomposing; they have come from their graves to confront the Living. When Hamlet calls the Ghost a dead corpse that has burst its cerements, cast up by the sepulchre to revisit the night (1.4.47–53), he invests the phantom with a physicality quite remote from the ethereal wraiths of modern imagining. The 'complete steel' of the armour that encases the Ghost (52), meanwhile, would permit the audience to imagine a revenant macabre beyond the power of the Globe to stage in broad daylight.⁶ Most of the wall paintings date from the fourteenth century. Since they did not depict the deity, many escaped the Reformers' whitewash and would have retained much of their horror in the sixteenth.

An alliterative poem included in a manuscript assembled in 1426 by the Shropshire author, John Audelay, develops the legend of the three 'gostis ful grym' (58) in ways that, coincidentally or not, relate the story more closely to *Hamlet*.⁷ Uncertainty about their identity introduces an element of suspense. What are these apparitions? Unaccountably at this stage of the tale, the first Living king recognises among the Dead the cross on the pall that covered the coffin (54). And at that moment, his horse refuses to move, but snorts as he stands, while his falcon falls to his fist out of fear (55–56). As if they know, animals register even more decisively than human beings an experience from another realm. Here, too, the third Living king, cold with terror as he looks at the Dead from

behind his hands (79–82), believes they are demons. When Hamlet repeatedly ponders the possibility that the Ghost may be a devil, he not only demonstrates a proper awareness of Protestant theology but also echoes the initial anxiety of the third king at this unnerving encounter (1.4.40–42; 2.2.600–601; 3.2.83).

‘Nay, we are no fyndus [fiends]’, replies the first of the Dead in the Shropshire poem, however; instead, he reveals unexpectedly, we were once your *fathers* (92–93). ‘I’ll call thee Hamlet, / King, father’, Shakespeare’s hero exclaims (1.4.44–45). But if the poem’s three Dead are the fathers of the Living kings, they are also their proleptic doubles. ‘Makis your merour be me’, urges the second of the Dead (120). In a parallel poem, probably written at about the same time in north-west England, the ghost of Guinevere’s mother appears at the hunt to warn the young queen against excess. Like the three Dead, this revenant, bare, pale, hollow-eyed and muddy, hung about with toads and snakes, urges her daughter to see her own future in this glass: ‘Muse on thi mirroure’.⁸

‘I’ll call thee Hamlet’. In encountering the corpse of the father whose name he shares, surely the prince also confronts the fact of human mortality and his own eventual destiny: as I am, so you shall be. When we first see Hamlet, his melancholy centres on his mother’s frailty, the brevity of mourning and the corresponding forgetfulness of the living (1.2). His meeting with the Ghost, however, changes the terms of the protagonist’s situation in more ways than one: the spectre brings Hamlet face to face with death itself. Moreover, in calling for revenge, the Ghost demands that Hamlet incur the possibility of his own extinction sooner rather than later. Justified or not, regicides do not generally live to enjoy their triumph.⁹ The prince is asked to ‘take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing, end them’ (3.1.59–60) in both senses of that term.

II

The Audelay poem ends with a self-referential twist. Having delivered their lurid warning, the three Dead are satisfied and glide back to their graves (131). The Living kings build a minster and on the walls are written this very story—though too few, alas, will believe it. No doubt the mural legend was illustrated with the familiar images. So remote are these decaying corpses from the diaphanous ladies and headless cavaliers of our own popular fantasy, that we have tended not to think of the pictured Dead as phantoms, but the poem twice calls them ‘ghosts’ (58, 131).

Meanwhile, as if in confirmation, a ghost story of the same period invokes the wall paintings for comparison. Well over a hundred miles away on the edge of the North Yorkshire moors, a monk of Byland Abbey jotted down on the blank pages of an old manuscript the history of Snowball the tailor, who was riding the two miles or so home to Ampleforth from Gilling by night, when he encountered a shape-shifting figure that knocked him violently to the ground. The terrified Snowball fought it off with his sword and then, summoning his faith, he 'conjured' the apparition (addressed it firmly in the name of the Trinity and the blood of Jesus Christ),¹⁰ telling it to stand still and reveal its name, along with the cause of its suffering and a suitable remedy. At their second encounter the spirit assumed the form of a she-goat but, when conjured (in the previous sense), fell to the earth and rose up in the shape of a large man, horrible and emaciated, in the likeness of one of the dead painted kings [*et horribilis et macilenti ad instar unius regis mortui depicti*]. Thus embodied, he was able to engage in dialogue.¹¹

There is nothing here of the costumed manifestation compelled to haunt the scene of a past tragedy. Nor is the apparition presented as a psychological projection of the viewer, an effect of melancholy or guilt: Snowball is a stranger; this protean ghoul is consistently palpable and physically threatening. Snowball's tale is one of a dozen stories of the walking dead recorded by the anonymous Byland monk. Some of the others are less detailed and also less fully informed by Christian teaching. Instead, they bear all the hallmarks of fireside tales, their elements of pagan legend sporadically intertwined with fragments of orthodox theology. For example, William of Bradford was followed three times by a spirit that cried out 'how, how, how', the words presumably simulating the wailing sound it made. The fourth night, at about midnight, as William was returning from Ampleforth, the clamour intensified and then at the crossroads ahead of him he saw a pale horse. There was good reason to be afraid. Crossways, we know from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are likely places for the graves of those denied Christian burial and such 'Damned spirits' are all too inclined to leave their 'wormy beds' at night (3.2.382–384).¹² If William also remembered from sermons he had attended that in the Book of Revelation a pale horse bears Death on its back, while hell follows with him (6.8), the tale does not draw attention to the allusion.¹³

Church doctrine plays no part whatever in the story of James Tankerlay. This previous rector of Kirby, buried close to the chapter

house at Byland Abbey, took to walking in the hours of darkness as far as Kirby itself and one night he blew out [*exsufflavivit*] the eye of his former mistress there. On this, the abbot and monks had his body exhumed in its coffin and instructed Roger Wayneman, the carter, to transport it to Lake Gormire. While the coffin was being thrown into the lake, the oxen drawing the wagon almost sank into the water for fear. There is no reference whatever to Christian belief here until the monk who has recorded the tale adds piously in his own voice, 'May the all-powerful have mercy on him if, even so, he is among the number of the saved'.¹⁴

Like the ghost that assaulted Snowball, James Tankerlay is corporeal and dangerous. To prevent further harm, his body must be disposed of. This story shares with the pagan Scandinavian sagas the assumption that ghosts leave their graves to harm the living and that the way to lay them is to destroy their corpses.¹⁵ In the twelfth century, William of Newburgh, a canon of the Augustinian priory less than two miles from Byland, recorded as history a number of tales concerning such animated cadavers. One of these provides a glimpse of the process by which Christianity assimilated the vernacular tradition. When a walking corpse frightened an entire community by day as well as by night, the matter was referred to the Bishop of Lincoln. His advisers assured the bishop that such occurrences were quite common; the usual remedy was to dig up the body and burn it. This struck the bishop as irreligious, however. Instead, he recommended that a scroll conferring absolution be placed in the coffin on the corpse's chest. When this was done, the trouble ceased.¹⁶

But the religious remedies did not always work. William's contemporary, the accomplished storyteller Walter Map, told of a Welsh ghost who walked nightly, calling his fellow-villagers by name. Each of them fell ill and died within three days. This revenant failed to respond to holy water; he was laid only when an English knight split his head open to the neck. In a second case, however, a cross on the grave was eventually effective.¹⁷ These narratives belong to the moment when the Church's appropriation of ghost lore for purgatory was still in its infancy. By the fifteenth century, when the Byland monk came to transcribe the tales he had heard, the assimilation was more complete. Snowball placated his shape-shifting ghost by burying its absolution in the grave. But, as the story of James Tankerlay demonstrates, enough traces remain to confirm the survival of the pagan tradition.

Like Map's Welsh ghost, the walking dead traditionally carried infection. According to William of Newburgh, one wicked man had taken to

coming out of his tomb in Berwick and terrifying the townsfolk. The simple people feared attack, while the wiser sort knew that dead bodies spread disease. When at last the corpse was exhumed, chopped up, and incinerated, the nightly disturbances came to an end, but it was notable that a subsequent episode of the pestilence was more destructive in Berwick than elsewhere.¹⁸ Over two centuries later, the Byland ghosts remained infectious: Snowball was gravely ill for some days after his supernatural encounters; having secured absolution for a ghost who had stolen some silver spoons, a ploughman was sick for many days afterwards.¹⁹

Perhaps, then, the hellish 'contagion' Hamlet associates with yawning graveyards is more than metaphorical (3.2.391–392)? Possibly, a similar thought prompts him to call the haunted air of Denmark 'a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (2.2.304–305). Moreover, early modern ghosts remained capable of physical violence. In 1581 Philip Stubbes recounts how a seeming revenant dealt his neighbour a blow that left her in a physical state too appalling to describe. (With due deference to Protestant orthodoxy, however, Stubbes makes clear that the ghost was the devil in the body of the dead man.²⁰) No wonder, then, that the prince's friends regard the Ghost as dangerous and do their best to prevent Hamlet from following it. Suppose, for instance, it exposes him to harm and then changes shape, like Snowball's spectral interlocutor?

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason? (1.4.69–73)

In the event, Horatio is wide of the mark: arguably, the Ghost lures Hamlet into another kind of danger entirely. A father who urges his son to commit high treason, even against a murderer, might not be thought to have the son's long-term interests at heart.

Like the guards in *Hamlet*, the Byland tailor and ploughman are ordinary people who have played no part in the main events that have led to the haunting. Ghosts often seem to prefer to deal in the first instance with intermediaries. Adam de Lond's sister appeared to old William Trower and, when conjured, confessed that she had improperly made over some deeds to her brother, allowing him to evict her own husband

and sons from their home. The revenant implored William to plead with her brother to restore the deeds and their land to her former family.²¹

As does Old Hamlet, this apparition walks to put right a secular injury done to her family. The ghosts of popular narrative displayed a continuing concern with earthly justice.²² Crimes perpetrated against the next generation would become a major concern of the deceased in the early modern period. 'A number of men there be yet living', Thomas Nashe noted in 1594, 'who have been haunted by their wives after their death about forswearing themselves and undoing their children, of whom they promised to be careful fathers'.²³ That this traditional role for ghosts survived well into the seventeenth century is attested by several of the incidents recounted by Joseph Glanvill and John Aubrey, where spectres return to insist on the restoration of property to their heirs.²⁴

Among these, the story of James Haddock's ghost resembles the Byland tales in enough particulars to confirm the continuity of the narrative tradition. It also echoes *Hamlet*, presenting a similar family situation in a different social register. In 1662 Francis Taverner was riding home one night to Hilborough in Ireland, when his steed came to a sudden halt at a crossroads. Three horsemen appeared but their hooves made no sound. The third, in a white coat, claimed to be James Haddock, slightly known to Taverner but dead these five years. This figure went on to haunt Taverner repeatedly, instructing him to intervene with Haddock's widow, now remarried to a man who had appropriated property bequeathed by Haddock to his own son. In the end, the ghost threatened to tear Taverner to pieces if he failed to deliver the message and then, 'changing itself into many prodigious shapes', it vanished.²⁵ Only when he obeyed did it depart for good, crawling on its hands and feet over the courtyard wall, while the property was restored to the boy.

Like so many of the Byland ghosts, the threatening, corporeal, shape-shifting James Haddock appeared to a disinterested party in the middle of the night. This dead father returned to point out the injury done to his son's inheritance by the man who had married his former wife. In *Hamlet* the father walks to denounce the man who has married his widow and stolen the crown that should surely have passed to the prince. Such apparitions continued to bring injustices to light. Some, like the majority of Shakespeare's ghosts, were victims of homicide. Late in the seventeenth century, Henry More recorded that in the 1630s the ghost of Anne Walker appeared to a local miller and accused two men of her death. They were subsequently executed for the crime.²⁶ Aubrey tells

how a Mr. Brown revealed that he had been murdered when his spectre appeared to his sister and her maid in Fleet Street at about the hour when he was killed in Herefordshire.²⁷ Old Hamlet's timing is not so precise but his project is also to secure the punishment of his murderer.

III

At first glance, the Byland monk is not the most sophisticated of story-tellers. And yet the tales convey a strong sense of the uncanny. These apparitions are frightening, their horror commonly registered in the reactions of those who so reluctantly confront them. A man obliged to walk when his own horse broke its leg was very scared [*perterritus*] when he saw what seemed to be another horse [*quasi equus*] standing on its hind legs on the road ahead.²⁸ A master ploughman turned and fled in mid-conversation, leaving his interlocutor to a spirit that was tearing at his clothes.²⁹ Robert of Boltby Junior, from Kilburn, buried in the graveyard, walked at night to the alarm of the villagers, while the dogs followed him, howling. A group of local youths determined to catch him but when they assembled at the churchyard for the purpose, all but two of them took to their heels at the sight of the ghost.³⁰ Horatio, too, is harrowed with fear and wonder, though without deserting his post. The safest response is to 'prohibit' the apparition in the name of divinity. 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' Hamlet exclaims, as the hero stands his ground (1.4.39).

In other Byland instances the uncanny is marked by the response of the animals, as it was in the Shropshire poem. William of Bradford's terror of the apparition at the crossroads is confirmed as instinctive in the tale by the behaviour of his dog, which barked feebly at the sight of the phantom horse, and cowered between his master's legs. It was the oxen who very nearly drowned for fear as they delivered the errant corpse of James Tankerlay into Lake Gormire.

My own heart goes out to the oxen. Even today this semi-circular stretch of water, the remains of an ancient glacier, is not accessible by road. Protected on one side by the steep Gormire Rigg and on the other by the even more precipitous Sutton Bank, the lake remains lonely and correspondingly austere. Though the Byland stories include no descriptive passages, the places they name—Ampleforth and Gilling, Kilburn and Kirby (now Cold Kirby)—are mostly within five miles of the Abbey itself. If the narratives were indeed transcriptions of fireside tales,

listeners would have been able to supply for themselves the local colour that in a later work would have been spelt out for the reader. This is hilly country, providing any number of blind summits for the travellers by night who feature in so many of the stories. Moreover, the land is fertile and still wooded, well able to harbour things that go bump in the night. Byland Abbey, founded in the twelfth century, had rapidly developed on the basis of good farming practice to become one of the grandest and wealthiest of the Cistercian monasteries. The ruins still stand, testifying eloquently to its former magnificence. But in the wake of the Black Death the abbey had fallen on hard times. Supporting at the height of its grandeur up to 80 monks and 160 lay brothers to till the soil, by 1381 Byland was reduced to eleven monks and no more than three lay brothers. If in the early fifteenth century, when the tales were recorded, the outlying granges were similarly depleted, the farmland of the surrounding area would have been relatively neglected and the landscape in consequence wilder and less cultivated.

But it would probably be a mistake to assume that any one part of medieval England was more readily haunted than another. The light cast up by our cities makes it easy to forget how very dark the countryside must have been on moonless evenings, and how very long were the winter nights through which travellers were obliged to complete their journeys. Darkness and solitude might well prompt experiences undreamt of in their philosophy. What *were* they, these living dead who defied the categories by which people reduce the world to knowledge? Although they are named as ‘spirits’, and for all their propensity to assume a variety of shapes, the Byland ghosts are none the less substantial. When Robert Foxton caught Robert of Boltby on his nightly way out of the graveyard, he was able to place the spectre on the church stile, while his companion ran for the priest, crying, ‘Hold tight until I get back’.³¹ The separation of the soul from the body at the moment of death, however strenuously promoted by Christianity, seems to have exerted only an intermittent hold on the popular imagination.³² Shakespeare’s Ghost, now insubstantial, now corporeal, is variously ‘as the air, invulnerable’ (1.1.150), a ‘spirit’ (repeatedly) but also a ‘dead corse’ (1.4.52) ‘come from the grave’ (1.5.131), released by his tomb to walk the night (1.4.47–53).

Palpable as they are, the Byland ghosts push, none the less, at the limits of mortal understanding. The spirit that appeared to Snowball the tailor formed its words in its intestines and not with its tongue. Robert of Boltby, too, speaks from his entrails, as if from an empty jar.

(Roman revenants squeak and gibber [*Hamlet*, 1.1.119]³³: evidently, English folk ghosts adopt a hollow tone.³⁴) In another case, a woman caught a spectre and brought it into the house on her back. One of the bystanders noticed that her hands sank deep into its flesh, as if it were putrid, and not solid but phantasmic.³⁵

In the end, these eerie creatures are also sad, leaving their graves 'more in sorrow than in anger' (*Hamlet*, 1.2.231), and they generally want something from the living. Above all, they long to be addressed. 'It would be spoke to', Barnardo notes of Old Hamlet; 'Question it, Horatio', Marcellus urges (1.1.48). And, indeed, the Ghost comes to them in a 'questionable shape' (1.4.43). The Byland revenants confirm the popular view that phantoms do not speak first.³⁶ Instead, much of their shape-shifting behaviour, like their groans and wails, is in the first instance attention seeking. William of Bradford did not offer help to the pale horse that appeared at the crossroads, but merely prohibited it in the name of God and in virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ from obstructing his path. When it heard him, the apparition took on the likeness of a square of canvas and rolled about. From this, the monk concludes, we can infer that the spirit deeply desired to be conjured and given effective aid. 'If there be any good thing to be done / That may to thee do ease, and grace to me, / Speak to me', the more thoughtful Horatio invites Shakespeare's Ghost (1.1.133–135). Before he was absolved, Robert of Boltby used to stand by the doors and windows of his house and beneath the walls, as if he were listening. Perhaps, the writer speculates, he was waiting for someone to come out and conjure him in order to attend to his needs. The ghost lingers on the outside of his erstwhile home.³⁷ Is it possible that for Old Hamlet the ramparts of the castle at Elsinore constitute a royal equivalent, the outer walls of his former dwelling?

A quantity of circumstantial detail and the preference for dialogue characteristic of oral narrative invest the Byland ghost stories with a degree of plausibility. At the same time, they remain in the first instance winter's tales. Analysing the genre as it survived into the twentieth century, M. R. James points out that 'a slight haze of distance is desirable' in a ghost story. "'Thirty years ago", "Not long before the war", are very proper openings', he adds.³⁸ Tellers of fireside tales have always known that an element of removal enhances the credibility of an otherwise unlikely narrative. The Byland monk seems to have known it too or, perhaps, simply to have reproduced the mode of the stories as he

heard them. Writing sometime early in the fifteenth century, he ascribes the tale of Snowball the tailor to the time of Richard II, who died in 1400. In other instances, he suspends the question of truth entirely, with the effect of foregrounding the narrative itself. These events, he makes clear, happened to other people—or so they claim. ‘It is said’ [*Dicitur*] is his favourite attribution, or ‘*Refertur*’, it is related or alleged. The story of James Tankerlay begins, ‘Old people relate’. Noting the terror of the oxen as the coffin was thrown into the lake, the monk adds the hope that he is not himself in any such danger in transcribing this story, since he writes only what he has heard from elderly people. Did the Danish castle, with its theatrical combination of the remote and the everyday, offer Elizabethan playgoers a similar distance, a similar suspension of truth?

IV

I have made much of the Byland tales because they offer a rare and neglected sample of English popular stories apparently uncensored and relatively unappropriated by the medieval Church. True, they are recorded within the precincts of the institution but not, apparently, as exemplary or as raw material for sermons. Only two of a dozen instances concern masses for the souls of the revenants. Absolution after excommunication is a commoner request but several of the apparitions are driven by more temporal concerns. The Byland stories confirm the evidence of the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead concerning the wandering corpses of popular imagination; they also testify to a tradition of fireside tales that foreground the uncanny, the component that is so conspicuously missing from the early modern stage tradition derived from Seneca, but so apparent in the first act of *Hamlet*.

That element also features in the traditional English and Scottish ballads of the supernatural, as does suspense, where the economy of the narrative mode itself often leads to a sudden shock of recognition that all along the participants in the story have been ghosts. The ballads as we have them are not entirely reliable, of course, as a guide to the state of the genre in Shakespeare’s time. They were circulated orally, many of them in Scotland and the border country, and transcribed mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the printed texts often reach back to a much earlier epoch, they may have been contaminated in detail by later beliefs and narrative strategies. Some of the ballads were known, however, in Shakespeare’s London, including at least one

ghost story. In Francis Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (?1607) Old Merrythought twice sings extracts from 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William' as snatches of popular song. William loves Margaret but marries another; Margaret dies of grief and returns to haunt William's bride-bed. In Fletcher's version:

When it was grown to dark midnight,
And all were fast asleep,
In came Margaret's grimly ghost
And stood at William's feet.³⁹

Soon afterwards William dies of sorrow. Here, as so often, the ghost is menacing: this apparition returns to summon the living.⁴⁰ Another William is torn to pieces by a 'Great and grievous ghost' that would frighten ten thousand men.⁴¹ Elsewhere in the ballads contact with the dead incurs contagion, as it does in the medieval tales. 'The Unquiet Grave' records a dialogue conducted at the burial place. Here the living lover craves a last embrace but the dead replies, 'If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips, / Your time will not be long'.⁴²

Meanwhile, a Scots ballad ghost repeats the admonition of the Three Dead. Clerk Saunders leaves his grave to revisit another Margaret and reproach her for her pride. But Margaret cannot grasp his message. If you really are my true love, she asks, where are the bonny arms that used to embrace me?

By worms they're eaten, in mools they're rotten [mould]
Behold, Margaret, and see,
And mind, for a' your mickle pride,
Sae will become o thee.⁴³

Like the painted Kings, Margaret's admonisher has begun to putrefy. The macabre is a recurrent feature of the ballad stories: yet another William declares, 'For the wee worms are my bedfellows, / And cauld clay is my sheets'.⁴⁴ Like the 'old mole' in the 'cellarage' (*Hamlet*, 1.5.170, 159), tunnelling in the mould where its name places it,⁴⁵ these ghosts come from the grave and belong underground in the earth, where they reside alone.

There is regret there, too: a nostalgia for human warmth and the comfort of bedlinen. 'I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay

him i'th'cold ground', Ophelia laments for her father (4.5.69–70), singing snatches of popular song. In the same way Claudio fears 'To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot' (*Measure for Measure*, 3.1.118). Since they cannot rejoin the living, however, ghosts long to rest, at least, in peace. "Oh who sits weeping on my grave, / And will not let me sleep?" asks the dead lover reproachfully in 'The Unquiet Grave'.⁴⁶ A rare early modern non-Senecan dramatic spectre echoes this complaint when the sorceress Medea summons him back to the world of the living. In Robert Greene's *Alphonsus King of Aragon* (1587–1588) Calchas, priest of Apollo's oracle at Delphi, is required to reveal the future in a dream. 'What meanst thou thus to call me from my grave? / Shall nere my ghost obtaine his quiet rest?' he demands.⁴⁷ Once he has performed this last task, however, Medea reassures him, she will trouble him no more. 'Rest, rest, perturbed spirit', Hamlet urges (1.5.190). In due course, this will also be Horatio's hope for the dead Hamlet (5.2.366): it is the best wish the living can offer the dead.

In their depiction of the afterlife the ballads are remarkably secular. A single ballad ghost claims to suffer the pains of hell⁴⁸; I have found no mention of purgatory. According to Christian theology, while the body returns to the dust of which it is made, the soul is immortal, for better or worse. The ballads, however, place all the emphasis on the corporeality of the walking dead, their mournful condition, and their obligation to return to their graves at first light.⁴⁹ At the very least, then, these poems confirm the long vernacular survival of the medieval tradition, while the parallels with *Hamlet* indicate that Shakespeare had not far to seek for the treatment that distinguishes Old Hamlet from his Senecan predecessors on the English stage. We may assume, in short, that Shakespeare's heritage included the old wives tales and fireside stories of his Warwickshire childhood, and the winter's tales that no doubt continued to circulate in early modern London.⁵⁰ If the call for revenge comes mainly from Seneca, if the flames of purgatory modernise the Senecan underworld, the ghost lore and the storytelling skills that make the apparition in *Hamlet* chilling grow out of the conventions of popular narrative.

Shakespeare's tragedy of revenge engages with mortality in many forms: bereavement, murder, military heroics, disintegration in the grave, and the fear of damnation. It ends with acknowledgement of the inevitable: one way or another, death will come. But the play begins by raising these issues in the most theatrical of modes: a winter's tale of an unquiet spirit walking the earth with a deadly mission for the living hero.

NOTES

1. This chapter is a revised extract from 'Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2010): 1–27.
2. Shakespeare references are to *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
3. For accounts of some images now lost see E. Carleton Williams, 'Mural Paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead in England', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd ser., 7 (1942): 31–40. The domestic property is Longthorpe Tower, Peterborough.
4. Belchamp Water, Essex; Longthorpe Tower. British Library MS Arundel 83(II), f. 127. The Psalter image is widely reproduced: see, for example, Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), Plate VIII and 134–138. For the four other extant English manuscript versions see Susanna Greer Fein, 'Life and Death, Reader and Page: Mirrors of Mortality in English Manuscripts', *Mosaic* 35, no. 1 (2002): 69–94. (I owe this last reference to Kenneth Rooney.)
5. At Wensley the Dead hold scrolls to similar effect.
6. Ghosts are twice described as 'meager' [emaciated] in John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge* (?1601), ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 1.1.8, 1.3.42. The concealing role of the armour does not exclude the possibility that it also operates as a marker of the genealogy disrupted by Hamlet's failure to inherit the throne (see Margreta de Grazia, *'Hamlet' Without Hamlet* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 143). The 'fowle sheete' ascribed to early modern stage ghosts in *A Warning for Fair Women* probably implied a shroud, perhaps dirtied by the grave. According to Reginald Scot, the credulous were easily fooled by a 'knave in a white sheet' (*A Discoverie of Witchcraft* [London, 1584], 152). But for the purposes of recognition, some stage ghosts must have appeared in the clothes they wore when alive (Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 100).
7. John Audelay, 'De tribus regibus mortuis', in *The Poems of John Audelay*, ed. Ella Keats Whiting, EETS OS 184 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 217–223.
8. *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, ed. Ralph Hanna III (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), l. 167.
9. The only revengers to survive on the early modern stage are Marston's in *Antonio's Revenge*. They withdraw from the world, however.

10. Cf. *Awntyrs*, l. 133. The usage survived into early modern English. Hamlet ‘conjure[s]’ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (presses them to speak the truth) (2.2.285).
11. M. R. James, ‘Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories’, *English Historical Review* 37 (1922): 415–418. Translations from the Latin are my own.
12. This familiar motif evokes the old Roman belief that ghosts walked when they had not been interred with all the proper rites.
13. James, ‘Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories’, 419.
14. James, ‘Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories’, 418.
15. M. R. James draws attention to the Scandinavian element in the tales (‘Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories’, 414). It is tempting to ascribe this to a continuing Viking influence in North Yorkshire, but similar beliefs are found all over Europe and survive longer than we might expect (Claude Lecouteux, *Fantômes et revenants au moyen âge* [Paris: Imago, 1986], 27–30).
16. *The History of William of Newburgh*, trans. Joseph Stevenson, *The Church Historians of England*, vol. 4, Part 2 (London: Seeleys, 1856), 656–657.
17. Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*. *Courtiers’ Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, revised by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 202–204.
18. *William of Newburgh*, 657–658. William’s phantom of Anantis also brought sickness until the body was dismembered and burned (660–661). The village of Drakelow in Derbyshire was abandoned when two revenants spread a deadly plague (G. David Keyworth, ‘Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead-Corpse?’ *Folklore* 117 [2006]: 244).
19. James, ‘Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories’, 418, 419.
20. Philip Stubbes, *Two Wunderfull and Rare Examples* (London, 1581).
21. James, ‘Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories’, 422.
22. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 713–718; Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 252–253, 261–262.
23. Thomas Nashe, *The Terrors of the Night*, in *Thomas Nashe*, ed. Stanley Wells (London: Edward Arnold, 1964), 173.
24. Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus: Or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (London, 1681), Part 2, 235–237; John Aubrey, *Miscellanies* (London, 1696), 62–64.
25. Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, Part 2, 279–280. (The pagination is duplicated here.)
26. Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, Preface, 2–11. Return from the dead to reveal a murder is common in folk tales (Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index*

- of *Folk Literature* [Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955–1958], E231).
27. Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 62.
 28. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', 414.
 29. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', 419.
 30. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', 418.
 31. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', 418.
 32. Jean Delumeau, *La Peur en occident XIV^e–XVIII^e siècles: Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), 75–83.
 33. Cf. *Julius Caesar*, 2.2.24. Comedy's description in *A Warning for Fair Women* of 'a filthie whining ghost' that 'Comes skreaming like a pigge halfe stickt, / And cries *Vindicta*' probably confirms the Senecan origin of previous early modern stage ghosts (Charles Dale Cannon, ed., *A Warning for Fair Women: A Critical Edition* [The Hague: Mouton, 1975], Induction, ll. 54–57).
 34. John Deacon and John Walker imagine the Witch of Endor impersonating the ghost of Samuel by speaking in the bottom of her belly 'with an hollow counterfeit voice' *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Devils* (London, 1601), 126.
 35. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories', 418–419.
 36. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 424–425.
 37. In Northern Ireland folk ghosts often returned to their former homes on All Souls' Night (Linda-May Ballard, 'Before Death & Beyond—A Preliminary Survey of Death & Ghost Traditions with Particular Reference to Ulster', in *The Folklore of Ghosts*, ed. Hilda R. Ellis Davidson and W. M. S. Russell [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer], 29).
 38. M. R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, ed. Darryl Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 407–408.
 39. Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 2.2.438–441; cf. 3.3.569–570. Cf. Francis James Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Folklore Press, Pageant, 1957), no. 74.
 40. Cf. Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 72.
 41. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, no. 255, st. 13.
 42. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, no. 78A, st. 5.
 43. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, no. 77F; cf. no. 47.
 44. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, no. 47A, st. 19.
 45. As Margreta de Grazia points out, the spelling and pronunciation of *mole* and *mould* were interchangeable in 1600 ('*Hamlet*' Without *Hamlet*, 29).
 46. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, no. 78A, st. 3.
 47. Robert Greene, *Alphonsus King of Aragon, 1599*, ed. W. W. Greg (London: Malone Society, 1926), ll. 956–957.

48. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, no. 77E, st. 13.
49. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, nos 79; 77A, C, G.
50. As folklorists themselves have been very ready to concede, Shakespeare was familiar with the vernacular traditions. See, for instance, Lowry Charles Wimberley, *Folklore in The English and Scottish Ballads* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1928), 226. See also J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, ed., *Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* (London: Shakespeare Society, 1845); and T. F. Thiselton Dyer, *Folk Lore of Shakespeare* (London: Griffith and Farrar, 1883).

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‘For by the Image of My Cause,
I See / The Portraiture of His’:
Hamlet and the Imitation of Emotion

Richard Meek

When Hamlet reveals to Horatio the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which he has arranged artfully from afar, he states that ‘They are not near my conscience’ (5.2.58).¹ Given the potential of conscience to make cowards of us all it seems appropriate that, as the play nears its climax, Hamlet is apparently untroubled by his own. Yet, despite this apparent lack of sympathy towards his enemies, Hamlet does find his conscience pricked by his recent treatment of Laertes at Ophelia’s grave:

But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause, I see
The portraiture of his. I’ll court his favours.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion. (5.2.75–80)

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Hamlet's pity for Laertes derives from the fact that they are in the same, or a similar, predicament—both are revenging sons. He uses a striking pictorial metaphor to suggest the close likeness between them, apparently describing Laertes's situation as a 'portraiture' of his own. This might look, then, like a straightforward example of emotional or situational correspondence; and yet, as René Girard points out in *A Theatre of Envy* (1991), Hamlet reverses the expected hierarchy between the self and other. We might expect Hamlet to say 'by the image of *his* cause I see the portraiture of *mine*'.² But in Hamlet's formulation, he looks back at his own 'image', as if he is seeing himself—or an image of himself—from Laertes's perspective. Hamlet becomes the other, or temporarily changes places with him. The play implies, perhaps, that moments of sympathetic 'recognition' are often about self-recognition, and that the distinction between the self and other in such moments becomes complicated or even collapses altogether.³

The idea of the other as an image of the self is further complicated by Hamlet's comments about his emotions. According to Hamlet, the 'bravery' of Laertes's grief—that is, its extravagance or pretence—put him into a 'towering passion'.⁴ In other words, Laertes's counterfeit emotions give rise to a real and intense passion in Hamlet, which is not only inspired by but also (paradoxically) more authentic than the original. Hamlet's initial assertion of similitude and resemblance gives way to competition and emulation. This intriguing passage thus raises larger questions about emotions in *Hamlet* and indeed more generally. What is the source of our emotions—do they come from within the self or are they inspired by others? Should we regard emotions as imitative, comparative, or even competitive? What is it that makes Hamlet's emotions seem more authentic than those of other fictional characters? Certainly Hamlet compares himself to various emotional and mimetic models in the course of the play, in an attempt to rouse up the right passions to be an effective revenge hero. As Girard puts it, 'Hamlet must receive from someone else, a mimetic model, the impulse that he does not find in himself'.⁵ Girard suggests that Laertes is the most important mimetic model for Hamlet: he is the character who finally inspires Hamlet to act and carry out his revenge.⁶ This is a provocative reading, but perhaps too neat for a play that resists definitive answers and interpretations, and which contains so many instances of emotional and mimetic comparability.

In this chapter I want to explore the ways in which *Hamlet* is part of a larger textual network of mimetic models, and how the play recalls other texts that are concerned with representing emotion. I examine other

works from the period that use pictorial or artistic metaphors to express sympathetic correspondence, or the relationship between the self and the other. As we shall see, such texts—including Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, and Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*—acknowledge the ways in which emotional correspondence can involve emulation as well as imitation. Moreover, these plays and poems influence each other in ways that are comparable to this curious relationship between Hamlet and Laertes, and in several cases we are left wondering which text is the original and which is the copy. In this way, the period's fascination with emotional imitation and mirroring is enacted on a textual or intertextual level. The chapter also reflects upon the difficulty of determining the emotional sources of both Hamlet and *Hamlet*. For, despite their indebtedness to other textual and emotional models, both Prince and play display an uncanny ability to appear more authentic than the originals that they imitate. My investigation also addresses wider questions regarding the nature of intersubjectivity, and suggests that understanding of, and sympathy for, the other does not derive from straightforward likeness but rather involves a recognition of difference.

I

The use of a pictorial metaphor to describe the affinity between two individuals can be found in several earlier literary and dramatic texts from the late Elizabethan period. Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* (completed c. 1580) is a vast prose romance concerned with two noble cousins, Pyrocles and Musidorus, who fall in love with Philoclea and Pamela. The two princes go off with their respective partners, but are then reunited at the start of Book 3. As they recount their adventures to one another the narrator offers the following meditation on mutuality, friendship, and emotion:

they recounted one to another their strange pilgrimage of passions, omitting nothing which the open-hearted friendship is wont to lay forth, where there is cause to communicate both joys and sorrows—for, indeed, there is no sweeter taste of friendship than the coupling of their souls in this mutuality either of condoling or comforting, where the oppressed mind finds itself not altogether miserable, since it is sure of one which is feelingly sorry for his misery; and the joyful [...] shall be sure to receive a sweet reflection of the same joy, and (as in a clear mirror of sincere goodwill) see a lively picture of his own gladness.⁷

True friends do not simply offer each other company, but rather the friend is ‘feelingly sorry for [the other’s] misery’. In other words, this pity comes ‘By or from actual personal feeling, knowledge or experience’ (*OED*, ‘feelingly’, 4a). Here we also find the vocabulary of semblance and mirroring: the friend offers a ‘lively picture’ of one’s emotional state, and a ‘sweet reflection of the same joy’. It is worth noting that the word *lively* could refer to both intense feelings (*OED*, 3b) and vivid representation (‘Of an image, picture, or description: lifelike [...] that brings the subject to life; that represents the original faithfully’ [*OED*, 4a]). The fact that Renaissance representations of emotion often refer to sympathetic individuals as ‘lively’ images points to the close affinity between concepts of sympathy and mimesis in the period.⁸ And yet the idea of the other as a ‘lively picture’ of the self remains attractive but problematic. Can it really be the same emotion that the friend feels? The vocabulary of the passage—‘reflection’, ‘mirror’, and ‘picture’—seems to imply that sympathy involves recognising oneself as well as feeling the sorrows of another.

The notion that sympathy involves self-recognition—which is hinted at in the passage above—is arguably one of the most important and suggestive insights of early modern texts concerned with emotional correspondence. This idea becomes more explicit in one of the most influential plays from the period: Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587). The play is primarily concerned with the murder of Hieronimo’s son, Horatio, and his struggle to achieve justice; although it is as much about Hieronimo’s attempts to articulate and represent his grief as it is about his desire for revenge. In one key scene, Hieronimo encounters Don Bazulto—an old man who has also lost his son:

HIERONIMO What’s here? ‘The humble supplication
Of Don Bazulto for his murdered son.’
SENEX Ay, sir.
HIERONIMO No sir, it was my murdered son,
O my son, my son, O my son Horatio!
But mine, or thine, Bazulto, be content.
Here, take my handkercher and wipe thine eyes,
Whiles wretched I in thy mishaps may see
The lively portrait of my dying self.⁹

Here Hieronimo uses the same pictorial metaphor that Sidney had used, and that Shakespeare would employ in *Hamlet*. Don Bazulto becomes a ‘lively portrait’ of Hieronimo’s grief. This phrase suggests the ways in

which contemplating the suffering of another can offer both consolation and a means of understanding one's own grief. But the comparison is more complicated than this, because Hieronimo goes on to describe the difference between their respective positions, and his shame at not having yet revenged his son's death:

See, see, O see thy shame, Hieronimo!
 See here a loving father to his son!
 Behold the sorrows and the sad laments
 That he delivereth for his son's decease! [...]
 If love express such power in poor estates—
 Hieronimo, whenas a raging sea,
 Tossed with the wind and tide, o'erturneth then
 The upper billows, course of waves to keep,
 Whilst lesser waters labour in the deep,
 Then sham'st thou not, Hieronimo, to neglect
 The sweet revenge of thy Horatio? (3.13.95–107)

Is this comparison or competition? Even though Hieronimo regards Bazulto as a 'lesser thin[g]' in social terms, he suggests that his own reaction to Horatio's death should be equal to Bazulto's 'sad laments'. Critics of the play are uncertain of the precise meaning of Hieronimo's elaborate metaphorical scheme; but one possible interpretation is that individuals from both poorer and richer 'estates'—represented by the 'upper billows' and 'lesser waters' of the sea—suffer the same emotional turmoil if they suffer great losses, even if one is more obviously visible.¹⁰ Hieronimo's recognition that he and Bazulto share a sense of loss apparently breaks down the social distinctions between them. But it is clear that Bazulto is not merely an image or copy: rather the other becomes something to emulate.¹¹

The idea of the other as an image or portrait is literalised in Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Towards the end of the poem, after she has been raped by Tarquin, Lucrece comes across a 'piece / Of skilful painting' (1366–1367) that depicts the events of the fall of Troy—one of the archetypal tragic narratives of the period.¹² This story derives from book 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas explains to Dido how Troy fell to the Greeks. Virgil was, of course, a highly important classical influence upon Shakespeare, who would have known these passages of the *Aeneid* from his Grammar school education.¹³ As Colin Burrow has written, 'What [Shakespeare]

remembered from Virgil were the outlines of stories and their affective consequences'.¹⁴ Burrow suggests that books 2 and 4 of the *Aeneid* present models of 'situated affect'—that is, they do not simply retell the story of Troy's fall, but rather represent the emotional effect of Aeneas's act of storytelling to Dido.¹⁵ Similarly the emphasis in *Lucrece* is upon the emotional impact of the Troy narrative on Lucrece. She comes to pity the figures in the painting because they are unable to give voice to their suffering, and goes on to narrate the plight of Hecuba, Priam, Hector, and Troilus. Lucrece is especially interested in the tragic figure of Hecuba, wife of King Priam, who has been murdered by Pyrrhus:

To this well-painted piece is Lucrece come,
To find a face where all distress is stelled.
Many she sees where cares have carvèd some,
But none where all distress and dolour dwelled;
Till she despairing Hecuba beheld,
 Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,
 Which bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot lies. (1443–1449)

The word 'stelled' means both fixed in position (*OED*, 2a) and portrayed or delineated (*OED*, 3).¹⁶ In other words, Lucrece seeks out the 'face' of another where distress is permanently and realistically depicted. The emotional mirroring between the pair is highlighted by the phrase 'Till she despairing Hecuba beheld', in which 'despairing' could refer potentially to Hecuba, Lucrece, or both.¹⁷ The narrator goes on to describe Lucrece's sympathetic encounter with this painted figure: 'On this sad shadow Lucrece spends her eyes, / And shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes' (1457–1458). The poem acknowledges that Hecuba is a 'shadow', in the sense of 'a portrait as contrasted with the original [...] an actor or a play in contrast with the reality represented' (*OED*, 6b). And yet, despite the fact that this is merely a representation, Lucrece 'shapes' her woes to those of Hecuba. Once again, then, Hecuba is not just a mirror or reflection of Lucrece; the verb *shapes* suggests an active process, in which Lucrece modifies her suffering to harmonise with that of the other.

Lucrece's reflections upon Hecuba's suffering lead to a blurring of the distinction between representation and reality. She tears at the deceptive Sinon with her nails, because he reminds her of Tarquin, but then remembers that she is looking at a painting:

Which all this time had overslipped her thought
 That she with painted images hath spent,
 Being from the feeling of her own grief brought
 By deep surmise of others' detriment,
 Losing her woes in shows of discontent:
 It easeth some, though none it ever cured,
 To think their dolour others have endured. (1576–1582)

Here the narrator describes Lucrece's 'deep surmise of others' detriment'—suggesting the complexity of her emotional and cognitive engagement with the characters on the painting.¹⁸ I have argued elsewhere that Lucrece's temporary absorption into the fictional world of the painting both comments upon and intensifies the way in which we respond to Shakespeare's poem. The poem warns us not to get too caught up in a work of art, as Lucrece does, but perhaps paradoxically this is what draws us further into the mimesis.¹⁹ In this way, Lucrece's act of sympathising with Hecuba reflects upon, and complicates, the rhetorical and mimetic processes of *The Rape of Lucrece* itself. I am not suggesting that readers of the poem necessarily forget that Lucrece is a fiction, but rather that there is a curious mirroring between the reader of the text and the figure of Lucrece, who sympathises with a compelling representation of a legendary character.

While the poem presents Lucrece's encounter with Hecuba as a form of productive and sympathetic mirroring, its conclusion suggests that grief can be competitive as well as consolatory. Lucrece retells the story of her ravishment to her husband, father, and other lords, before committing suicide. Having apparently learnt nothing from Lucrece's narrative, old Lucretius misreads Lucrece's young body, seeing the ravages of time upon her: 'But now that fair fresh mirror, dim and old, / Shows me a bare-boned death by time outworn' (1760–1761). Lucrece is nothing more than a 'Poor broken glass' (1758) in which Lucretius sees only his own predicament. Collatine is another image of inarticulacy, as 'The deep vexation of his inward soul / Hath served a dumb arrest upon his tongue' (1779–1780). Collatine eventually pronounces the name of Tarquin, and seems to want to make the word a physical object, as if he wants to do harm to it. However, this passion in Collatine and Lucretius gives rise to a competitiveness in their grief that is inappropriate to the occasion:

Yet sometime 'Tarquin' was pronouncèd plain,
 But through his teeth, as if the name he tore.
 This windy tempest, till it blow up rain,
 Held back his sorrow's tide, to make it more.
 At last it rains, and busy winds give o'er.
 Then son and father weep with equal strife,
 Who should weep most, for daughter, or for wife. (1786–1792)

Collatine seems to be consciously holding back his sorrow in order to appear more sorrowful—an oddly self-conscious exercise for one in his situation. This competition between Collatine and Lucretius, and the excessiveness of their mourning, is noted by Brutus, who, 'Seeing such emulation in their woe, / Began to clothe his wit in state and pride' (1808–1809). In this way, the poem offers us several different perspectives on Lucrece's woe and her relationship with others. It reminds us that, if the other is seen as a 'mirror' of the self, the identity of the other can be erased. But *Lucrece* also suggests that extreme grief can give rise to a form of emulation or rivalry, especially when characters seek to demonstrate the intensity or authenticity of their passions. This idea is explored in an even more self-conscious manner in several revenge tragedies of the period, in particular *Hamlet*.

II

We have seen, then, how Elizabethan writers used the idea of other-as-image as a way of exploring ideas of intersubjectivity and emotional correspondence. The figure of Hecuba in *Lucrece* is especially interesting in this regard because she is part of a wider tragic narrative, and not simply a mirror of Lucrece's situation. This fascination with the story of Troy may suggest that it may be more effective to seek out a narrative that corresponds to, rather than simply replicates, one's emotional state. Like Lucrece, Hamlet is also a character in search of a story to make sense of his emotions—and to help him to perform the appropriate passions for his role as revenger.²⁰ In 2.2 he asks the First Player to recite a 'passionate speech' (2.2.393); that is, one expressive of strong feeling. The speech is another version of 'Aeneas' tale to Dido' (2.2.404–405). As well as evoking the painting in *Lucrece*, Shakespeare may be recalling Marlowe's dramatisation of this episode in Act 2 of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.²¹ As various commentators have noted,

it is a highly self-conscious moment, in which a passage of affective storytelling—supposedly from another play—finds its way into *Hamlet*.²²

The first part of the speech, which is recited by Hamlet himself, offers a vivid verbal portrait of Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, who is summoned to the Trojan war to avenge his father's death. Thus, along with Hamlet and Fortinbras (and later Laertes), Pyrrhus is another revenging son, and another potential mimetic model for Hamlet. But as an emotional model Pyrrhus is ambiguous to say the least, and appears to be utterly lacking in pity and compassion: he is 'horridly tricked / With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons' (2.2.415–416).²³ The First Player continues with the speech, which describes how the 'hellish Pyrrhus' (421) momentarily pauses before killing King Priam:

[...] for lo, his sword
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam seemed i'th' air to stick.
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing. (435–440)

This moment is perhaps comforting for Hamlet, as it implies that it is acceptable for a revenge hero to pause before completing his revenge. Pyrrhus is described as a 'painted tyrant', as if he is like a static work of art; but clearly he is not a sympathetic model like the painted Hecuba. Indeed it is unclear whether Pyrrhus should be regarded as a mirror for Hamlet or Claudius—who has also killed a king. As David Scott Kastan has written, 'Pyrrhus [...] becomes a figure both of the avenging son and of the father's murderer, subverting any moral distinction in the single example which shows at once "virtue her feature" and "scorns her own image"'.²⁴ In this way, while Pyrrhus might seem to be a valuable mimetic model for Hamlet, the differences between the two figures are as significant as the similarities. Pyrrhus also underscores Hamlet's similarity to Claudius, and the ways in which revenge is 'a desperate mode of imitation'.²⁵

But if revenge tragedy is centrally concerned with imitation, as Kastan has aptly shown, then it is also a genre that is preoccupied with imitating—and performing—emotion. Hamlet seems to be aware that stirring up the right passions is a vital part of being an effective revenger; at the same time, however, he states his admiration for those 'Whose blood and judgment are so well commedled / That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger /

To sound what stop she please' (3.2.59–61). Similarly, in his advice to the players, Hamlet suggests that, 'in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give its smoothness' (3.2.4–7). It is unclear, however, whether Hamlet is able to follow his own advice about mingling passion with judgement and temperance.²⁶ Perhaps this is one reason why Hamlet seems to be more interested in the Player's account of Hecuba's piteous plight than Pyrrhus's act of vengeance: 'Say on, come to Hecuba' (2.2.458–459). The Player describes how Hecuba's grief is so great that her 'bisson rheum' (464)—her blinding tears—threaten to put out the fires of Troy. But this is her emotional response to the fall of the city. When Hecuba sees Pyrrhus killing Priam her grief is yet more extreme and affecting:

I PLAYER [...] But if the gods themselves did see her then,
 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
 In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
 The instant burst of clamour that she made,
 Unless things mortal move them not at all,
 Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
 And passion in the gods.
 POLONIUS Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears
 in's eyes. Prithee no more. (2.2.470–478)

In this final part of the Player's speech, we find that Hecuba's grief is enacted by the gods (a figured audience within the narrative), by the Player, and even by the hitherto unmoved Polonius, who a moment ago had found the speech 'too long' (456). This moment reminds us that early modern texts often attempt to elicit sympathy by figuring sympathy, and giving readers and audiences a set of emotional models to imitate.²⁷

Certainly this speech has a profound effect on Hamlet, but perhaps not the one we might have expected. Because while Lucrece forgets that she has spent her time with 'painted images' (1577), Hamlet is all too aware that the story of Hecuba is a fiction. He appears to be far more interested in the Player's capacity to imitate and experience another's suffering than Hecuba's grief:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
 Is it not monstrous that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,

Could force his soul so to his own conceit
 That from her working all his visage wanned,
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing?
 For Hecuba! (2.2.502–510)

Hamlet finds it 'monstrous' that the Player can weep for a fictional character; which perhaps recalls Hieronimo's displeasure at seeing Bazulto's response to his son's death. This is a moment when *Hamlet's* mimetic workings could potentially collapse, in the sense that this soliloquy draws our attention to the fact that Hamlet himself is a fictional character played by an actor. And yet the reverse seems to happen: rather than exposing Hamlet's fictional status, his admiration for the Player's performance produces a remarkable emotional 'reality effect'—a compelling illusion of Hamlet's internal suffering—which is an effect of this imitation.²⁸

The complexity of this moment is underlined if we consider other plays from the same period in which characters' emotions are compared to those of actors. John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (first printed 1602) has various similarities with *Hamlet*.²⁹ It is another revenge play that features a ghost; it also explores a variety of attitudes towards revenge and performing emotion. In Act 1 we have a powerful speech from Pandulpho, who—like Hieronimo—has lost his son. Pandulpho distinguishes his own authentic grief from a particular form of histrionic acting, refusing to play the role of the conventional revenger:

Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
 For my son's loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
 Or wring my face with mimic action,
 Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
 Away, 'tis apish action, player-like.³⁰

Marston's play was printed before the earliest quartos of *Hamlet* appeared, and so it is difficult to be sure which play was written first. This speech could be Marston echoing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or he could be recalling the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*, which may lie behind both texts.³¹ It seems ironic, then, that this speech is itself concerned with mimicry and imitation. Pandulpho sets up a contrast between himself

and an actor; but arguably this is not as complex as Hamlet's response to the Player's speech.³² There is a clear distinction here between 'reality' and acting: the phrase 'mimic action' implies that acting is hypocritical or mere copying; while 'apish action' similarly implies 'unreasoningly imitative' (*OED*, 'apish', 3). For Pandulpho, then, 'Player' is a pejorative term, implying one who performs a set of actions that are second-hand and possibly second-rate.³³ Similarly, the play's protagonist, Antonio, suggests that his own performance of passion will be more authentic than that of an actor: 'I will not swell like a tragedian / In forcèd passion of affected strains' (2.3.104–105).

A later dramatic work co-written by Marston contains what appears to be a more conscious and explicit allusion to *Hamlet*. In the opening scene of *The Insatiate Countess* (1613) Guido, the Count of Arsenia, expresses his disbelief that the mourning Countess—who resembles Gertrude—is now ready to woo Roberto:

GUIDO [...] what thinkest thou of this change?
 A player's passion I'll believe hereafter,
 And in a tragic scene weep for old Priam,
 When fell revenging Pyrrhus with supposed
 And artificial wounds mangles his breast,
 And think it a more worthy act to me
 Then trust a female mourning o'er her love.³⁴

Clearly the play is recalling *Hamlet* here.³⁵ But the central conceit of this speech is that the 'tragic scene' of Pyrrhus's murder of Priam is 'artificial'. The Countess's mourning is fake, like a Player's passion. Again, we have a straightforward dichotomy between inauthentic and authentic emotions. But in *Hamlet* the situation is more complex because the Player's grief—at least for Hamlet—appears to be authentic, or becomes indistinguishable from reality. Hamlet implicitly suggests that his own grief is inadequate, or inauthentic:

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
 That he should weep for her? What would he do,
 Had he the motive and the cue for passion
 That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
 Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
 Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
 The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.511–518)

Lynn Enterline writes that this speech 'poses an impertinent school-boy question about one of the humanist school's most important axioms: that only by imitating texts from the Latin past does a student become master of his own discourse and modes of self-representation'.³⁶ But what is also striking here is the way in which Hamlet's reflections upon *imitatio* enable Shakespeare to blur the distinction between representation and reality. Here Hamlet imagines a superior performance of his own part, in which the Player plays his role for him.³⁷ This implicit comparison and competition with the Player's emotions arguably creates a compelling illusion of immediacy: Hamlet seems more 'real' precisely because his emotions fall short of a fictional model.

It is even more suggestive, then, that Hamlet's reflections upon the Player's passions are themselves a reworking of various comments from other writers, including Montaigne, Quintilian, Plutarch, and Plato, who refer to the ability of actors to cry on demand, and to find themselves overcome by the emotions they perform. Quintilian describes how he has 'frequently seen tragic and comic actors, having taken off their masks at the end of some emotional scene, leave the stage still in tears. And if the mere delivery of the written words of another can so kindle them with imagined emotions, what shall *we* be capable of doing, we who have to imagine the facts in such a way that we can feel vicariously the emotions of our endangered clients?'³⁸ And, in his essay 'Of diverting and diversions', Montaigne remembers this passage from Quintilian in terms that some editors think recalls *Hamlet*:

An Orator (saith Rethorick) in the play of his pleading, shall be moved at the sound of his owne voyce, and by his fayned agitations; and suffer himself to be cozoned by the passion he representeth: imprinting a lively and essentiall sorrow, by the jugling he acteth, to transerre it into the judges [...] *Quintilian* reporteth, to have seene Comediants so farre engaged in a sorrowfull part, that they wept after being come to their lodgings: & of himselfe, that having undertaken to move a certaine passion in another, he had found himselfe surprised not only with shedding of tears, but with a palenesse of countenance, and behaviour of a man truly dejected with griefe.³⁹

Both actors and orators must allow themselves to be 'cozoned'—that is, beguiled or cheated—by their own performance. This will bring about a 'lively and essentiall sorrow' in themselves and listeners, suggesting that the imitated passion will be both lifelike and have actual existence (*OED*,

‘essential’, 1b). Harold Jenkins suggests that the phrase ‘paleness of countenance’ is echoed by Shakespeare in Polonius’s comment about the First Player: ‘Look where has not turned his colour’ (2.2.477).⁴⁰ But the idea that this passage from Montaigne is a ‘source’ of *Hamlet* is complicated by the fact that it is itself a reworking of Quintilian. This moment reminds us that emotional expression is often a ‘matter of impersonation’, and points to the difficulty of ‘locating the passions independent of the signs that may express and produce them’.⁴¹ But it also suggests that such intertextuality plays an important part in creating Hamlet’s compelling illusion of selfhood—despite, or perhaps because of, the difficulty of locating the textual ‘origin’ of his emotional models. Perhaps this is when the most powerful literary representations of emotion can arise: when a fictional character compares his or her emotions to a variety of fictional exemplars.

III

As we have seen, Hamlet’s encounter with the Player involves emulation, but with Hamlet admitting his *inferiority* to the Player when it comes to performing grief. And yet while Hamlet finds the Player’s performance of emotion—for all its rhetorical and dramatic artifice—entirely persuasive, he finds Laertes’s grief for his sister’s death in 5.1 entirely artificial. When Laertes leaps into Ophelia’s grave, he asks those present to bury her with dust to make a mountain ‘T’o’ertop old Pelion or the skyish head / Of blue Olympus’ (5.1.220–221). Hamlet is appalled by such extravagant poetics: ‘What is he whose grief / Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow / Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand / Like wonder-wounded hearers?’ (221–224). Hamlet castigates Laertes for using a rhetorician’s ‘emphasis’, and for employing a conventional ‘phrase of sorrow’.⁴² One might object that it is somewhat hypocritical for Hamlet to be worried about rhetoric, which is a key feature of revenge tragedies, including his own. But it is worth emphasising that Hamlet’s attitudes towards emotion, rhetoric, and acting never stabilise during the play. His criticism of Laertes is notable for its rhetorical extravagance:

HAMLET I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
 Could not, with all their quantity of love
 Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

CLAUDIUS Oh he is mad Laertes.
 GERTRUDE For love of God forbear him.
 HAMLET 'Swounds, show me what thou't do.
 Woo't weep, woo't fight, woo't fast, woo't tear thyself?
 Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
 I'll do't. Dost thou come here to whine?
 To outface me with leaping in her grave?
 Be buried quick with her, and so will I. (236–246)

Is this Hamlet parodying or emulating Laertes's rhetorical 'emphasis'? Hamlet notes various gestures of extreme passion that Laertes might perform—including weeping, fighting, and tearing himself—and accuses Laertes of attempting to 'outface' him, suggesting Hamlet's anxiety about being upstaged or overcome.⁴³ He goes on to construct an even more elaborate image of mountainous mourning, inviting others to throw 'Millions of acres on us', until their pile of earth makes the mythical mountain of Ossa seem 'like a wart' by comparison (248–250). This competitive bombast ends with Hamlet's promise that 'I'll rant as well as thou' (251). Hamlet is arguably at his least sympathetic in this encounter, in which he seems more concerned with outperforming Laertes than with memorialising Ophelia.⁴⁴ He implies that his own feelings are more authentic, and better expressed, than those of Laertes; but his speeches are characterised by the same rhetorical extravagance. Perhaps, then, we might see this as another instance of the play's emotional 'reality effect', in which Hamlet implicitly compares himself to, and competes with, the emotions of another fictional character.⁴⁵

Such emotional rivalry is also at work in Shakespeare's engagement with other revenge tragedies of the period, several of which suggestively resemble this encounter. At the end of Act 4 of *Antonio's Revenge*, Pandulpho reveals that his stoical attitude has been a superficial and temporary mask rather than a genuine change of heart, stating that 'Man will break out, despite philosophy'.⁴⁶ He continues: 'Why, all this while I ha' but played a part, / Like to some boy that acts a tragedy, / Speaks burly words and raves out passion' (4.5.46–49). We have already seen how Pandulpho distinguishes himself from an 'apish' player in Act 1; now he likens himself to a boy actor who performs a passionate role. This is especially ironic given that the play was originally performed by the Children of Paul's, and moreover because Pandulpho's 'part' has involved concealing his passions rather than 'rav[ing]' them out.⁴⁷ He goes on to

describe herself as ‘the miserablest soul that breathes’ (53). This assertion of Pandulpho’s exceptional misery brings out a competitiveness in Antonio:

’Slid, sir, ye lie! By th’ heart of grief, thou liest!
 I scorn’t that any wretched should survive
 Outmounting me in that superlative,
 Most miserable, most unmatched in woe.
 Who dare assume that, but Antonio? (54–58)

There is, then, a curious doubling between the emotional competition we find in *Hamlet* and in *Antonio’s Revenge*. Marston’s play appears to be competing with *Hamlet*, and specifically the scene in which Hamlet is competing with Laertes. We have seen how Hamlet worries that Laertes is trying to ‘outface’ him through his emotional behaviour; similarly Antonio thinks that Pandulpho is trying to ‘Outmoun[t]’ him. This exchange could be seen as a parodic reworking of the exchange between Hamlet and Laertes; and yet, as we have already noted, it is difficult to establish which play is imitating which. If we accept Janet Clare’s suggestion that elements of Q2 *Hamlet* may be a response to *Antonio’s Revenge*, then we could plausibly argue that the exchange between Pandulpho and Antonio prompted Shakespeare to amplify and extend the corresponding scene with Hamlet and Laertes, which is considerably briefer in the 1603 First Quarto.⁴⁸ Ultimately, however, it may be impossible to determine which text is the ‘original’, or to distinguish clearly between imitation, emulation, or parody. In this way, the emotional and rhetorical competition between the characters within the texts both exemplifies and metaphorises the authorial competition at work between the playwrights.

Such questions of textual and emotional competition also arise when we turn to the expanded version of Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was also printed in 1602. This quarto of the play advertises itself as ‘Newly corrected, amended, and enlarged with new additions of the Painters part, and others, as it hath of late been divers times acted’.⁴⁹ The authorship of these additional scenes is uncertain, although Shakespeare has recently reemerged as a viable contender.⁵⁰ Clearly the author of the scenes was seeking to refresh a popular revenge play, which may entail a degree of writerly competition or emulation. Some commentators have suggested that the author of the additions was competing with Marston,

who included a Painter scene in *Antonio and Mellida* (c. 1599; printed in 1602). But others have suggested that Marston's scene (5.1) is a parody of the Painter scene in *The Spanish Tragedy*, added to the text of *Antonio and Mellida* shortly before publication.⁵¹ Such controversies make precise dating of the Painter scene in *The Spanish Tragedy* difficult, but it seems likely that it was written around the turn of the century, and thus at the same time as *Hamlet*.⁵² Certainly the Painter scene shares with *Hamlet* an interest in mimetic and emotional comparability; it also contains some specific elements that resonate with Hamlet's encounters with both Laertes and the First Player.

Hieronimo is told that there is a painter at the door: 'Bid him come in, and paint some comfort, / For surely there's none lives but painted comfort' (Fourth Addition, 73–74). The painter reveals that he has also lost a son. However, at the start of their encounter there appears to be a competitive aspect to their mourning:

HIERONIMO How, was thy son murdered?
 PAINTER Ay sir, no man did hold a son so dear.
 HIERONIMO What, not as thine? that's a lie
 As massy as the earth: I had a son,
 Whose least unvalued hair did weigh
 A thousand of thy sons: and he was murdered.
 PAINTER Alas sir, I had no more but he.
 HIERONIMO Nor I, nor I: but this same one of mine
 Was worth a legion: but all is one. (Fourth Addition, 92–100)

Hieronimo's encounter with the Painter thus begins with a kind of emotional rivalry or competition. It does not involve a sharing of woe, but rather offers Hieronimo a means of expressing the superiority of his own love for Horatio.⁵³ Hieronimo's claim that Horatio's least valued hair outweighs 'A thousand of [the Painter's] sons' (97) echoes Hamlet's suggestion that his grief surpasses that of 'forty thousand brothers' (5.1.236). As with *Antonio's Revenge*, we have two instances of emotional competition that recall, or perhaps even compete, with each other. We should note that this is not simple imitation: the pairings in both texts are quite different, with two revenging sons (Hamlet and Laertes) and two mourning fathers (Hieronimo and the Painter). Nevertheless, there is a curious resemblance between Hamlet's agon with Laertes and Hieronimo's competition with the Painter.

The initial emulation between them soon subsides, however, as Hieronimo begins to focus on the Painter's artistry. He is fascinated by the capacity of the Painter's art to capture or represent authentic emotions: 'Canst paint a doleful cry?'; 'Seemingly, sir', says the Painter (126–127).⁵⁴ The Painter suggests that it *is* possible to paint someone who appears to be genuinely weeping, even if this is an illusion. Hieronimo asks the Painter to 'stretch [his] art' (133) and to paint a portrait of his discovery of Horatio's murder:

And then at last, sir, starting, behold a man hanging: and tottering, and tottering as you know the wind will weave a man, and I with a thrice to cut him down. And looking upon him by the advantage of my torch, find it to be my son Horatio. There you may show a passion, there you may show a passion. Draw me like old Priam of Troy, crying 'The house is a-fire, the house is a-fire as the torch over my head!' Make me curse, make me rave, make me cry, make me mad, make me well again, make me curse hell, invoke heaven, and in the end leave me in a trance; and so forth. (147–157)

Like Hamlet, Hieronimo conceives of his own emotions by comparing himself to a classical exemplar—'old Priam of Troy'—and, more specifically, imagining himself as a representation of that figure. As with the painting in *Lucrece*, this imagined painting of Troy can be read as an example of, and metaphor for, intertextual borrowing and exchange. It reminds us that paintings depicted within literary or dramatic works are often more concerned with other texts and stories than they are with actual paintings, and concerned to explore the capacity of art—whether verbal or visual—to represent the passions. But, in this particular case, the painting also reflects upon the competitive and imitative aspects of revenge tragedy as a genre, and the ways in which its characters (and authors) invoke fictive or narrative models, often drawn from classical texts. It also self-reflexively dramatises its own participation in the literary and theatrical marketplace, in the sense that the scene involves Hieronimo commissioning a new artistic work offering a 'doleful' image of his emotional state. Whether or not it was Shakespeare himself who was commissioned to write the Painter scene, it makes the relationship between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet* all the more intricate and complex. With the 1602 additions, *The Spanish Tragedy* becomes source, analogue, and perhaps also offshoot of *Hamlet*. The textual mirroring

between the revenge plays I have explored thus recalls the emotional mirroring between Hamlet and Laertes with which I began: the relationship between the textual 'original' and its imitation collapses.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that early modern representations of emotional borrowing and imitation are tied up with larger questions about literary imitation. Furthermore, the metaphors about paintings and images employed by Elizabethan authors and playwrights debate not only different models of artistic mimesis, but also different ideas about the self and the other. As we have seen, the most provocative representations of intersubjectivity come about, not when the self and other are identical, but rather when they are different. It might seem apt, then, that *Hamlet* as a text is not self-identical. The moment with which I began, in which Hamlet compares himself to Laertes using the metaphor of a portrait, is differently handled in all three texts of the play. It does not appear in the Second Quarto (1604); the speech as I quoted it appears in the 1623 Folio. But it does appear in Q1—the so-called 'bad' quarto, printed in 1603. In this version of the speech, the vocabulary of images and portraits is missing, but we do have an emphasis on the disjunction or discord between the self and other. Critics have often regarded Q1 as a poor imitation of a lost original, and lacking in artistry; but this version of the speech contains an intriguing variation on Hamlet's description of his relationship with Laertes:

Believe me, it grieves me much, Horatio,
That to Leartes I forgot myself;
For by myself methinks I feel his grief,
Though there's a difference in each other's wrong.⁵⁵

This version of Hamlet's speech emphasises that one can 'feel [another's] grief' even if his situation is different from one's own. And, unlike the Folio version, which describes a form of emotional competition between Hamlet and Laertes, this version is more optimistic about the possibility of sympathy or even empathy between them. Hamlet draws a comparison between two distinct individuals; and accordingly Laertes is not presented as an image or straightforward reflection of the self. Nevertheless, Hamlet 'thinks' that he can feel Laertes's grief, even though 'there's a

difference in each other's wrong'. This fascinating textual crux, which is itself concerned with similarity and difference, suggests that it is the variations between literary and theatrical texts where creativity can flourish; and this is consistent with the Renaissance practice of imitation, in which reproducing the work of others can lead to imaginative transformation. Yet this passage also suggests that it is the space between individual selves—whether in life or in art—where sympathy can be found.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated quotations from the play are taken from *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
2. See René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 279.
3. For a complex meditation on the relationship between the self and the other see Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). Ricoeur argues that 'the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other' (3).
4. *OED* suggests that *bravery* could mean 'Display, show, ostentation; splendour' (3a) and 'Mere show, ostentatious pretence. *Obs.*' (4).
5. Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 276.
6. See Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 277. Girard's primary focus is on mimesis and envy rather than emotion, although he does acknowledge the importance of the passions in Hamlet's desire for revenge: 'Hamlet is certainly no coward [...] his inaction, following the command of the ghost, results from his failure to muster the proper sentiments' (283). For further discussion of emulation in *Hamlet* see Vernon Guy Dickson, *Emulation on the Shakespearean Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), ch. 3.
7. Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Jean Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 168.
8. Jonathan H. Holmes considers this trope in relation to dramatic performance in "'To Move the Spirits of the Beholder to Admiration": Lively Passionate Performance on the Early Modern Stage', *Literature Compass* 14, no. 2 (2017): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12381>. Clearly, however, this term was also used to describe representations of emotion in prose and poetry from the period. Erasmus discusses the proverbial sayings 'As though in a mirror' and 'As though in a picture' in his *Adages* (see *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 33, trans. R. A. B. Mynors [Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1982], 162–163). For further discussion of Erasmus's usage of these metaphors see Brian Cummings,

- 'Erasmus and the Invention of Literature', *Erasmus Yearbook* 33 (2013): 22–54.
9. Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. J. R. Mulryne (London: A & C Black, 1989), 3.13.78–85. Quotations from the play are taken from this edition.
 10. For the alternative reading see Philip Edwards, ed., *The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), note to 3.13.102–107.
 11. My discussion here chimes with Nancy Selleck's stimulating discussion of metaphors involving 'active mirrors' in the period: 'Renaissance mirrors have an active dimension, engaging the viewer with something beyond his or her actual self-image, and in some way *adding to or changing* the self they confront [...] By presenting something *other* than the self, such mirrors mean to produce a more complex process than just self-recognition—they provoke comparison and make one aware of the similarity or difference between oneself and the model' (*The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 102–103).
 12. Quotations from Shakespeare's poetry are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). On the importance of the Troy narrative in the Renaissance see Heather James, 'Dido's Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001): 360–382; and Abigail Heald, 'Tears for Dido: A Renaissance Poetics of Feeling?' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2009).
 13. For important discussions of Shakespeare and the grammar school see Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); and Ross Knecht, "'Shapes of Grief": *Hamlet's* Grammar School Passions', *ELH* 82 (2015): 35–58. See also Marion A. Wells, "'To Find a Face Where All Distress Is Stell'd": *Enargeia*, *Ekphrasis*, and Mourning in *The Rape of Lucrece* and the *Aeneid*", *Comparative Literature* 54 (2002): 97–126.
 14. Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 61.
 15. *Ibid.*, 56.
 16. Cf. Sonnet 24: 'Mine eye hath played the painter and hath stelled / Thy beauty's form in table of my heart' (1–2).
 17. See Burrow's note to 1447: 'The participle dangles sympathetically between Hecuba and Lucrece'.
 18. The *OED* cites this passage under its fifth definition of *surmise*: 'The formation of an idea in the mind; conception, imagination' (*OED*, 5).
 19. See my *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 78–79.

20. John Lee writes that ‘the tragedy of Hamlet does not lie in the Prince’s death in the final scene. Rather it inheres in the Prince’s life, in his struggle to find an identity or story that will express him’ (*Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’ and the Controversies of Self* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000], 206). See also Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): ‘The passion [Hamlet] wants—fury—must be created *ab initio* through others’ examples. He lacks, so to speak, any first text, on to which he might map others’ stories’ (86, n. 38).
21. See James, ‘Dido’s Ear’, 377–381.
22. See, for example, Harry Levin, *The Question of ‘Hamlet’* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 138–164; Arthur Johnson, ‘The Player’s Speech in *Hamlet*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962): 21–30; and Bruce Danner, ‘Speaking Daggers’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 54 (2003): 29–62 (esp. 47–53). See also Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare*, 98–110.
23. Edwards notes that Pyrrhus was ‘renowned for his savagery and barbarity’ (note to 408).
24. David Scott Kastan, ‘“His Semblable Is His Mirror”: *Hamlet* and the Imitation of Revenge’, *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987): 113.
25. *Ibid.*, 113. See also Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 260.
26. For a recent discussion of the tension between passion and judgement in *Hamlet*—and the Renaissance more generally—see Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage: Passion’s Slaves* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), xiii–xxviii. See also Eric Levy, ‘The Problematic Relation Between Reason and Emotion in *Hamlet*’, *Renascence* 53 (2001): 83–95.
27. Marina Warner also considers the importance of empathy in this passage, although her approach is different from my own inasmuch as she emphasises the difficulty in generating identification through representing the responses of figured spectators: ‘The swollen ekphrasis solicits empathy, striving strenuously to rouse pity and fear according to the principles of classical tragedy, but through the constant references to spectators in their response, draws attention to the difficulty of doing so’ (‘“Come to Hecuba”: Theatrical Empathy and Memories of Troy’, *The Shakespeare International Yearbook* 11 [2011]: 76–77).
28. I borrow the term ‘reality effect’ from Roland Barthes; see ‘The Reality Effect’, in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141–148. Barthes is primarily interested in the way in which seemingly insignificant details can give a narrative the atmosphere of ‘reality’. But he also notes how vivid or ekphrastic

- descriptions that compare events to a picture can produce a powerful illusion of verisimilitude: 'the writer here fulfils Plato's description of an artist as a maker in the third degree, since he imitates what is already the simulation of an essence' (145). I am interested in the ways in which Hamlet's soliloquy describes his desire to imitate the Player's simulated emotions, and how this might produce a mimetic or emotional 'reality effect'.
29. See Janet Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 177–178.
 30. John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 1.5.76–80.
 31. Reavley Gair favours the theory that 'Shakespeare and Marston were working at the same time and in competition' (13), and that both were drawing upon a lost play on the Hamlet theme (the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*). See also Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life* (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), 145–149.
 32. This is the view of Harold Jenkins, who argues that Shakespeare could not have derived this passage from Marston, but that Marston could have easily derived it from Shakespeare; see the 'Introduction' to his Arden 2 edition of *Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1982), 10–11.
 33. See Kristine Steenbergh, 'Emotion, Performance and Gender in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*', *Critical Studies* 34 (2011): 109. See also Steenbergh's recent essay 'Weeping Verse: Jasper Heywood's Translation of Seneca's *Troades* (1559) and the Politics of Vicarious Compassion', *Renaissance Studies* 31 (2017): 698, which compares a passage from Heywood's *Troades* with Hamlet's response to Hecuba's suffering.
 34. John Marston and Others, *The Insatiate Countess*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 1.1.119–125. The play's authorship is a matter of debate, although critics tend to agree that Marston composed a draft of the play (including the first act), which was then revised and expanded by others. See Melchiori's 'Introduction', 12.
 35. See Charles Cathcart, *Marston, Rivalry, Rapprochement, and Jonson* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 114.
 36. Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, 133.
 37. Tanya Pollard takes a different view, arguing that the soliloquy focuses on Hamlet's competition with Hecuba: 'he implicitly competes with Hecuba's performance, which includes drowning the stage with tears, maddening the guilty murderer of her son, and amazing her audiences, both onstage and off' ('What's Hecuba to Shakespeare?', *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 [2012]: 1081).
 38. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6.2.35, vol. 3, 63.

39. Michel de Montaigne, *The essayes or morall, politike and millitarie discourses*, trans. John Florio (London: Valentine Simmes for Edward Blount, 1603), 503–504.
40. See Jenkins, longer note to 2.2.515–516 (481).
41. See Jacqueline T. Miller, ‘The Passion Signified: Imitation and the Construction of Emotions in Sidney and Wroth’, *Criticism* 43 (2001): 414.
42. See Edwards’s note to 5.1.222. See also *OED*, ‘emphasis’, 4: ‘Intensity, forcefulness; an amplification of something. *Obs.*’
43. See Peter Mercer, *‘Hamlet’ and the Acting of Revenge* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 242–243.
44. See Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph Over Reason*, 99. Edwards quotes George MacDonald’s comment: ‘Perhaps this is the speech in all of the play of which it is most difficult to get into a sympathetic comprehension’ (note to 236–238).
45. Stefan Laqué considers the encounter between Hamlet and Laertes in ‘“Not Passions Slave”: Hamlet, Descartes and the Passions’, in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 267–279. However Laqué’s reading of this encounter is more optimistic and materially inflected than my own, suggesting that it represents Hamlet’s ‘acknowledgement of the bodily basis of the passions’ and ‘an appreciation of the force and relevance of the passions’ (279).
46. This line echoes Laertes’s comment about his forbidding of his tears in 4.7: ‘The woman will be out’ (4.7.189).
47. For further discussion of stoicism and concealing emotions see Jane Rickard’s chapter, below. On the metadramatic aspects of Pandulpho’s speech see Barbara Baines, ‘*Antonio’s Revenge*: Marston’s Play on Revenge Plays’, *SEL* 23 (1983): 289.
48. See Clare, *Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic*, 181.
49. *The Spanish Tragedie* (London: Printed by W[illiam] W[hite] for T[homas] Pavier, 1602), Title Page.
50. For a discussion of the authorship of the additions, see Lukas Erne, *Beyond ‘The Spanish Tragedy’: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 119–126; and Clare, *Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic*, 186–188. See also Brian Vickers, ‘Identifying Shakespeare’s Additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* (1602): A New(er) Approach’, *Shakespeare* 8 (2012): 13–43; and Douglas Bruster, ‘Shakespearean Spellings and Handwriting in the Additional Passages Printed in the 1602 *Spanish Tragedy*’, *Notes and Queries* 60 (2013): 420–424. The fact that the additions have been generally accepted as authentically Shakespearean is indicated by their inclusion in *The New Oxford*

- Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, gen. ed. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
51. See Erne, *Beyond 'The Spanish Tragedy'*, 120–121.
 52. Clare suggests that Shakespeare may have been revising *The Spanish Tragedy* as he was working on *Hamlet* (*Shakespeare's Stage Traffic*, 186).
 53. For further discussion of representational and emotional rivalry in *The Spanish Tragedy*, see my chapter “‘Fabulously Counterfeit’: Ekphrastic Encounters in *The Spanish Tragedy*”, in *Ekphrastic Encounters: New Interdisciplinary Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. David Kennedy and Richard Meek (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).
 54. The Painter scene in Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* does contain what appears to be a parody of this exchange: Balurdo asks the Painter ‘Can you paint me a drivelling, reeling song and let the word be “Uh”?’ and the Painter responds ‘It cannot be done, sir, but by a seeming kind of drunkenness’ (*Antonio and Mellida*, ed. W. Reavley Gair [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991], 5.1.29–34).
 55. Quoted from *The First Quarto of Hamlet*, ed. Kathleen Irace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.1–4.

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‘Each Subtlest Passion, with Her Source
and Spring’: *Hamlet, Sejanus*
and the Concealment of Emotion

Jane Rickard

After his first encounter with the Ghost, Hamlet tells himself that he will forget common sayings or maxims: ‘I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past’ (1.5.99–100).¹ But, thinking of his uncle, he comes up with a ‘saw’ of his own:

O villain, villain, smiling damnèd villain!
My tables – meet it is I set it down
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I’m sure it may be so in Denmark. (1.5.106–109)

Though Hamlet immediately doubts whether he actually has hit upon a general truth or simply an observation particular to the circumstances of his country, his phrase would resonate for later readers. It even finds its way into the margins of one of the copies of Ben Jonson’s folio *Workes* (1616) held at the Huntington Library: in the first act of Jonson’s

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Roman tragedy *Sejanus*, against a speech discussing how the clients of the evil favourite ‘smile and betray’, someone has written ‘A Man may smile, and smile and be a Villain’.² Elsewhere in this copy, as in other copies, marginalia identify Jonson’s classical sources. Here the reader, whose hand seems to be eighteenth-century, appears to be proposing *Hamlet* as a source.³

This is the only instance in all of the more than 30 copies of Jonson’s collection held by the Huntington of an early reader identifying any contemporary text in their annotations, and it is striking that that text is *Hamlet*. It is a plausible connection: *Sejanus* was first performed shortly after *Hamlet* in 1603 and in this particular speech Shakespeare’s play is at least an analogue if not a source. And it is a connection that signals the interest of both plays in outward show and what it covers. That interest, in both plays, extends to the concealing of emotion, particularly anger, and develops in part through engagement with classical texts, especially Seneca’s *Medea*, which seems to have been a seminal text for exploring how and to what effect anger may be hidden. Moreover, Hamlet’s speech raises questions about how the store of past phrases and texts may be used, rejected, or added to in the exploration of present concerns, and these are questions that were also important to Jonson.

While *Sejanus* has been linked to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* the possibility of a connection with *Hamlet* has received little attention.⁴ Meanwhile, Jonson has not loomed large in the turn towards the emotions in early modern studies in which Shakespeare has, of course, been so prominent.⁵ Within this field Thomas Wright’s *The Passions of the Mind in General* has become ‘the handbook’.⁶ Had Shakespeare written a dedicatory poem praising Wright for ‘presenting, limiting, / Each subtlest passion’ one can imagine how much ink would have been spilt over it. Jonson did write this poem—close to the time of *Sejanus*—and it has gone virtually unremarked.⁷ The underrepresentation of Jonson in emotion studies is in part a result of how Jonson and Shakespeare have long been defined in relation to each other. Jonson has, by long tradition, been seen as learned, scholarly, and timebound in stark contrast to the emotionally literate, creative, and transcendent Shakespeare, a contrast which has almost always worked to Jonson’s discredit. The problems inherent in such a simplistic opposition have been recognised since the middle of the twentieth century and many scholars have been wary of returning to this pairing.⁸

Some, however, are beginning to explore the relationship between Jonson and Shakespeare in new ways. For example, Colin Burrow has highlighted the impact of Jonson on Shakespeare's legacy, suggesting that Jonson's strategy in his elegy to Shakespeare for the First Folio of presenting Shakespeare's classicism as one that 'belonged to a past age' was 'so effective that Shakespeare is only now being brought back to his rightful place within the history of English classicism'.⁹ Andrew Hadfield has considered how both writers were 'intimately concerned with the issue of lying'.¹⁰ A special issue of the journal *Shakespeare* has given a welcome reassessment of 'many of the entrenched dichotomies which have shaped previous critical appraisals of the pairing' of Shakespeare and Jonson.¹¹ David Riggs has provided a succinct account of the relationship of the two authors which emphasises how they learned from and competed with one another.¹²

Yet this new work has not tackled the question of emotion (it does not feature among the 'entrenched dichotomies' reassessed in the special issue). Riggs's essay gives as one of the 'fundamental differences between the two playwrights' how in their early comedies 'Shakespeare explores the emotional resonances' of the relationships that he depicts while Jonson favours complexity of plot. He does not qualify this assertion by considering Jonson's tragedies and other works.¹³ By considering Jonson only as a writer of comedy, Riggs builds on an assumption recently made explicit by Kathryn Prince in a brief account of emotions in early modern drama. Prince writes that Jonson, 'drawing on the Galenic notion of the humours, derives an entire dramaturgy from an approach to the emotions that he explains in the induction to his 1599 play *Every Man Out Of His Humour*', the passage in question being one that presents each person as possessed by 'Some one peculiar qualitie'.¹⁴ This narrow view of Jonson has been invoked to underscore by contrast how interested Shakespeare was in the complexity of the self; John Lee, for example, emphasises the latter's concern with 'the degree to which we may remake ourselves and our societies' by adding 'Shakespeare's plays are not Jonsonian comedies of humours'.¹⁵ As the assumption that Jonson was not particularly interested in the emotions as distinct from the humours continues to inform, and is even in some cases perpetuated by, studies of his works as well as discussions of Shakespeare so it is unsurprising that Jonson's works have barely appeared at all in studies of early modern emotion.

The present chapter takes seriously the anonymous annotator's intuition that there is an intimate and mutually illuminating relationship between *Hamlet* and *Sejanus*. The concern is less with tracing a line of influence from Shakespeare's play to Jonson's than with exploring their shared interests and challenging certain assumptions about how the two playwrights differ. In particular, the chapter argues that Jonson's tragedy is concerned with the emotions in ways that derive in part from—rather than being somehow in tension with—his profound engagement with classical literature, particularly Seneca's tragedy of anger and violence, *Medea*. The chapter brings this account of *Sejanus* into dialogue with *Hamlet*, building on recent work which has highlighted the extent to which Shakespeare also responded to the story of Medea, and underlining some of the topical concerns that the two plays share. In this way, it extends recent attempts to reconfigure the opposition between Jonson and Shakespeare, and makes the wider point that exploring the emotions, engaging with classical literature, and addressing topical issues are, for early modern authors, intertwined endeavours.

SEJANUS AND THE EMOTIONS OF POLITICS

Set in Tiberian Rome, *Sejanus* vividly portrays an oppressive and corrupt state in which a historian is put on trial for his writing and all of the virtuous characters live in fear of spies and informers.¹⁶ Though it is based on historical sources, particularly the *Annals* of Tacitus, the play is, as various critics have explored, daringly topical, evoking current debates, recent trials, and the ongoing issues of surveillance and censorship.¹⁷ In the quarto edition Jonson gives many—though not all—of his classical sources in marginal notes, explaining in the preface that he has done this 'to show my integrity in the story, and save myself in those common torturers that bring all wits to the rack' ('To the Readers', 19–21). Such strategies did not prevent him from being called before the Privy Council. It is not certain at what point in 1603 the play was first performed and whether the hostile political reaction was to this performance or to the printed version of 1605. Jonson claims in his preface that 'a second pen' was involved in the writing of the play as performed and that the printed text is a revised one; he may be either responding to trouble already caused by the staged version or trying (unsuccessfully) to prevent trouble over the printed one ('To the Readers', 31–35).¹⁸ As well as being daringly topical, *Sejanus* is an exceptionally angry play. All of the key emotion words relating to anger appear more often in this

play than in *Hamlet*: 'anger' itself appears only once there but four times here; 'wrath' also appears once there but five times here; 'fury' does not appear at all in Shakespeare's play but Jonson's uses it 13 times; and 'rage', which appears four times in *Hamlet*, occurs in *Sejanus* a striking 18 times.¹⁹ Even the destruction of the historian Cordus's books by the Senate is described as 'this rage of burning' (3.478).

Sejanus is in some ways closely aligned with the late Elizabethan and Jacobean vogue for Seneca and Tacitus. This vogue was part of a wider Neostoic movement, which sought to provide 'a practical system of ethics'.²⁰ What *Sejanus* also draws from Seneca, however, is some of its emotional energy and complexity. Stoicism has, of course, long been caricatured as advocating that the wise man should be unfeeling and imperious to all emotion.²¹ But, as Emily Wilson emphasises in her recent translation of Seneca's tragedies, 'The Stoics did not believe that all emotions should be repressed, or that all emotions were wrong. Rather, they taught that most of the feelings that trouble and disturb us in daily life are the result of false beliefs'. Seneca was deeply concerned with intense emotions, especially anger, which he refers to as 'the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions', and *Medea* exemplifies that concern.²² This Senecan play, which has not tended to be the focus of studies of his influence on early modern dramatists, gives a vivid portrayal of a violent barbarian witch who was a fascinating and troubling figure for the early moderns.²³ Medea is so enraged by the betrayal of her husband Jason, who has agreed to marry King Creon's daughter, that she poisons the bride-to-be, an act which leads in turn to the death of the King, and then murders her own children in front of their father before escaping without punishment.²⁴ Heavey suggests that Medea could have been explored as a figure for resistance to tyranny, but was used instead 'to demonstrate the horrors of disobedience and rebellion'.²⁵

Jonson, like Shakespeare, engages with the Medea story in rather more subtle and ambivalent ways. Seneca's play is reworked at one of the key junctures of *Sejanus*. At the end of the first act Sejanus speaks in soliloquy. He has just been publicly assaulted by Drusus, the Emperor's son. Rather than retaliate, he resolves to conceal his anger at this literal blow and thus achieve a fuller revenge:

He that with such wrong moved can bear it through
 With patience and an even mind knows how
 To turn it back. Wrath, covered, carries fate:
 Revenge is lost, if I profess my hate. (1.576–579)

The same sentiment appears early in Seneca's play as part of the nurse's advice to Medea:

Who'er has dumbly borne hard blows with patient and calm soul, has been able to repay them; it is hidden wrath that harms; hatred proclaimed loses its chance for vengeance.²⁶

Though Jonson reworks the nurse's advice as self-address, the words retain the quality of a truism (or, to use Hamlet's term, 'saw') as Sejanus reflects in the third person on how to proceed. Such a direct and sustained allusion seems likely to have been identifiable for some spectators and readers, but, as we shall consider further below, Jonson does not acknowledge this debt to Seneca in his marginal notes. This 'hidden wrath' will drive Sejanus for the rest of the play and, at least for the learned, he has been identified with the dangerous, deceptive and destructive figure of Medea.

It is not, however, only the villainous characters who conceal their emotions in Jonson's play. Just before the encounter of Drusus and Sejanus, the virtuous characters had been counselling each other to restrain their emotional responses in the face of Sejanus's elevation:

CORDUS	Great Pompey's theatre was never ruined Till now, that proud Sejanus hath a statue Reared on his ashes.
ARRUNTIUS	Place the shame of soldiers Above the best of generals? Crack the world! And bruise the name of Romans into dust, Ere we behold it!
SILIUS	Check your passion. (1.542–547)

Passion is dangerous as we quickly see in Drusus, who had not been part of that counsel. When Sejanus walks into Drusus and then tells him to give way the Emperor's son strikes the favourite in anger: 'Give way, Colossus? Do you lift? Advance you? / Take that!' (*Drusus strikes him*) (1.564–565). His angry act may be justified by the villainous favourite's behaviour but it leads to the wrath that Sejanus will hide, and Drusus will be murdered before the end of the next act. The first act is thus setting up an ethical debate about how controlling or concealing emotion may be a strategy for achieving vengeance but may also be necessary for survival.

That debate continues across the play. Gallus advises Agrippina, widow of Germanicus, 'You must have patience' (4.1). She retorts 'I must have vengeance first' (2), but eventually seems to be persuaded, telling her sons 'though you do not act, yet suffer nobly' (74). Sabinus also affirms that Agrippina and her sons 'must be patient; so must we' (3.127). Cordus the historian is praised by his friends during his trial not only for speaking 'Freely' but because he 'is not moved with passion' (3.461–462). He will be put to death but his calmness ensures that he is able to give a powerful defence of historical writing first. Conversely, Silius, who had advised Arruntius 'check your passion', will in his trial reject the 'patience' that Sejanus recommends to himself and others caution in Agrippina. Specifically, he rejects it as un-Roman:

AFER	It shall appear to Caesar, and this Senate, Thou hast defiled those glories with thy crimes –
SILIUS	Crimes?
AFER	Patience, Silius.
SILIUS	Tell thy mule of patience! I'm a Roman. (3.165–168)

Silius too meets an untimely end. But, thwarting those who falsely accuse him, he makes the rational choice of killing himself, and this is a death that his friends welcome as honourable. Arruntius himself continues to fail to check his passion; we are told that he 'Cannot contain himself' (2.407). He survives but only because of his usefulness to the regime (Sejanus advises Tiberius to 'preserve him' because 'His frank tongue, / Being lent the reins, will take away all thought / Of malice in your course against the rest' [3.498–500]). Thus the virtuous characters do not entirely repress their emotions or express them only in moderation, but they are true to the Stoic ideal that emotion should result from true apprehension of virtue and vice—they get angry when there is good reason to get angry. Their emotions are, however, dangerous and susceptible to being exploited by others.

This emphasis on the struggle of the virtuous characters to control and conceal their emotions is not simply a way of underlining their political impotence.²⁷ It is also part of the play's interrogation of what role emotions do and should play in politics. The villains who ultimately triumph have more control over their emotions than does Sejanus who is driven not only by anger but also, increasingly over the course of the play, by pride. These intense emotions make Sejanus an even more

Senecan character: as his first soliloquy draws on *Medea* so part of his second, in which he refers to ‘my incensèd rage / Whose fury shall admit no shame or mean’ (2.148–149), and part of his last, in which he exclaims ‘I feel my advancèd head / Knock out a star in heav’n!’ (5.8–9) draw on *Thyestes*. Sejanus’s emotions make him vulnerable to an even more sinister character: Macro, the man hired by the duplicitous Tiberius to spy on and undermine his erstwhile favourite. The Emperor understands Macro’s particular skills, describing him as one who: ‘hath studied / Affections, passions, knows their springs, their ends, / Which way, and whether they will work’ (3.695–697). These lines may also reflect Jonson’s own study: they echo his response to Wright’s *The Passions of the Mind* in his dedicatory poem which praises how the book presents ‘Each subtlest passion, with her source and spring’ (l.7). Macro’s clinical understanding of human nature allows him to toy with Sejanus who, not realising how he is being misled, exclaims ‘You take pleasure, Macro, / Like a coy wench, in torturing your lover’ (5.360–361). At Sejanus’s trial Macro (whose behaviour in this scene is Jonson’s invention, not based on historical sources) asserts that no one should ‘take compassion of [Sejanus’s] state’, makes the brutal suggestion that it would be fit to ‘tread his brains / Into the earth’ and uses a telling formulation: ‘If I could lose / All my humanity now, ’twere well to torture / So meriting a traitor’ (5.659–663). It is particularly through Macro that the play is exploring a double bind: to be subject to one’s emotions makes it difficult to act rationally and leaves one vulnerable to men such as he, but to have total control of those emotions is to be as devoid of humanity as he is.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the cold Macro is the ‘eager multitude’ (5.741), which responds to the downfall of Sejanus with unbridled fervour. Terentius describes how:

They filled the Capitol and Pompey’s Cirque;
Where, like so many mastiffs, biting stones,
As if his statues now were sensitive grown
Of their wild fury, first they tear them down. (5.748–751)

Like dogs, these people attack the inanimate statues as though they are ‘capable of sensation’ (and we might note that this is one of the first usages of ‘sensitive’ in this way).²⁸ When they finally manage to seize Sejanus’s dead body they tear it into pieces in a frenzy of ‘violent rage’,

'malice', 'joy', 'wrath', and 'hatred', and are 'quite transported with their cruelty' (5.789–814).²⁹ The mob thus gives us the least proportional emotional response in the play and the fullest expression of the wild emotion found in Seneca.

By contrast, the virtuous characters—or at least those who survive—are able to recognise that the punishment of Sejanus at the end of the play is excessively cruel. Arruntius suggests that Sejanus has been treated 'inhumanely' (5.707), a recent coinage which underlines the difference between the animalistic mob and those characters who have not lost all their humanity. Terentius begins his account by addressing Arruntius and others as:

O you whose minds are good,
 And have not forced all mankind from your breasts,
 That yet have so much stock of virtue left
 To pity guilty states, when they are wretched:
 Lend your soft ears to hear and eyes to weep
 Deeds done by men beyond the acts of furies. (5.735–740)

Terentius is an ally of Sejanus so his speech could be read as a cynical attempt to manipulate his listeners. Yet he is not the most corrupt of the favourite's followers and does uphold certain conventional morals (in act five he counsels Sejanus to listen to heaven, advice that he repeats in the final, sententious, speech of the play). His plea is given emotional force as it aligns virtue with compassion. 'Mankind' here appears to mean 'human feeling' (*OED*, 2b) and it is the only example that the *OED* gives of the usage of the word in this way; again Jonson is trying to expand the available vocabulary for representing feeling. Nuntius, the messenger who continues the tale, also asks 'begin your pity' (5.816). He describes the brutal treatment of Sejanus's young children, movingly emphasising that their 'tenderness of knowledge, unripe years, / And childish silly innocence was such / As scarce would lend them feeling of their danger' (825–827). Moreover, his account reminds us of the peculiar qualities of Macro: delivering Sejanus's young daughter to be raped by the hangman so that she is no longer a 'virgin immature' and may legally be put to death, Macro is 'wittily and strangely cruel' (832–833).

These appeals for compassion are true to the spirit of Seneca's essay *On Anger*, which ends by exhorting 'so long as we draw breath, so long as we live among men, let us cherish humanity'.³⁰ But they also diverge

significantly from Seneca's description of pity in *On Mercy*. This essay maintains that pity is the 'failing of a weak nature that succumbs to the sight of others' ills' and that 'no sorrow befalls the wise man; his mind is serene'. Such a position is easy to misrepresent and Seneca is at pains to point out that he is not advocating heartlessness: 'All else which I would have those who feel pity do, he will do gladly and with a lofty spirit; he will bring relief to another's tears, but will not add his own'.³¹ Arruntius reflects Seneca's position at the end of the play when he tells 'you things / That stand upon the pinnacles of state' that 'he that lends you pity is not wise' (5.875–876, 879). But this character is, as Chetwynd suggests, problematised as a moral spokesman, and the play gives much more rhetorical force to the appeal of Terentius.³² Moreover, Lepidus, even while like a true Stoic disparaging pity as pointless, marvels that none should 'lend so much / Of vain relief to [Sejanus's] changed state as pity!' He appears to be moved by the accounts of Terentius and Nuntius, interjecting with such exclamations as 'O popular rage!', 'Alas!', and 'What can be added?' (5.701–702, 758, 780, 815). *Sejanus* warns not only against being swept along by uncontrolled emotion like the mob but also against being 'strangely' untouched by emotion like Macro. Spectators and readers are left to adjudicate as to the value of pity and as to whether feeling pity, however politically ineffectual it may be, is part of retaining one's humanity.

The extent of Jonson's concern with the emotions in *Sejanus* may have been obscured in part by the tendency to reduce Stoic philosophy to the idea of emotional repression, along with a wider lack of recognition of the depth of his engagement with Seneca. Ironically, however, Jonson himself is also responsible for this oversight: the extensive notes in the quarto edition of *Sejanus* cite several of Seneca's philosophical writings (*On Benefits*, *To Marcia: On Consolation*, *On the Happy Life*, *On Tranquillity of Mind*, and *Natural Questions*) but none of his plays.³³ Perhaps it was Jonson's defensive strategy of emphasising the historical accuracy of *Sejanus* that led him to underplay such literary sources as *Medea*. Perhaps he also counted on some of his early readers sharing his deep knowledge of classical literature and being able to recognise the allusions. In another of the Huntington's copies of Jonson's 1616 *Folio Workes* a seventeenth-century reader has identified eight allusions to Seneca's plays (including in Sejanus's soliloquy at the end of act one).³⁴ It seems unlikely that such readers would have seen Jonson as uninterested in the workings of the passions.

Most modern readers, of course, lack such classical knowledge, and their responses are shaped by editorial and critical traditions which, in a circular way, reinforce the assumption that Jonson was not especially interested in the emotions. One example of editorial glossing may underline the point. In the following passage Arruntius is reacting to a long speech in which Tiberius feigns humility and to the enthusiastic response of the Emperor's sycophantic followers:

ARRUNTIUS	Let me be gone!
	Most felt and open, this!
CORDUS	Stay.
ARRUNTIUS	What, to hear more cunning, and fine words With their sound flattered, ere their sense be meant? (1.505–507)

'Feel' has, ever since it entered the language, been a complex verb: the *OED*'s first definition is 'To have a sensation, impression, perception, or emotion'. The Revels edition, however, glosses 'felt' in this passage as 'perceived'; the Cambridge edition glosses it as 'palpable'. One suspects that an editor of Shakespeare would not have been so quick to close down the ambiguity here: Arruntius is not just observing that the duplicity of Tiberius is obvious; he is reacting with outrage. In such ways, long-standing traditions of editing and interpreting Jonson's works have made it harder for us to appreciate that his characters do not just perceive; they also feel in an emotional sense.

HAMLET AND SEJANUS

If Shakespeare's interest in the classics was for a long time nearly as unappreciated as Jonson's interest in the emotions, that neglect has now been addressed. Shakespeare's classicism has been the subject of a number of important recent studies, including those concerned with emotion, such as Lynn Enterline's *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion*.³⁵ *Hamlet's* engagement with the conventions of Senecan revenge tragedy is well-known; indeed, Shakespeare even points to it himself by having Polonius namedrop Seneca as he comments on the versatility of the travelling players (2.2.366). And Shakespeare does much more than rework conventions and make overt references: as Colin Burrow argues, Seneca's influence on Shakespeare is 'extensive but [...] elusive', taking the form of imaginatively reworked situations, moods and images rather than

parallel passages.³⁶ Burrow points out that *Hamlet* incorporates moments of ‘Senecan’ rhetoric which are almost comically undercut by Hamlet’s non-Senecan actions, adding that this is ‘part of the pulse’ of the play.³⁷ Such self-conscious responses to Senecan drama give the illusion that it is the characters rather than just their creator who have read the classical author.

Shakespeare was familiar with the story of Medea, which, as noted above, was found in Ovid as well as in Seneca. In 2 *Henry VI*, for example, Young Clifford describes what he would do to a child of the house of York to avenge the killing of his father as follows: ‘Into as many gobets will I cut it / As wild Medea young Absyrtis did’.³⁸ Recounted in Ovid, *Tristia*, 3.9, this part of the Medea story describes her killing her own brother in order to escape her father; Young Clifford’s words thus hint at how families involved in civil wars destroy themselves. Shakespeare’s most well-known use of Medea’s story, again in Ovid’s version, is in *The Tempest* where Prospero’s description of the magical power that he is giving up at the end of the play (5.1.41–50) recalls Medea’s account of her control over the natural world in book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*.³⁹ Other engagements with the story in Shakespeare have, as Heavey’s book-length study of Medea in early modern literature argues, been less well recognised. Maintaining that though Shakespeare ‘seldom refers to her directly, his tragedies flirt with the exciting potential of the destructive and vengeful Medea-figure’, Heavey focuses on Tamora (*Titus Andronicus*) and Lady Macbeth.⁴⁰ Yet not even Heavey’s book considers the relationship between *Hamlet* and the Medea story, let alone the triangular relations among these texts and *Sejanus*.

The nurse’s advice to Medea to hide her wrath in order to achieve vengeance, found in Seneca’s *Medea* not in Ovid’s surviving works, resonates in Claudius’s advice to Laertes. When the young man returns to Denmark he is ‘incensed’ at the killing of Polonius, proclaiming ‘That drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard’ (4.5.127, 118) and asserting that he ‘dare[s] damnation’ to get his revenge (133). Claudius eventually persuades him that in order to achieve the revenge he desires he must bear the wrong patiently. The idea of patience as strategy, which, as we have seen, is introduced by the nurse in *Medea* and echoed by Sejanus, is repeatedly invoked by Claudius:

Strengthen your patience in our last night’s speech;
We’ll put the matter to the present push.

[...]

An hour of quiet shortly shall we see,
Till then in patience our proceeding be. (5.1.261–262, 265–266)

In this way, the King is able to 'calm' what he refers to as Laertes's 'rage' (4.7.192) and set up the swordfight in which Laertes will, however unsatisfactorily, get his revenge. We might also note that Laertes uses poison as does Medea and that in both plays the poison kills more than its intended target. For any audience members who recognised these echoes of the Medea story, it makes Laertes a still more ambivalent figure, underlining that he is not only an avenger but also, at least briefly, a political challenger who could be viewed as an enemy to the monarchy or as a figure for resistance to tyranny.

These ideas of anger and patience recur elsewhere in the play too. The Prince appears angry in the closet scene with Gertrude, prompting her to advise him 'Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper / Sprinkle cool patience' (3.4.122–123). We might note that his anger is in part, like that of Medea, at a second marriage (in this case of a mother rather than of a husband). With Claudius Hamlet hides any anger that he feels—or is inciting himself to feel—as he deliberates his revenge. The irony is that he shows all too much 'patience'. Burrow suggests that "If only I could be like Medea or Atreus" is part of Hamlet's ambition' and part of his problem that 'he can't simply re-enact a Senecan past'.⁴¹ Burrow continues by focusing on Hamlet's allusion to Atreus in his 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' soliloquy. Yet Medea may be an even more important figure for Hamlet: as Christopher Tilmouth points out in his account of Seneca's play, Medea, like Hamlet, struggles to sustain her fury. 'Medea's commitment to vengeful wrath is', he writes, 'as fitful as it will later be in Hamlet'.⁴² Moreover, the way in which Gertrude's advice to her son in 3.4 parallels Claudius's advice to Polonius's son in 4.7 and 5.1 creates a rich set of connections, linking Hamlet and Laertes via the figure of Medea, and hinting at how excessive and destructive the ultimate revenge of both will be. Seneca's play thus appears to be, whether directly or indirectly, one influence of many on Shakespeare's play. This relationship has received little attention from editors of *Hamlet*, reflecting Burrow's wider observation that Shakespeare's editors have been 'astonishingly reluctant to discuss Seneca'.⁴³

Hamlet's Senecan emphasis on being patient and concealing emotion extends, as it does in *Sejanus*, into a wider concern with controlling speech. The Prince's lament 'break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue' (1.2.159) is echoed in Polonius's advice to Laertes, 'Give thy thoughts no tongue' (1.3.59). These lines are recalled in Jonson's play when Livia (wife of Drusus and complicit in his murder) observes that 'The thoughts be best are least set forth to show' (2.120).⁴⁴

In *Hamlet* as in *Sejanus*, this is advice that villains also heed. Claudius, like Tiberius, makes public displays of mourning and filial loyalty while keeping his deeds and intentions hidden. Following the death of Drusus the duplicitous Emperor appears in public claiming to be ‘in so fresh a grief’ (3.43). The agonised response of Arruntius could equally be an articulation of Hamlet’s frustration at Claudius’s unknowability: ‘the space, the space / Between the breast and lips’ (3.96–97). Like *Sejanus*, *Hamlet* is exploring the ethics of hiding, expressing, and feigning emotions.

Hamlet is, of course, like the virtuous characters in Jonson’s tragedy, subject to spies and informers, evoking in ways comparable to *Sejanus* the late Elizabethan world of State-sponsored surveillance.⁴⁵ The dramatic situation of 3.1, in which the audience sees Claudius and Polonius spy on a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia which they have orchestrated, is echoed in the fourth act of *Sejanus* when two of the villain’s agents spy on a conversation between Sabinus and one of their informers to see if he can be induced to say anything incriminating. Claudius may assert that he and his courtier are ‘Lawful espials’ concerned only to find out if Hamlet suffers for ‘th’affliction of his love or no’ (*Hamlet*, 3.1.32, 36–37), but the King may also, like Sejanus’s spies, be looking for ‘words of danger’ (*Sejanus*, 4.96). In both plays this kind of surveillance creates an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship. Arruntius again sounds like Hamlet when he asks himself ‘May I think, / And not be racked?’ (4.304–305). But where the Prince’s soliloquy in 3.1 expresses fear of being tormented by dreams (‘in that sleep of death what dreams may come’ [3.1.66]) Arruntius’s next words reveal that his concern is with self-exposure: ‘What danger is’t to dream? / Talk in one’s sleep?’ (4.305–306). The continuation of the line retrospectively attaches to Arruntius’s first rhetorical question a sense that to think is not only to suffer mentally but to risk being subjected to the physical torture of the rack.⁴⁶ Thus comparing the two plays gives a different perspective on Hamlet, emphasising that for him too thoughts and dreams may be not only inwardly tormenting but dangerously vulnerable to scrutiny.

The characters of Shakespeare’s play are also to some extent subject to the mood and behaviour of the people. As in *Sejanus*, it is the main villain of the play against whom the anger of the crowd is most directed. Here, however, the crowd is described by the villain himself. Claudius claims that Hamlet cannot be subjected to ‘the strong law’ because ‘He’s loved of the distracted multitude, / Who like not in their judgement, but their eyes’ (4.3.3–5), a contemptuous description echoed in *Sejanus*.

While we might suspect that Claudius is shaping the narrative to his own ends the suggestion that the people are disorderly and quick to 'like' is given credence by their celerity in rallying behind Laertes on his return. This time it is a messenger who describes the crowd to Claudius with horror:

The ocean, overpeering of his list,
 Eats not the flats with more impitious haste
 Than young Laertes in a riotous head
 O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord,
 And, as the world were now but to begin,
 Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
 The ratifiers and props of every word,
 They cry 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king'. (4.5.99–106)

The metaphor of the ocean, looking over and thus rising above its boundary, powerfully suggests that the people having escaped their usual places are a dangerous and destructive force, while 'impitious' appears to be a Shakespearean coinage meaning 'pitiless'.⁴⁷ Laertes is pitilessly overwhelming Claudius's officers with the disordered people who have risen above their station to defy tradition and choose this young man as King. This is for Claudius—and presumably for many in Shakespeare's England—a frightening glimpse of the 'wild' emotion that Seneca describes and of the potential power of the mob. The crowd's violent and pitiless mood forms a striking link with *Sejanus*. Unlike in that play, however, there is no counterbalancing plea for compassion from any other characters at the end of the play, but simply a telling haste that the dead bodies be put on view and their stories told 'Even while men's minds are wild' (5.2.373). Here the angry mob is not subjected to moral judgement but is simply to be subdued to prevent further 'plots and errors' (374).

Many of the connections between *Sejanus* and *Hamlet* explored in this chapter seem likely, when we consider the early performance history of the two plays, to have been apparent to early audiences, and to both playwrights. For both plays were performed at the Globe by the King's men, probably within three years of each other. Richard Burbage, who, of course, played Hamlet, also appeared in *Sejanus*, probably taking the title role. More strikingly still, Shakespeare himself appears in the list of 'principal tragedians' which Jonson appends to his play in his

1616 *Workes*. Critics have posited that Shakespeare played Tiberius, the Emperor who outdeceives Sejanus.⁴⁸ While seeing Shakespeare's innovative and self-conscious revenge tragedy may have helped to inspire Jonson it is equally possible that *appearing* in Jonson's exploration of political scheming, public discontent, and personal betrayal inspired Shakespeare in turn. As Burrow puts it, 'It would be strange to suppose that [Shakespeare] simply recited his lines and then went home to bed afterwards'. He suggests that Jonson's play, and the new fashion for neo-stoic thought of which it was part, led to Shakespeare experimenting 'with what might be called British Senecanism' in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.⁴⁹ Encountering *Sejanus* may also have encouraged Shakespeare to return to the subject of Rome in *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

We can, then, see Shakespeare and Jonson as in productive dialogue with each other's work, and with other influential texts of mutual interest, rather than in opposition or contrast. Developing recent critical insights into how early modern understandings of emotion were informed by classical thought in relation to Jonson opens up an important dimension of this author's work and, in turn, a further significant window into early modern emotion. Moreover, the comparison reveals that there are ways in which it is *Sejanus* rather than *Hamlet* that asks questions about emotions that are urgent now: can we react proportionately to wrongs committed against us? Can we pity our enemies? Can we preserve our humanity in inhumane times? As bringing the two plays into dialogue highlights that the concerns of *Sejanus* extend further beyond its own time than is often recognised so this approach also highlights some of the ways in which *Hamlet* is of that time, engaging with Senecan ideas that were current and resonating with concerns about surveillance that were pressing. Instead of overstating the topicality of the one and the transcendence of the other we can see both as complex texts in which classical models, topical issues, and ongoing human concerns give shape and meaning to each other.

NOTES

1. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards, updated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). All subsequent references are to this edition.
2. Jonson, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London: William Stansby, 1616), Huntington Library shelfmark 606579, 361. I explore such early

- annotations further in a forthcoming essay on 'Seventeenth-century readers of Jonson's 1616 *Works*'. The speech in question may be found in Tom Cain (ed.), *Sejanus*, in David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (gen. eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 2, 1.22–41. All subsequent references to Jonson's works are to this edition (hereafter *CWBJ*) unless otherwise specified.
3. I am grateful to Vanessa Wilkie, curator of manuscripts at the Huntington, for discussion of the dating of the hand.
 4. See Edward Pechter, 'Julius Caesar and *Sejanus*: Roman Politics, Inner Selves and the Powers of the Theatre', in *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Essays in Comparison*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 60–78; Ian Donaldson, "'Misconstruing Everything": *Julius Caesar* and *Sejanus*', in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 88–107; and Maurice Hunt, 'Jonson vs. Shakespeare: The Roman Plays', *Ben Jonson Journal* 23 (2016): 75–100.
 5. A quick glance at some important recent studies in the field makes the point: Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (eds.), *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) refers only once to Jonson (92); Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (eds.), *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015) has just two passing references (29, 183); and Jonson does not appear at all in the index of Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
 6. Erin Sullivan, 'The Passions of Thomas Wright: Renaissance Emotion across Body and Soul', in *The Renaissance of Emotion*, 25.
 7. Jonson's poem, 'To the Author', appeared in the second edition of *The Passions of the Mind* in 1604. It is quoted from *CWBJ*, vol. 2, 501, ll. 6–7. Interest in the poem has largely been confined to the possibility that Wright was the priest who converted Jonson to Catholicism (see note, 501).
 8. For a more detailed account of this critical history see James Loxley and Fionnuala O'Neill Tonning, 'Significant Others: On the Comparison of Shakespeare and Jonson', *Shakespeare* 12 (2016): 335–337.
 9. Colin Burrow, 'Shakespeare', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume II (1558–1600)*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 617.
 10. Andrew Hadfield, 'Jonson and Shakespeare in an Age of Lying', *Ben Jonson Journal* 23 (2016): 52. This issue of the *Ben Jonson Journal* is a

- special issue devoted to Jonson and Shakespeare, and includes the article by Maurice Hunt cited above.
11. Loxley and O'Neill Tonning, 'Significant Others', 336.
 12. David Riggs, 'Ben Jonson' in *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography*, ed. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 186–198.
 13. Riggs, 'Ben Jonson', 186. Riggs considers the relations between the early comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare then moves ahead to Jonson's later comedies and Shakespeare's romances, treating the latter's turn to tragedy in the first decade of the seventeenth century as a point of divergence (193) and making no reference to *Sejanus*.
 14. Kathryn Prince, 'Drama', in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 93. This collection has only two further references to Jonson (61, 73).
 15. John Lee, 'Shakespeare, Human Nature and English Literature', *Shakespeare* 5 (2009): 184.
 16. These characters are sometimes grouped together as Germanicans and Stoics but, as Penelope Geng emphasises, 'the Germanicans are not interchangeable' and the view that they, particularly Arruntius, take of Stoic philosophy shifts over the course of the play ("He Only Talks": Arruntius and the Formation of Interpretive Communities in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*', *Ben Jonson Journal* 18 (2011): 131). The present essay uses the term 'virtuous characters' to reflect the differentiation of this group from Tiberius, Sejanus, and their followers, but this is not to imply that the extent and nature of this 'virtue' is presented as uniform or unquestionable.
 17. On the question of Jonson's fidelity to his historical sources see A. Richard Dutton, 'The Sources, Text, and Readers of *Sejanus*: Jonson's "Integrity in the Story"', *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 181–198. On the play's concern with free speech see Cynthia Bowers, "I Will Write Satires Still in Spite of Fear": History, Satire and Free Speech in Jonson's *Poetaster* and *Sejanus*', *Ben Jonson Journal* 14 (2007): 153–172; and Tom Cain, 'Jonson's Humanist Tragedies', in *Ben Jonson and the Politics of Genre*, ed. A. D. Cousins and Alison V. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 162–189. On its engagement with current political, religious, and legal debates see Peter Lake, 'From *Leicester His Commonwealth* to *Sejanus His Fall*: Ben Jonson and the Politics of Roman (Catholic) Virtue' in *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England*, ed. Ethan H. Shagan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 128–161.
 18. For further discussion see Cain (ed.), *Sejanus*, Introduction, 198–202 and Philip J. Ayres (ed.), *Sejanus*, Revels (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), Introduction, 16–22.

19. The word counts for these terms in *Hamlet* are the same in F and Q2.
20. See J. H. M. Salmon, 'Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England' in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 169. Salmon briefly discusses *Sejanus* (178–180).
21. Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* (1511), for example, mocks the Stoics in such terms. See Jill Kraye, 'Stoicism in the Renaissance from Petrarch to Lipsius', *Grotiana* 22 (2001): 21–24, esp. 30–31.
22. Seneca, *Six Tragedies*, trans. Emily Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Introduction, xv–xvi. Seneca is quoted from his essay *On Anger* in Seneca, *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1928), I, 107.
23. On the lack of critical attention to Seneca's *Medea* see Katherine Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea: Medea in English Literature, 1558–1688* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 58. Heavey is particularly concerned with how the *Medea* story is used in the period to explore the conduct of women.
24. Such details made translators and compilers of Seneca's plays concerned to defend the morality of these works. Thomas Newton, for example, maintains that Seneca '*sensibly, pithily, and bytingly layeth downe the guerdon [requitall] of filthy lust, cloaked dissimulation & odious treachery*', that last list of themes illustrating Seneca's appeal for dramatists such as Jonson and Shakespeare (Seneca, *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*, compiled by Thomas Newton [London, 1581], Preface, sig. A4r). *Medea*'s story could be found in Ovid's *Heroides*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Tristia*, and Euripides's *Medea*, as well as in Seneca (whose play may itself have been influenced by a lost drama by Ovid), as well as in many subsequent reworkings.
25. Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea*, 19.
26. Seneca, *Medea*, ll. 150–154 in *Seneca's Tragedies*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1917), vol. I.
27. The inability of the virtuous characters to resist the regime has been the subject of considerable critical debate. Dutton, among others, has argued that these 'Germanicans and Stoics' are presented as too passive, lamenting the corrupt regime but failing to take action or 'to construct a viable alternative' ('The Sources, Text, and Readers of *Sejanus*', 189). Ali Chetwynd maintains that the play satirises Arruntius for his lack of self-awareness, for getting most of his predictions wrong, and for inadvertently assisting Tiberius and Sejanus through his simplistic moralising ('"He That Lends You Pity Is Not Wise": Rereading *Sejanus* for Pity and Terror', *Ben Jonson Journal* 14 [2007]: 43–60). For Lake, however, the

- play reflects the view that subjects have no legitimate recourse to active resistance against their ruler ('From *Leicester His Commonwealth* to *Sejanus His Fall*', esp. 148).
28. See note to 5.750.
 29. While Jonson is following historical sources, this description of the actions of the mob also recalls the depiction of the plebeians in *Julius Caesar* who, fired up by Antony, attack Cinna the poet crying 'Tear him to pieces' (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. Marvin Spevack, updated ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 3.3.26).
 30. Seneca, *Moral Essays*, I, 355. Jonson had evidently read this essay and draws on it in *Sejanus* (5.576).
 31. Seneca, *Moral Essays*, I, 439, 441.
 32. On Arruntius see note 27, above.
 33. For discussion of Jonson's interests in Seneca's philosophical writings as suggested by the annotations in a copy that survives from his library see Robert C. Evans, 'Jonson's Copy of *Seneca*', *Comparative Drama* 25 (1991): 257–292.
 34. Jonson, *Workes* (1616), Huntington Library shelfmark 499968. This reader has written quotations from and references to various works by Seneca in the margins on pages 373, 377, 380, 391, 392, 403, 437. The folio lacks the marginal notes that Jonson had provided in the quarto but the sources that this reader identifies are, as noted above, not simply those that had been given in that earlier edition. For an overview of the nearly 250 source identifications made in this copy of Jonson's *Workes* see James Riddell, 'Seventeenth-Century Identifications of Jonson's Sources in the Classics', *Renaissance Quarterly* 28 (1975): 204–218.
 35. Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
 36. Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 165. For Seneca's influence on Shakespeare see also Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor (eds), *Shakespeare and the Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. Chs 8 and 9; Jessica Winston, 'English Seneca: Heywood to *Hamlet*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485–1603*, ed. Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 472–487; and Curtis Perry, 'Seneca and the Modernity of *Hamlet*', *Illinois Classical Studies* 40 (2015): 407–429.
 37. Colin Burrow, 'Shakespeare', 611. See also Gordon Braden's essay on 'Tragedy' in the same volume, which acknowledges that while the 'relevance of Senecan drama to Shakespeare's work [...] does not need to be overstated' it 'may have aspects and details still to be revealed' (389).

38. Shakespeare, *2 Henry VI*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.2.58–59.
39. See, among others, Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Methuen, 1954), 147–150; Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 287–288; Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 249–254; Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 130–131; and Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea*, 138–142.
40. Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea*, 105. On Lady Macbeth as a Medea figure see also Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 191–194.
41. Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 174. See also Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, for the more familiar argument that while at times Hamlet strives to assume the role of the passionate Senecan avenger at others he appears to subscribe to the Stoic view that passion is not to be trusted (54–67).
42. Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 83.
43. Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 163.
44. Ayres (ed.), *Sejanus* notes this echo (see note to 2.120) but Cain (ed.), *Sejanus* treats the line as merely proverbial (see note to 2.120).
45. Recent critics have not tended to address this aspect of *Hamlet's* topicality. For an example of an earlier study that does explore it see Patricia Parker, 'Othello and Hamlet: Dilation, Spying and the Secret Place of Women' in *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts*, ed. Russ McDonald (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 105–146. Parker identifies *Hamlet* as coming at a 'crucial historical juncture, the point where an older language of divine or angelic intelligence was being converted into the new lexicon of espial and the "privy intelligences" provided by a progressively more organised network of informers and spies' (131).
46. See 'racked, adj²': 'That has been racked (in various senses); *esp.* tortured on the rack; tormented; strained to or beyond the limit' (*OED*, 1).
47. See note to 4.5.101.
48. See Cain (ed.), *Sejanus*, Introduction, 197; C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds.), *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–1952), vol. 9, 191.
49. Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 187. For his discussion of these two plays see pages 187–201. Cain also suggests that 'without *Sejanus* it is difficult to see Shakespeare's later Roman plays, or *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, treating the uses and abuses of power as they did' (Cain [ed.], *Sejanus*, Introduction, 197).

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PART II

‘I know not “seems”’ Expression
and Sensation



Hamlet's Tears

Dympna Callaghan

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew (1.2.129–130)¹

Since as a genre tragedy focuses on the emotions that constellate grief and loss, it is not surprising that Shakespeare's most famous tragedy entails its fair share of tears. Lachrymosity is not, of course, a requirement of catharsis, which was for Aristotle tragedy's redeeming affective² consequence. Nonetheless, weeping—both onstage and in the audience³—often constitutes the physiological evidence of its purgative processes. Yet the energies of lamentation run counter to the cultural pressure in post-Reformation England, if not actively to forget the dead, then at least to abbreviate the mourning rites traditionally owed to them. Lafew's truism in *All's Well That Ends Well* that 'Moderate Lamentation is the right of the dead; excessive grief the enemy to the living' (1.1.51) rehearses a commonplace rationalisation against exaggerated and inappropriate mourning. The latter became elided with the Catholic practice of perpetual remembrance of the deceased as souls in Purgatory.⁴ This did not mean, however, that Protestants advocated 'hugger-mugger' interments (4.5.84) like that afforded Polonius. On the contrary,

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aristocratic deaths were typically followed by the performance of often elaborate funeral rites. Nonetheless, the emphasis fell increasingly on the temporally contained rituals of the funeral service and the burial rather than on the post-funeral period of mourning. Thus Claudius acknowledges the general principle that irremissible duties of mourning must be paid to a deceased parent: ‘the survivor bound / In filial obligation for some term / To do obsequious sorrow’ (1.2.90–92). Simultaneously, however, he faults Hamlet with the specifically religious transgression of demonstrating ‘a will most incorrect to heaven’ (1.2.95) by exceeding what he dictates as mourning’s delimited ‘term’.

There was, then, in early modern England a theological impetus to recover more swiftly from bereavement than in prior generations. This was further bolstered by quasi-medical treatises such as Timothy Bright’s *Treatise on Melancholy* (1586) and Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), which urged the physiological and psychological dangers of protracted mourning. What had been, in medieval Catholicism, the pious act of perpetual remembrance became instead what Claudius condemns as the ‘impious stubbornness’ (1.2.94) of pathological grief.⁵ Such is the cultural context of the abruptly curtailed rituals afforded Polonius as the murder victim of the heir to the throne, and for the ‘maimed rites’ (5.1.208) accorded to Ophelia because her suicidal death was ‘doubtful’ (5.1.216). In the case of Hamlet’s father, there is no similar rationale for the unseemly acceleration of the grieving period to make way for Gertrude and Claudius’ incestuous nuptials: ‘the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables’ (1.2.179–180).⁶ Having been enjoined by the newlyweds to curtail his ostensibly immoderate grief, Hamlet tells Horatio that were he equipped with the facility and license for unrestrained expression possessed by the Player who recites Hecuba’s mourning, he ‘would drown the stage with tears’ (2.2.497). Repeatedly and explicitly aligned with femininity in the play, the natural, physiological expression of mourning is condemned by Claudius as effeminate, as ‘unmanly grief’ (1.2.94),⁷ and, in a signal instance of the ‘orotund polysyllables’ characteristic of the slippery usurper, as ‘obstinate condolment’ (1.2.105).⁸ Of course, grief is complicated, as Hamlet recognises: it’s not just about ‘the fruitful river in the eye’ (1.2.80). Grief also involves a form of sadness and an utter dejection that is beyond expression.

This chapter hopes to disclose the literary—more than the psycho-analytic, medical, or cultural⁹—means whereby those concealed inner

emotions, 'that within which passes show' (1.2.85), are represented, and to do so via close examination of the content and the context of Hamlet's wish to melt, thaw, and dissolve.¹⁰ Since in the period both 'melt' and 'dew' were common synonyms for weeping, at one level at least, Hamlet wants the emotional release of tears.¹¹ The desire to thaw, too, suggests the capacity to dissolve into tears the lumpen, icy burden of unbearable sorrow.

I want to take the terms of Hamlet's wish for dissolution very seriously, and therefore I take as my focus the two lines of the above epigraph, which are quoted from the most recent Arden edition of the play. As with so many of the textual challenges of *Hamlet*, however, the crux in these lines renders the exact status of Hamlet's flesh singularly problematic. Solid, sullied, sallied, and grieved are all potential descriptors of Hamlet's condition. For now, I propose to bracket this adjectival conundrum (though I will take it up later), and go with the assailed, besieged, or harassed intimations of the 'sallied flesh' preferred by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the editors of the Arden 3 edition. For whatever the state of his flesh, Hamlet wishes it would melt: that much is clear. I also want to take the terms of Hamlet's wish *literally*, rather than as a metaphor for his desire for annihilation (though of course it is also that). I will do so first because the fact that Hamlet aspires to a state of liquefaction indicates a fraught relationship with tears and renders their deployment onstage ambiguous. Does the textual Hamlet actually cry or not? Should the actor playing him actually weep or not?¹² Secondly, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (whose traces and influences are to be felt everywhere in Shakespeare) provides literary precedent for literally melting in sorrow at the death of a loved one. In what follows, I will press the question of what it means that Hamlet expresses not just a death wish—a temptation to suicide—in the first soliloquy, but also that he actively seeks Ovidian transformation.

With so much water in the play—in the form of actual and perhaps feigned tears; 'the weeping brook' (4.7.173) in which Ophelia drowns; the sea itself in Hamlet's voyage towards England during which he reclaims, via his father's seal, his identity as 'Hamlet the Dane' (5.1.237); not to mention the water that is 'a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body' (5.1.162)—Hamlet's melting and thawing and dissolving into dew is an important cue working to amplify and intensify the affective potency of the protagonist's forbidden mourning. Ultimately, this desire for watery metamorphosis becomes a powerful engine of tragic catharsis,

and thus licenses a form of expressive mourning in the aesthetic arena of the theatre that was otherwise and elsewhere in the culture firmly proscribed.

FORBIDDING MOURNING

Surprisingly, perhaps, there is no specific indication, either in the text or in the stage directions of either Q2 of 1604–1605 or the Folio of 1623, that Hamlet weeps. Since ‘the fruitful river of the eye’ and the ‘windy suspiration of forced breath’ (1.2.79–80) he refers to in 1.2 pertain to the general behaviour of the bereaved rather than specifically to his own reactions, he may or may not have already sobbed when he saw his father ‘quietly interred’ (1.4.49). Hamlet’s wish ‘that this too, too sallied flesh would melt’ is arguably the expression of a desire to shed tears that are either not permitted or that will not come; or, alternatively, that he is already weeping such copious tears that he desires the process to continue to the dissolution of his entire being. The situation is much clearer in Q1 where Hamlet pronounces explicitly that ‘the tears ... still stand in my eyes’ (Q1, 2.34). While Q1 is arguably an accurate representation of stage practice, the text itself remains unreliable. All we know for certain about the protagonist’s physiological response to grief from Q2 and the Folio is that Hamlet’s eyes are lowered at the beginning of the play, in a gesture that is consistent with his downcast spirits:

Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust. (1.2.70–71)

This description contrasts with Claudius’ Picasso-like image of emotional disfigurement that he presents as the public face of mourning for his brother whose proper funeral rites have been displaced by hasty nuptials¹³: ‘With an auspicious and a dropping [or, in the 1623 text, a ‘drooping’] eye’ (1.2.11).

In the first soliloquy, then, Hamlet’s first private moment onstage, the audience may witness his tears—or not. Arguably, the choice belongs to the actor, and is not a requirement of the text, as it is for example in *Richard II* where the king cannot read the indictments against him because ‘Mine eyes are full of tears; I cannot see’ (4.1.244). Actors playing Hamlet have offered both approaches. For example, Jamie Ballard played Hamlet in Jonathan Miller’s production at the Tobacco Factory in Bristol in 2008: ‘When he cried, he blubbed like a man whose flesh

– and substance – really was beginning to melt’. In contrast, Angela Winkler offered a dry-eyed performance in Peter Zadek’s production at the Edinburgh Festival in 2000 where ‘She delivered the soliloquies, scarcely moving, looking straight out into the audience with an extreme candour’.¹⁴ That is to say, the actor playing Hamlet and the director have an interpretive choice to make about whether or not to weep. This is unlike the actor playing Ophelia, who does not have a choice: ‘I cannot choose but weep’ (4.5.69). However, in contrast to Ophelia’s grief, it may be that Hamlet *chooses* not to weep when he rejects, among the traditional attitudes of mourning ‘the fruitful river in the eye’ (1.2.80) as a mere semblance, one of ‘the trappings’ of sorrow (1.2.86).

It is, then, highly debatable as to whether Hamlet’s mourning for his father inevitably involves actual weeping and this despite the fact that tears are the most natural and candid expression of grief, which is a point made by Laertes upon learning that his sister has drowned:

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
It is our trick – nature her custom holds
Let shame say what it will. [*Weeps.*] (4.7.183–186)

Tears are the reflex response to the death of a loved one, an entirely natural impulse or ‘trick’ of nature, and the point is given added emphasis by the fact that both Q2 and the Folio contain the stage direction ‘[*Weeps.*]’

In 1.2 Hamlet is clearly forbidden both by Claudius and by his mother to grieve further for his father. We might speculate that Hamlet, a student at Wittenberg, the foremost Protestant university in Europe, willingly refrains from tears, despite his other signs of mourning, because, as we have noted, weeping is itself associated with specifically Catholic practices of lamentation. However, his commentary on the actor playing Hecuba in Act 2 may indicate that his repressive mechanism has been activated all too successfully and that he now actually lacks the capacity to weep at all:

What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her,
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and that for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears (5.2.494–497)

Hamlet envies the actor who can express feelings at will, even in relation to fictional circumstances. In lieu of tears, Hamlet's forcibly suppressed expression of sorrow and rage surfaces as tortured misogyny and as an 'antic disposition' (1.5.170) that is too disturbing to be merely an act. As illuminating readings by Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Neill, among others, have demonstrated, the return of Hamlet's repressed emotions are also of a piece with the way that proscribed Catholic rites of memory resurface in the period like the Ghost come from Purgatory.¹⁵ Metaphorically, however, *Hamlet* is also haunted by those 'sheeted dead' of the Roman world that Horatio recalls rising from their graves as a portent—rather than in Hamlet's case, as a consequence—of political catastrophe:

A little ere the mightiest Julius fell
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets (1.1.113–115)

This is the play's first meditation on the parallel universe of the ancient world, which so fully permeated Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, and which conspicuously undergirds *Hamlet* with its Latinate onomastics, its references to the assassination of 'Imperious Caesar' (5.1.202), and its account of Alexander's bones derived from Plutarch. The horror of the Roman revenants' return is sketched out by Horatio with the expansive spatial dynamics appropriate to the demise of a great civilization: from little to mightiest; from what has stood to what has fallen. Horatio's is a specifically political commemoration of Rome, and thus one encouraged rather than forbidden in Elizabethan England. Similarly, while banishing Purgatory from the cosmic schema curtailed pious commitments to perpetual mourning and remembrance of the dead in ways that might have stifled legitimate grief, incessant, uncontained mourning and commemoration was never banished or proscribed in classical and Elizabethan Latin literature. Christopher Marlowe's Latin hexameter poem, his 'Epitaph on Sir Roger Manwood', for example, specifically commands tears, 'Plange!', as a sign of respect for the deceased justice who was, according to Marlowe's poem, the light and glory of the courts and the venerable law: '*Plange! fori lumen, venerandæ gloria legis*'.¹⁶ In Thomas Churchyard's translation of Ovid's *Tristia*, the poet imagines the tears of those back in Rome who read of his plight in the inhospitable climate of

Tomis, the remote port on the Black Sea to which he had been exiled for offending Caesar:

Some shalt thou finde that wil bewayle, me thus in exile sent,
And reading thee with trickling teares, my carefull case lament.¹⁷

Indeed, Latin culture celebrated and enshrined grief in the complex mythic psychologies of the ancients' mourners, especially in the inconsolable griefs of Niobe and Hecuba that feature so prominently in this play. Indeed, the perpetual mourning figured in these exemplary stories accrued even greater significance with the rise of the Elizabethan grammar school.¹⁸ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in particular, the transformations of grief-stricken characters serve to represent instances of the utmost extreme forms of emotional intensity. As in the play, in classical literature such bereaved and anguished figures are typically female.¹⁹ Even though, like Hecuba, they may also engage in acts of vengeance, there remains a sense that, like Pyrrhus, male mourners ostensibly put a much neater period on their sufferings by means of an unwavering commitment to violent revenge.

While mourning was less problematic in the ancient world in the way that it came to be in post-Reformation England, female grief, nonetheless, was not always admirable. Hecuba's transformation into a barking hound or Niobe's into a weeping statue might be read as punishments for persistent mourning, of which ardent Elizabethan Protestants might well approve.²⁰ Yet these transformations, especially in the etiology of Ovidian grief, also represent the incalculable emotional anguish consequent upon extraordinary loss, the extent of which can only be grasped by resort to what we might call the extra-human imagery firmly associated with lachrymosity: baying hounds and weeping stones. Unquestionably, howling Hecuba's sorrow may be pathological, but it is also perfectly commensurate with the circumstances that have produced it. As Shakespeare puts it in *Titus Andronicus*, 'Hecuba of Troy / Ran mad for sorrow' (4.1.20–21) at the loss not only of her husband, but also of her sons, and of Troy itself. Indeed, in *Hamlet*, Hecuba's regal diadem has been replaced by a head 'clout' when she witnesses her elderly husband's body minced to pieces by the demonic avenger, Pyrrhus (2.2.444) to represent, in sartorial terms, the extent of her abjection and diminishment. Further, the cultural association of Hecuba

with insanity²¹ and the displacement of her sovereignty offer a feminine reflection on Hamlet's own plight, both on his madness and on the fact that Claudius has displaced him because he 'Popped in between th'election and my hopes' (5.2.64).

The presentation of Hecuba's all-too-human tragedy in the play can only arouse deep compassion:

About her lank and all-o'erteemed loins,
A blanket in the alarm of fear caught up. (2.2.446–447)

The desolate Hecuba has become what in Latin would be termed '*effoetata*', 'worn out by bearing', that is utterly depleted of further generative energy. As a terrified old woman clutching a blanket, one whose role was to produce sons for Priam but whose over-used reproductive capacities have long been spent, she offers a contrast with Gertrude whose 'matron's bones' (3.4.81) are still sexually active in the 'incestuous sheets' (1.2.163) on the 'enseamed bed' she now shares with Claudius (3.4.90).²² Shakespeare creates a world of ethical distinction in the implicit contrast between that blanket and those sheets. Ultimately for Hamlet, this is the difference—the seismic gulf—between those who are possessed of the capacity, not just for mourning, but for proper feeling, for basic human empathy, and the sociopathic incapacity of those who are not. Hamlet numbers his mother among the latter:

[...] O shame, where is thy blush?
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And **melt** in her own fire (3.4.79–83)

If a woman of Gertrude's ostensibly post-reproductive years can give in to lust, then any attempt at sexual continence in the natural ardour of youth might as well dissolve.²³ Of course, one of Hamlet's concerns about his mother's remarriage may be that she is still capable of producing an heir who would then displace him in the line of succession. Potentially, it is this specifically political anxiety that provokes his diatribe against his mother and her active, albeit legitimately connubial, sexuality.

Whatever motivates Hamlet's tirade, the image of hot sexual passion which melts virtue brings to mind a very different kind of melting

flesh—of emotional or physiological dissolution—than that desired by Hamlet in ‘O, that this too, too sallied flesh would melt’. In John Donne’s ‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’, however, the two senses of ‘melt’ converge. In that poem, ‘melt’ implies tearfulness, to be sure since, like a proper Protestant, the poet advocates the quiet expression of an emotionally contained parting from his lover rather than a histrionic display:

So let us **melt**, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move (ll. 5–6)²⁴

Potentially, too, ‘melt’ may indicate here a subdued, private, and specifically sexual farewell as opposed to a public and/or noisy performance of parting. Certainly, in relation to his mother, Hamlet’s use of the word ‘melt’ is freighted with such sexual connotations. Gertrude is no ‘Niobe, all tears’ (1.52), tears that, with hindsight, may not even have been genuine. Little wonder, then, if Hamlet remains uncommitted to their expression as a sign and symptom of his own mourning.

DELIQUESCENCE

Hamlet wants not simply to die, ‘not to be’, but rather he expresses a more specific wish for metamorphosis. In his desire for deliquescence, the process of transformation is that of melting, and thawing, and its destination is ‘dew’.

O, that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew. (1.2.129–130)

Neither the barking Hecuba nor even—despite the tears shed for her nine murdered children—the petrified Niobe would seem to offer adequate Ovidian precedent for these lines. A better one is the figure of Canens or Singer as she is called in Arthur Golding’s 1586 translation. Her story occurs in Book XIII of the *Metamorphoses*. Unlike Niobe or Hecuba, she is not specifically mentioned in the play, but given Shakespeare’s ever-present debt to Ovid and the ways in which the images and language of Golding’s translation as well as the original Latin saturate his work, it is important to draw out some of the striking parallels between that instance of Ovidian mourning and Hamlet’s own.

Indeed, as Jonathan Bate points out: ‘To the educated Elizabethan, Ovid’s book of changes was the central point of reference for the notion of transformation’²⁵:

[...] Something have you heard
Of Hamlet’s transformation – so call it
Sith nor th’ exterior not the inward man
Resembles that it was. (2.2.4–7)

Hamlet’s wish in the first soliloquy represents the fulcrum of his radically altered personality and demeanour, and, in spite of his misogyny, in it he demonstrates an affinity with Ovid’s female mourners. Canens, the daughter of Janus and Venila, was the wife of Picus. Theirs was a mutual connubial devotion. Then, tragedy strikes, as it almost invariably must in both Ovid and Shakespeare’s happy marriages. While he was out hunting one day, the handsome Picus was spotted by Circe who became enamored of him. As a faithful spouse, Picus refused Circe’s advances:

[...] Another holdes my hart:
And long God graunt shee may it hold, that I may never start
To leawdnesse of a forreigne lust from bond of lawfull bed,
As long as Janus daughter, my sweete Singer, is not dead. (Book XIII,
ll. 433–436)²⁶

The passage is reminiscent of the protestations of the Player Queen:

Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife
If once I be a widow ever I be a wife. (3.2.216–217)

Picus is also like the embodiment of virtue envisioned by the Ghost in the Ovidian vignette of seduction by a deity that he weaves into the narrative of spousal betrayal:

But Virtue, as it never will be moved
Though Lewdness court it in a shape of heaven. (1.5.53–54)

Like Adonis, Shakespeare’s early exemplar of male continence, Picus is impervious to sexual temptations presented in ‘the shape of heaven’. The story of conjugal fidelity is the exact obverse of the accounts of adulterous desire that Hamlet tells in the first soliloquy and that the Ghost

recounts when he reports Gertrude's relationship with Claudius, 'that adulterate beast' (1.5.42).

As is the way of goddesses, however, once she has been repulsed by Picus, Circe exacts revenge by transforming him into a woodpecker. When he fails to return home, Canens exhibits extravagant grief, thinking it 'not ynough to weepe and teare her heare, / And beat herself' (Book XIII, l. 477–478) but in the extremity of her sorrow, goes into the surrounding countryside in search of her beloved husband:

[...] and never tasted rest,
 Nor meate, nor drink of all the whyle. The seventh day, sore opprest
 And tyred bothe with travelt and with sorrowe, downe shee sate
 Uppon cold Tybers bank, and there with teares in moorning rate
 Shee warbling on her greef in tune not shirle nor over hye,
 Did make her moane, as dooth the swan: whoo ready for to dye
 Dooth sing his buriall song before. Here maree molt at last
 With moorning, and shee pynde away: and finally shee past
 To lither ayre. (XVIII, 481–489)

Crucially, Canens actually succeeds in vanishing through her mourning and achieves the impossible desire that Hamlet articulates so early in the play, even before he has seen the Ghost.²⁷ Yet, in ending her life on the banks of the Tiber, in a liquefaction that has a musical accompaniment, her swan song also offers an Ovidian analogy to the drowning of Ophelia who dies chanting 'snatches of old lauds' (4.7.175). However, it is worth recalling that Hamlet also sings in the play:

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
 The hart ungalld play,
 For some must watch while some must sleep.
 Thus runs the world away. (3.2.263–266)

The paronomastic 'hart ungalld' echoes the first soliloquy's condemnation of Gertrude's remarriage: 'Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears / Had left the flushing in her **galled** eyes' (1.2.154–155). The eyes that are no longer red from the weeping that accompanies mourning and the unwounded deer, whose body does not bear the 'gall', the redness of a bloody wound, are both instances of a callous indifference to suffering; failures of empathy.

Canens, however, is much more closely related to Hamlet's first soliloquy, especially in Golding's description of Canens' 'marrow' ('maree') or substance melting ('molt'/melt) away—'Here maree molt at last / With moorning'—and the attenuation of her being into liquid. In neither Ovid nor in Golding's translation does Canens drown. Rather, like Q1's rendition of Hamlet's wish as 'melt to nothing', she dissolves into the air:

ultimus adspexit Thybris luctuque viaque
fessam et iam longa ponentem corpora ripa.
Illic cum lacrimal ipso modulata dolore
Verba sono tenui maerens funderat, ut olim
Carmina iam moreias canis exequialia cyncus;
Luctibus extremum tenues liquefacta medullas
Tabuit inque leves paulatinamente evanuit auras

[The Tiber was the last to see her, spent with grief and travel-toil, laying her body down upon his far-stretching bank. There, with tears, in weak, faint tones, she poured out her mournful words attuned to grief; just as sometimes, in dying, the swan sings a last funeral song. Finally, worn to a shade by woe, her very marrow changed to water, she melted away and gradually vanished into thin air.] (Book XIV, 425–431)²⁸

Charles Martin's blank verse translation well captures Ovid's image of Canens' disappearance:

the nymph, Canens, who dies of grief for her beloved Picus:
At last, attenuated so by grief
That in her bones the marrow turned to water,
She melted down and vanished on the breezes (14.606–608)²⁹

Notably, this passage is devoid of the quasi-erotic connotations of 'melt', which we noted in relation to Gertrude's waxy virtue in the heat of what is presented in the play as her very physical passion for Claudius. Melting is, instead, as it is in *2 Henry IV* a symptom of ennui: 'the continent, / Weary of solid firmness, melt[s] itself / Into the sea' (3.1.47–49). The sensuality of Ophelia's drowning is a combination of both despair and erotic display, as it is in Shakespeare's love tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra*, which contains more uses of the word 'melt' than any other play in the canon. One of that play's most famous lines again describes melting into water, specifically, the submerging of Rome in Anthony's

ardent renunciation of the Eternal City in favour of his passion for Egypt's queen: 'Let Rome in Tiber melt' (1.1.35). That line is mirrored in 'Melt Egypt into Nile' (2.5.78), referring again to liquefaction, but also suggesting the erotic mutuality of these world-shaping lovers. The association of Ophelia's melting/drowning with coitus is intimated in her unrestrained sartorial condition, 'her clothes spread wide' (4.7.173). Similarly, there is arguably a sublimated desire for sexual release in Hamlet's desire to 'thaw', 'melt', and achieve a resolution or, literally, arrive at dissolution. The desire for death as a release from emotional anguish is subtly situated as analogous to orgasm, *le petit mort*, an interpretation supported both by history and by psychoanalysis.³⁰

The 'dew' into which Hamlet wishes to 'resolve' or metamorphose himself is worth further examination. Tears are the most common bodily secretion to which 'dew' refers, and there are numerous examples in Shakespeare, such as Lucrece's 'dew of Lamentations' (l. 1829) or *Richard II's* 'That you in pittie may dissolue to deaw / And wash him fresh againe with true loue teares' (5.1.10–11). Dew also features in the story of another famous Ovidian weeper, the 'slobbering' Narcissus³¹ whose weeping is caused by sexual frustration rather than by mourning and whose tears presage his drowning:

Dixit et ad faciem reddit male sanus eandem
et lacrimis turbavit aquas, obscuraque moto
Reddita forma lack est. (Book III, 473–476)

This saide in rage he turnes againe unto the forsaide shade,
And roses the water with the teares and sloubring that he made,
That through his troubling of the Well his ymage gan to fade. (Book
III, 596–598)

Like Ophelia, his speech is distraught, and his disturbed mind is reflected in the surface of the water that has been agitated by his tears³² (rather than merely 'ruffled', as the Loeb translation has it).³³ Having beaten his own breast black and blue, he begins to waste away:

He could no longer beare it out. But fainting straight for paine,
As lith and supple waxe doth melt against the burning flame,
Or morning dewe against the Sunne that glareth on the same:
Even so by piecemale being spent and wasted through desire,
Did he consume and melt away with Cupids secret fire (Book III,
612–616)

‘Dew’ and its plural form can mean, as it does here, dewdrops or simply, droplets, as in ‘dews of blood’ (1.1.116) in *Hamlet*. ‘Dew’ was, of course, a feature of the atmosphere as in Horatio’s lyrical description of morning: ‘the dew of yon high eastward hill’ (1.1.166), defined in the *Complaynt of Scotland* (1550) as ‘ane humid vapour generit in the sycond regione of the ayr’ (*OED*). However, it was also understood in specifically physiological terms as in the ‘liquid dew of youth’ (1.3.40): ‘[D]ew is a humor contained in the hollownesse of the members, and joyned to their substance’, says a 1631 translation of Scribonius’ *Natural Philosophy*.³⁴ This is precisely the melting bone marrow, the ‘maree molt’ described by Golding. In his note on the text, Harold Jenkins is adamant that: ‘To *resolve* (change into another form or element) is another synonym for *melt* and *thaw*, and does not imply [...] A further transformation into vapour’.³⁵ Be that as maybe, ‘resolve’ in another sense is also precisely what Hamlet lacks: ‘the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought’ (3.1.83–84); or, rather, Hamlet subjects his emotions, his rage, and his desire for vengeance to cognitive appraisal.³⁶

The thwarted sexual expression believed to subtend the emotional meltdowns of women were, by the nineteenth century, fully categorised as the psychopathology of the hysteria with which they had long been associated. Certainly, the ‘effeminately dolent’³⁷ Richard II fits this mould: ‘O that I were a mockery king of snow, [...] / To melt myself away in water-drops’ (4.1.260–262). However, for all that these emotional states have been perennially aligned with women, as we have noted, the ‘dew’, into which Hamlet wishes to ‘thaw’ his substance and resolve his pent-up flesh, bears potentially more masculine connotations. Early modern body fluids were thought to be fungible, and as Tobias Döring points out: ‘Together with blood and the three other humoral substances, all liquid excretions of the body – like urine, sweat, semen or tears – were understood to form a physical continuum of flows. According to temper or situation, each of these could transform into another’.³⁸ There is further evidence for this notion in John Florio’s translation of Montaigne referred to seminal fluid as ‘this droppe of water’ as he ponders questions of genetic inheritance perhaps because he was afflicted with gallstones, a condition from which his father also suffered:

Wee need not goe to cull out myracles, and chuse strange difficulties: mee seemeth, that amongst those things wee ordinarily see, there [in Nature]

are such incomprehensible rarities, as they exceede all difficulty of myracles. What monster is it, that this teare or drop of seed, wherof we are indengred brings with it; and in it the impressions, not only of the corporall forme, but even of the very thoughts and inclinations of our fathers? Where dooth this droppe of water containe or lodge this infinite number of formes? And how beare they these resemblances, of so rash, and unruly a progresse, that the childe childe shall be answerable to [look like] his grandfather, and the nephew to his unckle?³⁹

Hamlet tells us in the first soliloquy that Claudius does not resemble his father: 'no more like my father / Than I to Hercules' (1.2.152–153). Yet his father, from his own account, was in fact very like Hercules, or at least Hyperion, one of the Titans. In other words, Hamlet does not appear to resemble his father any more than Claudius does, and there is the possibility that, by what Montaigne calls the 'rash and unruly' progression of familial resemblance, he actually looks like Claudius. Certainly, the Renaissance Prince Hamlet does not resemble his father, who is depicted as having engaged unthinkingly in the violent rituals of war when he 'smote the sledded Polacks on the ice' (1.1.62). And perhaps there is an unnerving genetic resemblance to that 'mildewed ear' (3.4.62), his uncle, whose scheming at least involves cognitive machination even though, clearly, it does not involve the ethically motivated rumination so characteristic of Hamlet. This is part of what Michael Neill has termed 'the patterns of ironic duplication so characteristic of revenge tragedy'.⁴⁰ This sense of similitude between Claudius and Hamlet is further intimated in the scene Hamlet writes for the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*. Here, the villain is 'one Lucianus, nephew to the king', and it is he who commits regicide, a substitution that has been grist to the mill of psychoanalytic readings since Ernest Jones' Freudian reading early in the twentieth century.⁴¹

FLESH

But what of the substance, the flesh that is to be progressively transformed by melting, thawing and (perhaps finally) dissolving? First, we must return to the textual question posed at the start of this chapter about whether this flesh is 'solid', 'sullied' (stained), or 'sallied' (assailed).

O that this too too *sallied* flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew (Q2, 1.2.129–130)

O, that this too too *solid* flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew (F, 1.2.128–127)

O, that this too, too *sullied* flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew (Edited versions)

O that this too much *grieved and sallied* flesh
Would melt to nothing (Q1, 2.55–56)

‘Solid’ flesh is adopted by many modern productions and editions⁴² of the play because it comports with the idea of thawing something frozen, of moving from a solid state to a liquid one. This is consistent with the early modern understanding of melancholy in humoral theory as cold and dry in correspondence with the element of earth resulting in what Timothy Bright described as the ‘hardness whereof the flesh of a melancholy person is’. Similarly, Robert Burton claimed that flesh was composed of congealed blood⁴³ so that its melting might be understood by Elizabethans as less of a physical impossibility than it is for us. The flesh, then, might dissolve not into drops of water, but into drops of blood, whose purity was determined by the seminal fluid that comprised that vital secretion in the consolidation of patrilineal identity. Hamlet’s foil and mirror image (5.2.77–78), Laertes, points this out:

That drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries ‘Cuckold!’ to my father [...] (4.5.117–118)

Laertes’ reasoning here is that any part of his being that is not enraged by the murder of his father must mean that his blood is polluted and that he is not the legitimate offspring of Polonius, who must have been a cuckold. However, Laertes’ unrelenting vengeful fury offers him fulsome assurance of his legitimacy. The tangible assurance of paternity provided by the apparent solidity of flesh—by its sensual reality or by family resemblance—is thus far from secure.

In tandem with Gertrude’s remark in Act 5 that her son is ‘fat and scant of breath’, however, ‘solid’ might also deliver us a Hamlet whose ‘machine’ (2.2.121), his corporal frame, melts like Falstaff’s ‘lard’. In *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff ‘sweates to death, / And lards the leane earth as

he walks along' (2.3.14–15); and, even more pertinent in relation to Hamlet is the representation of Falstaff in *Merry Wives of Windsor*:

[...] thinke of that, a man of my Kidney; think of that, that am as subject to heate as butter; a man of continuall dissolution, and thaw [...].
(3.5.89–90)

Hamlet as the mirror of all princes is probably not meant to resemble the corpulent Falstaff: 'this unwhole- / some humidity, this gross watery pumpion' (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.3.35–36) for all that his flesh shares the same physical capacity to thaw like the gluttonous Sir John's watery pumpkin of a body. Hamlet's inaction is, however, associated with the lugubriousness of flesh as opposed to the speed of thought: 'swift / As meditation' (1.5.29–30). Editorial emendations that change 'sallied' to 'sullied' suggest the Calvinist idea that the flesh is not just contaminated, but that it is itself a contaminant, in a way that comports with the biblical sense of 'the world, the flesh and the devil', with a particular emphasis on the sexual sins of 'the passions of our flesh' (Eph 2.2.). A poem in *Tottell's Miscellany* (1573) echoed precisely these sentiments:

The life is long that loathsome doth last [...]
Wherefore with Paul let all men wish and pray
To be dissolved of this foul fleshly mass.⁴⁴

Q1's 'grieved and sallied', providing an instance of hendiadys which Shakespeare uses extensively *Hamlet*,⁴⁵ also conveys this edge of sexual torment. There is some argument that in the period 'sallied' and 'sullied' may have been synonyms, but that aside, as Harold Jenkins has pointed out, '*sallied* is less likely to be a corruption of *solid* than the other way about':

The possibility of an intended play on both words cannot be ruled out; but what happens perhaps is that by a natural mental process the word (*sullied*) which gives at once a clue to the emotion which the soliloquy will express, brings to mind its near-homonym (*solid*), which helps to remote the imagery of *melt*, *thaw*, *resolve*, *dew*.⁴⁶

If Hamlet's flesh has been polluted, the source of its contamination is 'He that hath killed my King and whored my mother' (5.2.63):

You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,
And, would it were not so, you are my mother. (3.4.14–15)

Hamlet plays upon—and suffers from—the gender dysmorphia inherent in the Christian doctrine of marriage in which the identity of the woman is subsumed by that of her husband:

My mother. Father and mother is man and wife.
Man and wife is one flesh. So – my mother. (4.3.60–61)

Saturated with the overwhelming emotions he has been forbidden to express, Hamlet no longer ‘resembles’ himself but is ‘like a whore’ and the son of a whore. Thawed out flesh becomes like the waterlogged ‘whoreson’ dead body of which the Gravedigger speaks: ‘[Y]our water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body’ (5.1.161–162). The condition of this body post-mortem is one way of resolving melancholy whose remedy was the melting of excess earth energy into water. Unlike the Ovidian attenuation of his being into evaporating dew to which Hamlet aspires in Act 1, the Gravedigger describes the material fate of human flesh that has been transformed by mortality and inhumation. As Margreta de Grazia has pointed out: ‘Flesh and earth repeatedly coalesce through overpass of sound and sense, as they do in the name of the first man, called after not his father but the dust from which he was fashioned, *adamah*, the Hebrew word for clay’⁴⁷:

[...] There is no ancient
gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers and grave-makers.
They hold up Adam's profession. (5.1.29–31)

Unlike the Ovidian attenuation of his being into evaporating dew to which Hamlet aspires in Act 1, this is the literally terrestrial fate of human flesh: it is tragic catharsis come to earth.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified, all references to the First Quarto and Folio versions of *Hamlet* are from *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Methuen, 2007). All references to the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* are

- from *Hamlet*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, 2nd ed., eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
2. Mark W. Roche observes that for Hegel, the catharsis of tragedy ‘takes place in the consciousness of the audience, and it recognises the supremacy of the whole of ethical life and sees it purged of one-sidedness’, ‘The Greatness and Limits of Hegel’s Theory of Tragedy’, in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 57.
 3. R. S. White suggests that *Hamlet* is especially concerned with audience response: ‘Shakespeare was developing a new and complex kind of utility for the soliloquy. It may hold the function of a conventional character speaking to himself, though not yet presenting a revelation of an inner sense in the modern psychological sense, while also presenting the audience with a dialectal point or an affective problem to ponder—perhaps even to respond to, with cheers, groans, yes or no—as we still observe vestigially in pantomime’, *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 41.
 4. Thompson and Taylor, op. cit. 43.
 5. See also Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (New York: Routledge, 2017), chapter 7.
 6. Tobias Döring, argues that psychoanalytic interpretations of mourning must be historicized to account for what mourners were not permitted ‘to say and do in the face of death’, *Performances of Mourning in Shakespearean Theatre and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 75. See also Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 240–243.
 7. This despite the fact that in the New Testament, Christ is himself a mourner when he weeps for the death of Lazarus in John 11:35.
 8. Ruth Morse, ‘Shakespeare’s Depriving Particles’, *Shakespeare Survey* 70 (2017): 207–212.
 9. Gail Kern Paster has explored the Galenic principles behind the emission bodily fluids in *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Stephanie Shirilan has addressed the medical discourse around melancholy in *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015); Jennifer C. Vaught’s *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) argues mourning was further devalued in the early modern period because of the strong associations between weeping and the *Mater Dolorosa*, whose veneration was now proscribed (117); although she

- provides no critical reading of *Hamlet*, Juliana Schiesari psychoanalytic approach to her subject suggests that a heightened consciousness is attributed to melancholy men and that ‘loss itself becomes the dominant feature and not the lost object’ (*The Gendering of Melancholia*, 11).
10. David Hillman has argued that Hamlet in this speech rejects ‘the exteriority of “seeming”’, and that ‘the play itself is one of the central transitional points between the physical and the “spiritual” in Western culture’ (*Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body* [New York: Palgrave, 2007], 85; 116).
 11. For example, in *1 Henry IV*, Mortimer is moved to tears by the Welsh lady’s song: ‘Nay, if you melt, then will she run mad’ (3.1.206). All references to Shakespeare’s works other than *Hamlet* are taken from *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2 Vols., General eds. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
 12. Döring remarks upon the ‘questionable signifying power’ of tears and passions in public performances (*Performances of Mourning*, 111); Tom Lutz’s comprehensive book on weeping does not resolve the questions of whether Hamlet weeps or whether he should do so, though he does comment specifically on the play, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 252.
 13. Like a practiced politician, at this moment Claudius may even shed a feigned tear.
 14. Susannah Clapp, ‘The Ten Best Hamlets’, *The Guardian*, Saturday 21 August 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/aug/22/10-best-hamlets-david-tennant>. Summarizing Bishop John Jewel’s views on proper mourning, Ralph Houlbrooke remarks: ‘Grief found its natural overflow in tears. Indeed, it might be dangerous to the individual to deny grief an outlet, “If it were not for weeping the heart would burst”’, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 224–225.
 15. Michael Neill, *Issues of Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
 16. Dymrna Callaghan, ‘Marlowe’s Last Poem: Elegiac Aesthetics and the Epitaph on Sir Roger Manwood’, in *Marlowe the Craftsman: Lives, Stage and Page*, eds. Sarah K. Scott and M. L. Stapleton (New York: Routledge, 2010), 159–177.
 17. Ovid, *The Three First Bookes of Ouid De Tristibus Translated into English*, trans. Thomas Churchyard (London, 1580), 2.
 18. Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare’s Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3.

19. Alison Thorne notes that ‘Mournful women, especially bereaved mothers ... are often represented in this period as disturbing, even transgressive figures whose extreme sorrow threatens to overspill the parameters of acceptable feminine behaviour. Their culturally scripted performance of grief was also deplored as proof of their sex’s natural incapacity to govern their emotions’, “‘O, lawful let it be / That I have room ... to curse awhile”’: Voicing the Nation’s Conscience in Female Complaint in *Richard III*, *King John*, and *Henry VIII*, in *This England, That Shakespeare*, eds. Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 116. See also, Patricia Phillippy, *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.
20. Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 20; 191.
21. See Tanya Pollard, ‘What’s Hecuba to Shakespeare?’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2012): 1060–1093, which argues that Hecuba is ‘a female version of Hamlet’ (1060).
22. See R. S. White, ‘Ophelia’s Sisters’, in *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 93–113. White argues that Gertrude’s ‘enseamed bed’ could refer to the practice of mending old sheets by cutting them through the middle and stitching together the edges, inserting new fabric at the centre.
23. On the possibility that Gertrude and Claudius may produce a son and heir who will ‘pop in’ between the election and Hamlet’s hopes, see Dympna Callaghan, *Hamlet: Language and Writing*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 155.
24. John Donne, *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. John Carey, Oxford World’s Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
25. Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 192–193.
26. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Arthur Golding’s translation of the *Metamorphoses* are from Ovid, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation of 1567*, ed. John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia, PA: Paul Dry Books, 2000).
27. R. Clifton Spargo reminds us that ‘If *Hamlet* teaches us nothing else, it makes us ever aware that an imaginative opposition to even the most ordinary of deaths can be suddenly turned toward an interrogation of the predicative conditions of the unjustly perpetrated death’, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 5.
28. All Latin quotations are from Loeb Classical Library edition, trans. Frank Justus Miller, revised G. P. Goold, *Metamorphoses* LCL Books 1–8, Ovid III, 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 3rd ed., 1977).

29. Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).
30. Peter Sacks explains: '[A] forced renunciation prevents a regressive attachment to a prior love-object, a potential fixation on the part of the griever, whose desire in such cases for literal identification with the dead is another force very much like the death wish. Melancholia usually involves a lasting return to the kind of regressive narcissism noticed before, often including an identification between the ego and the dead such that the melancholic tends toward self-destruction. The healthy mourner, on the other hand submits to a displacement of his prior attachments and to a disruption of his potential regression to dyadic fantasies, allowing his desires to be governed instead by a rule like that of the father's law of substitution. Only by repeating the child's acquiescence in this way can the mourner truly survive', *The English Elegy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 16.
31. For a psychoanalytic reading of 'Hamlet's archaic narcissism' (as opposed to Hamlet's relation to Ovid's Narcissus) see John Russell, *Hamlet and Narcissus* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 32; 37.
32. Lynn Enterline understands Narcissus as an image 'of loss that exceeds all compensation', *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 1995), 1.
33. Op. cit., 157.
34. Wilhelm Scribonis, *Naturall Philosophy, or, A Description of the World, Namely, of Angels, of Man, of the Heavens, of the Ayre, of the Earth, of the Water and of the Creatures in the Whole World*, trans. Daniel Widdowes (London, 1621).
35. Harold Jenkins (ed.), *Hamlet: The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1982), 187.
36. See Martha C. Nussbaum's commentary on John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013), 9.
37. See Jean E. Howard, 'Monarchs Who Cry: The Gendered Politics of Weeping in the English History Play', in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Dymrna Callaghan (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 457–466.
38. Op. cit., 121.
39. Michel de Montaigne, 'Of the Resemblance Between Children and Fathers', in *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses: of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (London: 1603, STC/18042), 427.
40. Michael Neill, 'English Revenge Tragedy' in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Bushnell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 343.

41. Ernest Jones, 'The Oedipus Complex as Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: A Study in Motive', *The American Journal of Psychology* 21 (1910): 72–113; See also R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning*, 39–80.
42. See for instance, *Hamlet: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Robert Miola (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011); *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, ed. Philip Edwards, updated ed., The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
43. Timothy Bright and Robert Burton, quoted in *Hamlet: The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 437.
44. Qtd. in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. Jenkins, 437
45. Steven Urkowitz, 'Back to Basics: Thinking About the Hamlet First Published', in *The Hamlet First Published (Q1, 1603)*, ed. Thomas Clayton (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 261.
46. Op. cit.
47. Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

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Hamlet's ‘Spendthrift Sigh’: Emotional Breathing On and Off the Stage

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This chapter is concerned with the air that circulates in and out of the emotional body in *Hamlet*.¹ A play heavily invested in air, as Carla Mazzi and Carolyn Sale have argued, as well as in the materiality of life and death, in the permeability of physical boundaries, and in shaping and locating the self in relation to the outside world, *Hamlet* foregrounds the instability and artificiality of ascribing meaning to the air that escapes the human body.² Drawing on Mazzi and Sale, I focus specifically on sighing to argue that what characterises sighing in the play is not only its ability to signify a range of emotional perturbations, such as love, longing, pain, sorrow, grief, but also its role in restoring the body to provisional order, mirroring thus the temporary reality of a theatrical performance that re-enacts and regulates emotions only for them to break loose again. *Hamlet* does not rest at a definition of sighing as a symptom that accompanies emotional or physical suffering, but instead offers us an example of sighs as ‘emotional practice’. The anthropologist Monique Scheer, building on the work of William Reddy and Barbara Rosenwein, has historicised emotions by applying Pierre Bourdieu’s

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concept of habitus, a ‘system of cognitive and motivating structures’ on which she expands as follows: ‘people move about in their social environments [...] in most cases supremely practiced at the subtleties of movement, posture, gesture, and expression that connect them with others as well as communicate to themselves who they are’.³ Sighs, which in affect theory would traditionally be classified as ‘automatic behaviours, reflexes, spontaneous responses’, can in this respect be ‘more fruitfully thought of as habits emerging where bodily capacities and cultural requirements meet’.⁴ What makes ‘emotional practice’ a pertinent designation for sighing is the underlining principle that ‘the physiological contains both the organic and the social, which cooperate in the production of emotion’, undermining purist clings to the body as well as social determinism.⁵ Approaching sighs as ‘emotional practice’ allows for a flexible model of materiality that affirms (while contradicting) Scheer’s point that ‘emotions cannot be conjured out of thin air’; in *Hamlet* they can.⁶

Translating emotional breathing from page to stage is often a seamless, inconspicuous process. Explicit stage directions, textual references to a character’s agonised or lovesick exhalations, and cues, such as the ‘cryptodirections’ E. A. J. Honigmann identifies in renaissance playtexts, are embodied on stage by the actors, who, to paraphrase the RSC’s first voice director, Cicely Berry, depend on their breath, and how they apply it.⁷ While training to achieve maximum breathing capacity with the least possible effort can be strenuous, it produces a stage performance of inhalations and exhalations that appear natural and authentic. When Claudius enters the stage in Act 4, Scene 1, he marks Gertrude’s dysregulated breathing: ‘There’s matter in these sighs, these profound heaves; / You must translate. ’Tis fit we understand them’ (4.1.1–2).⁸ Gertrude’s sighs, already or recurrently emitted and populating the stage’s acoustic and atmospheric world, have affectively impressed Claudius who now seeks to interpret them rationally: he has deciphered the sighs and heaves as symptoms of emotional turmoil, of pain or sorrow, and proceeds to identify the cause. In *The Winter’s Tale*, on the other hand, Leontes hastens to a precarious interpretation of sighs, which might or might not be actualised on stage. Amidst his paroxysmal speech when faced with the sight of Hermione giving her hand to Polixenes, he lists sighing as evidence of what he imagines to be a sexual relationship between the two:

LEONTES [...]

But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,

As now they are, and making practised smiles
 As in a looking-glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
 The mort o'th'deer – O, that is entertainment
 My bosom likes not, nor my brows (1.2.115–119)⁹

In an orchestrated scene of a fictional illicit affair, the dying breath of a wounded deer, with its connotations of a woman's sexual groans, provides the crude soundtrack to Leontes's fantasy. In Cheek by Jowl's 2017 production, directed by Declan Donnellan, a frantic Leontes (Orlando James) placed Hermione (Natalie Radmall-Quirke) and Polixenes (Edward Sayer) in a pornographic performance that materialised on stage his darkest obsessions. When delivering the words 'to sigh, as 'twere the mort o'th'deer', Leontes stood above and between the couple, his hands resting on their bosoms. With the word 'deer', Hermione and Polixenes released an exaggerated and deep sexual sigh which sent Leontes sliding backwards as if he was the one expelled from their chest. The 'O' after the 'deer' in the text might be Leontes's articulation of the imagined sigh, but James's literal embodiment of an orgasmic exhalation on stage made the sigh not only audible, but powerfully visible, too. The exchange with Camillo later in the scene confirmed the sigh's promiscuous credentials: 'Stopping the career / of laughter with a sigh – A note infallible / of breaking honesty' (1.2.284–286).

The two examples of representing sighs demonstrate that emotional breathing escapes the confines of the dramatic text and flows between page, stage, and audience in unpredictable, yet inclusive, circles. Breath belongs to, and is determined by, the affective fabric of the original play-text as much as it is by the actor's present and living body, while the recycling process of inhaling and exhaling reaches out to implicate the spectators, whom, according to Sale, breath animates: 'what they receive renders them active, or rather creates in them the capacity or the potential to become that which they observe: the breath makes them "capable" by turning them all into potential actors'.¹⁰ Although indebted to Sale's viewpoint of how breath circulates in the theatre, this chapter focuses specifically on sighs in order to suggest ways that sighing can contribute to, and expand, current research in the history of emotions, while enriching our understanding of the economy of breathing Shakespeare presents us with in *Hamlet*.

How exactly did Shakespeare and his contemporaries define sighs? Outside the walls of the theatres, sighing was the most popular type of

emotional breathing in the early modern era, seen as an alternative to speech, a body language with the potential to authentically express one's spiritual hardships or fervency, bodily ailments and sorrows, and erotic (un)fulfilment. The widely held belief in respiration as a cooling agent for the body, originating in Western physiology with Plato and Aristotle, and the lack of any significant systematic engagement with that function until the 1650s and 1660s, meant that the most extensive discussions of sighing in scientific circles were to be found in premodern theories of the passions.¹¹ An early example appears in the writings of Alexander of Aphrodisias in the third century BCE. Answering 'why doe such as are in grieffe, and in love, and in anger, sigh very oft?', Alexander argues that a sigh is actually produced when the body, due to excessive passion, forgets to act according to its regular routine:

Because that the soule and minde of such as are grieved, is turned into the cause of grieffe and sorrowe [...] the soule then being intentive upon that whither she moveth, doth after a sort neglect & forget to give motive vertue and power unto the muscules of the breast. Therefore the heart not receiving aire by opening of the breast, & by a consequence neither blowing not cooling, [...] the heart, I say, doth force the minde and give her warning, that she would give more motion unto the muscles, and cause greater breathing in and out, and that she would take more store of colde ayre, and thrust out more excrements, and that often small breathings would performe that that one great one may effect. And therefore men of oldtime; called the word suspirio sighing, of the straitnes of the breast.¹²

When confronted with and immersed in excessive sorrow or love, sighing is the heart's solution to the negligence and numbness of the mind, seeking to restore the balance that has been disrupted by the stillness of the chest. The body appears to lose its cognitive abilities and to be sleeping, forgetting itself, until the suffocating heart moves to a sudden motion. The notion that sighing is an impulsive and abrupt movement of the emotionally overwhelmed heart trickles down to the Renaissance and familiar treatises on passions that customarily list sighing as a symptom of melancholy, whether in the form of green sickness or intellectual and religious melancholy. Thomas Wright, for instance, in *The Passions of the Mind* (1604) describes the effects of sadness on the body by suggesting that it floods the heart with melancholy blood and in doing so threatens to dry it: 'The cause why sadnesse doth so moove the forces of the body,

I take to be, the gathering together of much melancholy blood about the heart, which collection extinguisheth the good spirits, or at least dulleth them'.¹³ The dried, dull, contracted heart, lacking moisture, has to sigh, as Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) affirms: 'sighing hath no other cause of moving than to coole and refreshe the hearte, with fresh breath, and pure aire, which is the nourishment and foode of the vital spirites, besides the cooling which the heart it selfe receiveth thereby'.¹⁴ Sighs attributed to love melancholy work in similar ways as Nicholas Coeffeteau writes in his *Table of Humane Passions* (1621), reminding us of the self-forgetfulness that Alexander of Aphrodisias talks about: 'his soule that loves intirely, is perpetually employed in the contemplation of the party beloved, and hath no other thoughts but of his merit, the heate abandoning the parts, and retiring into the braine, leaves the whole body in great distemperature, which corrupting and consuming the whole blood, makes the face grow pale and wane, causeth the trembling of the heart, breeds strange convulsions and retires the spirits [...] followed with passionate and heart-breaking sighes'.¹⁵ For Jacques Ferrand's *Erotomania* (1640), sighs are symptoms of green-sickness but they also gesture towards a process of recollection, being initiated by 'Nature' to rectify the absent-mindedness of 'strong Imaginations':

Sighing is caused in Melancholy Lovers, by reason that they many times forget to draw their breath, being wholly taken up with the strong Imaginations that they have, either in beholding the beauty of their Loves, or else, in their Absence, contemplating on their rare perfections, and contriving the meanes how to compass their Desires. So that at length recollecting themselves, Nature is constrained to draw as much Aire at once, as before it should have done at two or three times. And such a Respiration is called, a Sigh; which is indeed nothing else, but, a doubled Respiration.¹⁶

One such lover is Romeo, who, at the beginning of Shakespeare's tragedy is portrayed by his father as suffering from the condition Coeffeteau and Ferrand describe, 'With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew, / Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs' (1.1.130–131), only for Romeo to confirm that sighs purge the body from the fiery state ignited by unrequited love: 'Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs; / Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes' (1.1.188–189). Romeo's addiction to love and his frequent sighing is later ridiculed by Mercutio who readily pigeonholes Romeo's heavy breathing as the

traditional rhetoric of the lovesick male: ‘Romeo, humours, madman, passion, love, / Appear though in the likeness of a sigh’ (2.1.7–8).¹⁷ In these early accounts of emotions sighs are interpreted the moment they are exhaled as solid evidence of a complex and rather violent procedure the body has to undergo to tackle its own dis-ease. Sighing emerges as the body’s natural and instinctive cure, offering relief, comfort (‘it may seeme probable that the sobbing and sighing [...] if they be not vehement and long [...] drawing in of fresh aire, geue also some comfort’)¹⁸ and even pleasure that approximates self-indulgence (‘it is certaine, that even in cares and vexation, there is also a content in the teares and sighes wee powre forth for the absence of that wee loue’).¹⁹

At the very start of his performance, Hamlet challenges that sighing can lead to a reliable diagnosis of suffering and is wary of those who use their breath in instructed and artificial ways. He states so in his first appearance, where he enlists breathlessness as an actor’s tool.

HAMLET Seems, madam – nay, it is, I know not ‘seems’.
 ’Tis not alone my inky cloak, cold mother,
 Nor customary suits of solemn black,
 Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
 No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
 Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
 Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief
 That can denote me truly. These indeed ‘seem’,
 For they are actions that a man might play,
 But I have that within which passes show,
 These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.76–86)

Listing what ‘seems’ against ‘that within which passes show’ the prince condemns the validity of the performative elements of grief, from funeral garments and material accessories to mournful physical expressions, including the ‘windy suspiration of forced breath’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* marks Hamlet’s comment here as the first example where the term ‘suspiration’ refers to ‘(deep) breathing’.²⁰ In his sarcastic rejection of what he perceives to be Gertrude and Claudius’s feigned sorrow, Hamlet chooses to emphasise grief’s manifestation through corporal air, resulting in and from sighs, by drawing attention to its evaporating and insubstantial nature. The compressed circulation and expulsion of air from the body is identified as a universal symptom of grief, but the

double meanings in 'windy' (relating to the wind and frivolous, bombastic, and unsubstantial) and in 'forced' (violently expelled and feigned), as well as the context of Hamlet's speech, render breathlessness insincere. Hamlet's response undermines the validity of forced breath as a symptom, as a sign on which meaning can be fixed; in doing so, it undermines the pneumatic subjectivity ascribed to an individual by the involuntary exhalations from their chest.

Scepticism of sighing extends from the performance of grief to the performance of love. Welcoming Rosencrantz's invitation to the players, Hamlet proclaims that the actor playing 'the Lover shall not sigh gratis' (2.2.319) attesting to voluntary sighing as a rhetorical trope for courtship, very much in the spirit in which Mercutio taunts Romeo for his clichéd respiration. Ferrand, in his treatise on love melancholy, cites an observation by the Spanish medic, Christophorus à Vega, that 'those that are in Love, will not eat Grapes; because this kind of fruit filleth the Stomack and Belly with Winde, and this Inflation oppressing the Midriff, and hindering the motion of the Heart, disturbeth Respiration, and suffers them not to sigh at their pleasure'.²¹ The theatricality of sighing, invoked at a lover's own 'pleasure', is what Hamlet associates with the players, and can be read as indicative of Hamlet's wider suspicion of the hypocritical potential of breath. In his playful but impatient exchange with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Act 3, Scene 2, he acknowledges breath's instrumental function:

HAMLET It is as easy as lying. Govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops. [...]

You would play upon me! You would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ. Yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood! Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you fret me you cannot play upon me. (3.2.349–363)

Exposing the scheming intentions of his childhood friends, Hamlet refuses to act as the pipe or the lung or heart into which fresh air will be channelled and as such resists the manipulative force of breath, the breath that seeks to fill one with meaning and orchestrate their actions. Polonius also adheres to the instrumental purpose of breathing, when

advising Reynaldo how to engage in espionage of his son, Laertes, he commands him to ‘breathe his faults so quaintly / That they may seem the taints of liberty’ (2.1.31–32) uses ‘breath’ to refer to insincere words, and to the spread of unsubstantiated rumours.

Other characters in the play, however, endorse in their speech and their conclusions the medical model that identifies sighing as the body’s act of recollection and of restoring itself to order when experiencing intense emotional agitation. The Second Quarto of *Hamlet* (1604) features a digression by Claudius, when, in Act 4, Scene 7, he persuasively enlists Laertes to avenge the death of Polonius by murdering Hamlet in a fatal duel. The digression, ten lines which do not appear in the 1623 Folio, serves to prompt Laertes to act on his love for his father, arguing that inaction ultimately leads to the passion consuming itself and the body that hosts it:

CLAUDIUS [...]

There lives within the very flame of love
 A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it;
 And nothing is at a like goodness still;
 For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,
 Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,
 We should do when we would; for this ‘would’ changes,
 And hath abatements and delays as many
 As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents,
 And then this ‘should’ is like a spendthrift’s sigh
 That hurts by easing. But to the quick of th’ulcer. (4.7.112–121, Arden)

While the extract might be superfluous to the progress of the play’s performance and not always staged, the lines here remain faithful to the tragedy’s preoccupation with excess of passion, and the potential of such to consume the individual incapable of moderation. The moral imperative to revenge is communicated via means of popular knowledge: editors are quick to acknowledge that the phrase ‘like a spendthrift’s sigh / that hurts by easing’, refers to the idea ‘that every sigh a man breathes costs him a drop of blood and thus wastes part of his life’.²² The folkloric origins of the concept are generally accepted by editors as early as the eighteenth century, with Samuel Johnson glossing this line in the following way: ‘a sigh that makes an unnecessary waste of the vital flame. It is a notion very prevalent, that sighs [...] wear out the animal powers’.²³

Moreover, editors are often prone to draw on other examples from the Shakespearean canon where sighing is perceived as consuming blood: we find cross-references to *2 Henry VI* (3.2.60–64) with sighs described as ‘blood-consuming’ and ‘blood-drinking’, to *3 Henry VI*, where sighs are called ‘blood-sucking’ (4.5.21–24), and to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (3.2.97) where ‘sighs of love cost the fresh blood dear’.²⁴ From the perspective of humoral theory of the passions examined earlier in the chapter, the process is to be expected, as during sorrow the heart shrinks and dries with melancholy blood resulting in constant gasping for air to offer relief to the body. That sighs consume blood appears to be an inverted reading of the symptoms as the cause and the graphic personification of blood-thirsty sighs heightens the inert physical body on which violent respiration acts. While editors agree on the cultural capital of the phrase, they disagree on whether the line in Hamlet should read a ‘spendthrift’s sigh’ or ‘a spendthrift sigh’. In the first case, advocated by the Arden editors for instance and found in the original quarto, the sigh refers to the prodigal man’s regret of having spent his money. In the second case, the sigh itself is the spendthrift, problematising a purely figurative reading and raising questions about bodies and their potential to self-destruct.²⁵ In either case, Claudius expresses the belief that constrained love turns the body against itself, disturbs its regulated breathing (‘growing to a pleurisy’), and in this painful condition sighs relieve it while waste it. Despite Hamlet’s principle not to waste, not to ‘spend’ his ‘windy suspiration’ in vain, the play dramatises breath as elusive and difficult to manipulate. The ‘spendthrift sigh’ and Claudius’s reference to it in the context of delayed and unsatisfactory action allude to what is no longer there, a ‘should’ that has been supplanted by a ‘would’, an ethical commitment to revenge that has been indefinitely postponed, a sigh that has already been wasted.

In some of its most affective moments, the tragedy follows and sustains the axiomatic belief in suspiration’s wasteful energy. The example of Gertrude being upset and producing ‘profound heaves’ seen and or heard by Claudius as he enters her closet in the beginning of Act 4 is one of them, her sighs obvious symptoms of her misery after her encounter with Hamlet and his murder of Polonius. A memorable, even though not witnessed on stage, instance of self-destructive sighing is reported to Polonius and the audience via Ophelia, in her account of Hamlet’s appearance in her closet in Act 2, Scene 1:

OPHELIA [...]

At last, a little shaking of mine arm
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
 As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
 And end his being. (2.1.89–93)

Ophelia's lines are delivered in a state of shock and apparent distress after her meeting with Hamlet: she enters the scene 'affrighted' (2.1.72) and 'fear(s)' (2.1.82) Hamlet has gone mad. Whether the part is performed in a frantic or stunned manner, her report carries an emotional intensity that in most productions is interpolated with her disrupted breaths (due to haste of delivery and/or edginess), and makes the encounter vivid in the audience's mind. Although we can only imagine Hamlet's sigh, directors might opt for Ophelia to embody in her gestures the sigh that shatters Hamlet. Both Katie West, in Sarah Frankcom's *Hamlet* (Royal Exchange, Manchester, 2014), and Natalie Simpson, in Simon Godwin's production (RSC, Stratford-Upon-Avon, 2016), for instance, pointed to their stomach with tense hand gestures as they brought that sigh to life, a nod perhaps to the notion prevalent in the period that bowels are 'the seat of the tender and sympathetic emotions'.²⁶ The wasting of blood Claudius mentions to Laertes is here reinvented as the emptying and annihilation of the body, an inevitable effect of turbulent sighing, leading Polonius to declare his verdict:

POLONIUS [...]

This is the very ecstasy of love,
 Whose violent property fordoes itself
 And leads the will to desperate undertakings
 As oft as any passions under heaven
 That does afflict our natures. (2.1.99–103)

That the body appears to be wasting itself in sighing allows Polonius to offer a satisfactory, for his purposes, explanation and to categorise Hamlet's breath under passionate, and thus violent, love melancholy. Hamlet's, and Ophelia's for that matter, disordered state is neatly regulated by her father, who seeks to make known what he perceives is hidden in Hamlet's interior: 'This must be known which, being kept close, might move / More grief to hide than hate to utter love' (2.1.115–116).

Polonius has created a narrative out of the loss of air that Hamlet purportedly performs via Ophelia's body and account.

The loss inherent in the physiological act of sighing, as well as in any attempt to determine its affective origins is triumphantly portrayed in the play's last scene. Shortly before he dies, Hamlet's final plea with Horatio is for an orchestrated sigh, one that is produced pathologically in pain but ultimately turns into the finely tuned play the spectators experience on stage:

HAMLET [...]
 O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
 Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!
 If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
 Absent thee from felicity awhile,
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
 To tell my story. (5.2.327–333)

The intimate proximity between the two men, justified by Hamlet's command to 'let go' (5.2.327) of the poisonous cup, creates on stage a spectacle of communal suffering and heavily charged breathing. Frequently in productions the speech is delivered with Hamlet dying in Horatio's hands, sighing heavily and intermittently due to the physical exhaustion of the duel with Laertes and the fact he has been fatally wounded by the latter's poisonous sword; an exhaustion often accentuated after physically struggling to stop Horatio from committing suicide either by shouting, running over to him, or even grappling with him for the cup, actions that occasionally leave Horatio as breathless as Hamlet. Aware these are Hamlet's final moments, the audience are invited to pay close attention to every spoken word, perhaps—depending on seating arrangements—suspending their own breathing to catch Hamlet's last words. Actors and audience are breathing together and are short of air at the same time, the theatre reality creating a shared emotional and suffocating experience. The haunting emotionality of Hamlet's final breath is found in first-person accounts such as John Keats's, who describes Edmund Kean's death as Hamlet in 1817 as a liminal moment where the body disappears: 'the bodily functions wither up – and the mental faculties hold out, till they crack. It was an extinguishment, not a decay. The hand is agonised with death; the lip trembles, with the last breath – as we see the autumn leaf thrill in the cold wind of evening.

The very eye-lid dies'.²⁷ Hawkins's account of Kean's final moments on stage is less about the evaporation of the body and more about its disturbing clinging to life: 'his limbs shuddered and quivered; his hand dropped from between his stiffening lips, and he uttered a cry of nature so exquisite it could only be compared to the stifled sob of a fainting woman'. A reviewer from across the Atlantic in the nineteenth-century, commenting on Edwin Booth's Hamlet, also appears intensely focused on the moment when breath becomes air: 'you can just see the second when the breath leaves his body, by the sudden slight drop downwards into limp lifelessness'. In Simon Goodwin's 2016 RSC production, the loss of life in Hamlet's body is transformed into a powerful energy in Horatio's, as Hamlet (Paapa Essiedu) faints into oblivion and Horatio (Hiran Abeysekera) releases a heart-piercing howl. A reviewer's reaction to this scene captures the collective suffocation endured by all present: 'the howl of pain he unleashes when Hamlet dies in his arms smashes the air from your lungs. It's startling, unexpected, but makes complete sense'.²⁸

Sale has argued that Hamlet is asking to breathe through Horatio who will communicate his breath to the audience, yet the request is even more specific.²⁹ Hamlet, in asking Horatio to 'draw thy breath in pain / to tell my story', is asking him to sigh: to inhale deeply and exhale by articulating what has occurred. Sighing is expected to assume the role of storytelling, of representing, of constructing narratives out of one's private experience, and of ordering what has been in disorder. Horatio's dictated breathlessness at the very end, alongside Hamlet's dying 'O,o,o,o,' (the invisibility of this line in Q2, and its translation by some editors in a stage direction instead, serving as conceptual parallel with the invisibility of breath) transform the whole tragedy into a sigh produced by the theatre and into a performance that asks the audience to hold their breath and interrogate it, explore it, test its potential to act as a continuation or disruption of the internal, and then let it out in cathartic relief. At the very end of the tragedy, and considering the temporality of each theatrical production that re-orders, rehearses, repeats, and re-enacts, *Hamlet* epitomises the slippery significations of sighing and the experience of loss inherent in all representation. This is a play very much aware that the economy of breathing is an economy of loss, whether literal—in the sense of the deeply inhaled and exhaled air—or metaphorical. Furthermore, this loss is always inevitable but never

absolute in the world of the theatre and in the world of *Hamlet*. Having witnessed Hamlet's evaporating final breath and its channelling through Horatio onto the atmosphere of the playhouse, our emotions work to sustain the illusion of Hamlet's dead body and to overlook the actor's now quiet rhythmical movement of the chest. As Carol Rutter writes with regard to Cordelia's corpse, 'speechless, motionless, reduced by death from somebody to *the* body, the corpse, the actor's body occupies a theatrical space of pure performance where it has most to play when it has least to act. It is a subject-made-object whose presence registers absence and loss'.³⁰ What refuses to allow the transition from subject to object is breath, an unmistakable sign of life outside the control of any actor, that restores the dead body of the character to its vitality even after it has exhaled its dying groan. We are back where we started, with Hamlet's command to 'draw thy breath in pain' gesturing to the desire to rhythmically regulate an experience that is repeatedly out of sync.

NOTES

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2. See Carla Mazzio, 'The History of Air: *Hamlet* and the Trouble with Instruments', *South Central Review* 26 (2009): 153–196; Carolyn Sale, 'Eating Air, Feeling Smells: "Hamlet's" Theory of Performance', *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006): 145–168.
3. Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220. See also William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns', *History and Theory* 49 (2010): 237–265.
4. Scheer, 201–202.

5. Scheer, 207.
6. Scheer, 219.
7. Cicely Berry, *Voice and the Actor* (New York: Wiley Publishing, 1973), 21. See also E. A. J. Honigmann, 'Re-enter the Stage Direction: Shakespeare and Some Contemporaries', *Shakespeare Survey* 29 (1976): 117–126.
8. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623* (Arden Shakespeare Third Series), ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).
9. William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (Arden Shakespeare Third Series), ed. John Pitcher (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).
10. Sale, 157.
11. See Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
12. Alexander of Aphrodisias (although Aristotle is listed as the author), *The Problems of Aristotle with Other Philosophers and Phisitians*. Edinburgh. Printed by Robert Waldgrave, 1595, XXII, K4.
13. Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London: Printed by Valentine Simmes and Adam Islip, 1604), 61.
14. Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (London: Printed by Thomas Vautrollier, 1586), 158.
15. Nicolas Coeffeteau, *A Table of Humane Passions with Their Causes and Effects* (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1621), 171–172.
16. Jacques Ferrand, *Erotomania* (Oxford: Printed by L. Lichfield, 1640), 133.
17. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (Arden Shakespeare Third Series), ed. René Weis (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).
18. Bright, 161.
19. Coeffeteau, 272.
20. *OED* online.
21. Ferrand, 116.
22. Not all editors agree with the excision; Thompson and Taylor have retained this passage for the Arden. Hibbard's glosses of lines 4.7.112–121 appear in the Appendix A in the Oxford edition (2008).
23. Qtd. in Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton and the Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173.
24. See Edmond Malone, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, Vol. III* (London, 1821), 454–456.
25. For a full discussion of editorial proceedings of this line and passage, see Walsh 173–174.
26. *OED* online, 3a.
27. The quotations from Keats, Hawkins, and the reviewer of Booth, appear in Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 905. See also, R. S. White, *Keats as a Reader of*

- Shakespeare* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), 89–90; and Jonathan Mulrooney, 'Keats in the Company of Kean', *Studies in Romanticism* 42 (2003): 238–243.
28. Stephen Collins, 'Review—*Hamlet*', Live Theatre UK, <https://livetheatreuk.co.uk/2016/04/16/hamlet/>.
29. Sale, 161–162.
30. Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.

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‘Eyes Without Feeling, Feeling Without Sight’: The Sense of Sight in *Hamlet*

Brid Phillips

Seeing is believing, or is it? The question is insistently and inconclusively raised throughout *Hamlet*.¹ The play’s emphasis on the language of vision continually draws attention to both the veracity of visual images and the reasoning required to decipher the complexities of vision. The ‘eye’ is mentioned thirty times while the word ‘look’ is used close to fifty times. The word ‘look’ often appears as an imperative urging a character to engage with another character, or an exhortation to carry out a task, or as a comment on someone’s appearance. Equally, and more significantly for my argument, it is used to indicate an emotional transaction or exchange where the truth is often obscured within obfuscated notions of this sense. Numerous other forms occur with regularity including ‘see’ which occurs forty-one times while ‘sight’ is referred to nine times over the course of the play. For example, Gertrude implores Hamlet to ‘let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark’ (1.2.79), a complex command discussed below; Horatio declares ‘Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine eyes’ (1.1.56–57) which undercuts the visual truths posited by others; while Hamlet accuses his mother, Gertrude, of having

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‘eyes without feeling, feeling without sight’ (3.4.76), firmly linking the sense as moderated by the passions rather than reason which is the more usual logic employed. This chapter examines how contextual clues within *Hamlet*, concerning early modern belief structures around vision, facilitate an analysis of the expression and performance of emotions. The chapter also uses the opportunity to consider the idea of emotional blindness and the gap between sight and emotional awareness in *Hamlet* as sight and emotion become intertwined and conversely set in opposition depending on the viewpoint of particular characters.

Shakespeare inherits and reflects complex and often contradictory theories concerning the physiology of sight, some claiming the pre-eminence of this sense while others cast suspicion on its apparent trustworthiness as a guide to the truth. Many of these theories developed from the work of the Greek philosopher and surgeon, Galen. He was widely influential throughout the medieval period, and indeed, into the early modern period for a theory of vision which privileged extramission. He maintained that the ‘spirit’ within the person sends out ‘shining pneumata’ from the eyes through the air, with the air acting like an extension of the optic nerve. The pneumata hits and surrounds the object in the visual field whereupon a likeness of the object travels back to the lens of the eye. The eye-spirit then carries the image to the retina and via the nerves to the front chamber of the brain.² The process involves a physical connection between the viewer and the object that produces sight. Traces of this theory continued in early modern literature, and for our purposes, specifically in *Hamlet*.

Although, extramission theory of sight and other archaic notions were superseded by other theories in the early modern period, they continued to influence literary contexts for longer.³ For example, strength of spirit was often mentioned as being visible in the eyes.⁴ Galen was gradually superseded by scientific writing on vision that appeared from Arabic writers such as the Arab polymath al Hasan ibn al Haytham,⁵ who fused optical theory and cognitive philosophy to explain the transmission of an image through the optic nerve to the brain.⁶ Alhazen was also quoted widely, regarding matters of optics, in such Western books as *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus.⁷ However, to understand the emotional transactions relating to vision within *Hamlet*, it is important also to consider the social and cultural structures in which Shakespeare wrote as well as the trajectory of the individual character. To this end I examine vision as it was mediated through contemporary early modern

thinkers writing works which propagated theories around sight and its conditional strengths and weaknesses. Beyond the attempts at physiological explanation inherited from Galen, vision and seeing had wider moral implications in the early modern period and the very act of seeing could be fraught with anxieties. As Stuart Clark puts it '[i]f the senses were windows on the soul, they were also doors, allowing entrance to temptation, vice, and evil spirits'.⁸ Anthony Munday notes in 1580 that '[t]here cometh much evil in at the eares, but more at the eies, by these two open windows death breaketh into the soule. Nothing entereth in more effectualie into the memorie, than that which commeth by seeing'.⁹ Later, in 1593, Munday discusses the theological and moral issues surrounding vision in *The Defence of Contraries*. He cites the disadvantages of sight as the 'voluptuous delights and pleasures, which daily ende in bitternes, alienation of sense, provocation to envie, irritation and commotion against the heart'.¹⁰ Sight was a sense that needed careful husbanding to avoid disappointment and worse.

In his 1601 book, *The Passions of the Mind*, Thomas Wright declares,

Without any great difficulty may be declared how Passions seduce the Will; because the wit being the guide, the eye the stirrer, and director of the Will, which, of itself being blind and without knowledge, foloweth that the wit representeth, propoundeth, and approveth as good.¹¹

Wright explains how the eye and everything it sees has a profound impact on the will through the movement of the passions in the unwary. The danger for the unwitting is the entry of evil into one's body. Indeed, the ghost of old Hamlet notes '[c]onceit in weakest bodies strongest works' (3.4.110). The will can be persuaded to believe all that the eye presents to it as true, so it behoves men to use reason to regulate what the eye sees.¹² Although Wright's text was ostensibly secular he was echoing the theological position expounded in the Bible. Through scripture it was known that the eyes had the capacity to allow evil to enter one's heart and it was necessary to guard against this. For example, one passage from Thomas Cranmer's bible reads: 'The lyght of the body is the eye. Therfor, When thyne eye is syngle, all thy body also shalbe full of lyght. But yf thyne eye be euill, thy body also shalbe full of darknes'.¹³

Wright is concerned about the sense of sight, especially because the Holy Ghost has repeatedly counselled men to be vigilant over this sense in particular. Wright logically concludes that there is an important reason

for this and it is because the Holy Ghost was aware of the far-reaching capacity of the sense of vision. Philosophers and theologians thought that the visual sense above all created an imprint on the imagination and was most likely to move the passions,¹⁴ especially in those who do not exert reasoned thinking to their vision. Indeed, in *Hamlet*, Claudius says '[Hamlet's] loved of the distracted multitude, / Who like not in their judgement but their eyes' (4.3.4–5). The subjects of Denmark love the aspect of Hamlet that is presented to them and which they witness with their eyes. But, in Claudius' opinion, this love is based on the sense of sight and not on any rational evaluation of Hamlet's worth. When Claudius suggests that Hamlet will enjoy the 'cheer and comfort of our eye' if Hamlet remains at Elsinore, he implies a physical extension of emotional comfort from his eye to the person of Hamlet. However, when Claudius looks on Hamlet with increasing frustration which builds to hatred and fear, the cheer and comfort soon disappears to be replaced by anger and the need to destroy.

Within such a complex cultural context, an examination of sight and seeing can offer us a fresh reading of *Hamlet*. The play opens at night on the battlements of Elsinore castle with Horatio present, as he wishes to see the reported apparition with his own eyes. Marcellus explains that Horatio wants to 'approve our eyes and speak to it' (1.1.28). Horatio needs to rely on the evidence of his own visual experiences to provide a sensible meaning for the ghost the others had witnessed. Already he creates an inconsistency as he does not trust the reports of others but is prepared to trust his own eyes. Once he has seen the ghost he declares:

Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes. (1.1.55–57)

This is a complex and contradictory statement on his visual experience as Horatio is depending on the truth of vision while doubting the veracity of the visual experiences of those reporting to him. When he is convinced by the report of his own eyes he, then, convinces those around him of the same. He ignores the understanding within the early modern social and cultural environment that there was an underlying untruthfulness regarding images witnessed by the eyes. Horatio is suggesting that his sense of sight is a sensible and reasonable organ which confounds accepted truths of the period. George Hakewill,

writing a few years after *Hamlet*, mentions these truths when he talks about the unreliability of ocular proof in a chapter entitled 'Of the false reporte which the eie makes to the inner faculties in the apprehension of natural things'.¹⁵ Horatio describes his encounter with the ghost to Hamlet saying, 'I think I saw him yesternight' (1.2.188). Although Horatio qualifies his statement with a nod to the rational, he hesitates to ascribe a certainty to his vision. He alone stops short of using the word 'seems'. At various times all the other main characters, Hamlet ('Seems, madam, Nay, it is'. [1.2.76]) Gertrude ('Why seems it so particular with thee?' [1.2.75]), Claudius ('Which may to you, perhaps, seem much unseasoned' [4.7.11]), Polonius ('they may seem the taints of liberty' [2.1.32]), Ophelia ('it did seem to shatter all his bulk' [2.1.92]), and Old Hamlet ('The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen' [1.5.46]), use this word to frame their uncertainties. This points to unqualified and uncertain representations of seeing which lead to many moments of emotional blindness. Horatio, alone, has attempted to modify his sensation with his rational mind, which in theory, legitimises his experience.

Later, before Horatio describes seeing the ghost to his friend, Hamlet describes seeing his father in 'my mind's eye' (1.2.184).¹⁶ Here he is illustrating the power of the imagination to create images when one is emotionally invested in the circumstances. It is a potent emotional moment, almost demonstrating the power of suggestion before the event, as Horatio is about to explain actually witnessing the ghost of Hamlet's father. Horatio describes the ghost walking past 'their [Marcellus and Barnardo's] oppressed and fear-surprised eyes' (1.2.202). Their emotional plight was fully realized in the expression of their eyes. The men are unsure what the apparition of the ghost means and more importantly whether it springs from evil or good. Hamlet, himself, can't decide on this point either when he sees the ghost and he addresses the ghost as follows, '[b]e thou a spirit of health or goblin damned, / [b]ring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell' (1.4.40–41). As Erasmus, a mainstay of the humanist movement, stated '[w]hat we behold with our eyes moved us more powerfully than what we only hear'.¹⁷ Marcellus and Barnardo's eyes, in this case, are both a window to their passions which were overwhelmed by fear and surprise, moved by the spectacle of the ghost, and a portal which allows their passions to be moved. Later, the importance of the eyes in emotional exchange is reiterated again when the men try to describe the emotional demeanour of old Hamlet, the ghost. Hamlet asks '[a]nd fixed his eyes

upon you?' (1.2.232). It appears that this 'fixing of the eye' augmented the emotional reactions of the men as they were physically held by the ghost's gaze. Hamlet's questioning of the men regarding the ghost revolves around the ghost's visual appearance as a means to uncover its motivations. He is most interested in the outward appearance and the eye-to-eye contact the ghost had with the men to uncover any meaning in the encounter. Hamlet becomes heightened in his need to follow and discover the meaning behind the apparition of a spectre which he believes is the shade of his father ('it is an honest ghost' [1.5.137]), a need which, I would suggest, springs from his desperate wish to believe the apparition is what it seems to be. Horatio, who himself has a complicated relationship with the encounter, is worried that Hamlet 'waxes desperate with imagination' (1.4.87), drawing attention to the unstable relationship between imagination, reason, and emotion and also, perhaps, to Hamlet's 'mind's eye' which had already replayed visions of Old Hamlet.

The formal court setting is another space where the vicissitudes of sight are played out. Here Claudius suggests the contradictory nature of passions particularly those mediated by the eye, which, in fact, was foreshadowed Horatio's inconsistent position on the battlements. Claudius comments on the emotionally diametric situation when his wedding to Gertrude follows hard on the funeral of the Old King saying, '[w]ith an auspicious and a dropping eye, / With mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage' (1.2.11–12) he wed Gertrude. He suggests that the eyes can reflect two different emotions within the same temporal space. Likewise, Gertrude uses the idea of the eye as an emotional vehicle when counselling Hamlet in the public sphere:

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off
 And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
 Do not for ever with thy veiled lids
 Seek for thy noble father in the dust. (1.2.67–71)

In this passage, Gertrude suggests that Hamlet's grief and melancholy can be witnessed in his eyes. Once he replaces his grief with acceptance of the present situation or, at the very least, a more appropriate emotion, his eyes will impart a suitably friendly gaze over the nation. Looking for his father in the dust also suggests that she is having difficulty reading his spirits and his emotions. His eyes are shielded by the 'clouds' that Claudius has said still hang on him and are hidden by the downward

gaze. This reflects the belief articulated by Thomas Wright that it is possible most of the time to 'view the passions or inclinations which [...] reside and lie hidden' in man's heart but there remains a difficulty in unpicking these clues should the individual dissemble or obscure their passions from the on-looker'.¹⁸ In this moment, Hamlet has become unreadable to Claudius.

Gertrude questions why grief, common to all, seems to take such a particularly outward expression in Hamlet, despite her apparent attempts to access his inner emotional state through his eyes. Hamlet notes the contradiction, saying, "'Seems", madam – nay it is, I know not "seems"' stating that he has 'that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe' (1.2.76; 85–86). Gertrude does not understand the warning that is being extended to her here. Is it ever possible to know another's interior, another's passions? One could and should suspect counterfeit passions when one is aware of the trappings, ornaments, and embellishments needed to create the appearance of particular passions. This poses a question to an audience used to accepting such signifiers. What or whom should they believe? As Bridget Escolme notes in relation to disguise, '[a] theatre audience willing to accept that one might don another's set of clothes and instantly be taken for that other, is an audience that has different expectations about theatrical representation from a modern one, and a different understanding of the way clothing confers identity'.¹⁹ This donning and doffing of costume not only pertained to identity but also to the demeanour of a character. While Hamlet points to all the signifiers of grief—black funerary clothes, weeping and a dejected appearance—as mere show and ornaments of grief, he maintains that his grief will continue even if he dispensed with them.²⁰ By making this point, Hamlet emphasises the difference between a genuine internal passion and an outward sign although he sidesteps the truth his mother offers when she suggests his internal emotional state. This idea of counterfeiting passions mirrors the idea of counterfeiting visions, the reality and the perception of reality as relayed by the eye. A spectator might even consider that if the vision of outward signs is potentially such an unreliable guide to true inner feelings, then Hamlet's own claims to authentic emotions are impossible to judge.²¹ The passions are undermined by suspicions that they are merely part of the necessary motif undertaken by a person playing a melancholic being. Hamlet, in his first appearance, assures those around him that, although his outward façade uses the common tropes of grieving, he suffers deep inward grief;

yet after hearing about the murder of his father from the ghost, Hamlet decides to use those very tropes to create a situation where he can entrap the guilty. He says, '[a]s I shall perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on' (1.5.169–170). His 'antic disposition' highlights the unknowable veracity or duplicity of emotional expressions.²² Emotional expressions can be learned and after the learning process they can be externalized and presented as a visual certainty. In this case the internal emotion is not necessarily present and the spectator is forced to make a judgement about those emotions presented to him as 'honest'.

Claudius, suspicious of the inscrutable emotional states displayed by Hamlet, suggests to Gertrude that 'seeing unseen' (3.1.32), he and Polonius will witness the truth of Hamlet's emotions and 'frankly judge'. This plan taps into the Machiavellian politics of spies and informants prevalent in Elizabethan times as to see, in one of its many iterations, could mean 'to keep in view; to watch over'.²³ The plan becomes more urgent as Claudius is increasingly convinced of a disconnect between Hamlet's public performance and private experience. The term 'to spy', already current in early modern England, could mean 'to watch (a person, etc.) in a secret or stealthy manner; to keep under observation with hostile intent' and also 'to look at, examine, or observe closely or carefully'.²⁴ Intelligence networks existed in Elizabeth I's court and beyond. The assumed relationship between the senses and spies was a commonplace in this period. For example, Jennifer Rae McDermott discusses the Rainbow Portrait of Elizabeth I whose gown is scattered with eyes and ears. McDermott maintains that this gown portrays the 'omnipresent faculties of perception associated with her [Elizabeth I's] widespread intelligence network'.²⁵ The Danish court is also experiencing covert hostility which necessitates spies and their activities which in turn demonstrates the dangers faced by Hamlet. In this instance Polonius is no stranger to the activity, having given Reynaldo a veritable lesson in the art of spying in Act 2, scene 1, as Polonius wishes to maintain surveillance over his son Laertes' behaviour at university. Polonius has no compunction about using underhanded means to remain informed of Laertes' activities. However, on this occasion, for Claudius and Polonius 'seeing' is a visual mismatch as we, the audience, know that Hamlet is playing a part to distract their 'seeing' eye and present a falsehood to their untempered vision.

Extramission theory, mentioned previously, relied on the idea of a physical connection between subject and object. C. M. Woolgar notes

that, concurrent with this theory, '[e]qually prominent in both theory and popular understanding was the notion that there was direct contact, effectively touch, between the seen and the seer'.²⁶ Ophelia appears to suggest a version of this phenomenon when she describes Hamlet leaving her chamber:

He seemed to find his way without his eyes
 (For out o' doors he went without their helps)
 And to the last bended their light on me. (2.1.95–97)

Ophelia alludes to the extramissive quality of sight when she describes Hamlet's eyes bending their light on her, Hamlet as the spectator, emits a 'shining pneumata' creating the connection with Ophelia the object of his attention. Hamlet uses his eyes to connect emotionally with Ophelia rather than using them to see his path out of the room. The luminous gaze that Ophelia feels is projected onto her by Hamlet, in her understanding, is infused with Hamlet's madness and terror, referencing another property of sight. Because Ophelia opens herself through her eyes to this vision she allows his emotions to penetrate and infect her. Using the strength of her narrative to paint her visual picture,²⁷ she catalogues a man who is 'pale', with

[...] his knees knocking each other,
 And with a look so piteous in purport
 As if he had been loosed out of hell
 To speak of horrors (2.1.78–81)

Ophelia is in danger, a danger to which she shortly succumbs, of leaving her mind open to the horror of these extreme emotions.

This look can also be explained in literary terms if one compares Hamlet's gaze intertextually to that of Orpheus. Hamlet's backward glance recalls the moment when Orpheus looks back on Eurydice and in that forbidden moment loses her. Hamlet's penetrating gaze reflects a man who has seen the horrors of hell, again foreshadowing losing Ophelia to her watery unchristian death and the uncertain afterlife she will face. I suggest that the implicit parallel between Hamlet and Orpheus underlines the power of vision, as this is the point at which Orpheus loses Eurydice for a second and final time to the underworld of the dead. The connection between their longing eyes was unable to

hold them together.²⁸ I believe that, this is the moment where Ophelia has been affected and the imbalance of emotions will ultimately bring her to her death. For Ophelia, this act of vision becomes a mimetic process whereby she looks upon madness and allows it to enter her through her eyes. Later in the play she becomes the vision of madness she has described in Hamlet and she is lost to both Hamlet and the living world.

Hamlet puts on his ‘antic disposition’ in the public sphere and following his performance Ophelia, captivated by the act of seeing, describes him thus:

Now see what noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled out of time and harsh –
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me
T’have seen what I have seen, see what I see! (3.1.156–160)

In his performance Hamlet suggests an inner state of love-melancholy which has in essence relied on the visual presentation for its veracity. He is using the unreliable sense of sight to legitimate his emotional performance. Ophelia has used her eyes to determine, what she believes to be, the devastation of Hamlet’s reason caused by an excess of emotion. Her eyes channel the tragedy that unfolds in front of her, through untempered reason and for her, to see is to understand. However, Ophelia unwittingly hits upon the subjective nature of sight when she says, ‘see what I see!’ She has processed the sights in front of her differentiated by her misguided internal reasoning. No two people will see an event in an identical fashion which goes part way to explain the tragic outcome for Ophelia. For Ophelia, witnessing Hamlet in this state has proved momentous. Ophelia, by privileging the act of seeing, now has her own emotional outlook tempered by this scene she has just witnessed. This echoes the opinion of Thomas Wright who makes it clear that every passion is potentiated by emotions already present within the person. So, when we love, the sight of everything fortunate that befalls our loved ones pleases us; and, when we hate, we cannot abide anything fortunate to befall the person we hate.²⁹ Simultaneously, Claudius, cogitating about what he witnesses, expresses reservations regarding Hamlet’s emotions posited by others and he reserves some doubts as to the form and

meaning of Hamlet's behaviour. Claudius, unlike some of the others, has not the same affections for Hamlet and is therefore more sceptical and less inclined to believe the performance.

Ophelia's later disintegrating emotional and psychological state can also be explained by the involvement of her imagination in conjunction with the sense of sight. Michel de Montaigne articulates an early modern consideration of the imagination when he quotes a medieval philosophical axiom, '*Fortis imaginatio generat casum*', or 'a powerful imagination generates the event'.³⁰ He continues saying that if he witnesses someone who is suffering, the same suffering is produced in him. He says, 'when imaginary thoughts trouble us we break into sweats, start trembling, grow pale or flush crimson; we lie supine on our featherbeds and feel our bodies agitated by such emotions; some even die from them'.³¹ The power of the imagination could exert a body to a physical reaction when the mind is open to such events. In these ideas the early modern eye is not only a moral sign but also an active moral agent, shaping and framing the individual's reactions such as that private moment between Hamlet and Gertrude, described below, when the sight of Gertrude's own face brings moral insight to her actions.

The question of sight and in particular a lack of sight finds its full expression in the exchange between Hamlet and his mother Gertrude in her bedroom. Hamlet, frustrated by Gertrude's emotional blindness, seeks to enlighten her, saying:

Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you. (3.4.17–19)

While echoing the tale of Narcissus, the point in relation to vision is that Narcissus finds himself when his interior is exposed through the reflection of his own image.³² As Faye Tudor puts it, '[t]he "mirror" offers a "true" image, even if sight is fooled'.³³ The relevance to Narcissus can also be explained by the idea of self-knowledge as the prophet announced that Narcissus would only live to a long age if 'him selfe he doe not know'.³⁴ Contemporary notions of self-examination, such as those expounded by Sir John Davies in his 1599 book *Nosce Teipsum*, echo the difficulties regarding the quest for self-knowledge. Davies states:

And thou my Soule, which turnst thy Curious eye
 To view the beames of thine own forme divine,
 Know that thou canst know nothing perfectly,
 While thou art Clouded with this flesh of mine (Section XXXIV, ll.
 17–20)³⁵

In this passage the soul is unable to see clearly when bodily concerns, such as those Hamlet is accusing Gertrude of, limit and obscure the capture of true and reliable knowledge. With Gertrude, Hamlet wants to use the primacy of vision tempered by reason to ascertain self-truths. In the seclusion of her closet with no other sensory distractions he attempts to focus her sense of sight on the twin pictures of her deceased husband and her present husband. He demands:

[...] Have you eyes?
 Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
 And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?
 You cannot call it love, for at your age
 The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble
 And waits upon judgement, and what judgement
 Would step from this to this? (3.4.65–69)

While Hamlet has previously suggested that the act of 'seeing' is not to be trusted, here he is imploring his mother not only to truly see, but also to use her reason to decipher the truth. Sight can have merit if one uses reason and astute judgement to temper one's conclusions. He is confused regarding her decision as he exclaims, '[s]ense, sure, you have – / Else could you not have motion' (3.4.69–70), suggesting that he credits her with reason and some measure of intellectual worth as she can be moved (particularly emotionally). However, he, then, accuses her of having '[e]yes without feeling, feeling without sight' (3.4.76), which suggests that, in a contradictory fashion, the sights presented to her eyes have not moved her. As Kathryn Prince notes, '[i]f all this is confusing, then it is entirely consistent with the play's themes, since confusion – especially regarding emotions as they are perceived, expressed and received – is one of the chief concerns of *Hamlet*'.³⁶

Some of the accusations which Hamlet brings against Gertrude are articulated by George Hakewill in 1615, who outlines all the evil that

the sense of sight brought, reflected in a selection of his chapter titles. For example, 'That the eie is the instrument of wantonnesse, gluttony, and covetousnesse'; 'How the eie was the chiefe occasion of original sinne and of examples in all those mischiefs which formerly are proved to arise from it'; and, 'Of the false reporte which the eie makes to the inner faculties in the apprehension of natural things'.³⁷ Hakewill goes further and suggests that the eye actively participates in evil doing when he says that 'the eie, and the hand, a[re] the two most offensive members of the body; one is the counsaillour to the heart, and the other [i]s the executioner'.³⁸ He includes chapters such as 'Of bewitching by the eie', 'Of the delusion of the sight in particular by the immediate working of the diuell', and 'That the eies serue not only treacherous porters & false reporters in natural & artificiall things but also as secret intelligencers for discovering [revealing] the passions of the minde, and diseases of the body', all of which reflect the contemporary fears regarding sight in the early modern period. Hakewill also associates the duplicity of vision with passions of the mind in chapter ten which is entitled 'A general discourse of the delusion of the eie by artificiall meanes as also by the passions of the minde'. Therein, he asserts that delusions of the eye can be caused by 'the violent passions of feare and melancholy'³⁹ and, as discussed, fear and melancholy figure largely in *Hamlet* in relation to the emotional structures of sight.

Vision, along with the humours of the body, should be tempered by reason, on which point Hamlet reproaches Gertrude for her apparent lack of reasoned discrimination particularly when she chooses to 'batten on this Moor'. He contrasts the goodness of his father's fair face with the black Moorish representation of his uncle. Although the immediate association might be the geographical majestic mountain compared with a lowly moor, one could also consider Shakespearean wordplay on Moor and 'blackamoor'.⁴⁰ Blackness, in both Gertrude and Claudius, signifies a moral stain but also the effect of the feminised humour of melancholy, a product both of her grief and of her incontinent female ways. Hamlet is attempting to 'purify' the maculate or spotted Queen.⁴¹ Hamlet insists that she should feel the physical and emotional effects of the disgrace she has brought on herself, asking 'O shame, where is thy blush?' (3.4.79). He demands that she look into her own eyes, insisting that then she can truly see her own shame, guilt, and buried grief.

The Queen responds by accepting his accusations:

[...] O Hamlet, speak no more.
 Thou turn'st my very eyes into my soul
 And there I see such black and griev'd spots
 As will leave there their tinct. (3.4.86–89)

Gertrude, forced into introspection by Hamlet, examines those passions which she had sought to conceal from the state, her son, and ultimately herself. She represents the embodiment of both vision and passions in the person of the melancholic described by Timothy Bright,

[o]f colour they be black, according to the humour whereof they are nourished, and the skinne always receauing the blacke vapors, which insensibly do passe from the inward parts, from the inward parts, taketh die and staine therof.⁴²

Her inward glance reveals a discolouration, a physical expression of her guilt and grief that causes her discomfort and concern.

For a moment Gertrude is wise to her own failings and emotional excesses, however, she quickly turns her attention to Hamlet's emotional state when Hamlet reacts to the appearance of the ghost. She is distracted by her son and no longer dwells on her own predicament. In this instance Gertrude is suffering from 'inattentional blindness',⁴³ which means she no longer acknowledges her own emotional and psychological position. Gertrude turns from her own emotional position to describe Hamlet's heightened emotionality in terms of the ocular window to the passions of his soul. Gertrude cries to Hamlet that, 'you do bend your eye on vacancy' and '[f]orth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep' (3.4.113; 115). She sees Hamlet's eye making its connection with what she believes to be an empty space and while doing so his inner spirit overflows from his eyes. With these words Gertrude alludes to the early modern belief, written about by Helkiah Crooke, that the eye is the chief seat of the soul which provides a window into the passions of the mind.⁴⁴ Crooke, in 1615, eloquently describes the role of the eyes in terms that echo Gertrude's utterance:

Doth not Hippocrates the pillar of Physicke, propound unto us most certaine signes of the passions of the mind by the Eyes [...] some famous

Phylosophers have placed the chiefe seate of the Soule in the Eyes. For these Eyes doe burne and shine, they twinkle, they winke, they are sorrowfull, they laugh, they admire, they love, they lust, they flatter, and in one word they decipher and paint the image of the Mind with so artificiall a pencil, that they seeme to be a second soule.⁴⁵

Here, again, eyes are active agents, conveying both the affective state of the soul and producing affective states in their own right. Not only do they see but also they are actively able to feel and transfer the knowledge of emotions. Crooke suggests that the manner of vision or sight is philosophical rather than a mere question of anatomy.⁴⁶ He illustrates the duplicity that the eyes can impose on the mind through the artificial images that they impress upon the mind. The responsibility for controlling emotional fluctuations, including those of the humours, rests squarely with the beholder. The inner workings of the eye can affect the internal spirit if not tempered with individual restraint.

During Gertrude and Hamlet's exchange, the ghost appears to Hamlet but Gertrude is unable to see the shade of her former husband.⁴⁷ She answers Hamlet's questioning of her visual skills saying '[n]othing at all, yet all that is I see' (3.4.129). This leaves us to wonder which of these two remain emotionally blind and which is using reason to mediate their sense of sight particularly as the utterances of the ghost cannot be corroborated. Some performances use an actor to deliver the lines so that both the audience and Hamlet can see the ghost while some present the ghost as a disembodied voice with no corporeal presence. Despite being a substantial embodied presence (on occasion) with the ability to communicate the audience may share Horatio's earlier scepticism regarding the ghost.⁴⁸ However, this complexity does not preclude the (in)substantial presence of the ghost from influencing emotional performances.

The question of emotional blindness can be extended to all of the main characters in the play and vies with the notion of sight as a privileged sense. Both Ophelia and Gertrude, in keeping with the words of Thomas Wilson in 1553, '[a]mong all the senses, the eye sight is most quicke, & conteinneth the impression of thinges most assuredly',⁴⁹ rely most heavily on their sense of sight. In this way they are the ones most emotionally blinded by the outward show of others. For an audience the question of emotional blindness reflects the tension between the privileged sense of sight, and the potential mistakes which arise when that sense of sight is relied upon to ascertain emotional states. This study

serves to remind a modern audience, which relies on hearing and reasoning as well as vision, how tragedy functioned within a paradigm that relied on the tensions associated with the primacy of sight. *Hamlet* is preoccupied with the notion of sight as a misleading sense which is an issue Shakespeare returns to repeatedly in works such as *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*.⁵⁰ However, although we, as Hamlet says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, 'would pluck out the heart of my mystery' (3.2.357–358) the problems about the status of sight may remain insolvable but are so central that they define an important part of the mystery of the play itself. Ultimately the connection between seeing and feeling in Shakespeare is questioned and found to be much less solid than some of the medical texts would suggest illustrating both the trustworthy and illusory sides to the contradictory nature of vision.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). All further references to the play are taken from this edition.
2. Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, vol. 2, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), Chapter 10, 'The Eyes', 463–503; David F. Hoener, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992). Hoener discusses the eyes and the spirits in detail (95–98).
3. Marcus Nordland explores the transition between theories in his book *The Dark Lantern: A Historical Study of Sight in Shakespeare, Webster, and Middleton* (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1999).
4. For example, in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius says 'I could weep mine spirit from mine eyes'. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 4.3.98–99. And, of course, in *Hamlet* when Gertrude says to her son, 'Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep' (3.4.115).
5. Nader El-Bizri, 'Classical Optics and the Perspective Traditions Leading to the Renaissance', in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, ed. John Shannon Hendrix and Charles H. Carman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 11–30.
6. Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16–17.
7. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 18; Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *Batman Uppon Bartholome: His Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum, 1582 With an Introduction*

- and *Index by Jurgen Schafer*, trans. Stephen Batman (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976). See particularly book five.
8. Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 24.
 9. Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (London, 1580), 95–96.
 10. Anthony Munday, *The Defence of Contraries* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum/Da Capo Press, 1969), 'For Blindnesse, Declamation', 4.
 11. Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in General*, ed. William Webster Newbold (New York: Garland, 1986), 2.2.3–11.
 12. In *The Passions of the Mind in General*, Wright states 'All senses no doubt are the first gates whereby pass and repass all messages sent to the passions; but yet the Scriptures in particular wonderfully exhort, command, and admonish us to attend unto the custody and vigilance over our eyes' (5.1.18–22).
 13. Thomas Cranmer, *The Byble in English: That Is to Saye the Content of All the Holy Scrypture, Both of the Olde and Newe Testament with a Prologe Thereinto, Made by the Reuerende Father in God, Thomas Archebysshop of Cantorbury* (London, 1541), Luke 11:34.
 14. For example, Thomas Aquinas, *Philosophical Texts*, trans. Thomas Gilby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 215–251.
 15. Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eie*. Indeed, ocular proof is the final piece of evidence which sealed Othello's misguided judgement of Desdemona. William Shakespeare, *Othello*, 3.3.362–363.
 16. *OED*, 'mind', n.1.
 17. Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus: Spiritualia and Pastoralia: Exomolgesis and Ecclesiastes*, ed. Frederick J. McGinness, trans. Michael J. Heath and James L. P. Butrica (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), vol. 68, 807. Erasmus was a fifteenth century humanist whose work was widely influential across Reformation Europe. For further discussion on the role of emotion in the *Ecclesiastes* see Kirk Essary, 'Fiery Heart and Fiery Tongue: Emotion in Erasmus' *Ecclesiastes*', *Erasmus Studies* 36 (2016): 5–34.
 18. Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in General*, 4.1.30–31.
 19. Bridget Escolme, 'Costume, Disguise, and Self-Display', in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performances*, eds. Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2014), 119.
 20. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that trappings refer to a cloth or covering spread over the harness or saddle of a horse or other beast of burden, often gaily ornamented ('trapping', n.1a); or ornaments; dress; embellishments; external, superficial, and trifling decoration ('trapping', n.1b).
 21. For further discussion of inwardness see Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University

- of Chicago Press, 1995). Maus examines theories of inwardness in her book beginning with reference to Hamlet's speech about the trappings of grief.
22. For a further discussion of 'antic disposition' see Emily Anglin, "'Something in Me Dangerous': Hamlet, Melancholy, and the Early Modern Scholar", *Shakespeare* 13.1 (2014): 7.
 23. *OED*, 'see', v. 7a.
 24. *OED*, 'spy', v. 1a and 3.
 25. Jennifer Rae McDermott, 'Perceiving Shakespeare', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 19 (2009): 1.
 26. C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 148.
 27. For a further discussion on the literary expression of the visual in this instance see Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), esp. 90–94.
 28. 'And now they were nearing the margin of upper earth, when he, afraid that she might fail him, eager for the sight of her, turned back his long-ing eyes; and instantly she slipped into the depths' (Ovid, *Metamorphoses Books IX–XV*, trans. Frank Justus Miller [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984], X: 55–57).
 29. Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in General*, 5.1.191–203.
 30. Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech (London: Allen Lane, 1991), 109.
 31. Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 110.
 32. Alison Thorne discusses the increasing market for plate-glass mirrors in this period and the possible effect on self-definition. See in particular *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking Through Language* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 107–108.
 33. Faye Tudor, "'All in Him Selfe as in a Glass He Sees": Mirrors and Vision in the Renaissance', in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, ed. John Shannon Hendrix and Charles H. Carman (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 171.
 34. Ovid, *The XV Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, Translated Oute of Latin into English Meeter, by Arthur Golding Gentleman, A Worke Very Pleasaunt and Delectable*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1567), 71.
 35. Sir John Davies, *Nosce teipsum This Oracle Expounded in Two Elegies I. Of Humane Knowledge. 2. Of the Soule of Man, and the Immortalitie Thereof* (London, 1599).
 36. Kathryn Prince, 'Drama', in *Early Modern Emotions*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 142.
 37. George Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eie*.
 38. George Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eie*, 36.
 39. George Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eie*, 54.

40. See note to 3.4.65 in *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor: 'The suggestion of a pun on "blackamoor" is supported by Hamlet's claim that the present King has a "face like Vulcan" in Q1 at this point (11.34). Vulcan being the blacksmith of the gods, whose face was darkened by the smoke of his occupation' (341).
41. Patricia Parker, 'Black Hamlet: Battening on the Moor', *Shakespeare Studies* 31 (2003): 130.
42. Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie, London 1586* (Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm/Da Capo Press, 1969), 128–129.
43. Graham Holderness discusses this phenomenon in his 'Review Article: Shakespeare and Perception', *Critical Survey* 26, no. 3 (2014): 95. Raphael Lyne goes into further details regarding the cognitive aspect of these theories in 'Shakespeare, Perception and Theory of Mind', *Paragraph* 37, no. 1 (2014): 79–95.
44. For further discussion on the effects of the eye and the ear see Jennifer Rae McDermott, 'Perceiving Shakespeare'.
45. Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man. Together with Controuersies Thereto Belonging. Collected and Translated Out of All the Best Authors of Anatomy, Especially Out of Gasper Bauhinus and Andreas Laurentius* (London, 1615), 651–646. (The page numbering appears to have suffered in the printing process as 646 lies between 651 and 653.)
46. Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, Book 8, 'Quest XXII: *Whether sight be made by Emission or Reception, where the nature of the Sight is accurately explained*' (666). Crooke mentions the classical supposition that a basilisk or a menstruating woman can infect something just with their looks. He refutes that this is true but states that it is the corrupt vapours coming out of their mouth, eyes, nostrils and from their whole bodies which infects the air. In a roundabout way, there is something evil that can arise from the eyes to corrupt and infect.
47. Reginald Scot states that witches 'never appeare to the whole multitude, sel-dome to a few, and most commonlie to one alone; for so one may tell a lie without controlment'. (*The discoverie of witchcraft* [London, 1584], 535.)
48. Sarah Outterson-Murphy discusses the insistence on a physicality of the ghost in *Hamlet* which in some ways precludes the comedic aspect of his presence in "'Remember Me:" The Ghost and Its Spectators in *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34, no. 2 (2016): 253–275.
49. Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique, 1553* (Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm/Da Capo Press, 1969), fol.116r.
50. Huston Diehl looks at the problematic nature of vision in *Macbeth* in 'Horrid Image, Sorry Sight, Fatal Vision: The Visual Rhetoric of *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare Studies* 16 (1983): 191–203.

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PART III

‘this quintessence of dust’ Character



Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy in *Hamlet*

Jeffrey R. Wilson

How did Shakespeare view himself as an artist?¹ This question is difficult to ask of any artist, but it is especially difficult to answer in the case of Shakespeare because he wrote almost nothing in his own voice.² He can't be interviewed and, in contrast to most of his contemporaries, he wrote no prefaces, no treatises, and only a couple of dedicatory epistles. The only words we have from him are those he attributed to his characters—even in his poetry the line between 'author' and 'speaker' must be firmly maintained—leading to questions of how much the statements of any given character might overlap with the thoughts of the author himself.

For example, the Hamlet who pronounces on 'the purpose of playing' (3.2.20) and stages 'The Mousetrap' (3.2.233) is readily available to be seen as an avatar for Shakespeare and his own thoughts on drama.³ In this reading, Shakespeare is 'the poet of nature' who believes drama should be naturalistic (should 'o'erstep not the modesty of nature' [3.2.19]), should be mimetic (should 'hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature' [3.2.21–22]), and should be more nuanced than the

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popular kind of drama that appeals to ‘the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise’ (3.2.10–12).⁴ But Hamlet’s habit of interrupting ‘The Mousetrap’ to tell its audience what it means—he is, Ophelia says, ‘as good as a chorus’ (3.2.241)—does not gel with Shakespeare’s habit of strategically writing himself and his own voice out of his drama. The Hamlet who anxiously and aggressively interprets his art for his audience seems uniquely unfit for the Shakespeare who, with a quiet confidence, always lets his art speak for itself.

At the same time, there is another storyteller hovering around Elsinore who seems more Shakespearean in spirit. I am referring not to King Hamlet’s Ghost, the part Shakespeare may have played, but to Hamlet’s friend Horatio. If we want a symbolic representative for Shakespeare himself, Horatio much more than either of the Hamlets matches up with Shakespeare’s artistic personality. If that link can be established, moreover, a close reading of Horatio’s character may provide us with some insight on Shakespeare’s image of himself as an artist and a man.

I

Horatio serves several functions in *Hamlet*.⁵ Most obviously, he is Hamlet’s schoolmate from Wittenberg and best friend, yet he is still an outsider in terms of class and possibly nationality (he’s not royal, and his Danishness is open to question).⁶ As an outsider, Horatio is an astute observer, as in Act III when he watches Claudius while Hamlet stages ‘The Mousetrap’. He is also a good listener, as in Act V when he patiently hears Hamlet’s story about the pirates. With his Italianate name, Horatio stands for a southern Europe more closely connected to the classical Greco-Roman tradition than the Nordic Denmark which has names like Hamlet. In the name Horatio, moreover, we hear the Latin *ratio*, ‘reason’, for Horatio is the rational foil to Hamlet’s emotional suffering. Both are scholars and sceptics, though Hamlet’s scepticism is more manic, Horatio’s more stoic. Perhaps the mathematical sense of *ratio* even informs Horatio’s calculating judiciousness. Hamlet says Horatio is ‘as just a man / As e’er [his] conversation coped withal’ because Horatio does not react to fortune’s blows whether good or bad (3.2.53–67).⁷ Horatio is even, just, measured, passive, and detached if not cold and indifferent.⁸ If Horatio is supposed to be Hamlet’s best

friend, therefore, he is the kind of friend who is ‘just there’, and he is ‘just there’, nearly silent, in several scenes. At his worst, he is something of a do-nothing and a yes-man for Hamlet in contrast to the friends who actually try to help Hamlet like Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Ophelia.

But Horatio is also a storyteller. In his name we hear not only *ratio* but also *oratio*, from the Latin *orare*, ‘to speak’. Like the Shakespeare described in this chapter, Horatio is a certain kind of orator whose stories are grounded in reason. That is probably why Shakespeare made Horatio into the symbolic author of the entire Hamlet legend insofar as Horatio obliges when, at the end of the play, Hamlet begs him to ‘tell [his] story’ (5.2.332).⁹ Beyond this meta-story, Horatio tells three other stories in *Hamlet*, two at the very beginning of the play and one at the very end. First he tells Marcellus and Bernardo (and us in the audience) the story of King Hamlet’s duel with Old Fortinbras; then he tells Prince Hamlet the story of the appearance of his father’s spirit; and then he tells Young Fortinbras the story of Prince Hamlet. Thus, where Hamlet’s overtly artistic moments—‘Aeneas’ Tale to Dido’ and ‘The Mousetrap’—are at the centre of things in Acts II and III, Horatio’s are on the periphery, framing things at the very start and very end, setting up and then punctuating the play, pointing both backward to before the play begins and forward to after it ends.

Hamlet’s association with emotion and Horatio’s with reason extend to the ways they tell their stories. ‘Aeneas’ Tale to Dido’ is performed because Hamlet asks for ‘a passionate speech’ (2.2.373), and during ‘The Mousetrap’ Hamlet is frantic, aggressive, and shoulders his way on stage. In contrast, Horatio’s scepticism surfaces in perspectivity and qualification during the three stories he tells. When Marcellus asks who can tell him why Denmark is on guard, for example, Horatio responds, ‘That can I, / At least the whisper goes so’ (1.1.79–80). Horatio doesn’t tell Marcellus what’s going on; Horatio only tells Marcellus what people *say* is going on. Moments later, when Horatio refers to ‘valiant Hamlet / (For so this side of our known world esteemed him)’ (1.1.84–85), he doesn’t describe King Hamlet; he only describes the way *other* people have described King Hamlet. What this means, in terms of telling a story, is that Horatio is constantly representing the voices of others rather than his own, a habit he shares with Shakespeare. While Hamlet waffles between action and contemplation, Horatio remains a thoroughly reflective person: ‘reflective’ in the sense of thoughtful, but also ‘reflective’ in the sense that Hamlet describes when he states that ‘the

purpose of playing' is 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature'. In the reflective, mimetic way he tells stories, Horatio does what Hamlet says to do but doesn't really do himself. Horatio reflects the world back to itself by habitually attributing ideas to others and writing himself and his own beliefs out of his stories. Even in the idea that Horatio is a 'foil' for Hamlet, we can detect his reflective nature.

Horatio is also the kind of sceptic obsessed with softening and moderating his statements with phrases such as 'A piece of him' (1.1.52), 'In the gross and scope of my opinion' (1.1.68), 'I take it' (1.1.104), 'I have heard' (1.1.149), 'And do in part believe it' (1.1.165), and—when he goes to tell Prince Hamlet of the Ghost of King Hamlet—'*I think* I saw him yesternight' (1.2.189, emphasis mine). None of the other stories told in *Hamlet*—the Ghost's story of King Hamlet's murder, for example, or Gertrude's story of Ophelia's death—exhibit this rhetoric of subjective perspective. To be constantly qualifying one's claims and stories with subjective softeners is to become what is sometimes called an unreliable narrator. It takes the grounds of certainty away from one's audience because the distinction between fact and the interpretation of fact cannot easily be drawn, a strategy Shakespeare also exploited. Shakespeare never said what he thought to be true; he only represented what men and women in the positions of his characters thought, said, and did. The effect of rigorously qualifying ideas and obsessively attributing them to others, for both Horatio and Shakespeare, is to increase the sense of irony in one's audience. Both Horatio's and Shakespeare's stories encourage audiences to recognize the possible separation between apparent and actual meaning—words, plays, and stories that seem to mean one thing can turn out, upon closer examination, to mean something else entirely. For example, Horatio's story of King Hamlet's duel with Old Fortinbras seems to be simple exposition of the backstory of the play. There is definitely a reading of this passage, however, in which Horatio is calling the supposed valour of King Hamlet into question. How 'valiant', really, is a King whose need to satisfy his 'emulate pride' (1.1.83) leads to a blood feud that puts his whole kingdom in jeopardy for generations to come? When an author like Horatio or Shakespeare refuses to take ownership of the claims and content of a story, it excites the interpretive faculty of his audience. That is why Shakespeare's plays are so malleable in their meaning and so resilient in modern culture: they not only allow but indeed encourage speculative interpretation that fills in gaps purposefully left by the author (that filling-in of gaps is the very thing I am

doing in this chapter). Horatio's story to Hamlet of his father's ghost is therefore followed by a long question-and-answer period in which Hamlet asks for details that the original story left out, something we only wish we could do with Shakespeare.

II

None of this makes the connection between Shakespeare and his meta-theatrical Hamlet mistaken or meaningless. It would be silly to think that one character or the other were a clean allegory for Shakespeare, but Hamlet and Horatio offer two very different images of the author. Where Hamlet is specifically a dramatist, Horatio is more generally a storyteller, which sets the latter apart from Shakespeare. But where Hamlet is the aristocratic dramatist putting up plays at court, Horatio is something of an upstart on the outside of the nobility looking in. Where Hamlet is present in his art, interpreting it, Horatio is absent. Hamlet is also the artist who is himself the subject of high drama, while Horatio is the one removed from the action, the observer. And where Hamlet is associated with jangly Italian melodrama ('The Murder of Gonzago' [2.2.477]), Horatio becomes the voice of a more classically and philosophically oriented theory of tragedy at the end of the play.

Just before he does so, Horatio almost becomes, like Hamlet, a player in the tragedy when he, 'more an antique Roman than a Dane' (5.2.324), goes to drink the poisoned liquor and kill himself. Hamlet begs Horatio not to do it specifically because of Horatio's penchant for telling stories: 'Absent thee from felicity awhile, / And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, / To tell my story' (5.2.330–332). Here the telling of stories is configured with pain, something that would have made sense to the Shakespeare who wrote a play about dealing with death titled *Hamlet* shortly after the death of his own son named Hamnet.¹⁰ If there was a connection between Hamnet and *Hamlet*—and that connection seems hard to deny—then it would be Horatio who is in Shakespeare's place experiencing the death of a loved one, living to tell the story, and telling it as tragedy:

Give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view,
And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear

Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
 Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
 Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
 And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
 Fall'n on the inventors' heads. (5.2.360–368)

Horatio here comes to stand for Shakespeare because what Horatio identifies in Hamlet's story—what Shakespeare himself identified when looking at his sources—is that it lends itself to a telling that exploits the conventions of tragedy as practiced by the ancients. Horatio does not tell of Claudius's murder of King Hamlet; he tells of 'carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts'. Horatio does not tell of Prince Hamlet's unintended murder of Polonius; he tells of 'accidental judgments'. Horatio does not tell of Hamlet's death during his duel with Laertes; he tells of 'deaths put on by cunning'. Horatio does not tell of Ophelia's descent into madness and suicide; he tells of death by 'forced cause'. Horatio does not tell of Claudius and Laertes's deaths during their plot against Hamlet; he tells of 'purposes mistook / Fall'n on the inventors' heads'. The content of Hamlet's story completely falls away here as Horatio theorizes it into the shape of tragedy just as, potentially, the content of the story of the death of Shakespeare's son fell away when it was reconfigured in *The Tragedy of Hamlet*.¹¹

The point here is not simply that Horatio voiced the tradition of tragedy as Shakespeare was embarking upon his period of great tragedies, with plays like *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* on the way. The point is also that Horatio is the author—rational, sceptical, stoic, surreptitious—who makes sense of things by identifying in them generic form. Taken together, the telling of stories and the identification of genre seems to give Horatio purpose and value in life. Specifically, the formal structure of tragedy seems to give Horatio a way to make sense of and cope with the death that surrounds him and that prompts him to consider taking his own life. It is not hard to imagine *The Tragedy of Hamlet* playing a similar role in the life of Shakespeare.

III

We are on shaky ground here. Any speculation about Shakespeare's life and attitudes toward art runs the risk of the biographical fallacy that scours and sometimes invents personal experience as a *roman à clef* for

literary expression. We have better footing talking about the text than the author. Yet it would be absurd, given the scarcity of historical facts we know about Shakespeare, to act as if his artistic output weren't an important resource for knowledge about the man. It would also be absurd to act as if Shakespeare's personal experiences didn't influence his art simply because we don't and can't know what they were with much certainty. The most balanced approach is to weigh what little biographical information we have about Shakespeare against the massive corpus of literary output that we have to determine what might, plausibly, have been the case.

When we do so, there is reason to believe that Shakespeare wrote some of himself into the character of Horatio. Specifically, there is reason to believe that, like Horatio, Shakespeare found solace after the death of a loved one in the telling of tragedy. By rationalizing pain and suffering as tragedy, Horatio and Shakespeare were able to avoid the self-destruction entailed in Hamlet's emotional response to life's hardships and injustices. In this line of thought, the sceptical and stoic storytelling represented by Horatio may have been, for Shakespeare, a coping mechanism against the radical and erratic scepticism of a Hamlet who looks at the world and finds no fairness, certainty, stability, or joy. If, in the Aristotelian tradition, the social function of tragedy is to purge the emotions of pity and fear from us in the audience who see those emotions represented on stage, it should also be noted that tragedy provides a *catharsis* for the author as well.¹² Here we can start to theorize 'authorial catharsis' as the notion that literary authors, especially when writing tragedy, express emotions of pain and suffering, thereby purging those emotions, and thus experience a release of troublesome passions. It works much like psychotherapy: expressing one's sadness leads to an exploration of the root causes of that depression, which can generate an understanding of why one feels as he or she does—in other words, to self-consciousness. Understanding is an inherently pleasurable phenomenon, and it is what writers of tragedy experience when they craft their stories: understanding of why bad things happen. It feels good to tell stories of bad things happening because those stories allow authors to exercise a degree of understanding, if not control, over the causes of pain and suffering, emotions which are usually acutely confusing (causing more of the same). If talking in psychotherapy is one effective means of fighting depression, the analogous act of writing tragedy may be as well.

Writing tragedy purifies the troubled mind by purging emotions of grief and anger. Writing tragedy allows us to go on living in the face of pain and injustice without killing ourselves or others.

IV

Shakespeare has often been called the ‘poet of nature’ in contrast to a ‘poet of art’. If the connection with Horatio holds up, however, Shakespeare may have thought of rationalism as the definitive feature of his artistic vision, this in contrast to the emotionalism displayed by Hamlet as well as the naturalism advocated in his ‘purpose of playing’ comment. Rather than a ‘poet of nature’ in contrast to a ‘poet of art’, Shakespeare could be a ‘poet of reason’ in contrast to a ‘poet of emotion’. This new construct does away with the opposition between a bookish author who sees literature as a technical craft (the poet of art) and the wood-note warbling genius whose authorship is unstudied inspiration (the poet of nature). In place of this opposition emerges a different distinction between the poet who attempts to imitate the world in which he lives and the one who focuses on expressing his own values and beliefs.

Perhaps the terms *reason* and *emotion* do not quite capture this distinction. Perhaps it would be better to speak of a ‘poet of the other’ and a ‘poet of the self’. Both kinds of poet would have a background in scepticism regarding the relationship between perspective and truth, but storytellers like Horatio (and, I would add, authors such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Keats) respond to the sceptical crisis by attempting to know, understand, and represent the ideas, feelings, and experiences of others; sceptics like Hamlet (or Montaigne, Jonson, Milton, or Wordsworth) respond with an interest in the self. The poet of the other, associated with the mirror that reflects a world back onto itself, represents the context and logic of multiple perspectives. In contrast, the poet of the self, associated with the lamp that illuminates the world, represents the distinctiveness and superiority of his own viewpoint.¹³ These two different personalities manifest in clearly distinct authorial modes—the poet of the other is grounded in self-effacing irony, while the poet of the self strives for egotistical sublimity.

If so, however, it must be remembered that a ‘poet of the other’ such as Horatio or Shakespeare takes his cue from a stoic rationality, while a ‘poet of the self’ draws his artistic energy from his own emotions.

Here, in contrast to the ‘poet of nature’ who never went to university and whose talents are mystical and innate, the ‘poet of reason’ is associated with the mind, with thought, with intelligence, and with deliberate study even if Shakespeare didn’t have a degree from Cambridge. As such, the notion of a ‘poet of reason’ retrieves Shakespeare from the suggestion that his art is unintellectual even as it broadens the sources and meaning of rational thought in the Renaissance.

NOTES

1. The author would like to thank Justin Dower, a student in the *Why Shakespeare?* course at Harvard University, for his contributions to the ideas explored in this chapter.
2. See, for example, the essays recently collected in *On Biography*, ed. Rosy Colombo and Gary Taylor, in a special edition of *Memoria di Shakespeare* 2 (2015).
3. All references to *Hamlet* are to William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin Group, 2001). For a reading that contrasts Hamlet-as-dramatist with Shakespeare-as-dramatist, see Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 43–44.
4. While anticipated by Ben Jonson and John Dryden, among others, Samuel Johnson was the most influential early critic to refer to Shakespeare as a ‘poet of nature’; see Philip Smallwood, ‘Shakespeare: Johnson’s Poet of Nature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*, ed. Greg Glingham (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 143–160.
5. The best review of the totality of Horatio’s surprisingly diverse and sometimes contradictory valences in the play comes from Andrew Hui, ‘Horatio’s Philosophy in *Hamlet*’, *Renaissance Drama* 41, no. 1–2 (Fall 2013): 151–171.
6. On Horatio’s complex status as both insider (classmate and friend) and outsider (poor and foreign), see Elizabeth Hanson, ‘Fellow Students: Hamlet, Horatio, and the Early Modern University’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 205–229.
7. On these lines, see the cluster of short essays entitled ‘Just Horatio’ by Lars Engle, Karen Newman, and Jonathan Crewe in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 256–278.
8. For a balanced discussion of Horatio’s interestedness amidst his disinterestedness, see Christopher Warley, ‘Specters of Horatio’, *English Literary History* 75, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 1023–1050.

9. This conceit formed the basis of a 2015 production of *Hamlet* by the Hyperion Shakespeare Company at Harvard University (directed by Lelaina Vogel). This production cleverly stipulated that Horatio has, as requested, been telling and retelling the story of Hamlet with every production of the play over the past four centuries, tellings that always end with Hamlet's request to tell his story again: 'Worn down by the force of centuries of grief', the director wrote in the playbill, 'Horatio calls upon the rest of the cast to do something a little different. Together, they will all perform the role of the Melancholy Prince. Maybe, Horatio hopes, this will be the last time'. Everyone in the cast played Hamlet at one point or another, while Horatio became both a member of the audience scrawling in his notebook and a director of the other actors.
10. See Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet', *New York Review of Books* (October 21, 2004), adapted from Greenblatt's, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York, NY: Norton, 2004), 288–322.
11. It is noteworthy that Horatio flat-out lies when, in his story, he says that Hamlet wasn't responsible for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths (5.2.357). On this moment and other issues relating to Horatio's partiality, see Christine Phillips, 'Speaking to the Yet Unknowing World: Hamlet, Horatio and the Problem of Imperfect Witness', *Medical Humanities* 36 (2010): 97–100.
12. On authorial catharsis, see Adnan K. Abdullah, *Catharsis in Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), esp. 'The Historical Meanings of Catharsis' (12–25); and Rachel Darling, "'Written Out": The Autobiographical Novelist-Character and Writing as Catharsis in Evelyn Waugh's, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* and Muriel Spark's, *The Comforters*', *STET* 4 (2014), <http://www.stetjournal.org//darling/>.
13. Here I am drawing, of course, from M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1953).

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‘A King of Shreds and Patches’: Claudius, Clothes, Feelings

Lisa Hopkins

Claudius is too easily dismissed as merely the villain of *Hamlet*. Of course he is that, but the architecture of the play would collapse if he were not also more than that. He is Hamlet’s mighty opposite, and in the logic of the play’s insistent production of doubles, he is also to a certain extent Hamlet’s semblable, son frère. In this chapter, I want to consider the different ways in which Claudius appears to different characters, and to suggest that the relationship between his varying images sheds light on the complex pattern of linkings and doublings which make *Hamlet* the extraordinary play it is, because it is able to endow not only its hero but also its villain with a sense of a credible interior life, of having that within which passes show.

When talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Claudius refers to

[...] Hamlet’s transformation – so I call it,
Sith nor th’exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father’s death, that thus hath put him

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So much from th'understanding of himself
I cannot dream of. (2.2.5–10)¹

I shall come back to some other aspects of this speech, but I want for the moment to concentrate on the idea of the exterior and the inward man. The tension between being and seeming is at the heart of Shakespearean drama, and it is particularly important in the construction of Claudius's role. Among Hamlet's many derogatory remarks about Claudius is the accusation that his exterior man is not all it should be: he is 'A king of shreds and patches' (3.4.103). When he says this, Hamlet is explicitly contrasting Claudius with his father, and it is one of the many striking aspects of the play that, although Old Hamlet is dead from the outset, we are offered three opportunities to make that same visual comparison, because we see the Ghost three times. Normally, we might not necessarily expect this to enable us to deduce much about Old Hamlet's customary appearance, for the dead wore a uniform, as in John Donne's tomb in St Paul's which shows him wearing his shroud; this is why Horatio muses on how,

A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets (1.1.118–120)

David George notes that the ghost in the *ur-Hamlet* is likely to have been similarly 'sheeted':

Kyd's ghost probably wore a white sheet; certainly the one at the Theatre around 1596 that 'cried so miserably like an oisterwife, *Hamlet reuenge*' wore white-face make-up, or else a pale 'visard' [...] The woodcut that appears on the first page of *The Rest-less Ghost* and *Strange and wonderful News from Northampton-shire* features a white-faced ghost that is apparently naked except for a white sheet with one end knotted around its head.²

In *Hamlet* itself, though, the Ghost looks very different not only from this but also, and unprecedentedly, from itself. When Horatio first tells Hamlet that his father's ghost has been seen, he describes it as 'a figure like your father / Armed at point exactly, cap-à-pie' (1.1.199–200).

Margreta de Grazia observes that armour 'is unusual attire for stage ghosts, who conventionally appear in drapery resembling winding sheets',³ though Brett E. Murphy points out that Lavater, 'a generally accepted source text for *Hamlet*', 'references ghosts wearing armour, which aligns with his particular fascination with armoured ghosts of men killed in battle'.⁴ The next time the Ghost appears, though, he is described quite differently: Hamlet assures his mother that he can see 'My father, in his habit as he liv'd!' (3.4.137). Unless we are to assume that the Ghost lived in his armour, he has got changed. Catherine Belsey notes that 'for the purposes of recognition, some stage ghosts must have appeared in the clothes they wore when alive',⁵ but I know of no other early modern text which imagines a Ghost as being able to change its clothes in this way. It is also worth noting that this change of costume is usually observed in production, including in arguably the three most watched film adaptations of recent years, those directed by Branagh, Almereyda and Doran. While the Claudiuses of these three films tend to costumes suggesting either or both of the military or the corporate, the Ghosts of each look studiously different on the battlements and in the bedroom.⁶

A number of points of interest emerge from this. Catherine Stevens notes that 'early modern understandings of sensory perception inform and intersect with interpretations of the supernatural' and that 'Shakespeare's ghosts haunt the individuals who most closely perceive them [...] their haunting is contingent upon a certain engagement with the gazing subject'⁷; in a sense, then, Old Hamlet's varying appearance may tell us as much about those who see him as about himself. Moreover, Jean-Marie Maguin, noting that 'Lavater's book may well be summed up as the vade-mecum of the Protestant Christian in the event of apparitions', observes that 'the removing of Purgatory from the conception of after-life meant that if the living were confronted with a ghost it could not be the soul of a dead man, though it assumed his external appearance. It could only be an angel sent by God or a fiend acting as Satan's deputy'.⁸ Cumulatively, all this means that there is simply nothing we can trust about Old Hamlet's appearance and, by extension, about the character and attributes it suggests. Just because it looks like him does not mean that it is him, and in any case even the fact that it looks like him is potentially conditioned by the expectations of whoever is observing him. Moreover, the odd fact of the Ghost's

costume changes suggests a deliberate manipulation of visual effects and appearances.

No such considerations inflect the appearance of Claudius. Unlike his brother, he is himself, unmediated; he is the king, an icon of stability; indeed in a sense the ultimate signifier. Yet however consistent his role and appearance may be, Claudius is notably flexible and adaptable in the way he responds to his different interlocutors. The Ghost may look different in different scenes, but he always talks the same language; Claudius on the other hand is typically dressed either consistently or at least in the same register, but bends himself to understand and to react specifically to each separate individual to whom he talks. In the language of modern corporate life, he is a man who exhibits emotional intelligence. Claudius is also different from his brother. Old Hamlet can think only of what Claudius did, not why he might have done it.

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
 With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts –
 O wicked wit, and gifts that have the power
 So to seduce! – won to his shameful lust
 The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
 O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there,
 From me [...] (1.5.42–48)

The Ghost credits Gertrude with a conscience—‘Leave her to heaven, / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her’ (1.5.86–88)—but he does not believe Claudius has one, though the audience sees soon enough that he is wrong. Old Hamlet cannot do what Claudius can; he cannot observe other people, predict their behaviour, and think himself into their heads. For him, it all comes back to ‘me’.

In marked contrast, Claudius’ most characteristic gambit is to ask people how they are. ‘And now, Laertes, what’s the news with you?’ (1.2.42). ‘How is it that the clouds still hang on you?’ (1.2.66). ‘How fares our cousin Hamlet?’ (3.2.92). ‘What, Gertrude, how does Hamlet?’ (4.1.6). ‘How do you, pretty lady?’ (4.5.41). ‘There’s matter in these sighs, these profound heaves, / You must translate. ’Tis fit we understand them’ (4.1.1–2). These six remarks are all phrased in different ways, and the last of them is not even technically a question, but they all probe the emotional states of others. ‘And now, Laertes, what’s the

news with you?' is studiously neutral: making no assumptions, it effectively invites Laertes to respond however he likes. When the response it ultimately elicits proves to be a disclosure of Laertes' desire to return to France, Claudius turns his attention to Polonius, desiring to know how *he* feels about it. At the end of the exchange, everyone is happy: Laertes gets to go, Polonius has no objection, Claudius looks sensible and benevolent. He is less fortunate with the results of his second question, but then the odds are stacked against him from the outset: even as he asks 'How is it that the clouds still hang on you?' he has already acknowledged that he has recognised Hamlet's discontent and probably has a pretty good idea of what lies behind it. This exchange cannot work in the same way as that with Laertes, because not only is Claudius' question not an open one, but unlike the case of Laertes and Polonius, there is no father to turn to make a third. Moreover, 'How is it that the clouds still hang on you?' contains a strong hint of impatience: what, still sulking? It is a question one might direct at a teenager, with results that are bound to be disastrous. Even so, there is an instructive contrast between Claudius's response to Hamlet and Gertrude's:

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not for ever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust. (1.2.68–71)

Gertrude, less circumspect than her husband, says precisely the wrong thing here, just as she does again later when she announces to the whole court that Hamlet is 'fat and scant of breath' (5.2.290)—so exactly what one's mother would say in front of all one's friends and acquaintances, and so perfectly designed to annoy. Claudius's question is clumsy, but it is not as clumsy as either of Gertrude's interventions.

Claudius also copes well when Hamlet lays claim to an emotion that exceeds expression: 'But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe' (1.2.85–86). This gives Claudius an entry: 'We pray you throw to earth / This unprevailing woe' (3.3.106–107), but he softens the pill by effectively proclaiming Hamlet his heir. This is Claudius all over: when he says 'Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye' (1.2.116), he is not just producing empty rhetoric but making a concerted attempt to turn the court of Denmark into a happy and functional place where the answer to 'How are you?' will

be ‘I’m OK, thanks’. He can even put a good gloss on Hamlet’s open insolence when he firmly declares ‘Why, ’tis a loving and a fair reply’ (1.2.121). He needs a drink after saying this, but he has saved the situation. When he offers to solve any problem ‘That, open’d, lies within our remedy’ (2.2.18), he could be an enlightened modern employer confirming a commitment to staff wellbeing and to taking steps to preserve mental health. He certainly seems to want people to be happy—‘it doth much content me / To hear him so inclin’d’ (3.1.24–25)—and his energies are resolutely positive: ‘All may be well’ (3.3.72).

Moreover, asking a question which presumes the answer is a mistake that Claudius does not make again: the next time he puts such an enquiry to Hamlet, it takes the more careful and tonally more neutral form of ‘How fares our cousin Hamlet?’, and there is a similar restraint and open-endedness in evidence when he asks ‘What, Gertrude, how fares Hamlet?’. As the play goes on, the tactic of asking everyone if they are all right begins to look like a rather desperate one—‘How do you, pretty lady?’ is not a very promising opening gambit to the visibly mad Ophelia—but it does nevertheless represent something genuine about the man, because he really seems to want to know. When he says to Gertrude ‘There’s matter in these sighs, these profound heaves, / You must translate. ’Tis fit we understand them’, he needs to understand the situation for political reasons and indeed for motives of self-preservation, but he is also on one level asking someone, for the last time in the play, how they are. He has perceived that she is upset; he wants to know why. Today, we might even call him empathetic.

Claudius is particularly good at reading responses to the question of how people are, and indeed at reading responses in general. Very early in the play, he explains the situation in Norway:

[...] young Fortinbras,
 Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
 Or thinking by our late dear brother’s death
 Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
 Colleague’d with the dream of his advantage,
 He hath not fail’d to pester us with message (1.2.17–22)

He thinks himself into Fortinbras’s head here, and soon he does the same with Old Norway’s: ‘Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras – / Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears / Of this his nephew’s purpose’

(1.2.28–30). Claudius can imagine the mental processes of both of them: the young man, perhaps not unlike his own nephew whom he knows he needs to keep under close observation, looking across the Sound at Denmark and thinking that he spots an opportunity; the old man, both a possible parallel to the brother he has just murdered and also perhaps a possible future version of himself, tired, turned in on himself, not knowing and not wanting to know what is going on around him. It is notable that there is no heat in his description of either Fortinbras or Old Norway, even when he is figuring Fortinbras as 'Holding a weak supposal of our worth'; there is no sense of affront at such a slight, merely a cool comprehension of what it must feel like to be young, and the king's nephew, and to be wanting to be doing something.

Given his awareness and understanding of Fortinbras, it is scarcely surprising that the person Claudius analyses most carefully is his own nephew, also young, also in line for the throne, also wanting to be doing something. As soon as Polonius tells him about Hamlet's affection for Ophelia, he asks, 'But how hath she receiv'd his love?' (2.2.128). He wants to know what effect this is likely to have had on Hamlet's state of mind, since it will clearly have made a difference whether Hamlet has found his affections requited or not; Claudius understands that, and is eager to know whether he has to deal with a young man who has been rejected or one who has been accepted, so he can plan his strategy accordingly. Even after the situation has significantly deteriorated, he does not give up trying to think himself into Hamlet's skin:

Haply the seas and countries different,
 With variable objects, shall expel
 This something settled matter in his heart,
 Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
 From fashion of himself. What think you on't? (3.1.173–177)

He's young, he's eager for adventure and experience; change might do the trick. The closing part of this speech is also typical of another Claudius tactic: he draws people in. 'What think you on't?' is merely one of a number of questions designed to involve his interlocutor in ways calculated to make him or her feel valued and consulted. 'Do you think 'tis this?' (2.2.152). 'Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?' (3.2.227–228). There is a suggestive contrast with Polonius' 'What

do you think of me?’ (2.2.129); Claudius never asks anyone what they think of him (he may guess that he does not want to risk the answer), but he does ask them what they think of things, as he does with Polonius here.

Claudius can also anticipate how others will react. After the murder of Polonius, he worries, ‘Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answer’d? / It will be laid to us’ (4.1.16–17). He is of course right: whenever there are dark deeds at a seat of power, the top man is immediately considered to be implicated. This is basic political instinct, but it is also something more than that, because it represents an understanding of how people’s minds work. He displays that again when he explains that he needs to be careful about how he treats Hamlet because ‘He’s lov’d of the distracted multitude, / Who like not in their judgment but their eyes’ (4.3.4–5). Claudius has never been one of the people, but he can follow their thought processes. It is true that his characterisation of them is wholly pejorative—they are ‘distracted’, they don’t think, they are led wholly by appearances—but he is more sympathetic when he elaborates a little later on how the common people’s affection for Hamlet operates on their thoughts and demeanour:

[...] the great love the general gender bear him,
 Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
 Work like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
 Convert his gyves to graces. (4.7.18–21)

This is a rich passage both poetically and conceptually. It is bookended by two lines which feature a strong alliteration on the letter *g*—great, general, gender, gyves, and graces—in ways which stress its self-contained completeness as an excursion into public opinion, and also contains the complex image of the populace’s feeling for Hamlet as like a gush of therapeutic water, fluid, free-flowing, and perversely miraculous. There is also something self-contradictory about the general opinion, though, because the public’s affection is like the spring that turns wood into stone—it is in short a petrifying well such as the one at Knaresborough (said to be the oldest entrance-charging tourist attraction in England, open for the price of an admission fee since 1630 and thus possibly known to Shakespeare)—and yet in another sense it has a precisely opposite effect, loosening rather than binding: instead of the hardening process of turning wood into stone, it offers instead a

quasi-mythical rehabilitation by dint of which the heavily physical 'gyves' become instead the ethereal and indeed transcendental 'graces'. It is also worth noting that there is a fundamentally Catholic sensibility lurking in this image of a wonder-working water, but that we do not register any sense of Protestant disapproval: Claudius may be a member of a royal house that sends its sons to Wittenberg, but he can imagine the mental landscape of a very different kind of person, with much older and simpler beliefs and loyalties.

Even as the pressure mounts on Claudius, he continues to read the thoughts and reactions of others: he understands that Ophelia's behaviour is underpinned by 'Conceit upon her father' (4.5.45), that 'the people muddied, / Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers / For good Polonius' death' (4.5.81–83) are a potential source of problems, that he has to be careful how he treats Hamlet because 'The Queen his mother / Lives almost by his looks' (4.7.11–12). He also understands that Laertes is too confused and angry to be a danger: 'Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person' (4.5.122). Throughout his dealings with Laertes, Claudius manages and manipulates him. He may sigh 'How much I had to do to calm his rage. / Now fear I this will give it start again' (4.7.191–192), but he can be in no doubt that even if it does flare up, he can damp it down again, and during the sword fight he uses reverse psychology in exactly the way that a good football manager might:

LAERTES My lord, I'll hit him now.

KING I do not think't. (5.2.299)

Nothing is better calculated to urge Laertes on than this cool dismissal of his powers. Claudius also understands Hamlet:

[...] Sir, this report of his
 Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
 That he could nothing do but wish and beg
 Your sudden coming o'er to play with you. (4.7.101–104)

He sees into Hamlet's head here, feeling the strength of his envy and guessing how it eats him, and he does so again when he correctly predicts that Hamlet will be too innocent to suspect foul play in the fencing contest: 'He, being remiss, / Most generous, and free from all

contriving, / Will not peruse the foils' (4.7.133–135). Even as he himself falls prey to the opposites of generosity and innocence, he recognises and acknowledges their existence, and displays for one last time his gift of empathy.

Nevertheless, from the outset, the play effectively offers us two different Claudiuses, even though they both look the same: the Claudius that the court as a whole seems to see, apparently a benign and effective ruler whose legitimacy no other character questions, and the Claudius whom Hamlet sees, who is a sinister tyrant, suspect even before the Ghost's revelation of his guilt, and all the worse for the fact that no one else can see him the way Hamlet does. In an article which is focused specifically on smiling, but by extension considers appearance more generally, R. S. White notes that 'To believe the Ghost's words necessarily makes Hamlet disbelieve his uncle's demeanour, confident that he sees through the bland and avuncular exterior to something villainous and hypocritical concealed behind the smile. Paradoxically, Claudius is caught in a double-bind logic, damned if he does smile but damned if he doesn't, and unable to control the various interpretations'.⁹ In one way, Claudius's position in this respect is no different from that of any other human—we are all subject to the gaze of others, and even in this age of videos and selfies none of us can really guess at the impression our face may make on others—but in Claudius's case the predicament is exacerbated because people (the court, Hamlet, Horatio under Hamlet's direction) are so constantly looking at him. So too, of course, is the audience, who are also in effect asked to see him through two separate pairs of eyes, Hamlet's and their own. In a play which reminds us, through Yorick's skull, of the bone construction which lies behind the face, we are also, in Claudius's case, constantly being invited to speculate on the mind behind the face. As a result we are constantly aware of Claudius as someone who is experiencing emotions, even if we cannot always feel certain what they are.

It is also worth noting that Claudius takes his name from someone whose interior and exterior failed to match, the Roman emperor Claudius. Suetonius, in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, notes that everyone thought Claudius a fool, and that his behaviour was erratic and consistently inconsistent, but after his accession to the throne he declared that his apparent stupidity had been merely a mask.¹⁰ Some elements of the emperor's story chime strongly with *Hamlet*: he hides behind a curtain after the death of Caligula, his fourth marriage, with his niece

Agrippina, was incestuous, he is gluttonous and drinks heavily, and his death was initially concealed to secure a peaceful succession for Nero, during which time 'a troop of actors were summoned, under the pretence that he had asked to be diverted by their antics'.¹¹ There is some suggestive evidence that at least one of Shakespeare's contemporaries connected *Hamlet* with the Emperor Claudius: R. A.'s *The Valiant Welshman*, published in 1615 but certainly written earlier, is a play which is full of echoes of *Hamlet*.¹² There are several allusions to *Hamlet* so close as to be almost quotations. At the outset, Fortune declares,

This Stage and Theater of mortall men,
Whose acts and scenes diuisible by me,
Sometime present a swelling Tragedy
Of discontented men. (1.1.3–6)¹³

There seems to be a tacit glance here at Polonius' 'scene individable' (2.2.395). Bardh says that Caradoc

Fights like a Nemean Lyon,
Or like those Giants, that to cope vvith Ioue,
Hurl'd Ossa vpon Peleon. (2.2.13–15)

The Nemean lion, Ossa, and Pelion are all mentioned in *Hamlet* (1.5.83, 5.1.245, 5.1.278). Caradoc himself declares,

And, if there be, as Heathen men affirme,
Some godlike sparks in mans diuining soule,
Then my propheticke spirite tels me true. (3.2.8–10)

Hamlet too has a prophetic soul (1.5.41). *The Valiant Welshman* is set in the time of the Emperor Claudius, who appears as a character; perhaps this too is to be understood as a glance at *Hamlet*, and if so it would be one which would confirm the idea of a connection between Roman emperor and Danish king.

It is in this discrepancy between inner and outer man that the heart of Claudius's tragedy lies, for he cannot see into his own mind in the same way as he can see into other people's. He can show self-knowledge and emotional honesty when he speaks of 'those effects for which I did the

murder – / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen’ (3.3.54–55), and again in his observation that

[...] I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it. (4.7.110–112)

This is an insight that we would not be surprised to find Shakespeare himself expressing in the sonnets. But though his first speech is all about emotion, during it he negotiates himself away from what would be generally considered appropriate feelings:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother’s death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves. (1.2.1–7)

He knows what ‘befits’ him, he knows he has to acknowledge that, he knows that grief is the expected and indeed even the necessary response—and yet he isn’t even going to pretend to feel it. He can analyse his own emotions, but he cannot control them as he can those of others:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t –
A brother’s murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent. (3.3.36–40)

Even in his failure, though, Claudius shows his humanity; indeed he shows it perhaps most fully in his failure. This is the classic *cri de coeur* of early modern protestant *angst*, felt first by Faustus, and with its full force registered in that most pointed of differences between the two surviving versions of the play: in the 1616 B text, the Good Angel tells Faustus that it is ‘Never too late, if Faustus will repent’ (2.2.82). This would be the standard Lutheran position: repentance is possible if the person chooses it. In the 1604 A text, however, the Good Angel’s

words are 'Never too late, if Faustus can repent' (2.2.84), suggesting the Calvinist position that it may be impossible to repent because God may have chosen to withhold from the individual the grace that would enable him or her to do so.¹⁴ Claudius implicitly revisits that crux when he uses 'can' and 'will' in consecutive lines; it is thus he, not Hamlet, who faces the classic Renaissance dilemma, while Hamlet, however uncharacteristically, is more spiritually certain on this issue: he is confident that to kill Claudius while he is praying would be to 'this same villain send / To heaven' (3.3.76–77), while the best that Claudius can do is to hope without much conviction that 'All may be well'.

All isn't well, though, and one of the reasons it isn't is that Claudius is not in fact the bland face of corporate culture, but a real, flawed person (insofar as a character in a play can be a person). Every bit as much as Hamlet, he is a modern, suffering, Protestant man; when he says 'How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience' (3.1.50) he is *not* a mediaeval penitent, for whom physical self-flagellation can bring spiritual reward and absolution, but a modern neurotic, preyed on by his own psyche, beating himself up not literally and productively (in a penitential sense) but metaphorically and uselessly. In this he surely elicits a response from us just as he does from other characters in the play. The fact that this speech is spoken aside means he takes us into his confidence here, and it will be a rare audience member who cannot feel a flicker of sympathy for the man with something on his mind; but he also makes a powerful appeal to the audience's imagination when he does not share anything at all with us:

OPHELIA The King rises.

HAMLET What, frighted with false fire?

QUEEN How fares my lord?

POLONIUS Give o'er the play.

KING Give me some light. Away. (3.2.259–263)

At first he is completely silent, making only that one, tell-tale movement of rising; even when he speaks, he says only five words. They are, though, words that say a lot. 'Mehr licht' cried the dying Goethe, clinging to life and light, shunning the darkness we associate with ghosts and death; Claudius too wants light, even though ironically what the play-within-the-play has in one sense done is to shed too much light, searching out and shaking up his 'occulted guilt' and the dark places of his

soul. That cry for light is a basic human instinct, from the night-light that comforts the crying child to the lamp that Goethe wanted. When he utters it, Claudius both articulates that basic humanity and also implicitly acknowledges his guilt; he is simultaneously an icon of innocence and helplessness and an icon of crime, and this contradiction takes us to the heart of Claudius's dramatic power as a character. In a modern corporate environment, Claudius might be a rather good manager, but he is also a murderer, an adulterer, and a usurper. None of these contradictory qualities is in the least diminished or negated by its co-existence with the others. The fact that it is possible to mount a defence for Claudius does not make him innocent (though use every man according to his desert and who shall scape whipping); it does, though, make him a sufficiently weighty counter-balance to Hamlet. *Hamlet* might be nothing without the Prince, but it would be significantly less than it is without Claudius.

NOTES

1. All quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982).
2. David George, 'Hamlet, the Ghost, and a New Document', *Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference* 7 (2014): 9.
3. Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 143.
4. Brett E. Murphy, 'Sulphurous and Tormenting Flames: Understanding the Ghost in *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 26 (2014): 117–118.
5. Catherine Belsey, 'Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 12, n41.
6. I am grateful to Richard Wood for helping me compile this information.
7. Catherine Stevens, 'Uncanny Re/flections: Seeing Spectres in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar*', *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 3 (2011): 23.
8. Jean-Marie Maguin, 'Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking by Night: A Joint Examination of the Ghost Scenes in Robert Garnier's, *Cornélie*, Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Light of Reformation Thinking as Presented in Lavater's Book', *Cahiers Elisabéthains* 1 (1972): 26.
9. R. S. White, 'Smiles That Reveal, Smiles That Conceal', *Shakespeare* 12, no. 2 (2016): 139.

10. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 183, 190, 203.
11. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 186–187, 198, 201, 207.
12. For whether or not 'R. A.' was Robert Armin, Shakespeare's fool, see Robert Armin, *The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke*, ed. Alexander S. Liddie (New York: Garland, 1979), 2.
13. R. A., *The Valiant Welshman* (London: 1663).
14. Christopher Marlowe, *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999).

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CHAPTER 12

‘Something After’?: *Hamlet* and Dread

Bradley J. Irish

In chapter seven of John Heywood’s mock-epic *The Spider and the Flie*—lovingly called ‘the least-loved long poem of sixteenth-century England’¹—the titular fly, ensnared in his rival’s web, attempts to wriggle from his plight by delivering an oration on ‘the vertue of Iustise’. In the midst of his discussion, the fly considers the four ‘Great letts’ to the administration of proper justice, a set of extenuating conditions that perverts the purity of ‘iudgementes geuen’:

Loue, Iudgth the loued, more, then iustice sheweth decreede,
Hate, Iudgth the hated, lesse, then Iustice constreines:
Meede, Iudgth the meeder, more, then Iustice conteinse,
Dred, in dred of the dreddid, the dredder driues
To Iudge, more or lesse, as the dreddid contriues.²

Heywood’s lines bear formal witness to the conceptual complexity of *dread* in the early modern period; while its three associates share a near-identical poetic structure, the explication of dread spills into an additional line, demanding five variations of the key term, rather than the expected two. Though perhaps conditioned by the needs of Heywood’s

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rhyme royal, these features are telling nonetheless: in sixteenth-century England, the idea of dread was exceedingly intricate, an affective state implicated in some of the era's primary cultural struggles.

And the period that gave rise to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was particularly dreadful for English subjects: in the 1590s, the heirless Queen Elizabeth was creeping towards the grave, cutthroat factionalism polarized the royal court, rumors of Spanish invasion constantly loomed, and a series of plagues and harvest failures terrorised the land more generally.³ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it is an affective atmosphere of dread that ultimately settles over Shakespeare's most enduring play—one that, from its notoriously chilling first scene, insistently troubles its characters with a gnawing sense of anxiety. To that end, this is a chapter about *dread* in *Hamlet*, and, more importantly, a chapter about dread more generally; in what follows, I make the case that thinking about dread, as it appears in a variety of intellectual traditions, can be a useful tool for thinking about how *Hamlet* works. In no other play does Shakespeare more frequently employ the term *dread* or its variants—and indeed, the word is anchored at the heart of its celebrated intellectual center, the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. But I'm not so much arguing that Shakespeare is particularly concerned with the word itself, which appears only modestly in both *Hamlet* and the rest of his corpus.⁴ Rather, I suggest instead that the affective dynamics of dread—as they are generally understood by Renaissance thinkers, contemporary psychologists, and modern philosophers—find literary analogy in the structural dynamics of *Hamlet's* fundamental dramatic conflict. There is a dreadful convergence of mood, theme, and form—a dramaturgical unity that at least partly accounts for *Hamlet's* emotional power.

Before getting to *Hamlet*, though, it is useful to begin by thinking about some meanings of *dread*. As I have discussed elsewhere, the word seems to have emerged in the late twelfth century, demonstrated here in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* earliest recorded example:

Pe eorðliche luerd ne mei don na mare bote pinen Pe wrecche licome to deaðe. Ah godalmihtin Pe mei fordon eiðer 3e Pine wrecche licome and Pine saule. Swilcne luerd we aȝen to dreden. *Pe* is godalmihtin.

[The earthly lord may do no more than put the wretched body to death, but God Almighty may destroy both thy wretched body and thy soul. Such a lord we ought to dread, that is God Almighty.]⁵

The early modern period abounds with similar usage, where texts routinely ask readers to cultivate a 'dread of punishment from the righteous power of God',⁶ or command them to 'reuerendly dread the wrath & iudgement of Almightye God'.⁷ But, as this theological context suggests, *dread* was not merely a synonym for *fear*, as in the casual sense of modern English—and indeed, early modern thinkers often keep the pair distinct, as in divided references to a 'love, fear, + dreade of God',⁸ or a 'dreade and feare of god'.⁹ *To dread* is to tremble before that which might annihilate you, but it is also to marvel at the capacity of power that renders that annihilation possible; it is a hierarchical emotion, acknowledging (and even celebrating) the magnitude of ontological distinction between the terrorised and terroriser. This accounts for the *OED*'s primary definition of 'to fear greatly, be in mortal fear of; to regard with awe or reverence, venerate', and it accounts for the cluster of concepts that most commonly evoked it in the early modern period, ontologically-elevated entities like God, monarchs, and death.

But there is another feature of early modern dread that demands attention, and that will be of particular interest to our discussion of *Hamlet*. In early modern usage, variations of the root *dread* can refer, in many grammatical forms, to either the subject who experiences terror *or* the object that causes it. The follow chart offers representative examples of this phenomenon:

– Verbal:

- *Subject Feeling Dread*
 - 'mankynd dredeth death by reason of his synne'¹⁰
- *Object Causing Dread*
 - 'The pompe of the world, is like a blazing Starre, that dreaddeth the minde by presaging ruine'¹¹

– Substantive:

- *Subject Feeling Dread*
 - 'the dreade of god putteth away synne'¹²
- *Object Causing Dread*
 - 'O Goddess heauenly bright [...] O dearest dread'¹³

– Adjectival¹⁴:

- *Subject Feeling Dread*
 - ‘If you haue a basshefull + dredefuill seruante & fynde hym faythfull, than love hym & cherysshe hym as your owne naturall chyld’¹⁵
- *Object Causing Dread*
 - ‘With harsh-resounding trumpets’ dreadful bray’¹⁶

– Adverbial:

- *Subject Feeling Dread*
 - ‘at the sight of it he shook and trembled dreadfully in every part of his body’¹⁷
- *Object Causing Dread*
 - ‘the Lorde shall cause hys terrible voyce to be heard among them [and] shall most dreadfully declare his grieuous anger towardses them’¹⁸

As these items suggest, *dread* (like the verbs *let*, *seed*, or *cleave*), is thus what is sometimes called an *autonym* or ‘Janus word’: a term that encompasses its own opposition, with a Möbius-like capacity to be endlessly done and undone.¹⁹ This linguistic quirk, I think, is actually quite suggestive—especially when we think about what such a property means in the specific context of emotional expression. *To dread* can mean either to feel emotion oneself or to inflict emotion in another party, a crucial reminder that affective phenomena must always be considered at both the subjective *and* intersubjective levels of analysis. (Indeed, despite the deeply personal *and* intersubjective nature of emotional experience, it has recently been argued that emotions are fundamentally ‘designed to function in a social context’.)²⁰ In other words, thinking about *dread* in early modern England demands particularly that we think about the emotion as both internalized and externalized, as inward-facing and outward-facing, as individuated and socially-embedded—and it is this demand, we’ll see, that will valuably guide our analysis of *Hamlet*.

In fact, the Janus-like qualities of *dread* feature prominently in how the emotion is understood by a very different intellectual tradition: that of modern psychology. In current psychological research, what Renaissance thinkers meant by *dread* is most pointedly considered by those working in what is called *terror management theory*

(TMT)—though in this case, obviously, the more modern term *terror* has been given priority.²¹ First developed in the 1980s by the social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon—who themselves took a cue from the cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker—TMT begins with the premise that human beings, ‘by virtue of the awareness of death and their relative helplessness and vulnerability to ultimate annihilation’, must exist ‘in constant danger of being incapacitated by overwhelming terror’.²² According to the theory, the response to this existential crisis of individual psychology is the creation of socially-constituted meaning:

Homo sapiens solved this existential quandary by developing cultural worldviews: humanly constructed beliefs about reality shared by individuals in a group that serves to reduce the potentially overwhelming terror resulting from the awareness of death. Culture reduces anxiety by providing its constituents with a sense that they are valuable members of a meaningful universe. Meaning is derived from cultural worldviews that offer an account of the origin of the universe, prescriptions of appropriate conduct, and guarantees of safety and security to those who adhere to such instructions – in this life and beyond, in the form of symbolic and/or literal immortality.

According to TMT, the psychic process of anxiety-buffering is contingent upon ‘first, faith in a particular cultural drama that portrays human life as meaningful, important, and enduring’—that is, collectively constructed *cultural worldviews*—and ‘second, belief that one plays a significant part in that drama’—the more personal mechanism of *self-esteem*.²³ It is through cultural participation ‘that people are able to construe the self as a valuable contributor to a meaningful existence rather than a mere material animal fated only to obliteration upon death’—because ‘adhering to the tenets of specific belief systems permits humans to feel that they are valued members of their respective cultures, granting them a sense of self-esteem’.²⁴

It is thus a central tenet of Terror Management Theory that the ‘complementary psychological structures of worldview belief and self-esteem allow individuals to sustain a state of relative psychological equanimity in the face of the awareness that they will eventually die’. And as it should be clear, this approach to existential dread—which concerns both the subjective, internal world of the emoter and the intersubjective,

external world they inhabit—also recalls the Janus-quality we saw in Renaissance understandings of the emotion: for these modern psychologists, *dread* is both inward facing and outward facing, just as it was for early modern subjects. Indeed, TMT has long ‘emphasised the importance of other people to validate the individual’s worldview and self-worth’, and its findings suggest that ‘the human needs for togetherness, intimacy, attachment, and affiliation are subordinate components of the fundamental need for self-preservation, and [thus] also serve as protective devices against the fear of annihilation’.²⁵ In fact, this dual focus is actually foundational to the theory itself: as Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski explain, TMT first emerged from the attempt to consider both why ‘people [are] so intensely concerned with their self-esteem’ and why ‘people cling so tenaciously to their own cultural beliefs and have such a difficult time coexisting with others different than themselves’.²⁶ Because ‘people’s social relationships with others play an important role in maintaining a sense of existential security’, psychologists in this tradition insist that we think of dread and terror as multidirectional affects, with implications for the subject’s psychic life and for the social life that it both nurtures and is nurtured by.²⁷

With good reason, then, Terror Management Theory is sometimes called ‘existential psychology’—and researchers in this tradition, like those in the related ‘existential neuroscience’, work to understand the endless struggle between the human mind and the menacing shadow of dread.²⁸ It is thus fitting, I think, for us to finally consider how *dread* is treated by a third intellectual tradition: that of existentialism itself, modern philosophy’s famed attempt to wrestle with the emotion, where we’ll find similar investments to what we’ve already seen. The existentialist inquiry into dread—or, as it is variously designated, *anxiety*, *anguish*, *angst*, or *angoisse*—was ultimately initiated by Søren Kierkegaard, whose short 1844 volume *The Concept of Dread* (as it was first known in English) set an agenda that would prove highly influential in the twentieth century.²⁹ Often regarded as ‘the most difficult of Kierkegaard’s works’, *The Concept of Dread* is a dazzling attempt to account for the place of *dread* in the Christian universe, as Kierkegaard would do more famously for *despair* in *The Sickness unto Death*; his treatment of the emotion is thus situated within a nakedly theological framework, recalling both the context from which the term *dread* first emerged in English and the early modern usage reviewed above.³⁰ As his analysis unfolds, Kierkegaard locates the origin of dread in Eden, where it emerged as a

'presupposition of hereditary sin'.³¹ By barring Adam from the tree of knowledge, he argues, God does not generate a taboo desire—for such desire for the forbidden would require a knowledge of good and evil that is itself 'a consequence of the enjoyment of the fruit'—but rather 'induces in him anxiety'—because that very prohibition, clouding his former innocence, 'awakens in him freedom's possibility [...] the anxious possibility of *being able*'.³² Though ignorant of good and evil—and ignorant of sinfulness, which had not yet been birthed by the sinful act—Adam does realize that 'the possibility is to *be able*', and the possibility of possibility becomes a source of undifferentiated dread.³³ Dread is thus 'always conceived in the direction of freedom'; it is the 'pivot upon which everything turns', for it is dread that reveals to us 'the infinite possibility of being able'.³⁴

For Kierkegaard, learning to dread is ultimately educative—'whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility, and only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude'—and it is through this schooling that the individual becomes properly orientated towards God, and thus authentically, existentially whole.³⁵ The subsequent existentialist tradition, exemplified most notably by Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre, had little use for this theological framework, but still identified *dread* as a crucial way that human subjects relate to their own selves (and possible selves).³⁶ In *Being and Time* (1927), for example, Heidegger develops (in the words of Dan Magurshak) 'existential analyses, now secularised, exactly parallel to those of *The Concept of Anxiety*'.³⁷ Indeed, his analysis similarly posits dread/anxiety as the emotion that 'reveals the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being':

Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein [Heidegger's term for the human condition of *being/existence/presence*] its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being – that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *Being free for* (*propensio in...*) the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is.³⁸

For Heidegger, anxiety reorients Dasein not to God, but rather to the finitude of existence—but the trajectory is fundamentally the same as what we encountered in Kierkegaard. Sartre, who equally lacked the devotional context that guided Kierkegaard's analysis, finds the autonomy implied by dread to be especially awesome, insofar as there is *no*

prohibition, only nothingness, that limits the actualization of our will: ‘the freedom which reveals itself to us in anguish’, he argues in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), ‘can be characterised by the existence of that *nothing* which insinuates itself between motives and act’.³⁹ Accordingly, ‘it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom’—it is ‘in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself’.⁴⁰

Unsurprisingly, the existentialist treatment of *dread* largely considers how individual subjects come to be. But this does not mean, however, that there is no social dimension to such elaborations—and indeed, in this sense even existentialism reflects the multi-directional understanding of dread that we encountered in both early modern usage and the terror management tradition. Kierkegaard, for example, has much to say about the ‘demonic’ soul—that which, rejecting the freedom of potentiality, has ‘anxiety about the good’, and maladaptively retreats to an ‘inclosing reserve’.⁴¹ In *The Concept of Dread*, it has thus been argued, freedom demands ‘inescapable social responsibility’, and the ‘demonic subject attempts the impossible feat of destroying all intersubjective connection to alleviate all responsibility’.⁴² Heidegger similarly acknowledges that ‘that which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself’.⁴³ And Sartre goes the farthest, suggesting that existential freedom entails a ‘responsibility [...] thus much greater than we had supposed, for it concerns mankind as a whole’:

The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. [...] When a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility.⁴⁴

In a recent article, Paul Megna has revealed how the existentialist treatment of dread is crucially anticipated by the medieval ascetic tradition—and we may find similar precursors in the early modern period.⁴⁵ Like Renaissance thinkers, and like psychologists working in Terror Management Theory, the existentialists found the dreadful subject to be looking inward and facing outward—a feature of no small importance to *Hamlet*, to which we’ll now turn.

In short: I have stressed the treatment of *dread* in these three parallel intellectual traditions because I think that *Hamlet* shares their mutual understanding of the emotion’s Janus-faced nature. When dread

appears in the play, it does so both in moments of personal reflection *and* in encounters of dramatic opposition; it is implicated throughout in exchanges of subjective and intersubjective interest. As such, dread helps unify the twin-strands of *Hamlet's* dramatic structure: the protagonist's deeply personalised inner conflict and his external struggles with the adversaries working to undo him, and whom he works to undo.

We may begin by thinking about *dread* as an interior phenomenon in *Hamlet*. The play was of particular interest to Kierkegaard—who, as a melancholy Dane, has been often compared to the titular hero—and Martin Scofield, in a Kierkegaardian reading, goes so far to say that *Hamlet* can 'be described as a tragedy of dread'.⁴⁶ But we need not follow Kierkegaard specifically to see how dread proves to be an integral part of Hamlet's individuated psyche in the play. Though the word itself only appears sparingly, the sentiment pervades his overall outlook—and when the term is deployed by Shakespeare, it is in moments of considerable importance. The first worth noting is in Hamlet's immediate response to the sight of his father's ghost, when he resolves to follow the beckoning apparition:

HAMLET Why, what should be the fear?
 I do not set my life at a pin's fee,
 And for my soul—what can it do to that,
 Being a thing immortal as itself?
 It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.
 HORATIO What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
 Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
 That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
 And there assume some other horrible form
 Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
 And draw you into madness? (1.4.64–74)

Though a brief exchange, this moment is tasked with a massive amount of thematic work, reprising the suicidal impulse of Hamlet's first soliloquy (1.2.129–159) and establishing the doubt and madness motifs that will come to preoccupy the play. But Horatio's fantasy of the 'dreadful summit' is also quite suggestive, when we consider how the subjective experience of dread has been imagined in the existentialist tradition. In what is perhaps the most celebrated passage of *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard unveils a dazzling metaphor to suggest the phenomenology of his governing concept:

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself.⁴⁷

For Hamlet, it is dreadful possibility that frees him to follow the ghost, even to the edge of such a yawning abyss. But his motives are illuminated even further when we consider Sartre's revision of Kierkegaard's famed metaphor:

I approach the precipice, and my scrutiny is searching for myself in my very depths. In terms of this moment, I play with my possibilities. My eyes, running over the abyss from top to bottom, imitate the possible fall and realize it symbolically; at the same time suicide, from the fact that it becomes a *possibility* possible for *me*, now causes to appear possible motives for adopting it.⁴⁸

As the audience learns from his initial appearance in the play, suicide has indeed become a '*possibility* possible' for Hamlet—and indeed, it is an embracing of that possibility that allows him to do that which is unthinkable for Horatio, set his life at less than a 'pin's fee' and follow the apparition. Though it seems improbable that the existentialists had *Hamlet* in mind when crafting this image, there is a remarkable correspondence nonetheless: in Shakespeare's rendition, Hamlet embraces the dread that allows him to be drawn to such a precipice, even with the possibility of self-annihilation that it entails.

And annihilation—self or otherwise—is also the theme that governs the other key moment when Shakespeare deploys the term *dread*: the 'to be or not to be' soliloquy, in which the play equally considers the effect of existential anxiety on the individual psyche.⁴⁹ After Hamlet's iconic opening gambit, and his agonising catalog of life's calamities, he reaches the conceptual center of his speech with a telling rhetorical question:

Who would fardels bear
 To grunt and swear under a weary life
 But that the dread of something after death
 (The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns) puzzles the will

And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of. (3.1.75–81)

In this passage, Shakespeare anticipates the central premise of Terror Management Theory, arguing that the dread of existential finitude is an anchor of the human condition, to which our subsequent actions and outlooks are tethered. Interestingly, modern psychologists and Hamlet consider the issue from an opposite trajectory; Terror Management theorists stress the affirmative, world-building consequences of dread, whereas Hamlet—for whom action against Claudius likely spells his own demise—stresses how dread poisons ‘the native hue of resolution’ (83), thus spoiling ‘enterprises of great pitch and moment’ (85). But the implications are identical: both parties argue that the human psyche is fundamentally governed by its relationship to dread.

Of course, Hamlet’s soliloquy is also linked to *dread*’s earlier appearance through a central motif: that of suicide. To be sure, ‘To be or not to be’ is not *only* about suicide—and indeed, Douglas Bruster importantly reminds that ‘the “suicide” interpretation [has] become a shortcut for many readers’.⁵⁰ But there is no doubt, given Hamlet’s established disposition, that the soliloquy’s comments on self-annihilation are not trivial:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th’oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of th’unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin. (69–74)

This rhetorical question, which immediately precedes the one quoted above, is the preamble to Hamlet’s explicit statement on *dread*. Here, he considers suicide not just as the existentialist’s possible possibility, but rather as one that is entirely understandable, even attractive—until, that is, we stop to reckon with ‘what dreams may come’ in death’s eternal sleep (65). Quite suggestively, this emphasis on dread of death entails a shift in Hamlet’s earlier position, which understood opposition to suicide in theological terms; when he first broaches the subject in 1.2, Hamlet invokes God’s prohibition ‘gainst self-slaughter’ as the unhappy reason for his continued existence (132).

In our previous discussion of *dread* in early modern usage, we saw that ontologically-elevated entities like *God* and *death* most commonly prompted the emotion in the Renaissance—and it is in terms of these dual entities that Hamlet thus variously understands the human response to the notion of existential annihilation. With *God* and *death*, we noted above, it is the *sovereign* that stands as the third crucial elicitor of dread in the early modern period—a usage confirmed in *Hamlet* by references to the ‘dread pleasures’ (2.2.28) of the ‘dread lord’ Claudius (1.2.50), or to the ‘dread command’ of King Hamlet’s ghost (3.4.105). But the conventionality of such statements should not obscure their importance to the action of the play. Thinking about this category of dread—that is, the dread of political relationality—demands that we approach the sentiment from something of an opposite trajectory than the inward-facing concerns of one’s individuated orientation towards mortality and the divine. To be sure, the boundaries between such elements are porous; sovereigns indeed wield the power of life and death over their subjects, while standing (as Shakespeare’s Gaunt famously puts it) as ‘God’s substitute / His deputy anointed in His sight’.⁵¹ But nonetheless, the political implications of *dread* activate the other side of its Janus-features—and in this light, we must attend to the emotion as a socially embedded construct, in which causing and experiencing terror becomes a mutually-reinforcing, intersubjective act.

When analysing *Hamlet*, this entails paying particular attention to how the play’s central dramatic conflict is organized. This is a deceptively difficult task—largely because, as Margreta de Grazia puts it, two centuries of post-Romantic criticism has insisted that Hamlet is a character ‘distinguished by an inner being so transcendent that it barely comes into contact with the play from which it emerges’.⁵² But, while we best remember *Hamlet* for its protagonist’s mind-bending soliloquies, the bulk of the play itself is really dominated by two sets of characters simultaneously acting upon one another, in two different sequences that unfold as the action progresses. In the first, interrogatory mode, Hamlet interrogates the veracity of the ghost’s claim, while Claudius (with the help of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern) in turn interrogates the cause of Hamlet’s melancholy; in the second, operational mode, Hamlet attempts to secure his revenge against Claudius, while Claudius (with the help of Laertes) in turn attempts to restore order to his court by eliminating Hamlet. This is hardly a subtle point, but it is easy to forget that these interpersonal conflicts are the engine of the play, and

that these interpersonal conflicts are what shaped its immediate literary impact: as Emma Smith has recently noted, *Hamlet*'s 'early modern heirs [...] all respond more obviously to the play's bloodthirsty scenario and language than to any new notion of interior characterisation'.⁵³

And in terms of *dread*, it is the uncertain outcome that attaches to each action—and the uncertainty of how such outcomes will come to inflect how one relates to others—that is the source of anxiety. Hamlet, famously uncertain of the ghost's credibility, is well-aware that 'the de'il hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape' (2.2.54–55), and spends half the play attempting to assess the appropriate orientation he must adopt toward Claudius. Claudius, burdened with the unenviable task of managing an increasingly erratic step-son, equally knows that 'Madness in great ones must not unwatched go' (3.1.187)—and, after the murder of Polonius, realizes just how 'dangerous it is that this man goes loose' (4.3.2). There is a sense then, in which these two characters are locked in an affective feedback loop; though obviously linked by the mirrored action of the play, they are also linked by the respective dread that they each inspire in the other.⁵⁴ The social component of *dread* finds expression in the way that Shakespeare sets his characters against one another—and finds expression, in turn, in each of their emotional lives. The dynamics of dread are thus reflected in the inward-facing meditations of Hamlet's soliloquies *and* in the outward-facing manner that he relates to his central antagonist, both of which manifest under the dreadful skies of Denmark more generally.

NOTES

1. James Holstun, 'The Spider, the Fly, and the Commonwealth: Merrie John Heywood and Agrarian Class Struggle', *ELH* 71 (2004): 58.
2. John Heywood, *The Spider and the Flie* (Manchester, 1894), 49. Meede/*meeder* here seems to mean *reward/briber*; see *OED*, 'meeder, *n.*' in which this line is the only example cited.
3. On the cultural context of the 1590s, see Bradley J. Irish, *Emotion in the Tudor Court: Literature, History, and Early Modern Feeling* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 147–149.
4. In Q2 *Hamlet*, *dread* appears five times (1.2.50; 2.2.28; 2.2.393; 3.1.77; 3.4.105); *dreadful* three times (1.2.206; 1.4.70; 2.2.424); and *dreaded* once (1.1.24). *Dreadfully* additionally appears once in the F text (Appendix 1, 2.2.267). *Dreading* does not appear. All quotations from *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden

- Shakespeare, 2006). After this chapter was written, Christy Desmet published “‘The Dread of Something After Death’: *Hamlet* and the Emotional Afterlife of Shakespearean Revenants’, *Actes des Congrès Société Française Shakespeare* 36 (2018), which considers (among other things) *dread* elsewhere in Shakespeare.
5. *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises*, ed. Richard Morris (London, 1868), 20–21. (Morris’s translation.) I treat *dread* in the context of the early modern English court in *Emotion in the Tudor Court*, Chap. 4.
 6. Thomas Wilson, *Saints by Calling: Or Called to be Saints* (London, 1620), 287.
 7. Heinrich Bullinger, *Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons Diuided into Five Decades* (London, 1577), 564.
 8. Thomas Becon, *An Inuetyue Agenst the Moost Wicked and Detestable Vyce of Swearing* (London, 1543), XXXIX^v.
 9. Stephen Gardiner, *A Detection of the Deuils Sophistrie* (London, 1546), CXXXVI^v.
 10. Edmund Allen, *A Catechisme, That is to Saie, a Familiar Introduccion and Trainyng of the Simple in the Commaundementes of God* (London, 1548), H.i^v.
 11. John Moore, *A Mappe of Mans Mortalitie, Clearly Manifesting the Originall of Death* (London, 1617), 201.
 12. *Certayne Sermons Appoynted by the Quenes Maiestie* (London, 1559), G.iiii.
 13. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton et al., 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), I.Proem.4.1; 9.
 14. In *Shakespeare’s Grammar* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2003), Jonathan Hope notes two features of adjectival usage that are relevant here. The first, *location of effect*, reflects the fact that adjectives ‘can refer either to the quality inherent in the modified noun [...] or to a quality the noun evokes in a second entity’ (46). The second, *subjectivization*, refers to the ‘move from describing an objective quality inherent in the modified noun, to carrying the subjective impression of the speaker’ (49). Incidentally, he cites several examples of *dread* in the discussion of subjectivization (49–50). I thank Professor Hope for discussing this matter with me.
 15. Richard Whitford, *A Dayly Exercyse and Experyence of Dethe* (London, 1537), H.7^v–8.
 16. William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002), 1.3.135.
 17. George Swinnock, *The Christian-Man’s Calling: Or, a Treatise of Making Religion Ones Business* (London, 1662), 409.

18. Thomas Cooper, *A Briefe Exposition of Such Chapters of the Olde Testament as Vsually are Redde in the Church at Common Praier* (London, 1573), 31v.
19. Isaac Goldberg, *The Wonder of Words: An Introduction to Language for Everyman* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1938), Chap. 12; Joseph T. Shipley, *Playing with Words* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 77.
20. Paul Griffiths and Andrea Scarantino, 'Emotions in the Wild: The Situated Perspective on Emotion', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*, ed. Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 437.
21. I discuss TMT in more detail in *Emotion in the Tudor Court*, Chap. 4.
22. Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, 'The Cultural Animal: Twenty Years of Terror Management Theory and Research', in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, ed. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, and Tom Pyszczynski (New York: Guilford, 2004), 16, for this and the next quote. For foundational articles in the field, see Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 'The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory', in *Public Self and Private Self*, ed. Roy E. Baumeister (New York: Springer, 1986), 189–212; Abram Rosenblatt et al., 'Evidence for Terror Management Theory I: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Reactions to Those Who Violate or Uphold Cultural Values', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, no. 4 (1989): 681–690; Greenberg et al., 'Evidence for Terror Management Theory II: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Reactions to Those Who Threaten or Bolster the Cultural Worldview', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 2 (1990): 308–318; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 'A Terror Management Theory of Social Behavior: The Psychological Functions of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 24 (1991): 93–159; and Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski, 'Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 29 (1997): 61–139.
23. Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 'Causes and Consequences', 198.
24. Jamie Goldenberg et al., 'Of Mice and Men, and Objectified Women: A Terror Management Account of Infrahumanization', *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 12, no. 6 (2009): 765, for this and the next quote.
25. Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 'Cultural Animal', 26; Mario Mikulincer, Victor Florian, and Gilad Hirschberger, 'The Existential Function of Close Relationships: Introducing Death Into the Science of Love', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 7, no. 1 (2003): 20.

26. Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 'Cultural Animal', 14.
27. Kenneth E. Vail et al., 'When Death Is Good for Life: Considering the Positive Trajectories of Terror Management', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 4 (2012): 312
28. On 'existential psychology', see *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, ed. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, Tom Pyszczynski (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004); on 'existential neuroscience', see Markos Quirin et al., 'Existential Neuroscience: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Investigation of Neural Responses to Reminders of One's Mortality', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 7, no. 2 (2012): 193–198; Johannes Klackl, Eva Jonas, and Martin Kronbichler, 'Existential Neuroscience: Neurophysiological Correlates of Proximal Defenses against Death-Related Thoughts', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 8, no. 3 (2013): 333–340; and *ibid.*, 'Existential Neuroscience: Self-Esteem Moderates Neuronal Responses to Mortality-Related Stimuli', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 9, no. 11 (2014): 1754–1761.
29. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, ed. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944). The standard scholarly translation is now *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), which is the edition from which I quote. For a general introduction to the text, see *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985).
30. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, xii.
31. *Ibid.*, 25.
32. *Ibid.*, 44.
33. *Ibid.*, 49.
34. *Ibid.*, 66, 43, 45.
35. *Ibid.*, 156.
36. On the secularisation of dread in the existentialist tradition, see Samuel Moyn, 'Anxiety and Secularisation: Søren Kierkegaard and the Twentieth-Century Invention of Existentialism', in *Situating Existentialism: Key Texts in Context*, ed. Jonathan Judaken and Robert Bernasconi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 279–304. See also K. Brian Söderquist, 'Kierkegaard and Existentialism: From Anxiety to Autonomy', in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Jon Stewart (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2015), 83–95.
37. Dan Magurshak, 'The Concept of Anxiety: The Keystone of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger Relationship', in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, 171. See this chapter more generally for Heidegger's debt to Kierkegaard.

38. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 232, 394.
39. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library 1956), 34.
40. *Ibid.*, 29.
41. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, 118, 124. 'Inclosing reserve' has also been translated as *morbid reserve*, *isolation*, and *withdrawnness*; see Stephen N. Dunning, 'Kierkegaard's Systematic Analysis of Anxiety', in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, 26.
42. Paul Megna, 'Better Living Through Dread: Medieval Ascetics, Modern Philosophers, and the Long History of Existential Anxiety', *PMLA* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1296.
43. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 232.
44. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian, 1956), 292. Megna notes that, for Sartre, the object of existential anxiety is 'the subject's radical obligation to others' (1297).
45. See Megna, 'Better Living Through Dread'.
46. Martin Scofield, *The Ghosts of Hamlet: The Play and Modern Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 96. On Kierkegaard's treatment of *Hamlet*, see Richard Kearney, 'Kierkegaard on Hamlet: Between Art and Religion', in *The New Kierkegaard*, ed. Elsebet Jegstrup (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 224–243; Joel D. S. Rasmussen, 'William Shakespeare: Kierkegaard's Post-Romantic Reception of "The Poet's Poet"', in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions Tome III: Literature, Drama and Music*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 185–213; and Leonardo F. Lisi, 'Hamlet: The Impossibility of Tragedy / The Tragedy of Impossibility', in *Kierkegaard's Literary Figures and Motifs Tome II: Gulliver to Zerlina*, ed. Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 13–38. On Kierkegaard and Hamlet the character, see Denis de Rougemont, 'Two Danish Princes: Kierkegaard and Hamlet', in *Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 79–98.
47. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, 61.
48. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 32.
49. For a convenient (and penetrating) introduction to this soliloquy, see Douglas Bruster, *To Be or Not to Be* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007).
50. *Ibid.*, 76.
51. Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 1.2.37–38.

52. Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.
53. Emma Smith, 'Character in Shakespearean Tragedy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91.
54. For 'affective feedback loop' in a different context, see Bradley J. Irish, 'Coriolanus and the Poetics of Disgust', *Shakespeare Survey* 69 (2016): 209.

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PART IV

‘Remember me’ Performance
and Adaptation



Misremembering *Hamlet* at Elsinore

Kathryn Prince

‘Who’s there?’¹ From its opening line, *Hamlet* is preoccupied with memory’s role in the actions and emotions of the present. Bernardo’s question is tied up with the emotions triggered by memory, specifically the memory of who went there yesterday: the ghost of Old King Hamlet, who will soon return to urge his son ‘Hamlet, remember me’ (1.5.90).

The emotional power of memory is keenly explored in *Hamlet*. Whether memory motivates a bereaved son to avenge his father’s murder, a wife to second-guess her second husband’s motives, or a suicidal friend to survive as a living memento mori, in *Hamlet* memory is a force active in the present, not safely relegated to the past. Memories mobilise emotions, and, through them, instigate actions in *Hamlet* as a play and as a performance in one memorable site, the ‘real’ Elsinore in Helsingør, Denmark.

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REMEMBERING AS AN EMOTIONAL PRACTICE

Memory performs a leading role in the speeches and actions through which emotions are practiced in *Hamlet*. As Monique Scheer has theorised, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological notion of practice, emotions are practised when they are mobilised, named, communicated, and regulated.² In *Hamlet*, characters use memory to practise emotions in a variety of ways. Hamlet uses memory to mobilise his own emotions, most memorably in his first soliloquy ('oh that this too too solid flesh would melt' [1.2.129–159]). Here, what he is using to mobilise his outrage is the memory of his mother's apparent ability to forget: his emotions arise from her apparent lack of them. He does think of his father a little later in the scene ('methinks I see my father [...] In my mind's eye' [1.2.183–184]), but without any particular indication that this memory is an instrument for mobilising emotions. That will come later, after the ghost has infected him with remembrance.

Hamlet's second soliloquy ('O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I' [2.2.484–540]) moves from a lament for his inability to mobilise his own feelings of vengefulness towards a plan to mobilise Claudius's guilt through a performance, *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet uses memory to mobilise the emotions of others throughout the play, for example in 2.2 when he reminds Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of their longstanding friendship in order to assert his right to their candour, mobilising their feelings of loyalty or, perhaps, shame at being the king's pawns when he invites them to 'deal justly' with him, to be 'even and direct' (253). This is the emotional practice underpinning his odd phrasing in 3.1, 'in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembered' (88–89): Ophelia, in remembering all Hamlet's sins, will more easily release him, or so he prays. In 3.2, he explains to Horatio that *The Mousetrap* is intended to 'unkennel' Claudius's 'occulted guilt' (76–77); that is, to mobilise the guilt that Claudius has managed to regulate. In 3.4 he urges his mother to 'Look here, upon this picture, and on this' (51) as a way of awakening her memory, mobilising her emotions about both her husbands, and (as he explains later in the scene) also making her feel shame (79); in the same speech, he borrows from Horatio's approach to cultural memory as an instrument of emotional regulation when he tells her how a 'matron' of her age should feel, according to received wisdom (81–86).

Hamlet often displays an acute awareness of posterity, even projecting himself into the future to imagine how his actions in the present

moment will be remembered. In 2.2, he introduces this strain of emotional practice in his amazement that those who praised his father have forgotten him in favour of the new king (300–305), and then, in relation to the actors, the thought that ‘after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live’ (463–464). In 3.2, he mocks himself and Ophelia by proclaiming his amazement that ‘a great man’s memory may outlive his life half a year’ (125). In 4.4, learning that Fortinbras is willing to go to war for a piece of land that has ‘no profit but the name’, Hamlet expresses shame that he has not protected his father’s legacy as Fortinbras has done (18). In 5.1, he considers the relationship between the ideas of a person that persist, the memory of ‘poor Yorick’, and the materiality that decays the skull (71–205, esp. 174–185). He attempts to retreat into impersonal memory, invoking Alexander the Great and Caesar, but is brought up short by the reality of Ophelia’s death (196–232). In the end, Hamlet is very interested in posterity: ‘report me and my cause aright’ (5.2.323), he implores Horatio, ‘tell my story’ (333).

Contrary to his own advice, Claudius is unable to relegate memories of Old King Hamlet to the past, connecting memory to repentance and regret. Even before *The Mousetrap*, Claudius’s inability to master his guilt is explicit. In 3.1, Polonius inadvertently triggers this guilt, leading Claudius to lament the ‘heavy burden’ that lashes his conscience (53). Throughout the play Claudius attempts to master memory, thereby regulating the associated emotions. He has a habit, unusual in this play, of invoking memories as nouns rather than remembering as a verb, as in his speech at the beginning of 1.2: of ‘our dear brother’s death / The memory be green’ (1–2) but ‘remembrance of ourselves’ regulates sorrow (7); in contrast, Hamlet’s ‘obsequious sorrow’ has, in its persistence, become a ‘fault’ against heaven, nature, and his father (92–107).

Gertrude initially uses memory in this way too, as a noun safely distanced from her own emotions. For the most part, Gertrude seems intent on forgetting, even to the extent that in 3.4 (a scene rich in forgetting and remembering) she forgets that Hamlet is being sent to England (199). In this scene she acknowledges the power of memory in the present, turning inward to acknowledge the ‘black and grieved spots’ on her soul (88) just as Claudius does in 3.3 when he expresses this guilt in prayer, acknowledging that his inability to truly repent prevents him from unburdening himself (36–72). Later, Claudius uses the idea of reputation, a kind of memory, to mobilise Laertes’s revenge.

In 4.7, he flatters Laertes into fighting Hamlet (69–137) and warns him that his growing reputation has made Hamlet envious (70–74). This in some ways echoes Hamlet's tactic of mobilising his own vengefulness by considering how much Fortinbras values reputation, and how poorly his own inaction reflects on his father's posterity. The result is a parallel not only between Laertes and Hamlet, but also between Claudius and Hamlet.

Claudius's involvement in the gambit to entrap Hamlet in 3.1 is discernible in Ophelia's use of a memory noun: she has 'remembrances' that she wishes to return to Hamlet, perhaps a sign that she has learned to use nouns, as Claudius does, to distance herself from difficult emotions, or a sign pointing to the source of this gesture (92). The violence of Hamlet's refusing to remember a shared memory aright is notable here ('I never gave you aught' [95]), repaid in the violence of a lie about her father's location ('At home, my lord' [130]). Ophelia becomes trapped in memory after her father's death, unable to embark on a revenge quest (as Laertes and Hamlet do) or to relegate his memory to the past, thereby regulating the emotions associated with it (as Claudius and Gertrude do and urge in relation to Old King Hamlet). In 4.5, Ophelia is haunted by her father's death, not literally as Hamlet is but no less destructively. It is unclear (and much debated) which of her remarks in this scene relate to Polonius and which to Hamlet. Her recourse to cultural memory (folk tales, ballads) allies her with Horatio, who, not incidentally, is the one to advise Gertrude that Ophelia should be attended to as her ramblings could lead to 'Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds' (15). While Claudius is intent on attributing all of these ramblings to grief for Polonius, it is not at all clear that this is so: some of these cultural memories are more closely related to regret that she has lied to Hamlet (the baker's daughter transformed into an owl [42–43]) and been unchaste (the Valentine's Day deflowering [48–66]; the flowers she reportedly picks before drowning, to make her 'fantastic garlands' [4.7.166–170]). Ophelia also uses cultural memory to mobilise emotions in others when she offers flowers that, in early modern culture, relate to memory: rosemary for remembrance, pansies for thoughts, rue for regret, columbines associated, perhaps, with the guilty memory of foolishness or cuckoldry (169–178).

The Ghost of Old King Hamlet, of course, uses memory to mobilise Hamlet's emotions in the present. His exposition in 1.5 is Hamlet's call to action, though it is not a complete success: although Hamlet

immediately picks up the ghost's exhortation to 'remember me', repeating the line thrice in his next speech and vowing to use the memory as a spur to action, he spends the rest of the play trying to mobilise his own reluctant feelings of vengefulness. Later, in 3.4, the ghost urges Hamlet 'Do not forget!' (106).

Polonius certainly has no trouble forgetting: 'What was I about to say [...] Where did I leave?' he wonders in 2.1 (48–50). In 2.2, he exhibits some self-awareness, perhaps, when he offers, 'or else this brain of mine / Hunts not the trail of policy so sure / As it hath used to do' (46–48). Anticipating Polonius's attempts to lodge his 'precepts' in Laertes' memory (1.3.57; 54–80), which interrupt Laertes's conversation with Ophelia, Laertes counsels his sister not to forget herself with Hamlet (5–51). Polonius is not forgotten after his death: as a foil for Hamlet, Laertes embarks on a revenge quest in 4.7. Claudius identifies this revenge quest as a threat to his own crown (4.5.88–96), making Laertes a potential usurper and therefore a foil to Claudius as well as Hamlet.

Finally, Fortinbras attends to posterity as a means of regulating emotions in the present. According to the Captain Hamlet encounters in 4.4, Fortinbras is willing to go to war for a piece of land that has 'no profit but the name' (18). In the end, it is this posterity, his own 'rights of memory' (5.2.373) along with Hamlet's sense of responsibility to posterity in naming his successor, that allows Fortinbras to ascend to the Danish throne.

THE MOTION OF EMOTIONS

Scheer's notion of emotions as a practice provides a basis for considering the connections between memory and emotions in *Hamlet*. Among emotional practices, the practice of mobilising emotions has a particularly early modern resonance: in this period, Shankar Raman notes in 'Hamlet in Motion', the term 'emotion' included, among other now-extinct meanings, 'moving out, migration, transference from one place to another'.³ In *Hamlet*, characters are 'moved' and seek to move each other through remembering, a response that Hamlet, after musing on the movement of an actor's emotions from 'motive' to action, decides to try to elicit in Claudius. Attending to the theatrical notion of actors helps to track the motion of emotions, their 'transference from one place to another' through memory. Memory, in this play, serves as the mechanism for this transference, the 'motive' for 'passion' (2.2.496).

In theatre semiotics, an actant is a term relating to these movements: an actant can be the subject doing an action, the object of that action, the initiator, the receiver, the helper, or the opponent of that action. Characters in *Hamlet* use memory actantially: they send and receive memories, they are the objects of memory, they block or assist others in the act of remembering. In his most famous soliloquy, Hamlet desires the oblivion of forgetting, a desire opposed by religion and the fear of 'what dreams may come' in death (3.1.65). He also desires vengeance or at least wants to desire it, for some purpose that might include Old Hamlet's posthumous reputation, a sense of justice or duty, or fear of reprisals from the ghost, but here he seems to be opposed by his own nature, a dilemma that has been identified as the central problem of the play by critics who wish to understand why Hamlet delays, as Stephen Greenblatt considers at length in his *Hamlet in Purgatory*.⁴ Hamlet wants Ophelia to remember his shortcomings for her own benefit, but is opposed by her feelings for him; he wants Claudius to remember his crime, and is helped by the players as well as Claudius's own guilt; he wants Gertrude to remember King Hamlet and reject Claudius, opposed somewhat inadvertently by Polonius's presence behind the arras. He wants Horatio to protect his posthumous reputation, helped, in the end, by Fortinbras. Hamlet wants memory to do a lot of emotional labour, and other characters, too, rely on memory as a driver of emotional practices.

Besides offering a way of tracking the motion of emotions, the actantial model suggests a path towards a better understanding of the play's movements more broadly, since actants are not always characters, as Ann Ubersfeld explains: 'An actant can be an abstraction (the City, Eros, God, Liberty)'.⁵ In Ubersfeld's theorisation of the actantial model, when the object of action is an abstraction, it is always 'represented metonymically on the stage'.⁶ Revenge is certainly one contender for object of action in *Hamlet*, represented metonymically by Laertes as well as by Hamlet himself, but memory is an even stronger one. In support of this point, I note that, if Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Lodge can be relied on to remember correctly, the play that Shakespeare was remembering when he wrote *Hamlet* has a ghost who urges his son 'Hamlet, revenge!' If the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* urges his son to 'remember' rather than to 'revenge', should we not take him at his word?⁷ Shakespeare certainly seems to want to draw attention to the importance of remembering in this play.

Indeed, the most clearly innovative aspect of *Hamlet*, its focus on the interiority of its protagonist, is contained in that shift from avenging to remembering. As Rhodri Lewis suggests, '[b]y the brilliant device of having his ghost instruct Hamlet not to revenge, but to remember and therefore revenge, Shakespeare bypasses such dramatic crudity [in earlier revenge tragedies] and shifts the attention of his audience to the disposition of his prince's emotional life, now at the very forefront of the play's action'.⁸ Remembering is an emotional process, and to focus on remembering is therefore necessarily to focus on inwardness. The lack of outward display to indicate the action of remembering is, perhaps, responsible for characters' insistence on verbal confirmation that they are being remembered, most unforgettably when the Ghost returns in 3.4 to whet Hamlet's 'almost blunted purpose' with the command 'Do not forget!' (106). The Ghost's exhortation is a direct response to Hamlet's question about the reason for this return: has the Ghost come, as Hamlet fears, to chide him for being 'tardy' in the completion of the Ghost's 'dread command' (103, 105)?

Hamlet seems unlikely to be in any real danger of forgetting his father, though his revenge mission seems, for five acts, at risk; indeed, as John Kerrigan argued in an influential article on memory and revenge in this play, by insisting on remembering his father by reviving him as a character in *The Mousetrap* or as an image in a portrait shown to Gertrude, Hamlet repeatedly deflects the task of revenge.⁹ If, as I am proposing, the actantial object of *Hamlet* is not the small subcategory of memory which is revenge but the larger category of memory itself, which includes revenge as a particularly active way of communicating the practice of remembering, it is striking that alongside Hamlet other characters also represent aspects of memory besides revenge: Polonius is associated with shameful, inadvertent forgetting, and Ophelia with shameful, inadvertent remembering, Claudius with guilty, inadvertent remembering, Gertrude with guilty, deliberate forgetting, Horatio with memory as an instrument of emotional regulation and Fortinbras with memory as an instrument of emotional mobilisation. One way of understanding these character oppositions is through the actions that the characters take to mobilise or regulate emotions through memory.

In this light, what Hamlet the character seems to want, from the beginning of the play right through to the end, is to be in charge of what is remembered, by him, about him, and by those around him. Whether seeking the oblivion of death, or a way of erasing other memories to

ensure his single-minded focus on his father or on vengeance, whether seeking to interfere in Ophelia's and Gertrude's memories to exert control over their emotions or asking Horatio to ensure that he is remembered properly, Hamlet is obsessed not with revenge but with memory. He begins the play wanting to control the way his father is remembered and ends it attending to the way he himself will be remembered.

SYNCOATED TIME, SYNCOATED SPACE

Because of his obsession with memory, Hamlet throughout the play, right up to his own death, is living in an anomalous temporality that Rebecca Schneider has described as 'syncopated time', in which 'then and now punctuate each other'.¹⁰ Memory introduces syncopy into the practice of emotions, mobilising present emotions through the recollection of emotions associated with both the past and the future (the anticipated memory of posterity), inviting strategies of containment that neutralise these emotional incursions. Performance introduces further complications, especially the performance of a play as rich in cultural and, often, personal memories as *Hamlet*, and even more so in certain sites harbouring associations of their own, like Shakespeare's Globe or Elsinore (really Kronborg Castle) in Denmark.

The differences between the real and fictional spaces occupied by a performance of *Hamlet*, and between the real and fictional passage of time during that performance, are meaningful. In her book not about Shakespearean performance but pertinent to it, Schneider develops Gertrude Stein's hugely useful way of thinking about *Hamlet* in performance. Offering a productive counterbalance to some of W. B. Worthen's arguments in *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*, Schneider argues that American Civil War reenactors are not merely engaging in what performance theoretician Richard Schechner would recognise as 'restored' or 'twice-behaved' behaviours,¹¹ but also creating a complex kind of temporality that connects the 'then' of the original actions with the 'now' of their performance—a temporality that also applies to Shakespearean actors in some contexts, and to their audiences in, again, some contexts. Schneider's account of reenactments is especially pertinent because she positions herself as a spectator, not a reenactor, but one who nevertheless, through witnessing, is a kind of participant, not unlike a theatre spectator in certain kinds of performance.

Syncopated time accounts for some of the pleasure in a performance of *Hamlet*, though not for Gertrude Stein. Stein was thinking about her nervousness while watching *Hamlet*, specifically *The Mousetrap*, when she articulated this productive notion:

the scene as depicted on the stage is [...] almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience. [...]our emotion concerning that play is always either behind or ahead of the play at which you are looking and to which you are listening. So your emotion as a member of the audience is never going on at the same time as the action of the play.¹²

Stein's theatregoing experience was one of emotions running ahead of, or running to catch up with, the action. While she responded to syncopation with nervousness, proposing her productive notion of landscape theatre as a solution, contemporary theatre has been more inclined to embrace its effects. The use of space to localise these syncopies is a notable aspect of contemporary Shakespeare production influenced by Stein and more recent theories drawing on her work, such as Elin Diamond's *Unmaking Mimesis* and Elinor Fuchs's *Death of Character*.¹³

Memory is a form of syncopated time, one that draws on the emotions of the past and the future to practice emotions in the present. The long-dead Yorick is no longer delighting Hamlet with his antics in the play's present, nor is Hamlet feeling that delight anew by recollecting it through the memory object of the skull; the memory of his delight gives rise to melancholy feelings precisely because the memory is relegated to the past. Claudius's act of remembering while praying is of a different nature because the emotion to which it gives rise, guilt, cannot be relegated to the past as long as he continues to benefit from the action that instigated his guilt. In Scheer's terms, the act of remembering mobilises emotions for both Hamlet and Claudius, but syncopation transmutes Hamlet's past delight into present melancholy while persistence serves to further mobilise Claudius's guilt. As Claudius himself articulates, only an act of syncopation, a decisive break in the continuity achieved by his divestment of the proceeds of his crime, will allow him to regulate his guilt.

Some of the features that connect syncopated time to the practice of emotions also apply to space in a way that Edward Soja has articulated, so much so that Soja's Thirdspace can be understood as a kind of

syncopated space.¹⁴ Space, according to Soja's influential development of Henri Lefebvre's theories on the production of space,¹⁵ can be categorised according to its ratio of reality to fiction. Firstspace is the material world, Secondspace is the imaginary world, and Thirdspace is their blend in the mind of the beholder. The challenge inherent in using Soja to discuss theatre is that the spectator is almost always engaged with this third category of space, watching actors exist in a space that is both the material space of performance¹⁶ and the imaginary world of the characters. At Shakespeare's Globe in London, some of the theatrical effects particular to its configuration and performance style relate to friction between these overlapping spaces, occurring when actors acknowledge the Firstspace through direct audience address, a technique typical of Globe productions; at the same time, the minimal set design typical of early modern English performance and of modern productions that seek to replicate original practices results in a relatively weak Secondspace conjured through clues in the dialogue. It is precisely this Secondspace that is strengthened at Kronborg Castle in Helsingør, Denmark, where *Hamlet* is performed not only in *a* real castle, but in *the* real castle, presented to audiences as 'Shakespeare's Elsinore'. This is different from, say, the performance of Thomas Ostermeier's *Hamlet* at the *Palais des papes* in Avignon, *a* castle but not *the* castle. Since all of Shakespeare's dramaturgy assumes a weak Secondspace, and depends for its spatial effects on a strong Thirdspace created in the spectator's imagination largely through imagery embedded in the dialogue, the Thirdspace of *Hamlet* at Kronborg is demonstrably different from *Hamlet* at the Globe; the aura of authenticity at the Globe attaches to the Firstspace, and at Kronborg to the Secondspace.¹⁷

REMEMBERING *HAMLET* IN *HAMLET LIVE*

Thirdspace introduces the possibility of spatial haunting, a concept that Marvin Carlson explores in *The Haunted Stage*.¹⁸ *Hamlet* is so frequently performed that most productions are haunted, in some way, by those that each spectator has already seen, if not by those evoked through performance choices and design elements, though few productions go to the extremes of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, a production haunted by the Richard Burton film footage that the live actors recreate in meticulous detail on stage while it plays on a screen behind them. At Kronborg, a production of *Hamlet* is multiply haunted. In addition to the spectator's

personal ghosts of *Hamlets* past, the castle is haunted by its own previous *Hamlets*: the play was performed there for the first time in the anniversary year 1816, by an amateur troupe of soldiers, the beginning of a sustained and eventful performance history.¹⁹ A portrait gallery in the castle commemorates other notable performances, beginning with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh directed by Tyrone Guthrie in 1937. Less than two months before *Hamlet Live* opened, the Globe's touring *Hamlet* was performed at Kronborg castle, after premiering at Shakespeare's Globe and stopping in 195 other countries over the course of its two-year run; Dominic Dromgoole, reflecting on this moment of the tour he witnessed as the Globe's artistic director, describes feeling that in this performance '[v]arious circles were being brought to a close',²⁰ with the Danish audience 'treat[ing] the play very much as their own'.²¹ While all of these productions can be understood in relation to Carlson's notion of haunting, the superimposition of *Hamlet's* fictive spaces on the real rooms of the castle, in the case of *Hamlet Live's* promenade production, is a special category of haunting, one which invites the castle's real and fictive past uses to intrude on the audience's experience.

Hamlet Live is peculiar in several respects that preclude generalizations about that audience experience. The performance of *Hamlet Live* was included in the price of admission to the castle and gathered spectators—tourists, really—who came and went as the scenes coincided with their movements through the castle's spaces. 'Would you like to perform *Hamlet* at Elsinore?' sounds like an invitation any Shakespearean actor would be hard pressed to refuse, but 'how about performing for a multilingual audience, many of whom do not know, or care about, the play, you, or your performance?' is a more accurate description of the conditions. I observed spectators taking selfies with the actors mid-scene, offering loud simultaneous translation, and impinging on the performance in multiple ways that detracted from theatrical illusion.

Peter Holst-Beck's script for *Hamlet Live* seems designed to trigger memories of the play through its pastiche of memorable lines and key scenes performed as a kind of reverse-engineered site specificity.²² While *Hamlet* was not written to be performed at Elsinore, performing it there, in the rooms of the castle, implants a false memory of *Hamlet*, one in which the castle is already heavily invested. This seems to be one of the production's particular aims, since I was told on two separate days, by two different actors mingling with the crowd between scenes, that Will Kemp had been a jester at the Kronborg court before joining

Shakespeare's acting company. In this way, Kronborg castle serves as the medium through which emotion was transferred, a kind of actantial helper in the action of remembering *Hamlet*. By yoking the syncopation of historical re-enactment to Shakespearean performance, *Hamlet Live* participates in the practice of misremembering *Hamlet* at Elsinore, in a kind of memorial colonization that recollects early modern memory arts. The connection between space and memory in *Hamlet Live* and other site-responsive productions of Shakespeare suggests a manifestation of the early modern practice of constructing imaginary 'memory palaces'. This method of imagining physical spaces as repositories in which to organize memories predates the early modern period, of course: in *On Memory and Recollection*, Aristotle distinguishes between remembering, which calls up a memory directly, and recollecting, which finds its way to a memory through the mediation of something that reminds the rememberer of it.²³ When Hamlet is showing his mother a picture of his father, he is attempting to prompt recollection; when an actor playing Hamlet does so in a room of Kronborg castle, that, too, prompts recollection.

MEMORY *LIEUX* AND *MILIEUX*

Hamlet Live implants a false memory of *Hamlet* within Kronborg castle, using scenes from *Hamlet* to prompt that Aristotelian recollection. *Hamlet* is not a site-specific piece written to be performed at Elsinore; nor is it even a play that responds in any particular way to this space. In Shakespeare's source, the story takes place in an entirely other part of Denmark, Jutland. Nonetheless, at Kronborg, as Balz Engler has suggested, '[t]he location authenticates the theatrical performance, and the performance in turn authenticates the experience of the location'.²⁴ Kronborg consolidates its claim to be 'Hamlet's castle' largely through its annual HamletScenen festival bringing international productions to Helsingør. *Hamlet Live* is a different kind of performance, filling the rooms of the castle, not just the performance space of the courtyard, with *Hamlet*.

Despite the dubious connection, Helsingør occupies a prominent place in Shakespeareans' literary geography, a term that encapsulates the associations between fictional worlds and their material counterparts. As Virginia Woolf reflected, reviewing a series of books directing literary pilgrims through the terrain of *The Dickens Country* or *The Thackeray Country*, literary geography stems from desires both sentimental and scientific: to see the sites that inspired an author and to determine the

extent to which the author has captured or been influenced by reality.²⁵ Helsingør is a site of pilgrimage only in the first sense, as a *lieu de mémoire*, Pierre Nora's term describing a place designated for remembering, which he distinguishes from a *milieu de mémoire*, a genuine site of memory.²⁶ Like Verona, the fictional site of *Romeo and Juliet* but also the real city imbued with the spirit of Shakespeare's tragic lovers for tourists intent on visiting 'Juliet's balcony', Helsingør is a *lieu*, not a *milieu*, of memory, distinct from the *milieux* of Stratford-upon-Avon and Bankside with their genuine, or at least ostensibly genuine, associations. These *milieux* possess their own aura of authenticity (to invoke Walter Benjamin) beneath their much-noted layers of artifice,²⁷ while the *lieux*, devoid of authentic aura, are dressed in borrowed finery. Recent theorisations of 'authentic fakes', hyperrealism, and the relationship between aura and atmosphere²⁸ call into question some of the conclusions that, relying on Benjamin, situate *lieux* firmly below *milieux* in terms of the experience they can offer to the spectator.

A *lieu de mémoire* is in some ways a memory palace made real, and like a memory palace it is subject to processes intended to rewrite its meanings. Hamlet expresses his awareness of this complement to the *ars memoriae*, the *ars oblivionalis*, in his vow to wipe his memory of 'all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past / That youth and observation copied there' to overwrite them with his father's 'commandment' (1.5.99–102). The vow is probably hyperbolic and certainly undermined by his shift within that same speech to topics other than this commandment. Nonetheless, it suggests that Hamlet understands memory as malleable, subject to deliberate erasure and superimposition. The early modern *ars memoriae* proposed overwriting as a form of forgetting; a memory palace, filled with images recollecting memories, could be restocked with other images recollecting other memories; the clues allowing an orator to remember one speech could be erased by new clues allowing him to remember the next. *Hamlet Live* functions in this way, as a memory palace that uses scenes from *Hamlet* to overwrite the previous history of Kronborg castle.

CONCLUSION

Kronborg castle's association with *Hamlet* is reinforced when the play is performed there, consolidating the castle's claims as a *lieu de mémoire* in Nora's sense or a site of literary pilgrimage in Woolf's; in turn, that

borrowed aura, transmitted through performance, lends itself to each new performance through a kind of spatial haunting. A performance of *Hamlet* at Kronborg reinforces the fictional world of Elsinore by situating spectators within Soja's Thirdspace and within Stein's syncopated time.

By constructing a misremembered recollection of *Hamlet*, the *Hamlet Live* actors contribute to the myth of *Hamlet* at Helsingør, and of Elsinore in *Hamlet*. In so doing, they also mobilise memory in ways that resonate with the motion of emotions through memory in *Hamlet*. The performance of *Hamlet Live* at Kronborg creates a syncopated awareness of 'then' and 'now' in a single 'here' that allies the fictional world of the play with the material world of the audience: this is quite different from the oscillation achieved in performances of *Hamlet* at the Globe, where similarities between the material conditions of performance in Shakespeare's time and those of the present moment create a heightened awareness of the material 'here', the Firstspace shared by the actors and the audience. By moving through the audience, and with the audience through the space, the *Hamlet Live* actors activate the space of Elsinore in ways recognisable from historical re-enactments. *Hamlet Live* achieves its purpose through multiple misrememberings that serve the purpose of recollection.

NOTES

1. All references are to *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
2. Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220.
3. Shankar Raman, 'Hamlet in Motion', in *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment, and Cognition*, ed. Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 120. Cf. *OED*, 'emotion', n., def. 1b, 2.
4. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
5. Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins and ed. Paul Perron and Patrick Debbèche (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 37.
6. *Ibid.*, 45.

7. The remark is in Lodge's *Wits Miserie, and the Worlds Madnesse* (London: Adam Islip, 1596), 56. It is frequently cited in work on *Hamlet* and memory.
8. Rhodri Lewis, 'Hamlet, Metaphor, and Memory', *Studies in Philology* 109 (2012): 612.
9. John Kerrigan, 'Hieronimo, Hamlet and Remembrance', *Essays in Criticism* 31 (1981): 105–126.
10. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 2.
11. Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.
12. Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Random House, 1935), 93.
13. Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
14. Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
15. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
16. I follow Gay McAuley (*Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999]) here in treating the audience space and the performance space as a single material space that the actors and the audience share.
17. Terms like 'replication' and 'authenticity' are vexed at the Globe, particularly in relation to productions during Emma Rice's brief but innovative tenure and in the candlelit Sam Wanamaker Playhouse; both involve lighting conditions that affect the experience of the Firstspace shared between actors and spectators. Direct audience address has been a signature technique of Globe actors; Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (London: Routledge, 2005) remains an excellent analysis of this practice and its implications.
18. Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).
19. Balz Engler, 'Local Habitations: Hamlet at Helsingør, Juliet at Verona', in *Shakespeare and Space*, ed. Ina Habermann and Michele Witen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 261. See also the Shakespeare by Hamletscenen website at <http://hamletscenen.dk/en/>.
20. Dominic Dromgoole, *Hamlet Globe to Globe* (New York: Grove, 2017), 354.
21. *Ibid.*, 355.

22. My thanks to Peter Holst-Beck for corresponding with me about this project.
23. Pertinent recent discussions of Aristotle's distinction between remembering and recollecting include David Bloch, *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection* (Boston: Brill, 2007); Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Richard Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2004). See also Hester Lee Jeffries, *Shakespeare and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Lina Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
24. Balz Engler, 'Local Habitations', 261.
25. Virginia Woolf, 'Literary Geography', in *Books and Portraits: Some Further Selections from the Literary and Biographical Writings of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Mary Lyon (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1977), 158.
26. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.
27. Robert Ormsby notes the growing body of scholarship on Stratford-upon-Avon and the Globe as tourist sites, and contributes to it, in 'Intercultural Performance and The Stratford Festival as Global Tourist Place: Leon Rubin's, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream and Twelfth Night', in *Shakespeare and Canada: Remembrance of Ourselves*, ed. Irena R. Makaryk and Kathryn Prince (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2017).
28. See especially Gernot Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics', *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 113–126.

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‘Speech Falters Speech Flinches When Horror Lifts a Fist to It’: Action, Emotion, and Inertia in Three *Hamlet* Variations

Stephen Chinna

In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet proclaims: ‘This is I, / Hamlet the Dane’ (5.1.254).¹ But, who is Hamlet? Is there only one ‘Hamlet the Dane’? Obviously not. There is no one complete and finished Hamlet. The character is always under construction, always a potential—both in the sense of those imagined nebulous Hamlets constructed in fragments from the pages of the text, and those many embodied Hamlets that may be seen and heard in performance. And then there are the Hamlets rewritten, the Hamlets that enter another play world whether in the text or in performance. Of these there are many, but I will look at just three: Howard Barker’s *Gertrude—The Cry* (2002); Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmaschine* (1977); Steve Chinna’s *When Salome Met Hamlet* (2009). I choose these because I have directed student productions of them in Theatre Studies units during my time at the University of Western Australia. All three plays treat Hamlet as a mainly reluctant player in the revenge narrative. Barker’s Hamlet withdraws from the action by suiciding in the face of

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his mother Gertrude's betrayals. Müller's fragmented Hamlet initially withdraws from the action, but eventually returns to become a killer of all father figures, and my Hamlet takes no part in much of the plotting, or the final killing of Claudius. He is an exceedingly distracted and supremely ineffectual revenger.

GERTRUDE—THE CRY

Howard Barker's *Gertrude—The Cry*² was first staged at Kronborg Castle at Helsingør (Elsinore) in 2002, as part of the annual International Shakespeare Festival there, directed by Barker himself. The UWA student production was staged in the Dolphin Theatre at the University of Western Australia in May 2004.³ For Barker, 'Gertrude's sketchily described character is soddened with shame and regret'. His Gertrude 'was to be passionate, defiant and more authentically tragic than the adolescent prince himself'.⁴ Tellingly, Barker refers to Hamlet as 'adolescent', a factor almost invariably overlooked for various rationales in stage productions, on screen, and in textual analyses of the character.⁵ In Barker's play, the characters of Claudius, Gertrude and an 'adolescent' Hamlet are retained—Polonius (faithful servant to Claudius) becomes Cascan (faithful servant to Gertrude); Ophelia is echoed in Hamlet's betrothed and later his bride, Ragusa; and Albert, a 'Duke of Mecklenburg', and eventual lover and husband of Gertrude (as well as briefly of Ragusa), is a loose amalgam of Horatio (friend to Hamlet) and Fortinbras (conqueror of Denmark). Isola, the mother of Claudius, is a purely Barker invention, echoing the absent mother in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, who Barker made present and integral to the plot as Clarissa in his *Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good*. And there is a baby, Jane, who cries but never speaks. The action of the play revolves around a battle between those labelled (by Cascan) as the moralists, represented by Hamlet and Ragusa, and the immoralists—Gertrude, Claudius, and Albert. Gertrude's orgasmic cry, the cry of the title, is the point of focus for that battle. It signifies a cry of betrayal, as Gertrude states in Scene 8:

GERTRUDE The cry's betrayal Claudius (*Pause*)
 CLAUDIUS Betrayal?
 GERTRUDE Betrayal
 And it comes from nowhere else. (44)

It is the cry that is heard four times as Hamlet dies, and the cry that will ultimately signify Claudius's death.

At the start of Barker's play, as in Shakespeare's play, Old Hamlet has been poisoned in an orchard, but here he dies looking up at the spectacle of a copulating Gertrude and Claudius who '*couple above the dying man. All three utter, a music of extremes*' (10). In Scene 3, when Hamlet views the body of his dead father, he questions the 'conventions' of mourning. He doesn't know what he feels, so he doesn't know what emotion he is supposed to express. Here, Hamlet has no model for how he should feel, for how to perform the 'correct' emotion:

I expected to be more moved than this (*Pause*)
 Cascades
 Storms of
 Torrents of emotion (13)

He continues, and Hamlet's misogyny, which is obvious enough in Shakespeare's play is here more blatantly expressed:

Never mind these things will come later when I least expect them in bed
 with a bitch or on a horse eyes full of tears you're crying she will say you're
 crying the horse will neigh yes horse yes bitch I am and I don't know why
 I'm blind I'm choking silly ha ha forgive me ha I'll get off off the bitch off
 the horse have you a handkerchief. (13)

This misogynistic tirade against women by Hamlet is repeated in later scenes of the play, where Hamlet confesses to his embarrassment at Gertrude's sexuality and refers to his distaste for 'sordid acts of intimacy I inevitably regret' (24). Earlier, when Gertrude enters '*in mourning*' we see how Hamlet, like Isola in later scenes, is both repelled and fascinated in turn by Gertrude:

How did you kill my father I can't work it out
 there is no mark on him
 (*He looks at her. He laughs*)
 I'm crying later
 (*He runs to her, clasps her*)
 Say you understand I'm crying later (14)

In a crucial difference from Shakespeare's play, Hamlet has not been usurped and cheated of his kingship by Claudius. As he announces to Gertrude in Scene 3: 'Now I am king the entire emphasis of government will be upon decorum' (15). His incapacity for action during the earlier stages of the play can be interpreted as being due to his sense of horror and confusion over the act of betrayal by Gertrude of his father. Hence, Hamlet relies on words. These frequent voluble outpourings express his conflicting emotions until words too lose their efficacy for him. At the close of Scene 7, he responds to his confusion over Albert's overt display of love for Gertrude (and Gertrude's impending betrayal of Claudius) by uttering on Gertrude's entrance:

I'm saying less (*Pause*)
 Suffering more and
 (*Claudius enters*)
 Saying less
 (*He goes out*) (41)

This is further exemplified in Scene 13 when Hamlet, entering with Ragusa to announce their impending marriage, again acknowledges the impotence of speech when action cannot be undertaken:

I'm saying less (*Pause*)
 I'm saying less and the reason I am saying less is
 that speech falters speech flinches when horror
 lifts a fist to it (*Pause*)
 The more horror the less speech
 [...]
 WORDS HOPELESS HERE (54)

However, Hamlet, when newly married to Ragusa, promises a moralistic regime with an emphasis that moves beyond the display of mere 'decorum'. As we discover later in the play, in Scene 20, it is intended that Hamlet's revenge will be visited on his mother for the betrayal of his father when Ragusa tells Gertrude at Hamlet's funeral:

We planned your execution
 It was in his diary

And not in pencil
 Ink
 [...]

 A contract with the axeman
 Spanish
 Far from cheap (85)

In Scene 16, Gertrude gives birth to a daughter, Jane, fathered by Claudius. Cascan, the wise servant, foreseeing a fascistic future under the rule of Hamlet and Ragusa, warns Claudius: 'How little my lord understands of the ambitions of the moralists' (67). He then urges him to kill Hamlet, who has just exited. Claudius, echoing Shakespeare's Hamlet, cannot act, as he has earlier failed to kill Albert when discovering him with Gertrude—so Cascan, still clutching the baby Jane, rushes after Hamlet. But it is Hamlet who, as Isola later states, 'has a knife' (72), and offstage, kills Cascan. Tellingly, the most directly physical action committed by Hamlet leading towards a definite effect, the death of Cascan, takes place offstage, unseen. In contrast, the death of Hamlet is visibly, and viscerally, played out in front of the audience.

In Scene 19, Hamlet enters, stating: 'The world is full of things I do not understand but others understand them evidently' (75). In a superbly constructed, tension-filled scene in performance, Hamlet, understanding that the glass of wine Claudius has handed him is poisoned, and encouraged by Gertrude, chooses to drink it, thus opting for suicide. This scene proved invariably gripping in performance, and Baker's textual layout aided the actor, and thus the audience, to apprehend Hamlet's working through his inertia towards a decision. Gertrude commands Hamlet: 'You drink it / You drink his glass'. Hamlet responds, as laid out on the page:

I
 Drink
 His
 Glass?
 I
 Hamlet
 Drink
 The

Glass
Of
Why (*Pause*)

And Gertrude responds: ‘I don’t know [...] I don’t know why’ (77). He fulfils the potential of Shakespeare’s Hamlet and overcomes his inertia to again take action, but in this instance by declining (like Müller’s Hamlet as we shall see) to take part any longer in this ‘tragedy’. As he dies, Gertrude’s orgasmic scream echoes throughout the theatre. At the conclusion of the play, in Scene 21, the stage is littered with bodies—of Hamlet (whose body remains on stage for the final 25 minutes of the play in performance), Isola (strangled by Claudius to spare her witnessing the killing of him by Gertrude), Claudius (killed with words of betrayal by Gertrude), and the baby Jane, drowned by Ragusa and flung onto the stage. Albert then enters to take Gertrude on their honeymoon—‘Two weeks in a warm climate’ (91)—and they exit.

HAMLETMACHINE

While Barker’s Hamlet isn’t initially sure what emotions he should feel, or how he should perform them, but finally overcomes his inertia to take his own life, the Hamlet, or Hamlets, of Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine* take refuge in becoming a machine, for a machine has ‘no emotions’.⁶ In ‘Hamlet the Difference Machine’ Stephen Barker invokes the Andy Warholian art-machine, which ‘destroys subjectivity entirely, has no “personality,” no emotions; it is action itself’.⁷ Here, a dichotomy between emotions, which lead to inertia, is set in opposition to actions, echoing Howard Barker’s Hamlet, caught between a dialectic which is explored in all three plays discussed here. The title also plays with the initials of the playwright, Heiner Müller, born in Germany in 1929 and who, like many Germans of his generation, experienced living under both Nazi Fascism and Stalinist Socialism. He was a poet and playwright from the mid-1950s, when he was initially hailed as the ‘heir to Brecht’, until his death in December 1995. While Bertolt Brecht saw the Hamlet story as about a man caught between two worlds—the savage (or emotional) late-medieval world of Elsinore, and the intellectual (rational) renaissance world of Wittenberg, Müller saw Hamlet as ‘much more a German than an English character [...] the intellectual in conflict with history’.⁸

This 'shrunken head' *Hamlet* (in Müller's words), is an extreme distillation of a two-hundred-page translation Müller had done of Shakespeare's canonical play. As Müller states: 'For thirty years Hamlet was a real obsession for me, so I tried to destroy him by writing a short text, *Hamletmachine*'.⁹ Robert Wilson's 1986 production of Müller's play was staged at the New York University in May of that year, and at the Kunsthalle, Hamburg in October. When I staged the play at the Dolphin Theatre at the University of Western Australia in 1996, I had not seen Wilson's version, nor any others (I first viewed a video of Wilson's Hamburg production in 1998), and so had no previous visual images to draw on. This was fortunate in many respects but the play obviously presents many challenges to a director. As Kirk Williams writes:

In place of a traditional plot, Müller presents a series of monologues and stage pictures tied loosely together by the repetition of rhetorical and visual tropes. In place of stable and psychologically consistent characters, the audience sees protean figures that trumpet their alterity and continually underscore their status as literary creations.¹⁰

Müller's play explores the impossibility of action in a postmodern world, as well in Hamlet's world. Like Barker's play, it also echoes and builds upon the misogynistic elements in Shakespeare's text. It is an intertextual montage of multiple allusions to other texts, 'brimming with direct quotes and paraphrases from Shakespeare, Brecht, Hölderlin, the Bible, Eliot, Cummings, Marx, Benjamin, Artaud, Sartre, and Andy Warhol'.¹¹ Political figures such as Lenin, Marx, and Mao wander through the text (and potential performances) and the play contains the possibilities in performance of many different styles, as well as shifting between languages, mainly German but sometimes in English. Here, Hamlet is an entity in fragments. These fragmented entities include a Hamlet who refuses to take part in the drama anymore, a Hamlet who splits into protagonist and antagonist, a Hamlet who wants 'to be a woman' (55), and a Hamlet who becomes a machine—'no pain no thoughts' (57). And there is an Ophelia who shifts through various incarnations—sometimes as a suicide, sometimes as a victim, and often as a revenger. For Müller, Ophelia 'has to do with Ulrike Meinhoff and the problem of terrorism in Europe' (50), suggesting the power that Ophelia can wield in this play

compared to Shakespeare's Ophelia, and though referring to the 1970s, Muller's comment has obvious relevance to almost any period in Europe, and elsewhere, over the past few decades.

The play opens, in the past tense, as a non-character designated block of text, minimally punctuated, containing capitalized sections, but ably capturing a condensation of the basic themes of Shakespeare's play—fratricide, sexuality, and revenge:

I was Hamlet. I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me. The bells tolled the state-funeral, murderer and widow a couple, the councillors goose-stepping behind the highranking carcass' coffin, bawling with badly paid grief WHO IS THE CORPSE IN THE HEARSE/ABOUT WHOM THERE'S SUCH A HUE AND CRY/'TIS THE CORPSE OF A GREAT/GIVER OF ALMS the lane formed by the populace, creation of his statecraft HE WAS A MAN HE TOOK THEM ALL FOR ALL. I stopped the funeral procession, I pried open the coffin with my sword, the blade broke, yet with the blunt reminder I succeeded, and I dispensed my dead procreator FLESH LIKES TO KEEP THE COMPANY OF FLESH among the bums around me. The mourning turned into rejoicing, the rejoicing into lipsmacking, on top of the empty coffin the murderer humped the widow LET ME HELP YOU UP, UNCLE (53)

In the student production I directed in 1996, there were three Hamlets—one male actor onstage in doublet and hose, one (male) standing on an upper gallery in a quasi-Stasi uniform, and the other, a female dressed in 'everyday' clothing, sitting in with the audience. The text was retyped to provide the prompt script with the actors' names so as to identify which lines were assigned to whom. For example, this page from the 1996 production's prompt script in my possession shows how lines were allocated to the various actors¹²:

CHECK: House on
Warms on
Works off
Blues on
Umbrella set SL prop table
Lipstick → Mini

ONCE FOR READY x

FAMILY SCRAPBOOK

x
CARUS; I was Hamlet, A ①
+ Follow x

LUKE; I was Hamlet, A

BARBARA; I was Hamlet, A

CARUS; I stood at the shore and talked with the surf

LUKE; BLA BLA,
ALL BLA BLA

CARUS; The ruins of Europe in back of me.

LUKE; ② The bells tolled the state funeral, murderer and widow a couple, the councillors goose-stepping behind the highranking carcass' coffin, bawling with badly paid grief

JON; WHO IS THE CORPSE IN THE HEARSE/ABOUT WHOM THERE'S SUCH A HUE AND CRY/

SIMON; 'TIS THE CORPSE OF A GREAT/GIVER OF ALMS

LUKE; The lane formed by the populace, creation of his statecraft

BARBARA; HE WAS A MAN HE TOOK THEM ALL FOR ALL.

LUKE; I stopped the funeral procession, I pried open the coffin with my sword, the blade broke, yet with the blunt reminder I succeeded, and I dispensed my dead procreator

BARBARA; FLESH LIKES TO KEEP THE COMPANY OF FLESH

LUKE; Among the bums around me.

CARUS; The mourning turned into rejoicing, the rejoicing into lipsmacking, on top of the empty coffin the murderer humped the widow ③

JON; LET ME HELP YOU UP, UNCLE,

Hamletmachine is in five acts, as was Shakespeare's play. In the first act, 'Family Scrapbook', Shakespeare's play is invoked, and quoted, where the son not only wishes to avenge his father's death, but is prepared to kill, to perhaps despoil his mother, and to seek revenge against women through the innocent Ophelia. The second act, 'The Europe of Women', introduces Ophelia who starts with 'I am Ophelia. The one the river didn't keep' (54), and then proceeds to provide a rollcall of women victims before closing by vowing revenge and gaining her freedom: 'I walk into the street clothed in my blood' (55). The third act, 'Scherzo', is where dance and movement comprise the majority of the stage action. Here, a gallery of dead philosophers throw their books at Hamlet while a ballet of dead women are presented, as though in a museum. Hamlet and Ophelia come together, and Hamlet declares—'I want to be a woman' (55). The fourth act, 'Pest in Buda/Battle for Greenland' (55–58), is densely packed with imagery and intertextual references. Macbeth, as well as Hamlet is invoked, and also Lenin, Stalin and Mao, and the 1956 uprising by Hungarians against the Russian occupation (principally in Budapest). After the opening lines, attributed to 'HAMLET', the ensuing lines start with the stage direction: 'THE ACTOR PLAYING HAMLET' (56). This distancing effect, which may be spoken in performance, is emphasised in the lines which follow where the Hamlet actor starts by refusing to take part:

I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. My words have nothing to tell me anymore. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing. I'm not interested in it anymore either. I won't play along anymore. (56)

In the Dolphin Theatre production these lines were apportioned to the three Hamlets, the last section being spoken by the female Hamlet seated in the audience, as shown below from the prompt script:

THE ACTORS PLAYING HAMLET

CARUS; I'm not Hamlet_x

LUKE; I'm not Hamlet

BARBARA; I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more.
 My words have nothing to tell me anymore.
 My thoughts suck the blood out of images.
 My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind
 me the set is put up. By people who aren't
 interested in my drama, for people to whom
 means nothing. I'm not interested in it
 anymore either. I won't play along anymore.

But this Hamlet, or Hamlets, soon become(s) co-opted back into the dialectic of revolution, where the oppressed becomes the oppressor, and the hierarchical system re-establishes itself. This invocation of Hamlet as a potential oppressor is echoed in Barker's play. In Müller's play, the Hamlet protagonist splits and splits again—becoming subject and object, human and machine. He finishes with:

My drama didn't happen. The script has been lost. The actors put their faces on the rack in the dressing room. In his box, the prompter is rotting. The stuffed corpses in the house don't stir a hand. I go home and kill the time, at one/with my undivided self. (56)

Here, the fragmented Hamlets are reintegrated, and he becomes the machine that will kill his father figures. The photograph of the playwright is torn up—signifying another killing of the father figure. At the end of this fourth act the old communist heroes are destroyed (*Marx, Lenin, Mao*) by the 'Actor of Hamlet' in a suit of armour, and a new 'Ice Age' descends on the stage (58). Hamlet, has once again taken power, become the slayer of the old regime, and thus, the old patriarchal order has reinstated itself. However, in the fifth act, which is not titled, Ophelia while imprisoned in a wheelchair and wrapped in gauze bandages speaks through Electra (the classical female victim from plays by Sophocles and Euripides) and the play closes with Ophelia quoting Susan Atkins, a member of the Manson 'family': 'When she walks through your bedrooms carrying butcher knives you'll know the truth' (58).

For all of the above acts, movement had to be devised that suggested the struggle being enacted on stage. With so little of the dialogue being apportioned to named characters in Müller's play text, the long passages of what could be delivered as monologues were apportioned to the various student actors, as the examples from the prompt script above demonstrate. As the play draws to an end, the Hamlets from the upper gallery (Luke) and the auditorium (Barbara) converge onto the stage, repeating the start of Ophelia's closing lines. Mimi, who plays Ophelia, speaks the final sentence from offstage:

BARBARA:	①	When she walks
LUKE:		When she walks x ②
BARBARA:		When she walks
LUKE:		When she walks
BARBARA:		When she walks
<i>As Luke approaches stage</i>		
LUKE:	through your bedrooms carrying butcher knives you'll know the truth.
MIMI: ↳ BARBARA }		This Electra speaking. In the heart of darkness. Under the sun of torture. To the capitals of the world. In the name of the victims. I eject all the sperm I have received. I turn the milk of my breasts into lethal poison. I take back the world I gave birth to. I choke between my thighs the world I gave birth to. I bury it in my womb. Down with the happiness of submission. Long live hate and contempt, rebellion and death.
MIMI: LEBKA		When she walks through your bedrooms carrying butchers knives you'll know the truth x
<i>When Mimi is OFFSTAGE</i>		

The deliberate casting of a female student to play one of the Hamlets allowed for the actor to be visually identified with Ophelia/Electra. Having spoken her lines from the auditorium up until the point where she came up onto the stage, at the same time as the Hamlet from the upper gallery came down, allowed for a fairly unsubtle closure.

The Shakespearean Hamlet had already exited the stage. While it is difficult here to describe fully and to do justice to the complexity of choices in choreography and staging that Müller's play demands, the more conventional textual formats of the other two plays discussed allowed for a much less complex directing process.

WHEN SALOME MET HAMLET (A DOMESTIC TRAGEDY)

While Müller's densely packed and intertextual play questions many facets of the Shakespeare text and its interpretations, *When Salome Met Hamlet* is less complex, but here Hamlet is also in fragments, as are the texts of the two plays used, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (written in French in 1891).¹³ The play was written without direct reference to either of the two source texts, revised to some extent during the rehearsal period and staged in the Dolphin Theatre at the University of Western Australia in May 2005. Having directed a production of *Salome* at UWA in October 2000, and having taught and lectured on *Hamlet*, I allowed the resonances from each play to inform the writing of the script. There are some parallels between the narratives: A brother kills a brother in order to possess his wife, and take over a kingdom. There are the shared themes of fratricide, incest, obsession, and revenge. Six characters from Shakespeare's play—Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Laertes, and Horatio—encounter six characters from Wilde's play—Herod, Herodias, Salome, Iokanaan (or John the Baptist), Naaman (an executioner), and Tigellinus (a noble Roman)—at Elsinore. Why? Laertes, while at university in Lyon, wishing to create a distraction from his murdering of his father Polonius who suspects Laertes' incestuous relationship with Ophelia, invites Herod (who, historically, Caligula had exiled to Lyon) and his entourage to Elsinore.

Many questions are raised and most are answered in the play: Why is Herod's court in Elsinore? What has happened to Polonius? What do the pigs feed on beneath the castle walls? Why does action seem alien to Hamlet's nature? Who will be left standing at the end? One thing is certain—bodies do eventually litter the stage in this play, which borrows from the conventions of the revenge tragedy—action leads to endings. As Gertrude states near the conclusion of the play: 'More cause and effect rarely I have seen' (73). This short scene (Scene 22), in its entirety below, encapsulates the manner in which the play draws on dialogue

and themes from Shakespeare's play. Gertrude is forced to do all of the accounts and household arrangements as Polonius has disappeared, and all of the servants have been sent off to fight the Norwegians. Here, Gertrude references the absence of Polonius as well as echoing Shakespeare's Claudius in his 1.2 speech to Hamlet concerning the loss of fathers. She also scoffs at Hamlet's expression of love for her—describing it as 'arrant nonsense':

GERTRUDE *alone in her room, doing the accounts. HAMLET enters.*

HAMLET Mother!

GERTRUDE Oh! Startle me you did my son. Oh, you look all awry! Are you out of sorts again? Tuck in your shirt. How can you walk about looking like something the cat dragged in? You are a prince. You cannot just stagger about, waving your arms and talking nonsense, you know.

HAMLET Why not? Your husband does. Mother. I suffer.

(Silence.)

I suffer.

GERTRUDE Yes. You suffer.

HAMLET Mother! *(He rushes to GERTRUDE and falls on top of her.)* Oh, mother, I suffer.

GERTRUDE Yes, yes. Of course you do. You suffer. Ohhh, never mind. We all suffer.

HAMLET But I really suffer!

GERTRUDE *(throwing him off herself).* Stop it. Stupid boy! Everybody suffers.

HAMLET But my father!

GERTRUDE Oh, you and your father. We all have fathers, have them and lose them. Where is my father? Have you seen him lately? No. Where is your father's father? Where is the father of Claudius? Where is the father of Ophelia? Yes, where is the father of Ophelia? But, nonetheless, you pine too much. Healthy it is not. Too much pining and look at you. A mess. Pine, pine. Pull yourself together, son. You are ridiculous.

HAMLET But mother, I love you!

GERTRUDE Do not be ludicrous. Of course you do not. What arrant nonsense. Love your mother? Whatever next? Where do you get it from? *(She exits.)*

HAMLET *sobbing as SALOME enters.* (58–59)

In this play, Hamlet is always mercurial—performing almost nothing but emotions that rarely lead to meaningful action. His inertia is explained away here by his constantly being distracted—at first he is in love with the idea of being in love with Ophelia, but then like Romeo's love for Rosaline suddenly shifting when he sees Juliet, when Hamlet meets Salome immediately his attentions are drawn to her. Later, when he plans to kill Claudius, he is again distracted by the thoughts of Salome—who cares not for him but loves only Iokanaan.

Clear grammatical language and syntax are frequently damaged in the play, echoing the fragmented and damaged states of the main players. For example, Gertrude has a tortured syntax not unlike that of Yoda in *Star Wars*, and Hamlet's language frequently breaks down, mirroring the emotional state of the protagonist. For example, in Scene 17, when Hamlet and Ophelia encounter each other:

HAMLET Love you? And who should love me? Eh? Who should love me?

OPHELIA I am open to your attentions.

HAMLET Wha? Open to? Open to me? Hoh! Hoh! Baba ... Wha ... wha ... Hoh ... hoh ... baba ... whore of a ... of a ... of a ... whore of a Babylon! Baba ... Babylon strumpet ... get you ... get you ... to a ... get you to ... Babylon ... incestuous whore!

OPHELIA Oh, soft! Please sir ... you do me wrong to treat me so ...

HAMLET Get ... you ... to ... a ... Babylon!

OPHELIA Oh, cruel, cruel ... (*she swoons*)

HAMLET Get ... you ... to ... a ... Babylon! To be (*pause*) to be, to be, to be – the dog. Ha! Here, Toby. What be with the woman on the floor? Dear, oh dear, oh dear. Not be well she ain't. Ooooh, not be well. Send for an apothecary. Apoth ... apoth ... a pox upon you sir! Ha! Rant, rant. An arrant ranter, I am, I am. I'm an arrant ranter, I am. (46–47)

The play ends with ten of the twelve characters dead on stage in the last ten minutes of the performance. Caesar has invaded from the south and only Salome and Iokanaan are left alive in Scene 25—complaining about the cold and bemoaning the state of Danish wine, which has been a running gag throughout the play:

SALOME *and* IOKANAAN, *sitting*.

IOKANAAN You are pensive, my dear. Think you of the past?

SALOME Ah, you caught me. Yes. I was thinking of all that went before. Our old life, and now this one. But, Gertrude was wrong. I have no need for apologies.

IOKANAAN But are you happy?

SALOME Yes. I have you. You have me. Caesar looks over us. You have to laugh. They did not expect that – coming up from the south. Whoops! Roman legions now guard the borders. And Horatio's crucifixion was a fine affair. As were they all fine affairs. (*The three frozen-in-position survivors – HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and OPHELIA – drop to the floor.*) All along the battlements. Then, all those fattened swine. How we observed the protocol. (*She laughs.*)

IOKANAAN Indeed. And the cold?

SALOME That, I will never get used to. Nor that Danish wine.
(74–75)

The variations on Shakespeare's play addressed above share some themes common to their source text. The misogyny expressed by Hamlet in Shakespeare's play is present in all three—particularly in Barker's *Gertrude—The Cry*. Hamlet's apparent inertia in the face of his father's murder is addressed in each play, but quite differently. Barker's Hamlet doesn't know how he can express his grief in the face of such 'horror', but ultimately decides the most fitting course of action is to 'exit' the play; Müller's Hamlet is a subject split within itself who only finds an 'undivided self' through stepping into a suit of armour and killing several father figures—Marx, Lenin, Mao—all germane to Müller's political context; and the last Hamlet discussed is too distracted to ever settle on carrying out his revenge—he dies after appointing Horatio as his very short-lived successor.

HAMLET Horatio. I expire. I expire for Denmark. Let those who follow know my story. I appoint you leader of the Danes. Be steadfast and brave. Stout and true. Be ... (*He dies*)

Silence. (73)

NOTES

1. *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006).
2. Howard Barker, *Gertrude—The Cry/Knowledge and a Girl* (London: Calder, 2002), 7–93. All further references from the play are by page number in this edition.
3. I have previously written on the play with a principal focus on the character of Gertrude. See Stephen Chinna, 'The Elemental Gertrude: Howard Barker's Refashioning of Hamlet's Mother', in '*This Earthly Stage*': *World and Stage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Brett D. Hirsch and Christopher Wortham (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 103–114.
4. The Wrestling School, <http://www.thewrestlingschool.co.uk/Gertrude.htm#barkerongertrude>.
5. I would certainly argue that the actor cast as Hamlet in the majority of stage and screen productions is invariably too old for the part. For examples of more sustained arguments concerning this, see Robert Cohen, 'Shakespeare's Sixteen-Year-Old Hamlet', *Educational Theatre Journal* 25, no. 2 (1973): 179–188; and Stephen Roth, 'How Many Years Had Hamlet the Dane?', in *Hamlet: The Undiscovered Country* (Seattle, WA: Open House, 2009), 25–38.
6. Heiner Müller, 'Hamletmachine', in *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*, ed. and trans. Carl Weber (New York: PAJ Publications, 1984), 49–58. All further references from the play are by page number in this edition.
7. Stephen Barker, 'Hamlet the Difference Machine', *Comparative Drama* 46, no. 3 (2012): 421, n. 31.
8. Müller, *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*, 50. For more on how Brecht interpreted Shakespeare, see Margot Heinemann, 'How Brecht Read Shakespeare', in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 226–254.
9. Quoted in Jonathan Kalb, 'On *Hamletmachine*: Müller and the Shadow of Artaud', *New German Critique* 73 (1998): 51.
10. Kirk Williams, 'The Ghost in the Machine: Heiner Müller's Devouring Melancholy', *Modern Drama* 49, no. 2 (2006): 190–191.
11. Williams, 'The Ghost in the Machine: Heiner Müller's Devouring Melancholy', 191.
12. All figures are from the 1996 student production prompt script which is in the possession of the author of this chapter. The scanned images from the commonly accepted standard layout prompt script show the

right-hand A4 page. The left-hand page (not shown) has directions for movement, blocking, and sound and lighting cues.

13. Steve Chinna, *When Salome Met Hamlet (A Domestic Tragedy)* (Hobart, TAS: Australian Script Centre, 2009). All page references from the play are from this text.

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Shakespeare's Hamlet and Stoppard's Guildenstern: Leap Between Un-Existentialist Anguish and Un-Absurdist Happiness

Paul Megna

Insofar as it contains many of the themes commonly associated with existential philosophy (e.g., freedom, responsibility, dread, and death), *Hamlet* is not infrequently seen as a precursor to existentialism, and existentialism, in turn, is often seen as a fitting philosophical lens through which to view *Hamlet*.¹ Although I would by no means categorically deny a certain family resemblance between Hamlet's philosophical sentiments and those expressed by existentialist authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,² I am particularly interested here in the way that Hamlet fails to live up to his reputation as a proto-existentialist hero and, in some ways at least, embodies an emotional trajectory at odds with the most well-known forms of existentialism. Over the course of Shakespeare's play, Hamlet leaps from an anguished reaction

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to competing religious and familial responsibilities to a resignation (bordering on happiness) that whatever course of action he chooses is necessarily in accord with a providential plan beyond his comprehension. As he undergoes this emotional shift, Hamlet wrestles with many of the philosophical issues that ultimately become associated with existentialism, but never quite embodies the existentialist ‘poster boy’ that he is so frequently considered. Although he was unaware of the term existentialism when composing his famous *Hamlet* spin-off *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*,³ Tom Stoppard plays with Hamlet’s un-existentialist leap when crafting his Guildenstern, who leaps repeatedly from a happy belief in his own absolute freedom to an anguished (and correct) understanding of himself as little more than a cog in an author-God’s literary-providential machine. Neither Shakespeare’s Hamlet nor Stoppard’s Guildenstern are unproblematic literary avatars of any manifestation of existentialism’s multiform philosophy of emotion, but both can be analysed to complicate, and thereby enrich, that philosophy.

HAMLET LEAPS

Making a case for an un-existentialist Hamlet is fraught with the same difficulties that arise for those making a case for an existentialist Hamlet. For one thing, existentialism has never been definable as a coherent set of philosophical beliefs. ‘The refusal to belong to any school of thought’, as Walter Kaufmann famously puts it, ‘the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life – that is the heart of existentialism’.⁴ For Kaufmann, who did more than anyone to solidify the existentialist canon in the Anglophone world, existentialism is a loosely affiliated constellation of iconoclastic philosophers, many of whom, as Kaufmann readily admits, either wrote before existentialism was recognised as a school of philosophy or openly rejected existentialism as a label for their philosophical insights. In other words, Kaufmann’s existentialists are not so much practitioners of a philosophical system as echoers of Hamlet’s famous rejoinder: ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy’ (1.5.165–166).⁵ Nevertheless, Kaufmann does mark within the work of most of his existentialists ‘a striking preoccupation with failure, dread, and death’⁶—a preoccupation everywhere evident in *Hamlet*. Unsurprisingly, then, *Hamlet* comes up

in several of the major works in Kaufmann's canon of existentialist writings. Rather than arguing whether Hamlet is either an existentialist or not, this first section briefly surveys *Hamlet's* influence on three of existentialism's most prominent figureheads—Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus—each of whom was simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by Shakespeare's angsty Dane.

Commonly recognised as the morning star of existentialism, Kierkegaard evinces a surprisingly limited preoccupation with Hamlet (given their shared Danish heritage and melancholic disposition).⁷ Indeed, his oeuvre contains only twenty allusions to *Hamlet*, many of which are in passing and seemingly incidental.⁸ However, Kierkegaard does (in the guise of Frater Taciturnus) offer a relatively sustained discussion of *Hamlet* in an appendix to *Stages on Life's Way* entitled 'A Side-Glance at Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'.⁹ Therein, Taciturnus slips between criticising Hamlet for failing to act effectively as either an 'esthetic hero' (i.e., one who takes vengeance promptly and effectively) or a 'religious hero' (i.e., one for whom religious doubts precipitate ethical action), and criticising *Hamlet* for failing to be either an effective revenge tragedy (i.e., the generic domain of the esthetic hero) or an effective religious drama (which, according to Taciturnus, is an oxymoronic designation in the first place, since the subjective struggles of the religious hero are too internal to constitute appropriate fodder for drama). As Richard Kearney aptly puts it, Kierkegaard's Hamlet 'is neither a religious hero nor an esthetic (tragic) hero but something in between. Neither fish nor fowl. A hybrid creature. In short an esthetic-religious mess. Perhaps not unlike Kierkegaard himself'.¹⁰ For Kearney, Kierkegaard saw his own anguished struggle between the esthetic and the religious on display in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, despite Frater Taciturnus' trenchant criticism of the chimeric failings of both play and character. Taciturnus' disapproval of *Hamlet*, according to Kearney's convincing argument, reflects Kierkegaard's meta-anguish at suffering the wrong sort of anguish.

However much Kierkegaard saw himself in Hamlet, he does not elevate the latter to the revered category of the 'Knight of Faith', as he does to Abraham and Mary in *Fear and Trembling*.¹¹ Published only two years before *Stages on Life's Way*, *Fear and Trembling* contains an extensive definition of the Knight of Faith in contradistinction to a related character: the Knight of Infinite Resignation.¹² Although Kierkegaard (as *Johannis Silentio*) admires both the Knight of Faith and the Knight of Infinite Resignation, he prefers the former to the latter. Posed with

the same dilemma—falling in love with an unattainable princess—the Knight of Infinite Resignation refuses to renounce his love, but resigns himself to the sadness of never consummating it in this world, whereas the Knight of Faith is confident that he will consummate his love in this world by adhering to the absurd supposition that all things are possible through God. Put simply, the Knight of Faith makes the leap into the absurd, while the Knight of Infinite Resignation remains true to his love, but resigned to its impossibility. It is tempting, though necessarily speculative, to posit that Kierkegaard was thinking of Hamlet's callous injunction to Ophelia to 'Get thee to a nunnery' in his discussion of the Knight of Infinite Resignation (3.1.136), or even in his own strange rejection of Regine Olsen. Nevertheless, Hamlet resembles the Knight of Faith neither in his treatment of Ophelia, nor in his pursuit of vengeance. Indeed, Hamlet takes something like a 'leap of faith' into the role of the esthetic hero (i.e., the revenger) towards the end of Shakespeare's play, but instead of leaping into an absurd faith that God will enable him to avenge his father's death, assume the crown, and marry Ophelia, he resigns himself, not to the impossibility of achieving happiness, but to what Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus dismissively calls the doctrine of '*che sera sera*' ['what will be will be'].¹³ Hence, after Hamlet is summoned to duel Laertes, Horatio warns him to avoid the contest should his 'mind dislike anything' (5.2.195), to which Hamlet replies:

Not a whit. We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all, since no man of aught he leaves knows what is't to leave betimes? Let be. (5.2.197–202)

Neither the Knight of Infinite Resignation, nor the Knight of Faith, Hamlet leaps out of an anguished relation to his own freedom (i.e., a state of Kierkegaardian anxiety),¹⁴ and into a state of resigned subjection to the movements of a providential machine over which he has no control. He leaps in the wrong direction.

Frater Taciturnus outlines two possible alternative plotlines that would be conducive to a religious interpretation of *Hamlet*: (1) if Hamlet 'conceived the plan, and then religious doubts divest him of it'¹⁵, or (2) if Hamlet possessed 'the demonic power resolutely and masterfully to carry out his plan', only to have him subsequently

'collapse into himself and into the religious until he finds peace there'.¹⁶ For Taciturnus, Hamlet should have leapt from the role of esthetic hero to that of religious hero either before or after pursuing vengeance (thereby nullifying his appropriateness for drama). What Taciturnus cannot tolerate, it seems, is Hamlet as Shakespeare writes him, whom Taciturnus denigrates as 'essentially a vacillator'.¹⁷ Curiously, both Frater Taciturnus and Kierkegaard-the-diarist concur that 'Hamlet does not have religious doubt' insofar as he does not heed the Biblical injunction in Romans 12.19 to eschew vengeance.¹⁸ While this is true enough, Hamlet does evince something like religious doubt when he opts not to kill himself since God has 'fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (1.2.131–132), when he worries that what appeared to be his father's ghost may be a devil exercising his 'power / T'assume a pleasing shape' (2.2.534–535), and when he opts not to kill Claudius 'in the purging of his soul / When he is fit and seasoned for his passage' (3.3.85–86). Indeed, in the last instance, Hamlet speculates (if only in the First Folio) that killing Claudius would constitute 'hire and salary' (F 3.3.79),¹⁹ rather than revenge (and therefore not violate God's injunction against vengeance). Instead of 'hire and salary', Q1 reads 'a benefit' (10.23),²⁰ and Q2 reads 'base and silly' (3.3.79). Since all of the versions have Hamlet insisting that killing Claudius would not constitute revenge, they might all be read as Hamlet defending the prospective act against Taciturnus' accusation that taking revenge is sacrilegious. However, in all three versions of this line, Hamlet is in the process of rejecting the act of killing Claudius as he prays, not because God reserves for himself the right to take vengeance, but instead because sending Claudius to heaven would not adequately avenge Claudius' crime against Old Hamlet. If all three Hamlets argue that killing Claudius in prayer is not an act of vengeance, that is precisely their rationale for not doing so. Nevertheless, the decision to avoid killing Claudius at a moment in which the usurper might achieve heavenly bliss thereafter is motivated by religious doubt, just not the exact form of religious doubt that Taciturnus has in mind.

Perhaps Taciturnus ignores Hamlet's religious doubts (or tacitly disqualifies them as irreligious) because Hamlet ultimately leaps in the wrong direction—towards a resolute fatalism and away from a tortured recognition of his freedom to affect his own eternal damnation or to aide in affecting his enemy's eternal salvation. To put the matter in Sartrean terms, one might say that Hamlet leaps out of a state

of anguished authenticity and into one of bad faith (though, of course, Sartre himself would never label Hamlet's religious anguish authentic). Critics have long applied Sartrean terminology to *Hamlet*. Even now a decades-old critical debate continues to smolder between critics who read Hamlet as 'an existentialist hero' insofar as 'he is in search of his true, authentic self, and thus suffers from the anguish of freedom',²¹ and those who read Hamlet as an existentialist anti-hero insofar as he is '[s]tuck in a moment of existential anguish [in which] he must decide which role to play, yet he is bound by his belief that he must act consistently with the unknown entity of his facticity'.²² For Oliver George Downing (a proponent of the latter view), both Hamlet and those critics who read him as an existentialist hero would misunderstand the message behind Sartre's parable of the waiter in the sections of *Being and Nothingness* devoted to 'bad faith'. They believe (as do many of Sartre's readers) that the waiter is in bad faith insofar as he renounces his freedom by play-acting as the 'waiter-thing'. According to Downing, Sartre is well aware that life involves adopting some socially prescribed roles at the expense of adopting others and doing so, if one does so knowingly, is not necessarily tantamount to sinking into a state of bad faith. Hamlet's problem, for Downing, is that he is unable to choose a role to play, since he insists (in bad faith) that this role must accord with his illegible facticity.²³ Both Downing and his opponents see Hamlet as anguished, but Downing sees Hamlet's anguish as an epiphenomenon of his bad faith, whereas his opponents see his anguish as an epiphenomenon of authenticity. Neither class of critics, however, place much onus on Hamlet's comparatively un-anguished final scenes, since doing so would complicate both readings, but for opposite reasons: whether Hamlet's early anguish marks him as authentic or in a state of bad faith, his mood ultimately swings from anguish to resignation to the dictates of providence—a swing which cannot readily be reconciled with a Sartrean (or Kierkegaardian) philosophy that lionises anguished freedom as authenticity's *conditio sine qua non*. In other words, Hamlet either leaps from authenticity to bad faith, or bad faith to worse faith; in neither case does he ultimately abandon fatalism. With Downing, then, I would argue that Hamlet cannot be considered an existentialist hero, but I do not think it necessarily follows that we ought to see him as an anti-hero, which implies that Shakespeare's play endorses a proto-existentialist ethic through Hamlet's bad example. Instead, Hamlet himself ultimately flirts with a darker reality totally anathema to Sartrean

existentialism—that he is not an agent at all, but a character prewritten and destined to die a tragic death. In other words, Hamlet comes closer than most literary characters to recognising his own fictionality and, in doing so, he alleviates rather than exacerbates the anguish that plagues him throughout much of Shakespeare's play.

Many critics have seen Sartre's play *Dirty Hands* (in which an Eastern European spy equivocates over assassinating a dictator) as a nod to *Hamlet*.²⁴ Whether or not Sartre intended it as such, allusions to *Hamlet* in his philosophy are infrequent and often incidental, though he did express appreciation for the play in several letters to Simone de Beauvoir.²⁵ Sartre, I would argue, was conscious of the fact that *Hamlet* concerns many of the ideas that he explores in his philosophical writing, but all too aware that Hamlet was too much a fatalist and religious zealot to stand as a literary spokesman for his personal brand of existentialism. Consequently, he mentions Hamlet several times in his philosophical oeuvre, but never offers concrete criticism of *Hamlet* in the mode of Kierkegaard's Frater Taciturnus. Tellingly, the sole mention of Hamlet in *Being and Nothingness* occurs in his aforementioned discussion of the café waiter in his chapter on bad faith. Here, Sartre (as is his wont) adopts the first person to argue that *no one* can be a café waiter in the sense that an 'inkwell *is* an inkwell'.²⁶ The waiter knows the duties and rights of a café waiter:

[a]nd it is precisely this person *who I have to be* (if I am the waiter in question) and who I am not. It is not that I do not wish to be this person or that I want this person to be different. But rather there is no common measure between his being and mine. It is a 'representation' for others and for myself, which means that I can be he only in *representation*. But if I represent myself as him, I am not he; I am separated from him as the object from the subject, separated *by nothing*, but this nothing isolates me from him. I cannot be he, I can only play *at being* him; that is, imagine to myself that I am he. And thereby I affect him with nothingness. In vane do I fulfill the functions of a café waiter. I can be he only in the neutralised mode, as the actor is Hamlet, by mechanically making the *typical gestures* of my state and by aiming at myself as an imaginary café waiter through those gestures taken as an 'analogue'. What I attempt to realise is a being-in-itself of the café waiter, as if it were not just in my power to confer their value and their urgency upon my duties and the right of my position, as if it were not my free choice to get up each morning at five o'clock or to remain in bed, even though it meant getting fired.²⁷

On first glance, Sartre's allusion to Hamlet is arbitrary: he might have chosen any dramatic role to make his point. His reason for choosing Hamlet, I think, is that Hamlet is more aware than most (but not all) dramatic characters that the act of selecting one role to play precludes the possibility of adopting others. Hence his longing admiration of the players, who can summon great emotion upon adopting a role and then move on to another without any great anguished decision (2.2.484–501). Hamlet, at times, seems alert to the fact that he might 'remain in bed' and refuse to fulfill his role as a revenger, but he ultimately opts to leap into the role of revenger (though only after he has been fatally wounded). Sartre was aware of Shakespeare's ability to shore up the extent to which all life is a matter of playacting. Thus, in *Saint Genet* he cites Jules Vuillemin's contention that 'in *Hamlet* the actor's point of view becomes true [...] the spectator's point of view is transformed in turn'.²⁸ Just as Hamlet is a character played by an actor who reveals to spectators that they too are always already engaged in playacting, so too does the café waiter reveal this to Sartre. Like Kierkegaard, though, Sartre was wary of adopting Hamlet as an existentialist hero, probably due to Hamlet's ultimate renunciation of the anguish of freedom. Moreover, if Kierkegaard thought Hamlet is not religious enough, Sartre, vehement atheist that he was, would have no doubt found Hamlet too religious to qualify for the role of unproblematic fictional precursor to his godless existentialist. Indeed, Sartre—who unequivocally claims 'there is no God and no prevenient design'²⁹—is unlikely to fully identify with a character who wonders 'what dreams may come' in the long sleep of death (3.1.65) and detects 'special providence in the fall of a sparrow' (5.2.197–198).

Though he repudiated the label of existentialist, Sartre's friend Albert Camus is often lumped together with Kierkegaard and Sartre in the retroactively constructed existentialist canon. 'There is only one truly serious philosophical question,' writes Camus towards the beginning of his famous, 1942 philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 'and that is suicide'.³⁰ Although he alludes to *Hamlet* several times in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus somewhat surprisingly makes no mention of the iconic speeches in which its protagonist grapples with his 'one truly serious philosophical question' by contemplating suicide. In fact, Camus' scattered references to *Hamlet* in *The Myth of Sisyphus* do not a sustained reading make: He accuses Lev Shestov of citing Hamlet's famous diagnostic statement 'the time is out of joint' (1.5.186) in a sense other than

either Hamlet's or Shakespeare's³¹; he applies to the actor Hamlet's adoring evaluation of Horatio as among the 'blest' subjects 'Whose blood and judgement are so well co-meddled / That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please' (3.2.64–67)³²; and he reproduces Hamlet's meta-dramatic maxim 'the play's the thing to catch the conscious of the king' (2.2.539–540) in order to agree that conscience, always on the move, is subject to catching.³³ In short, Camus uses *Hamlet* for various reasons, sometimes aligning his own project with scattered phrases in Shakespeare's text, but he does not overtly claim that Hamlet embodies the 'absurd man' he so admires. Perhaps the reason that Camus—who writes in his journal 'I do not believe in God and am not an atheist'³⁴—remains silent on Hamlet's contemplations of suicide is that Hamlet opts against suicide on profoundly dogmatic, Christian grounds. Worried about 'what dreams may come' (3.1.65) in death's eternal sleep, Hamlet opts to suffer the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' (3.1.57), rather than run himself through with the business end of a bare bodkin. True, Hamlet yearns earlier for an alternative reality in which the Everlasting had not 'fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (1.2.131–32), but he bows to this prohibition even as he bewails it. If Hamlet's willingness to fantasise about a metaphysical order in which suicide is permitted underwrites Camus' tendency to mention Shakespeare's Dane, Hamlet's unwillingness to ultimately endorse this conceptualisation of reality accounts for Camus' reticence on Hamlet's famous contemplations of suicide.

Another potential reason for Camus' silence on Hamlet's suicide speeches is that their emotional tenor is one of anguish. Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir all characterise anguish (Danish/German: *Angst*; French: *angoisse*) as an epiphenomenon of authenticity.³⁵ Camus also acknowledges anguish-anxiety's centrality in the human condition,³⁶ but he ends *The Myth of Sisyphus* with this difficult injunction: 'We must imagine Sisyphus happy'.³⁷ For Camus, the absurd man is simultaneously hopeless and happy—Sisyphus knows he will never see the end of his rock rolling, but he is nevertheless happy (or ought to be imagined as such). Camus rejects Kierkegaard's philosophy of the absurd on the grounds that Kierkegaard ultimately endorses a leap of faith that doubles down on a Christian essentialism that Camus (like Sartre) finds intolerable.³⁸ Camus' happy Sisyphus is something of an agnosticised amalgam of Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith and Knight of Infinite Resignation insofar as he resigns himself to

lifelong drudgery (like the Knight of Infinite Resignation), but also finds happiness therein (like the Knight of Faith). Camus' absurd hybrid of happiness and resignation is close to Hamlet prior to his death. Early in Shakespeare's play, Hamlet is anything but happy. He is grieved at his father's untimely death, angry at his mother's hasty remarriage (1.2.137–158), awe-struck by his father's ghost (1.5.92–112), envious of the player's ability to summon tears (2.2.485–495), but only fleetingly does he express anything like happiness (e.g., 2.2.307–313). Towards the end of the play, on the other hand, Hamlet evinces a resignation that might be seen to border on happiness, depending on how it is staged. In defying augury, Hamlet refuses to heed Horatio's advice to heed his own judgment. Instead, he professes an absolute confidence in his unalterable role in an entirely predetermined narrative over which he has no control: 'If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet will it come. The readiness is all'. (5.2.198–200). While it is up for debate whether this late Hamlet is possessed by a Nietzschean *amor fati* (i.e., a love for his fate sufficient to stomach an 'eternal recurrence of the same'),³⁹ he is certainly resigned to this fate. He is done trying to analyse 'the writing on the wall' in order to decide how to act. He is no longer (if he ever was) 'the man who thinks too much'; he is now the man who acts without thinking.

Well before his epiphanic assertion that 'the readiness is all', Hamlet utters the following lines in praise of Horatio, to which Camus alludes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her election
Sh'ath sealed thee for herself. For thou hast been
As one in suffering all that suffers nothing –
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks. And blessed are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well co-meddled,
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave and I will wear him
In my heart's core – ay, in my heart of heart –
As I do thee. [...] (3.2.59–70)

Here, Hamlet admires Horatio for his Boethian indifference to 'Fortune's buffets and rewards', which prevents him from becoming

instrumentalised as 'a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please'.⁴⁰ Although the Hamlet of Act III does not count himself among the blessed stoics who escape passion's thrall, the Hamlet of Act V apparently aspires to enter their number when he says to Horatio 'we defy augury' (5.2.197, my emphasis), perhaps alluding back to—and now including himself in—his praise of Horatio 'as one in suffering all that suffers nothing'. I wonder if Camus was thinking of this later Hamlet (or Hamlet's earlier praise of Horatio) when he wrote of the absurd man who

catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation.⁴¹

Whether or not he was, Camus never identifies either Hamlet or Horatio as an absurd man. Indeed, however much he happily resigns himself to fate, Hamlet never conceptualises the universe as transparent, limited, or limned with collapse and nothingness. Over the course of the play, Hamlet's belief in divine providence and transcendent moral order never wavers, but his emotional attitude towards his place in a predestined universe shifts from one of melancholic anguish to one of sanguine resignation. He neither evinces the complete hopelessness of Camus' absurd man, nor abandons his faith in metaphysical order.

If Hamlet somewhat resembles Camus' happy Sisyphus late in the play and Sartre's anguished-authentic decision-maker early in the play, his resolute theism throughout the play distances him from both the agnostic Camus and the atheist Sartre. For Kierkegaard's Taciturnus, Hamlet is not religious enough. For Camus and Sartre, he is too religious. None of these three so-called existentialists (only Sartre called himself one) un-problematically endorses Hamlet's leap from a character suffering from anguished religious doubt and filial obligation to one filled with resignation to his role in a providential narrative beyond his control or comprehension. All three seem to have had *Hamlet* on their mind when crafting their philosophical works, but all three were rendered uncomfortable (maybe even anguished) by the prospect of appointing Hamlet as an avatar of their respective anti-programmatic philosophical programs. I think their discomfort with Hamlet is due to the latter's changing emotional relation to his own freedom: Hamlet

never believes himself to be an entirely free agent; both his earlier anguish and his later complacency stem from his subjective recognition, not of his radical freedom, but of his sense that he exists in an entirely pre-scripted narrative of which he is not the author. When Hamlet leaps, he leaps from un-existentialist anguish to un-absurdist happiness. Of course, his leap has been helpfully contextualised as partaking in a cultural milieu profoundly influenced by the theological debates surrounding predestination and free will that raged in post-Reformation England.⁴² But Hamlet's cultural influence long outlived the Early Modern era and *Hamlet* provided fertile ground for the denizens of later epochs to think through anguish and freedom. Although some existentialist philosophers (including Karl Jaspers) have found in Hamlet a suitable exemplar for their convictions,⁴³ Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus all found Shakespeare's Hamlet too apropos to ignore and too problematic to espouse wholeheartedly.

GUILDENSTERN LEAPS (AND LEAPS AND LEAPS)

When asked by an interviewer in 1974 whether he believed his famous *Hamlet* spinoff *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* to be about 'existential problems posed by bit-part characters in Shakespeare', Tom Stoppard testily replied: 'First I must say that I didn't know what the word "existential" meant until it was applied to *Rosencrantz*. And even now existentialism is not a philosophy I find either attractive or plausible'.⁴⁴ Like Camus, Heidegger, and Jaspers, Stoppard is frequently associated with existentialism against his clearly stated will. Perhaps the reason behind the persistence with which undergraduates churn out papers on Stoppard's existentialism at a similar rate to that at which they write papers on existentialism in *Hamlet* is that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, like *Hamlet*, deals extensively with themes of death, freedom, anguish, and authenticity. If Shakespeare's Hamlet, as I have hitherto argued, leaps from an un-existential anxiety (i.e., a recognition that he is not free to act in a way that violates the dictates of God's canon or the vengeful demands of a spectral father) to an un-absurdist complacency in his role in an inscrutable but preordained divine narrative, Stoppard's Guildenstern leaps back-and-forth from a happy complacency in being a free agent in a random world to anguish at recognising himself as a character in a preordained world with a manic uncertainty likely to make even Hamlet blush.

Stoppard's play famously begins with an activity we have come to associate with random probability—the toss of a coin. Before either character speaks, Stoppard furnishes a stage direction indicating that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are passing the time by betting on a coin toss, or spin, as the case may be. The run of heads, we are told, is impossible and as a result, Rosencrantz's coin purse is overflowing and Guildenstern's is dwindling. Here, we get each character's note in the form of their reaction to the anomalous run of the coin coming up heads. Rosencrantz 'betrays no surprise at all – he feels none. However, he is nice enough to feel a little embarrassed at taking so much money off his friend'.⁴⁵ Guildenstern, on the other hand, 'is well alive to the oddity of it. He is not worried about the money, but he is worried by the implications; aware but not going to panic about it'.⁴⁶ As many critics have noted, Stoppard's duo owes at least as much to Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon, the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot*, as they do to their Shakespearean namesakes.⁴⁷ Indeed, like Beckett's Vladimir, Stoppard's Guildenstern is plagued by mental anguish largely lost on a woefully forgetful compatriot.⁴⁸ 'A weaker man,' Guildenstern muses, 'might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least in the law of probability'.⁴⁹ Here, Guildenstern evinces a certain quasi-existentialist machismo by characterising himself as strong to the extent that his faith in the law of probability is maintained in the face of experiential evidence that threatens to shatter his non-providential framework for understanding the world. Despite his desire to suppress panic as the number of heads in a row climbs from seventy-six to eighty-five and beyond, Guildenstern becomes increasingly agitated, not only by the philosophical implications of this anomaly, but also by Rosencrantz' nonchalance towards it. When Rosencrantz comments blithely that the eighty-five heads in a row breaks their previous record, Guildenstern replies 'don't be absurd'.⁵⁰ While it is unlikely that Guildenstern's rebuke constitutes a subtle, Stoppardian barb at Camus' philosophy, it does characterise Guildenstern as someone who takes comfort in systemic meaning and avoids revelling in absurdity.

When pressed by Guildenstern to acknowledge the anomaly's larger, extra-fiscal implications, all Rosencrantz can muster is the lukewarm sentiment: 'It'll take some beating, I'd imagine', to which Guildenstern replies: 'Is *that* what you imagine? Is that it? No *fear*?'⁵¹ 'Fear?' Rosencrantz asks, causing Guildenstern to fling a coin to the ground in fury before exclaiming: '*Fear!* The crack that might flood your brain

with light!’⁵² Himself afraid of the metaphysical implications of the law of probability’s failure, Guildenstern is angry that Rosencrantz does not share his fear and therefore remains in the dark. On one hand, his exasperated contention that fear might enlighten Rosencrantz betrays an understanding of fear as bound up with ontological recognition not so different from the Kierkegaardian-Heideggerian-Sartrean understanding of *Angst-angoisse* as the emotional result of subject recognising her own freedom. On the other hand, Guildenstern neither carefully distinguishes between anxiety and fear (as do Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre),⁵³ nor associates dreadful enlightenment with a recognition of freedom. The object of Guildenstern’s enlightening fear is not the non-object of his radical freedom. He is not filled with anguish at the fact that he and his friend are free agents acting in a random universe, governed by the law of probability and no other. To the contrary, Guildenstern is afraid of the fact that some other law has taken over. In an anxious effort to make sense of this new order, he lists possible explanations for the phenomenal streak of heads including that he himself is willing it in atonement for some unremembered sin, that time has stopped, that God is intervening to punish him or reward Rosencrantz, and that the two friends are witnessing, not the nullification of the law of probability, but ‘a spectacular vindication of the principle that each individual coin spun individually is as likely to come down heads as tails’.⁵⁴

Through this last explanation, Guildenstern tries to protect his faith in the law of probability by seeing the anomalous run of heads as proof of probability’s pre-eminence. But his faith is clearly shaken, for he goes on to offer the following syllogism: ‘one, probability is a factor which operates within natural forces. Two, probability is not operating as a factor. Three, we are now within un-, sub-, or supernatural forces’.⁵⁵ This syllogism throws Rosencrantz for a loop, not because of its implications about probability, but because of its implications about his friend’s well-being. ‘What’s the matter with you?’ he asks, to which Guildenstern replies:

The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear. Keep tight hold and continue while there’s time. Now – counter to the previous syllogism: tricky one, follow me carefully, it may prove a comfort. If we postulate, and we just have, that within un-, sub- or supernatural forces *the probability is* that the law of probability will not operate as a factor, then we must accept that the

probability of the *first* part will not operate as a factor, in which case the law of probability *will* operate as a factor within un-, sub- or supernatural forces. And since it obviously hasn't been doing so, we can take it that we are not held within un-, sub- or supernatural forces after all; in all probability that is. Which is a great relief to me personally.⁵⁶

Thankfully, my interest in Guildenstern's speech does not require me to assess the tenability of his labyrinthine logic (though I suspect that, like Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence, it is faulty, if not falsifiable).⁵⁷ Instead, I am interested here in the emotional dynamics supporting his herculean (or Sisyphean) efforts, which are much easier to unpack than the logic itself. The law of probability has been called into question by the run of heads tossed in a row (now up to ninety-two) and Guildenstern is afraid, so he seeks desperately to find comfort in a scientific rationalisation of the troubling phenomenon. Guildenstern's move to alleviate fear through scientific rationalisation is quite opposed to a Kierkegaardian-Heideggerian-Sartrean celebration of anxiety's authenticity. His comfort might be something like Camus' Sisyphean happiness—but that comfort is too hard won, ephemeral, and resolutely rationalist to allow us to characterise Guildenstern as a happy Sisyphus. Guildenstern does not defy augury (though he is fearful of a world in which augury is not solely the province of mathematics). Instead, he tries to deify probability, but his circumstances (and the author-God governing them) conspire against this ontological venture.

Despite the fact that he chides Rosencrantz for revelling in a mental darkness that might be enlightened by fear, Guildenstern himself yearns for the comfort afforded by a dim faith. Although he achieves this relief temporarily, after a short pause he is back to worrying that the improbable run of heads has dissolved 'a kind of harmony and a kind of confidence' that hitherto 'related the fortuitous and the ordained into a reassuring union which we recognised as nature'.⁵⁸ Guildenstern, like Hamlet in the early parts of Shakespeare's play, wishes he lived in a world governed by randomness and unshaped by a master plan and, like Hamlet's dread, Guildenstern's is a patently un-existential anxiety that he instead exists in a world dictated by un-, sub- or supernatural circumstances that he cannot help but acknowledge, but cannot understand. The irony, of course, is that he is not paranoid, or at least not incorrectly paranoid, since he is a character, a figment of Stoppard's imagination on the verge of recognising his status as such but trying desperately to ward

off this recognition. Where Hamlet ultimately finds comfort in fatalism, Guildenstern (here at least) anxiously rejects the manifest evidence of his own fictionality.

Despite his character note and debt to Beckett's Vladimir, Guildenstern does not have monopoly on mental anguish in Stoppard's play. Once our heroes arrive at Elsinore, Rosencrantz is bewildered by the confusing political intrigue into which he and his compatriot are quickly embroiled. He is particularly upset that no one (including Guildenstern and himself) seems able to distinguish between Guildenstern and himself: 'I haven't forgotten – how I used to remember my own name – and yours, oh yes! There were answers everywhere you *looked*. There was no question about it – people knew who I was and if they didn't they asked and I told them'.⁵⁹ Even here, Rosencrantz' anguish is rooted more in his faulty memory and social uncertainties than in large, philosophical questions about the nature of the reality he inhabits. In response to Rosencrantz's angst, Guildenstern offers the following placating advice:

GUIL We've been caught up. Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else, and is set off by it. Keep an eye open, an ear cocked. Tread warily, follow instructions. We'll be all right.

ROS For how long?

GUIL Till events have played themselves out. There's a logic at work – it's all done for you, don't worry. Enjoy it. Relax. To be taken in hand and led, like being a child again, even without the innocence, a child – It's like being given a prize, an extra slice of childhood when you least expect it, as a prize for being good, or compensation for never having had one. ... Do I contradict myself?

ROS I can't remember. [...]⁶⁰

In alluding to Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*,⁶¹ Guildenstern's question ('Do I contradict myself?') suggests that he wants to see himself as something other than a literary representative of a single philosophical idea or position. Although he does so with an undertone of anxiety not present in Whitman's rhapsodic narrator, he too asserts (albeit implicitly) that he contains multitudes and is therefore host to countless contradictions. Indeed, his injunctions to Rosencrantz to relax and enjoy being swept away by the stream of 'logic at work' contradicts not only his immediately prior warning to 'tread warily' and 'follow instructions', but also his earlier terror at the prospect of existing in a world governed by un-, sub-,

or supernatural forces. In these later lines, Guildenstern manically revels in his lack of agency, which he perceives as a reward for good behaviour or a compensation for his lack of a childhood.

Guildenstern's leap into enjoyable complacency resembles Hamlet's, but, unlike Hamlet's, his complacency is not capped off, undisturbed, by a quick and heroic death. He soon reverts back to his earlier anxiety at the prospect of un-freedom:

Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are ... condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one – that is the meaning of order. If we start being arbitrary it'll just be shambles: at least, let us hope so. Because if we happened, just happened to discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order, we'd know that we were lost. (*He sits.*) A Chinaman from the T'ang Dynasty – and, by which definition, a philosopher – dreamed he was a butterfly, and from that moment he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher. Envy him; in his two-fold security.⁶²

Over the course of this tortured and tortuous speech, Guildenstern leaps into a state of un-existential anxiety. He begins with the certainty that the events through which he is living are dictated by machinations outside of his control. However, his perception of his restricted agency is a far cry from the happy-go-lucky return to childhood he describes to Rosencrantz earlier. Here, the two are *condemned* to the whirring of providential wheels. Nevertheless, he tries to convince Rosencrantz (and himself) that they do possess some modicum of consequential agency, which, if exercised arbitrarily, would leave the plot in shambles. This hopeful thought, however, prompts Guildenstern to return to its corollary fear: that even spontaneous, arbitrary action is incorporated in the providential arc of authorial order. Note that Guildenstern does not focus on the disastrous consequences that would arise should this supposition prove accurate, but on those that would arise should he and his compatriot discover or even expect it to be accurate. Thus Guildenstern's fear here is more nuanced than that expressed in the beginning of the play, since, here, he is afraid of *believing* himself to be governed by un-, sub-, or supernatural forces, rather than simply being governed by them. In other words, he fears the irreparable loss that would come with even flirting with the mindset evinced by Hamlet in Act V of Shakespeare's play. Guildenstern envies Zhuangzi—the unnamed Chinese philosopher—for his *limited* uncertainty, which amounts to the two-fold security of either

being a philosopher dreaming of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being a philosopher.⁶³ Despite his uncertainty, whether he is a butterfly or a philosopher, Zhuangzi is secure in believing himself a free agent. Guildenstern's uncertainty, on the other hand, is more terrifying, since it contains the possibility that he is exactly what he in fact is: a fictional character whose most arbitrary, spontaneous act is not his own, but the preordained whim of the author-God Stoppard.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is preoccupied (as its title suggests) with death. Although both title characters worry about death, their attitudes towards it are quite distinct. In one of his more protracted and philosophical speeches, Rosencrantz oscillates between the stoic supposition that 'it's silly to be depressed by' the prospect of spending eternity in a box, since 'you'd never *know* you were in a box', and the more life-loving supposition that, when given the choice to be stuffed in a box alive or dead, one would naturally choose to be alive: 'Life in a box is better than no life at all. I expect. You'd have a chance at least'.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that he recognises that death (presumably in a universe with no afterlife) would not be uncomfortable, he still would rather be alive than dead, even if he had to spend eternity alive in a box, vainly hoping that: 'In a minute someone's going to bang on the lid and tell me to come out'.⁶⁵ How unlike Hamlet, who yearns for absolute death, is this life-loving Rosencrantz? Guildenstern, on the other hand, speaks almost longingly about the absoluteness of non-being in death: 'Dying is not romantic, and death is not a game which will soon be over ... Death is not anything ... death is not ... It's the absence of presence, nothing more ... the endless time of never coming back ... a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound'.⁶⁶ Guildenstern's account of death is chilling, poetic, and deeply sad; it inspires the sort of existential vertigo that one feels when contemplating their future non-existence (i.e., Heideggerian *Angst*).⁶⁷ He staunchly upholds the vision of absolute death about which Hamlet fantasises, but always roundly rejects his dogmatic theism.

In its context in Stoppard's play, however, Guildenstern's account of death as 'the absence of presence' comes across as wishful thinking. Shortly before delivering this speech, Guildenstern, in a fit of un-existential anxiety at his lack of control over his own situation, has just attempted to kill the Player, a character who finds self-worth in his capacity to die fake deaths for the amusement of others.⁶⁸ After stabbing the Player, Guildenstern wheels on the other players and, in a

nervous, almost hysterical voice, delivers a desperate, disjointed syllogism: 'If we have a destiny, then so had he – and if this is ours, then that was his – and if there are no explanations for us, then let there be none for him –'.⁶⁹ Guildenstern's anguish, once again, stems from the fact that he recognises that he exists in a predestined plot, but is offered no explanation of its overarching nature. His assault on the actor is an attempt to occupy an authorial position not unlike Stoppard's by determining the lead player's fate without providing any explanation as to why he has done so. Of course, it backfires. The actor promptly leaps up, revealing that his ostensible death at Guildenstern's hand was nothing but yet another simulated death. It is at this point that a dejected Guildenstern insists on an absolute, non-romantic, unperformed death—a death that he worries he will never experience.

Guildenstern's eerily beautiful account of absolute death as a total negation in which being becomes non-being recalls Hamlet's 'consummation devoutly to be wished' (3.1.65–66): a death in which no dreams come. But Stoppard bestows no such end on Guildenstern, who, along with Rosencrantz, disappears into nothingness a few lines later.⁷⁰ Guildenstern, unlike Rosencrantz, seems all too aware that, as a character in a drama, he is condemned to an eternal recurrence of the same, though unlike Act V's Hamlet, he feels nothing remotely resembling *amor fati*. Where Rosencrantz expresses relief prior to his disappearance, Guildenstern reasserts his belief that he must have, at some point, possessed a modicum of agency and, when he is reborn in subsequent productions of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, he will exercise it by opting out: 'There must have been a moment, at the beginning where we could have said – no. But somehow we missed it. [...] Well, we'll know better next time. Now you see me, now you –' and he disappears.⁷¹ Possessed by neither a Nietzschean *amor fati*, nor the hopeless happiness of Camus' Sisyphus, Guildenstern is anguished and hopeful to his last breath. His anxiety, however, is not Heidegger's, since it does not stem from contemplating his own future non-being (in fact, quite the contrary); nor is it Kierkegaard's or Sartre's, since it does not stem from a recognition of his absolute freedom and concomitant responsibility, but instead from a recognition of his complete lack of freedom and spontaneous agency. Hence Stoppard's frustration with the label 'existentialism'—in crafting Guildenstern, he was exploring a subjectivity quite different than that idealised by the so-called existentialists. While we might, then, label Guildenstern an 'existential antihero', doing so would

imply that, had he behaved like a ‘good existentialist’ (which involves different emotions and ideological convictions, depending on which philosopher you read), he would have somehow achieved authenticity. But, in a certain light, Guildenstern comes closer to achieving authenticity than most dramatic characters, insofar as he comes close to recognising himself as such and grappling with the philosophical implications of his fictional existence. Neither an existentialist hero, nor an existentialist anti-hero, Stoppard’s Guildenstern is a fictional character who recognises his own fictionality and reacts accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Where Hamlet leaps out of anguish at existing in a predetermined universe governed by a transcendent (if inscrutable) moral order into a complacent ‘readiness’ to play his part in this script, Guildenstern leaps from fear of existing in un-, sub-, or super-natural circumstances, to hopeful belief in his own agency in a world governed by probability, to complacent enjoyment in his own lack of agency, to an anguished (and repeatedly repressed) recognition that he is a character and not an agent at all. Guildenstern is characterised, then, by a comingled attraction to and repulsion from his freedom-less state. This ambivalence is clearly evinced in his appreciation for boats:

GUIL Yes, I’m very fond of boats myself. I like the way they’re – contained. You don’t have to worry about which way to go, or whether to go at all – the question doesn’t arise, because you’re on a *boat*, aren’t you? Boats are safe areas in the game of tag ... the players will hold their positions until the music starts ... I think I’ll spend most of my life on boats.

ROS Very healthy.

[...]

GUIL One is free on a boat. For a time. Relatively.

[...]

Free to move, speak, extemporise, and yet. We have not been cut loose. Our truancy is defined by one fixed star, and our drift represents merely a slight change of angle to it: we may seize the moment, toss it around while the moments pass, a short dash here, an exploration there, but we are

brought round full circle to face again the single immutable fact – that we, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, bearing a letter from one king to another, are taking Hamlet to England.⁷²

This is Guildenstern at his least bipolar. Instead of manically revelling in his own complete lack of agency or anxiously offering proofs that he exists in a universe governed by the law of probability and none other, he finds comfort in a relative, temporary freedom to extemporise on a boat whose course has been fixed. Despite his spoken desire to ‘spend most of his life on boats’, Guildenstern is unable to maintain this balanced enjoyment of qualified freedom. Like Hamlet, Guildenstern is a tragic figure, but, unlike Hamlet, he does not overcome his anguish to pursue his tragic end with a resolute readiness. His end is fraught with the very contradictions between regret and hope, anguish and enjoyment that characterise him throughout Stoppard’s play. In crafting Guildenstern, Stoppard picked up precisely (if unintentionally) on the un-existentialist emotional dynamics of *Hamlet*. Reading *Hamlet* next to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, therefore, further complicates the already contradictory philosophy of emotion present in the retroactively constructed existentialist canon, introducing us to new emotional ideologies that we are free to accept or reject, empathise with or laugh at.

NOTES

1. For a helpful overview of both existentialist readings of Shakespeare and readings of Shakespeare as a proto-existentialist, see Charlotte Keys, *Shakespeare’s Existentialism* (PhD dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012), 20–33. As Keys notes, Walter Kaufmann, *The Owl and the Nightingale: From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959) constitutes ‘the first study to acknowledge a philosophical affinity’ between Shakespeare and existentialism, but does not (despite its title) offer a history of existentialist ideas originating from Shakespeare’ (21).
2. In fact, Bradley J. Irish’s chapter in this volume compellingly and usefully explores the links between *Hamlet*’s treatment of dread and those of several existential philosophers.
3. *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 58.

4. Walter Kaufmann, 'Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre', in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Plume, 1956), 12.
5. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent quotations of *Hamlet* are taken from this edition and cited in the body of text.
6. Walter Kaufmann, 'Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre', 21.
7. Not only does Bradley J. Irish's chapter in this volume offer insights into Kierkegaard's vexed relationship to *Hamlet*, but, in Note 46, he offers a helpful survey of earlier scholarship on this relationship.
8. Richard Kearney, 'Kierkegaard on Hamlet: Between Art and Religion', in *The New Kierkegaard*, ed. Elsebet Jegstrup (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 224.
9. Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 452–454.
10. Richard Kearney, 'Kierkegaard on Hamlet', 230.
11. Søren Kierkegaard, 'Fear and Trembling', in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 9–41 (on Abraham), 64–65 (on Mary).
12. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 38–50.
13. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1950), 166–167 (A: 1.1.77; B: 1.1.74).
14. Kierkegaard defines anxiety as a subjective recognition of freedom in Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 76–77.
15. Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 454.
16. Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 454.
17. Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 453.
18. Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 453; cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 1561.
19. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 286.
20. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, 128.
21. Alireza Mahdipour, 'The Existential Idea of Self in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: A Justification for the Renaissance Convention of Play-Within-the-Play', *Journal of Faculty of Letters and Humanities* 49, no. 200 (Spring 2008): 136–137.

22. Oliver George Downing, 'To Be, Or Not to Be in Bad Faith: The Tragedy of Hamlet's Superficial Reading of Sartre's Waiter', *Philosophy and Literature* 38 (2014): 260.
23. Oliver George Downing, 'To Be, Or Not to Be', 254–260.
24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Dirty Hands*, trans. Lionel Abel, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955). See George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 128, which recalls how American art critic Harold Rosenberg claimed Sartre was inspired to write *Dirty Hands* after reading the discussion of *Hamlet* in his 1932 essay 'Character Change and the Drama'.
25. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1926–1939*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), 363, 375.
26. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 59.
27. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 60.
28. Qtd. in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 587.
29. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948), 39.
30. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 3.
31. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 35.
32. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 82.
33. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 77.
34. Albert Camus, *Notebooks, 1951–1959*, trans. Ryan Bloom (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 115.
35. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 115–117, 159, 162; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperCollins, 1962), 234–235; Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, 30–32; and Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 2015), 26–36, 44, 51.
36. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 48–49, 86.
37. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 123.
38. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 48–49.
39. For a helpful summation of Nietzsche's interrelated concepts of *amor fati* and the eternal recurrence, see Paul S. Loeb, 'Eternal Recurrence', in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 667–668.

40. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard H. Green (Mineola: Dover, 2012).
41. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 60.
42. For a classic account of *Hamlet* and predestination, see Charles K. Cannon, “‘As in a Theatre’: *Hamlet* in the Light of Calvin’s Doctrine of Predestination’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 203–222.
43. Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy Is Not Enough*, trans. Harald A. T. Reiche, Harry T. Moore, and Karl W. Deutsch (Boston: Archon Books, 1969), 61–71. Like Camus, Jaspers distanced himself from existentialism in the wake of Sartre’s exploding popularity.
44. See Note 3 above.
45. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 7.
46. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 7.
47. See, for example, Joseph E. Duncan, ‘Godot Comes: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*’, *Ariel* 12, no. 4 (1981): 57–70.
48. For the contention that Beckett’s Vladimir experiences mental anguish, as compared to Estragon’s physical suffering, see Michael Gurnow, “‘No Symbol Where None Intended’: A Study of Symbolism and Allusion in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*”, *Apmonia* (May 2001), <https://archive.is/cwgws>.
49. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 8.
50. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 9.
51. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 10.
52. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 10.
53. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 42, 185, 235; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 232–235; and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 29–30.
54. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 10–11.
55. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 11.
56. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 11–12.
57. For a discussion of Anselm’s ‘ontological argument’, see Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 73–94.
58. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 12.
59. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 28.
60. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 29.
61. Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself, and Other Poems* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 69.
62. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 42–43.

63. For a translation and discussion of Zhuangzi's butterfly dream, see Zhihua Yao, "'I Have Lost Me': Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 40, no. 3/4 (September–December 2013): 511–526.
64. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 50–51.
65. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 51.
66. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 90–91.
67. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 356.
68. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 16.
69. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 89.
70. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 91.
71. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 91.
72. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 72–73.

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*Horatio: Loyal Friend of Hamlet
and Nutshell*

R. S. White

HAMM Why did you engender me?
NAGG I didn't know.
HAMM What? What didn't you know?
NAGG That it'd be you.¹

Or as Ian McEwan writes in *Saturday*, 'It's a commonplace of parenting and modern genetics that parents have little or no influence on the characters of their children. You never know who you are going to get'.² Did Shakespeare know when he engendered *Hamlet* that it would be 'the Mona Lisa of literature',³ which would take on a reproductive life of its own, spawning diversely unpredictable children? This essay looks in turn at two of these literary offspring, one challenging reason with emotion and the other teasing emotions with reason.

It is a peculiarity in the reception of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that each character in the play seems to have a withheld story to tell behind the facts we are given in the words of the text, which has irresistibly inspired

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authors to present fictionalised biographies. Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is only the best known of many re-tellings from oblique character angles. Jeffrey R. Wilson in his chapter in this book places the spotlight on the most diffident and self-effacing character, Horatio, using only the words of the play rather than speculating, and noting that the character's very name emphasises *ratio* or reason. But elsewhere Horatio has been given his own account of the story in fictional mode, as he is encouraged to do by his dying friend:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story. (5.2.298–301)⁴

He is undoubtedly important as the figure closest to Hamlet throughout. He receives a crucial letter from Hamlet in England and is the only major character to be left alive at the end. There are at least two fictionalised versions of his life, one written by a psychoanalyst with literary interests who puts Hamlet under 'analysis' from Horatio's observations,⁵ and the other by a literary biographer who had published a well-known scholarly book on opium and Romantic poets.⁶

Horatio: The Loyal Friend of Hamlet (2006) is by an American emeritus Professor of Psychology, Richard Coen, who lists a remarkably diverse range amongst his interests including composing music, poetry, and stories, Jungian theory and eastern religion. Unlike some of the Ophelia-centred novels targeting adolescent women as readers, which can be sentimental and superficial, this novel instead is a surprisingly substantial and well written account. The novel begins before *Hamlet* the play begins: Horatio, Laertes, Marcellus and Prince Hamlet meet up at Wittenberg University and debate various classic philosophical questions raised at some stage in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, such as Plato's, whether a philosopher-king is impossible; the rival merits of violence and non-violence as ways of solving problems; Aquinas on the rational soul of humankind; radical notions of equality in which beggars and kings are exactly the same in a material sense; whether Aristotelian reason or authoritarian creationism should guide decision-making; and similar deep philosophical matters. The story proceeds more or less like Shakespeare's but with an arch-rationalist Horatio as the narrator and central consciousness, sceptical, for example, as was his fellow Wittenbergian

Martin Luther, about the existence of ghosts, a man immune to the emotion-based superstitions of the credulous:

“My studies in philosophy,” I said, “don’t furnish many grounds for a belief in disembodied spirits. Whatever you two have seen, I am happy to serve as another witness. I trust that together we can find a more reasonable explanation for this figure that appears in the night. [...] Perhaps St. Augustine and other fathers of the church would say this might be so, but I find no such idea in the writings of the great Aristotle.” (86)⁷

His response on actually seeing the ghost is more complicated, though still only intellectually ‘shaken, not stirred’: ‘I felt perplexed. I had come expecting to cast light on a minor puzzle only to find a deep mystery that defied my understanding’ (78). At this point, of course, we find the clue given us in the play now quoted in the novel, ‘... the prince simply said, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are in your philosophy”’ (86) It may be significant that in the novel Horatio is paradoxically the one susceptible to vivid dreams, which undermines the generally unemotional certainty of his outlook. Remembering the occupation of the author of the novel, it may indicate the revenge of Horatio’s transgressive emotions over his controlling intellect—*id* over *ego*. He ruefully observes to Marcellus, ‘in the full light of day [...] that eerie luminescence fades to a wisp of nothingness. Yet the night is another matter altogether. When we stand close to the realm of sleep, we never know what strange creatures may emerge from the dark’ (91). Shakespeare was to offer the same sentiment from another rationalist in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Duke Theseus, who makes a similar point about the emotionally metamorphic nature of night:

Such tricks hath strong imagination
That if it would but apprehend some joy
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear! (5.1.18–22)

Later in the novel the author also supplies an even more challenging experience to his self-controlled and sceptical hero, the sudden onset of love, inspired by an attendant to the queen called Lucille. Horatio in the novel ends up sadder and wiser—but married—acknowledging that there

are many things that puzzle the rational philosopher but which must simply be accepted in the mystery of emotional truths.

* * *

To the ever-expanding list of fictionalised accounts of characters from *Hamlet* must now be added *Nutshell* (2016),⁸ an experimental novel by Ian McEwan, which undoubtedly will find its own enduring literary status at a higher level than *Horatio: Loyal Friend of Hamlet*. McEwan in his various interviews shows himself to have had a very ‘bookish’ education and past—an inspiring Leavisite teacher at school, an early saturation in ‘the canon’, a BA in literature from Sussex and MA from East Anglia—and he seems not conspicuously afflicted with ‘the anxiety of influence’ nor averse to reading literary criticism.⁹ His works are, in the words of one critic, ‘shaped by the many competing ideas, voices and literary references’, mentioning Sophocles, Wyatt, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, and many others.¹⁰ In relation to Shakespeare in particular, when McEwan was interviewed at the Oxford Literary Festival he referred to Shakespeare several times as a writer he continually returns to, preferring especially re-reading plays he has not revisited for some time.¹¹

Nutshell is a radical, creative revision of *Hamlet*. The play is copiously referenced in the novel and provides the novel’s title and opening epigram: ‘Oh God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams’ (2.2.256–8). In the ironic inversion of the novel, it is the world outside that holds ‘bad dreams’ (192). Some reviewers have detected elements of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth but the overwhelmingly obvious model is *Hamlet*.¹² In this daring adaptation, there is no need for a Horatio to tell Hamlet’s story aright, since Hamlet does so himself, before he is even born. Whereas *Hamlet* begins with the improbable report of a ghost from the immediate past come from the grave and in purgatory to report a murder, the novel takes as its basic conceit the no less unlikely stream of consciousness of the foetus of Hamlet-to-be, musing in the days before he is born, his imprisoning ‘nutshell’ being his mother’s womb. The first line of the novel is surely destined to find fame alongside those of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Moby Dick* and *Anna Karenina* as among the most arresting opening lines to a novel: ‘So here I am, upside down in a woman’ (1). This plunges us into the confined spaces of the mother’s womb and the baby’s mind, frequently growing drunk on the copious supply of wine

poured from above, and at the mercy of his mother's frequent, roiling orgasms. The book is 'a sport', an extended conceit, but with serious meditations on the purpose of existence, sometimes portentous but only pretentious when the author chooses: 'I've heard it argued that long ago pain begat consciousness [...] God said, Let there be pain. And there was poetry. Eventually' (46). It is not all confinement when the mind can work so actively as this particular baby's: 'Just think: nothing to do but be and grow, where growing is hardly a conscious act. The joy of pure existence, the tedium of undifferentiated days. Extended bliss is boredom of the existential kind. The confinement shouldn't be a prison. In here I'm owed the privilege and luxury of solitude [...]' (74). McEwan alludes to sayings by Jane Austen and William Blake to suggest the kind of freedom and amplitude of reflection that can be achieved within a small compass in writing, and by extension, in a womb:

To be bound in a nutshell, see the world in two inches of ivory, in a grain of sand. Why not, when all of literature, all of art, of human endeavour, is just a speck in the universe of possible things. And even the universe may be a speck in a multitude of actual and possible universes (62).

At times it feels like there is an analogy being drawn with the writer trapped in his own imagination but through that very faculty able to roam far and wide through time and space. Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* creates a narrator who seems to know the circumstances of his own conception, but McEwan's novel takes this device to an extreme. The leap of imagination is not entirely unprecedented, since there is a novel preceding McEwan's which itself is based on a play produced in 2013 at Chelmsford Theatre, *Hamlet's Bastard: The Story Shakespeare Didn't Tell* by Mick Foster, which, in the words of its publicity abstract,

tells the story from the viewpoint of [Matthias] a bastard son of the young Prince, who interviews the survivors and uncovers a different perspective on what happened and why. The bastard son also finds himself embroiled in court politics under the Norwegian King Fortinbras. The way he deals with the danger of being the only surviving member of the Danish royal family provides a contrast to his father's tragic story.¹³

Matthias is technically eligible to claim the throne of Denmark so King Fortinbras regards him as a threat, and history is repeating itself.

The Hamlet that Matthias slowly uncovers by interviewing eyewitnesses like Marcellus, Reynaldo, Voltemand, and Osric turns out to have been cruel, especially towards women and Horatio.

The unborn baby in *Nutshell* overhears the whole plot and execution of the murder of his poet-father (John Cairncross) by his beloved but duplicitous mother Trudy (Gertrude) and his immensely crass uncle, the ‘Priapic, satanic’ Claude (158), based on Claudius (and perhaps partly on the platitudinous, crafty, and dimwitted Polonius). He has ‘a toneless voice, that comes as though from the wings of a theatre, in a doomed production of a terrible play’ (94). The adulterers Trudy and Claude are overheard by the baby, plotting and carrying out the murder by poisoning of John in order to get his rambling home in St John’s Wood, London, valued at eight million pounds. The suburb is nowadays associated with affluence, expensive houses, and Lords cricket ground, but it has historical associations of seedy, adulterous affairs, a reputation dating back to the Restoration when Charles II was said to have had a cottage built for one of his mistresses. The setting, beyond the mother’s womb, is consistently London, and the only oblique suggestion of Elsinore lies in a desultory conversation about take-away food between Trudy and Claude, in which they consider a Danish meal.

Claude, of course, is the primary villain:

Claude, unlike Trudy, owns his crime. This is a Renaissance man, a Machiavel, an old-school villain who believes he can get away with murder [...] He may blunder through an undergrowth of clichés, but he understands what he did and why. [...] (147–148)

At least once he uses a mishmashed quotation from Lady Macbeth, showing his somehow muddled kind of evil: ‘So we’ll stick our courage to the screwing whatever. And get on with – ’ (125). The baby regards his mother indulgently, seeing Trudy as largely manipulated by Claude, but none the less complicit in the murder plot. He idealises his father John Cairncross, a man marked by ‘decency and talent’ (158), whose poetry seems like Shakespeare’s in the concentration on sonnets, echoed in some direct quotations, and lines occasionally reminiscent of Shakespeare’s. He also knows the poetry of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, borrowing from them as freely as the bard himself did: ‘Since there’s no help, come let us kiss and part’ comes from Drayton’s Sonnet 61 in his sequence *Idea*

(*Nutshell* 92). It seems at least likely that McEwan regards Hamlet's father as Shakespeare himself, which in an ultimate authorial sense he is. One of the baby's admiring comments is, 'That mysterious particle, my father, is gaining mass, growing in seriousness and integrity. I'm caught between pride and guilt' (153). Guilt because he knows of the plot and feels implicated: 'Knowing everything, almost everything, I'm party to the crime, safe, obviously, from questioning, but fearful. And curious, impatient to witness the [police] inspector's skills. An open mind could peel these two apart in minutes. Trudy betrayed by nerves, Claude by stupidity' (168). The baby's only recrimination against his father is that the latter expresses no concern for his coming child's existence, and pays much more attention to his young acolyte and lover Elodie, 'scanning poet, untrustworthy dactyl' (158), who writes only of owls, and whose later evidence, it is hinted, will help bring to justice the murderers of John.

From this set of intriguing premises McEwan unweaves a cleverly controlled murder story with an obscured but menacing ending. The unborn baby repeatedly vows revenge but is unable to do anything about it, not because he is afflicted with 'delay' or procrastination but because a baby in the womb must be patient. It is suggested that the murder will eventually be detected by the police and the malefactors punished, but with no help from Hamlet. The play's theme of madness, real or assumed, is not an issue in the novel since the narrator is, if anything, an arch-rationalist. Perhaps the charge of insanity is implicitly transposed to the author's adoption of an 'antic disposition'. The novel is a brilliantly conceived and controlled *tour de force* and draws first on the deep strain of black wit verging on despairing *ennui* in *Hamlet* itself, and secondly on the play's substructure as a murder mystery built on suspense. What interests me is that *Nutshell* perfectly exemplifies my argument advanced elsewhere that *Hamlet* itself is an inherently avant-garde work, which helps to explain why it has fuelled so many experimental works and revolutionary concepts over centuries.¹⁴ Obviously if it had been published before my book, I would have used it as a consummation of my argument, and in fact, in a curious way, even the cryptic central phrase which I use in my book to describe experimental and radical avant-garde movements ('ever new, ever now') occurs in modified form in McEwan's book as 'But here's life's most limiting truth – it's always now, always here, never then and there' (35). No doubt the chime is a result of the kind of coincidence and chaos theory which is characteristically McEwan

territory in all his novels, but none the less interesting that in this case it is *Hamlet* which has been the magnet in both cases. McEwan's phrase encapsulates the cultural position of Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet* itself, as a work whose endlessly inferred topicality always outweighs the deadening reputation of traditional canonicity.

In case McEwan's readers are not immediately aware of the pervading *Hamlet* register, some of the more famous quotations are sprinkled throughout, but generating different tones from the new context and applications. Often they connote emotions, most recurrently feelings of disgust, desire for revenge, diseased cynicism, and guilt. 'What a piece of work is a man' takes on a wholly different and acid meaning when used to describe Claude sarcastically: 'As a man he's a piece of work [...]' (24). Trudy refers to herself in the words used by Gertrude to describe the Player Queen in 'The Mousetrap': 'She thinks I protest too much' (89). Both Trudy, and even more particularly Claude, tend to live by such clichés, and the intertextual references reinforce the impression that their emotional lives are stunted. Other examples indirectly invoke situations in the play. The scathing contrast drawn in the play by Hamlet confronting his mother, comparing his father to Claudius as 'Hyperion to a satyr', is exemplified in the novel by the father himself: 'A strange elation has seized my father. Showing off to my mother, letting her know by comparison what she'll be missing' (96). These allusions are matters of attitude rather than emotions, the quotations used as familiar reference points to adjust our perceptions of characters. Meanwhile, the most famous question of all time is parodied in another binary to be revealed at the moment of birth rather than in contemplating death:

The strangely essential matter at the heart of every birth was now settled. Either-or. Nothing else. No one exclaims at the moment of one's dazzling coming-out, *It's a person!* Instead: *It's a girl, It's a boy.* Pink or blue – a minimal improvement on Henry Ford's offer of cars of any colour so long as they were black. Only two sexes. [...] (144)

In such mischievous observations we detect not only McEwan himself expressing a range of his opinions through this persona, but also the same brand of sardonic wittiness of his prototype, Shakespeare's Hamlet. In addition, 'To be or not to be?', has a quite specific significance if it crosses the mind of a baby waiting to be born, and who is sentient enough to philosophise on the coming event: 'I believe in life

after birth, though I know that separating hope from fact is hard' (160). The question of whether 'to be or not to be' is posed as 'to be born or not', and this baby is decidedly reluctant: 'To start life in a cell, bliss unknown, boredom of a fought-for privilege [...] I see no scheme, no plausible route to any conceivable happiness. I wish never to be born [...]' (76). It is especially sharply posed when he tries to strangle himself to death in utero with his umbilical cord: 'To take my life I'll need the cord, three turns around my neck of the mortal coil [...]' (127), borrowing 'this mortal coil' from Hamlet's suicidal speech and giving a more material and specific sense to the word 'coil'. As to the delay imputed by generations of older critics, the baby comes down on the side of action over procrastination—'Don't waste your precious days idle and inverted', he chides himself. 'Get born and act!', though the one thing an unborn baby cannot readily do is to 'act', and he realises the attempted suicide cannot happen because he will lose consciousness as soon as the noose begins to tighten (128).

Other quotations, hinted and explicit, pertain to the emotional life of the characters in the novel and the world it depicts. Here McEwan draws on the most emotionally charged passages spoken by Hamlet, and especially his outbursts to his mother expressing disgust and anger at her sexual relationship with Claudius:

I hate her and her remorse. How did she step from John to Claude, from poetry to dribbling cliché? Step down to the nasty sty to roll in filth with her idiot-lover, lie in shit and ecstasy, plan a house-theft, inflict monstrous pain and a humiliating death on a kindly man [...] (117)

Hamlet's scatological outburst, reveals a similar profound disgust for the body identified by T. S. Eliot as a mark of what he believed to be *Hamlet's* author's diseased consciousness:

Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
And let him for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out. (4.1.166–170)

It is this mood which drives the baby's disgust, and occasionally self-disgust:

[...] food crumbs, human hair and mouse shit. Yes, I was there when he tempted her again to bed, called her his mouse, pinched her nipples hard, filled her cheeks with his lying breath and cliché-bloated tongue.

And I did nothing. (157)

Some of his invective is saved for expressing distaste at the frequent occasions of feeling Claude's ever-active phallus hammering centimetres from his own head.

The image of 'mouse' borrowed from Shakespeare connects Trudy to the same rejective sense of ambient corruption felt by Hamlet in Claudius's Denmark where there is 'something rotten'—'Trudy's winter coats. This too solid stench feeds the timid mice behind the skirt-ing and swells them to rats [...]' (74), again reminding us of Hamlet's voyeuristic tirade to his mother, 'Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed, /Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse [...]' (4.1.166–167), and at least verbally of 'the mousetrap' which catches Claudius out. It also invokes the cluster of metaphors around corruption and disease in *Hamlet* itself, noted by critics like Maurice Charney,¹⁵ and Nigel Alexander,¹⁶ and by Ruth Stevenson who specifically cites the mouse in a 'network of figurative interaction' in the imagery of the play.¹⁷ Even Hamlet's famous melancholic mood is directly invoked in *Nutshell* by near quotation:

But lately, don't ask why. I've no taste for comedy, no inclination to exercise, even if I had the space, no delight in fire or earth, in words that once revealed a golden world of majestical stars, the beauty of poetic apprehension, the infinite joy of reason [...]. (91)

The running reference is to Hamlet's train of thought, in his speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where he likens the 'majestical roof' of the sky to 'a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours', and man—'in apprehension how like a god' and 'the paragon of animals' to a 'quintessence of dust': 'man delights not me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so' (2.2.230–312 *passim*). To impute such an adult mood of disillusionment to a baby before its birth holds its own black 'taste for comedy' which is so familiar in other works by McEwan. A prevailing nexus between crime and sex, sex and guilt (116), are recurrent dualities behind the tone.

Another source of wit and humour derives from the significance of the nutshell in the epigraph, linked as it is with Hamlet's sense that 'Denmark's a prison'. The active mind presented as confinement in the womb throws emphasis on consciousness, the mind's omniscience and capacity to reason making the baby 'king of infinite space'. He does have dreams, and also the 'infinite space' in his mind to make frequent references to contemporary events up to the writing of the book, including most of the preoccupations voiced by McEwan in his *ex cathedra* statements: the Syrian war, bombing of civilians from the air (84), climate change, and others. All these are seen in moral terms as signs of a more universal degeneration of society and the world. Or the sheer boredom of 'the socially real, the dull quotidian of the working-day world, of human contacts, appointments, obligations, video cameras, computers with inhuman memories. In short, consequences' (110). A recent assassination obliquely recalls to McEwan the method of murder chosen by Shakespeare's Claudius, in his case 'cursed hebona in a vial' (1.5.62) (perhaps henbane) to show it may not be as unlikely and contrived as it appears in the play:

Kind of antihistamine. People are saying the Russians used it on that spy they locked in a sports bag. Poured it in his ear. Turned up the radiators before they left so the chemical dissolved in his tissues without a trace [...]
(174)

McEwan is referring to Alexander Litvinenko who was poisoned not through the ear but with a cup of tea containing, curiously if we think of Polonius, a poison called Polonium-210. Equally it could apply to the recent airport murder of Kim Jong-Nam of North Korea, using a poisoned cloth wrapped over the face for a few seconds. In *Nutshell* the murder weapon is a poisoned take-away smoothie bought from a favourite café of John's. The injunction for revenge, the main plot-spring in Shakespeare's play is questioned on an international scale: 'Revenge is dead. Hobbes was right, my young friend. The state must have a monopoly of violence, a common power to keep us all in awe' (54). The baby muses on the mutually assured destruction of acts of revenge in blood-feuds: 'Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves, Confucius said. Revenge unstitches a civilization. It's a reversion to constant, visceral fear. Look at the miserable Albanians, chronically cowed

by *kanum*, their idiot cult of blood feuds' (135). All this seems at least to contribute to the feeling that *Hamlet* continues to have a strangely contemporary quality that makes it applicable, or at least capable of being appropriated, in any period and retaliation to violence taking any form. Which brings us to the much discussed topic of Hamlet's suspected 'delay'. The thinking foetus reproves himself for over-intellectualism: 'cowardly me, self-absolved of revenge, of everything but thought [...] I can only watch. Hours pass' (135). The references, of course, are to Hamlet's soliloquies, 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (2.2.552), and 'conscience does make cowards of us all' (3.1.85). At other times he despairingly reflects the existential pessimism of the melancholy Hamlet, mingled with a wry and penetrating humour familiar to readers of McEwan: 'I count myself an innocent but it seems I'm party to a plot' (2). The metafictional observation, and its existential implications, are among the cluster of issues raised in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, as discussed in Paul Megna's chapter.

While knowledge of *Hamlet* influences and may enrich our understanding of *Nutshell*, at the same time reading the novel itself implies some insights into Shakespeare's *Hamlet* too. Without time enough to be thorough, I mention in summary fashion just three points, and they are quite major ones, allowing the novel to offer a critical reading of some of the more notorious unsolved mysteries in the play. First, reading the novel sharpens our awareness of genre, showing that *Hamlet*, quite apart from being a tragedy about a doomed protagonist, is a murder mystery, and this recognition is crucial to our understanding of some issues while remaining mystified by others. Right up until the 'Mousetrap' scene in the middle of the play, Hamlet does not have conclusive evidence of his uncle's guilt in regicide. All he has is an improbable story delivered by an implausible ghost who claims to be his father speaking from purgatory, and since both ghosts and purgatory were not believed in by Martin Luther who was associated with Wittenberg where Hamlet studied, this is hardly conclusive evidence to satisfy a court of law. The whole notorious question of whether Hamlet procrastinates turns on the issues of his limited knowledge and his active conscience. Even when he has the opportunity to kill Claudius, Christian scruples hold him back. On this reading, he does not wilfully delay revenge but understandably spends half the play trying to get hard evidence, which is not easy because the suspicion is that the very system of justice is compromised by a cover-up at the highest level. Jane Rickard in Chapter 4

explores the ever-present element of concealment and spying at all levels of the play. Here we have the origins of a kind of modern murder mystery which is more sophisticated than an old-fashioned whodunnit, the kind where the detective himself becomes personally compromised or embroiled and rendered unable to act without incriminating himself. The embryo of such a plot lies in Hamlet's cold-blooded and clever reversal of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's unwitting implication in the plot to assassinate Hamlet, only to be executed themselves through Hamlet's 'knavery':

[...] Let it work;
 For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
 Hoisted with his own petard: and 't shall go hard
 But I will delve one yard below their mines
 And blow them at the moon. O, 'tis most sweet
 When in one line two crafts directly meet. (3.4.184–9: Q2 only)

Even at such grim moments in the play, an emotion of amused self-congratulation amounting to 'delight' prevails. In *Nutshell*, the foetus at the outset knows for sure about the murder plot, but this shifts the 'mystery' and suspense away from discovering the murderers and onto whether or not they will be caught; how, if the baby as detective is unable to act; and if so, by what clue they leave—in this case an unnoticed nest of baby spiders in a pair of gloves which proves these have not been worn recently, contrary to the murderers' elaborate rationalisation. All this highlights the fact that Shakespeare raises complex questions about knowledge, evidence, detection, and ultimately justice, with all the finesse of a modern television miniseries depicting a psychological murder story. In the middle of *Hamlet* the focus shifts from gathering evidence onto the question of whether it is possible the investigator will avoid personal incrimination and death due to his knowledge of the crime and criminals, with various ingenious twists along the way. We cannot forget that Hamlet is constantly spied upon and becomes the target for two assassination attempts contrived by Claudius once he knows of his nephew's degree of understanding of his own guilt, by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern unsuccessfully, and then by Laertes successfully.

This brings us to the second point concerning McEwan's intervention in celebrated discussion points about *Hamlet*. His scenario subverts the whole question of whether Hamlet is culpable in delaying revenge.

The baby does have vengeful intentions and considers ways of acting on them, but as indicated in the epigraph, being trapped in an effective ‘nutshell’ of the womb makes any action literally impossible. In an interview McEwan himself explains the heart of his plot as ‘The only person he could think of who was more helpless than a foetus was Hamlet (“able to think a lot, but trapped”).’¹ As if to stress this impotence and entrapment, McEwan gives to the baby the words, ‘[...] I can only watch. Hours pass’ (158). This redefines the different kind of mental imprisonment faced by Hamlet, a man who knows he is unlikely to be believed by anybody except Horatio, and perhaps not even by him, and that if he shows his hand he will be immediately targeted for murder. The relevant quotation summing up Hamlet’s position is, ‘break my heart, for I must hold my tongue’ (1.2.159), and the baby in *Nutshell* has no option *but* to hold his tongue.

McEwan’s third firm decision on a range of other contentious issues in the play concerns Shakespeare’s Gertrude. He uses as his working assumptions that Trudy is a willing accomplice in the murder, and that she has been adulterous before her husband’s death. Here he cuts through a whole industry of Shakespearean criticism which debates Gertrude’s guilt or innocence, generally coming to a verdict of ‘not proven’. It is one of many teasingly unanswered questions in *Hamlet*, among which several concern Gertrude, whether she had been adulterous with Claudius before her husband’s death, for example, and even if she were not an accomplice, did she know or suspect that Claudius had murdered King Hamlet? Cases for each of these possibilities can be mounted using the play text itself, but equally none is confirmed or denied by the text. And in what emotional state does Gertrude conclude that the marriage to Claudius has been ‘o’erhasty’? Is she at last understanding her son’s point of view? Or is she regretful? Penitent? Suddenly conscience-stricken? We do not know, and individual actors and audiences can make up their own minds. It would probably have been impossible for McEwan to maintain Shakespeare’s studious ambiguity since his narrator knows at first hand literally everything, even events before his conception, by overhearing all, but still this author’s clarity and lack of ambiguity on the issues of Trudy’s involvement, serve to highlight by contrast the apparently deliberate air of unresolved enigma surrounding

¹Ian McEwan, “I’m going to get such a kicking”, *The Guardian*, August 27, 2016.

Gertrude in *Hamlet*. These points, then, serve to redefine some of Shakespeare's artistic decisions and intentions, and to show that grey areas and unanswered questions in his play are likely to be deliberate—on the theory that if McEwan can solve them, then so could Shakespeare, if he had wanted to.

At the very end of the novel the Ghost makes an appearance, but it steadily dawns that in this case the revenant John Cairncross is a figment of the baby's imagination, conjured up in a 'reverie' or fantasy of wish-fulfilment. It is a disgusting sight with rotting, greenish-black lips and 'exuding a sweet miasma of glycol and maggot-friendly flesh' (187). In this case the silent ghost does not arrive to stir his son to revenge, but instead appears as a vision or fantasy, like the ghost of Banquo in *Macbeth*, taking his own revenge by confronting the guilty consciences of his murderers: 'His fleshless hand fastens on my uncle's throat [...] The remorseless, one-handed grip tightens' (187). He then kisses the terrified and shame-faced Trudy 'long and hard with icy, putrefying lips' (188); then climbs the stairs and begins to fade. The baby's contemplative response to his 'childish Halloween fantasy' (188) comes again with a glance at *Macbeth* and a realisation of 'what he wanted [...] How else to commission a spirit revenge in a secular age? The Gothic has been reasonably banished, the witches have fled the heath, and materialism, so troubling to the soul, is all I have left' (188). But ironically this ghost is not 'material' but illusory, and revenge is incomplete. Endings like that in *Hamlet*, it is implied, can occur only in antiquated literature, superstition, and dreams.

The final section of McEwan's novel is a stylistic *tour de force*, tracking the baby's journey from the womb to the light of day and his first actual glimpse of his beloved mother's face like that of a *femme fatale* in a *film noir*: 'Beautiful. Loving. Murderous' (198). Trudy has glimpsed some of the potential 'consequences' though she must now let things take their course with the fatalism of Hamlet towards the end of his play, 'Let be': 'She devised a plot, pure artifice, a malign fairy tale. Now her fanciful story is deserting her [...]. The tale has turned tail' (110). Claude distastefully delivers the baby, who arrives in time to hear the doorbell downstairs as the police net closes in. And if the evidence of the unworn gloves does not prevail, then the child now born is destined to spend his life trying to prove a case about his dead father from knowledge gained while he was a foetus in the womb, surely no less absurd on the face of it than the father come back from purgatory as a ghost. The last sentences

of the novel are ominous in terms of the murder story we have traced, and they foresee a different kind of post-birth confinement for the child and mother, this time in jail: ‘And I’m thinking about our prison cell – I hope it’s not too small – and beyond its heavy door, worn steps ascending from sorrow, then justice, then meaning’ (199). And finally, adapting Hamlet’s multi-laden but (in the light of his play’s afterlife) spectacularly wrong words: ‘The rest is silence’ (5.2.310). In McEwan’s unsettling vision of the life-to-come the line is revised as, ‘The rest is chaos’ (199) as the future is left to take care of itself.

NOTES

1. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 31.
2. Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (New York: Random Books, 2005), 25.
3. Jacqueline Rose, ‘Hamlet—The Mona Lisa of Literature’, *Critical Quarterly* 28 (1986): 35–49.
4. Quotations are from Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (eds), *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
5. Meg Harris Williams, *A Trial of Faith: Horatio’s Story: Hamlet in Analysis* (London: Karnac Press, 1997).
6. Alethea Hayter, *Horatio’s Version* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).
7. *Horatio: The Loyal Friend of Hamlet* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2006). All citations appear in the text.
8. Ian McEwan, *Nutshell* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016). All subsequent citations to *Nutshell* appear in the text.
9. See *Conversations with Ian McEwan*, ed. Ryan Roberts (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 7, 157, 178, 190.
10. Sebastian Groes, ‘Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in *Saturday*’, in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Sebastian Groes (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 99–114, 102.
11. Oxford Literary Festival on Friday March 23, 2018, at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, interviewed by Matthew Stadlen. I am grateful to Julie Maxwell for providing these details.
12. For critics detecting *Macbeth*’s influence on *Nutshell*, see Kate Clanchy’s review of McEwan’s novel (‘*Nutshell* by Ian McEwan Review – An Elegiac Masterpiece’, *The Guardian*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/27/nutshell-by-ian-mcewan-review>); as well as Decca Aitkenhead’s interview with McEwan (‘Ian McEwan, “I’m going to get such a kicking”’, *The Guardian*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/27/ian-mcewan-author-nutshell-going-get-kicking>).

13. Mick Foster, *Hamlet's Bastard: The Story Shakespeare Didn't Tell* (Seattle, WA: Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2017). The novel appears to have been self-published, available from <http://www.amazon.com/author/mickfoster>.
14. R. S. White, *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2015).
15. Maurice Charney, *Hamlet's Fictions* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 120–130.
16. Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play and Duel: A Study in 'Hamlet'* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).
17. Ruth Stevenson, 'Hamlet's Mice, Motes, Moles, and Minching Malecho', *New Literary History* 33 (2002): 435–459.

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